THE CONTEMPORARY HORROR FILM

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Council for National Academic Awards for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 1990

Sheffield City Polytechnic

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Abstract

This thesis approaches the contemporary horror film from a number of directions. Firstly, it is considered in relation to the historical roots of horror fiction, the tradition of the literary Gothic which stretches back as far as the late eighteenth century. The same chapter elaborates the broad outline of a methodology, drawing upon an established body of genre theory in both literary and film studies, which is then applied to the gradual diffusion of the Gothic legacy into the related genres of detective stories/thrillers, horror, and science-fiction, the inter-relatedness of these three genres forming part of the cultural context for modern horror. Chapter 3 considers Alfred Hitchcock's **Psycho** (1960) in relation to the structures and iconography of the original Gothic, and in the light of its fusion of conventions drawn from the horror film and the thriller. Chapter 4 compares this film with a similarly influential movie - **Halloween** - made almost two decades later, assessing some of the changes which the genre has undergone in the intervening period. The following five chapters (5-9) discuss a number of films of the period 1968 - 80, paying particular attention to works that have figured prominently in the established critical literarure around the genre, both as an appraisal of existing approaches and as an indication of the immediate context for developments over the last decade. The remaining four chapters (10 - 13) consider some developments of the 1980's, disputing the critical construction of the "body horror" category and providing an account of the horror-comedies which have generally been neglected by critics. The conclusion involves a synthesis of the material covered and a return to the Gothic tradition in order to conceptually situate the findings. There is an extensive biblography involving a variety of material ranging from popular magazines and newspapers to influential academic works, drawn more or less equally from the fields of literary criticism and film studies.

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1. Introduction.

In what follows I am concerned with some contemporary trends in a popular film genre and with the ways in which these ongoing developments have been understood and theorised in a variety of critical literature. The majority of the chapters that make up my account are, then, based upon detailed textual analysis of particular examples but the project also entails a dialogue with previous accounts or with more generally elaborated theoretical positions; the (partial) exceptions to this are the early chapters concerned with the Gothic tradition (whose importance may not be apparent at first sight but should increasingly become so) and some of the material on horror and comedy, which was largely prompted by the prevailing critical neglect of this area. At a more general level, the work is informed by the perspectives of a body of "genre theory" most prominently represented by Steve Neale's B.F.I. booklet of a decade ago, although I have also found the writings of some literary critics/theorists - particularly David Punter and Franco Moretti - to be useful.

This is not an exhaustive "history" or "survey" of the genre, but draws upon a number of these (of which the most important are Hardy (ed) 1985, Newman 1988, and Tudor 1989) and takes them as an informing context. It deals with contemporary examples of the horror movie, with the emphasis on the late 1970's and 1980's although some important predecessors are discussed at length. The films dealt with were taken from among examples that were particularly successful, influential or representative (or all three) or which combined those qualities with an interesting

relationship to other, closely allied, genres. The interaction with other genres is, in fact, one of the main preoccupations here, and is prompted by a conviction that it is necessary to assign theoretical priority to "genre" over "genres", the process over the categories it gives rise to. The chapters are organised in a loosely chronological progression, moving from **Psycho** (1960) to **The Fly** (1986) although I have not scrupled to present examples out of sequence for the purpose of comparison or in order to group related examples together.

The ideas which I present here have been heavily influenced by the work of a number of critics who are, at the same time, subjected to extensive criticism. This applies particularly to Robin Wood and the group of critics who discussed the horror film in the pages of **Movie** from around the mid 1970's onwards, and reflects the way in which I approached the genre. When I began writing, the **Movie** critics offered what I felt was the only coherent theoretical (as opposed to descriptive) account of the horror movie and, at the outset, I attempted (albeit with misgivings on some points) to provisionally employ their principles and categories, often testing these against their own chosen examples. In the course of doing so I came to abandon many of their key precepts and, in particular, the notion of a "basic formula" or analytic key to the genre as a whole. I was unable to reconcile this with the essentially hybrid fluidity of generic forms. I do not, however, mean to imply a wholesale rejection of what has been a sustained and productive critical project; the criticism of particular

propositions does not entail a negative assessment of a critic's work overall.

The model of genre employed here, then, is dynamic, flexible and responsive: repetition and innovation are seen as inseparable, standing in a **necessary** relation to each other. To paraphrase Trotsky: the development of new sets of conventions always involves a "complex turning inside-out" of old ones. Some conventions, though, no matter how often they are turned inside out, seem obstinately to recur in ever-changing guises, and I take this as an indication of the socially intractable nature of the tensions they express. Thus, although concerned with genre-as-process I find myself laying more than customary stress upon the continuity of the genre, as a corrective to some recent writing on the subject. Specifically, I reject the implication of epochal change which is present in some of the work that appeared in **Screen** in 1986-7 when that journal's interest in the horror film was at its peak. In general, this material seems, to me, a lot less interesting than that of the **Movie** tradition; even so, there have been some valuable insights and these are acknowledged where appropriate.

2. THE GOTHIC TRADITION AND MODERN HORROR

A. Gothic Origins.

This chapter will explore the origins and nature of the horror genre in the light of Steve Neale's theoretical account of genre in the commercial film industry; particularly his contention that genres are best understood, not individually (in terms of rigid sets of conventions built up around specific subject matter) but as a systematising process in which elements common to the whole of the mainstream cinema are present in different proportions and different configurations in particular genres at different times. One consequence of adopting this approach is an acceptance of the fact that genres tend to merge one with another. This prompts a shift of critical focus away from an emphasis on defining the principal characteristics of individual genres and demarcating their boundaries so that individual examples will fall "within" or "outside" them to an interest in the properties a genre will share with other proximate genres and the changing significance of particular elements in their transmigration across the generic spectrum. In the case of the horror film some elements have been loosely allied with science-fiction and fantasy while others engage in a clear and reciprocal interchange with the detective story and the thriller. Put another way, one could say that the horror film commonly mobilises reading strategies associated with these genres. And not only with these genres: for example, while geared towards producing a violent suspense rather than laughter the horror film often includes humourous elements,

though at a far less prominent level than in the various types of comedy. Similarly, it will often include a sub-plot of heterosexual romance (a feature of classical films generally and the dominant element in the melodrama and the musical) and may share narrative elements with other, more disparate genres.

Night of the Living Dead probably derives the narrative situation of a small group of people barricaded in an isolated building against an overwhelming external threat from **The Birds** although it is also a commonplace in the western. The representation of the "threat" itself, though, derives from more than one science-fiction tradition: the blurring of invasion and infection, external and internal threat, may recall **Invasion of the Body Snatchers** as well as various vampire fictions but it takes place within a scenario of devastation and social collapse from a tradition spanning **The War of the Worlds** to **The Day of the Triffids** and beyond. **Dawn of the Dead** elaborates most strikingly upon this latter aspect but clearly incorporates other generic elements from precedents as diverse as the "road" and "biker" movies of the late 1960's and early 1970's (the attack of the motorcycle convoy on the barricaded shopping precinct) and the "action" or "combat" movie - this latter relationship underlined by the (often parodic) use of appropriate music on the soundtrack which reaches its apogee in the ironic underscoring of the "happy ending".

One approach to the horror film, then, is to trace its development in relation to these other genres, particularly science-fiction and the detective story/thriller, to trace (in Easthope's words) "...its rise and fall in relation to

other genres, how it splits and combines with others to form new genres, its mutations into a new kind." (Easthope, 1979/80, p44.) Some kind of working definition of what has been central to each genre, historically, will be necessary before commencing such an examination and I will offer some rough outlines of these. Obviously, from Steve Neale's perspective, the central characteristic that these three genres have in common (and share with the rest of the Hollywood film industry) is that they are fictional narratives occasioned by some kind of disturbance of narrative equilibrium and working towards its restoration. Neale himself provides a working definition of the horror genre, noting that, (in common with the western, the gangster film, the detective film and often the thriller) narrative disequilibrium is often inaugurated by an act of violence and that (like the western, the gangster film and the war film) the horror genre is particularly marked by violence. However, it is not violence itself which is definitive of the genre, but its conjunction with images and definitions of "the monstrous". It is the monster (whether alien, supernatural being, animal, psychopath, etc) which is the destabilising agent, its actions, indeed its mere presence, serving to disrupt the categories of the "human" and the "natural".

I have bracketed the detective story and the thriller together so far, both out of convenience and because it would be unwise to draw a sharp distinction between them; they are better construed as the conventionally separable extremes of a continuum comprised of intermediate forms. The detective story will usually proceed from an instance of narrative

disruption in the form of a crime or an enigma and the discourses involved in the genre are those concerned with law and order. The tendency in the detective story is for the crime to be ingenious rather than commonplace and in the thriller - particularly the imperialist spy thriller - it will tend to figure as a vast conspiracy (= crime + mysterious concealment), often of such a magnitude as to threaten international security or even the continued existence of the human race. The "law and order" discourses of the detective story are often assimilated to, and superimposed upon, a more metaphysical opposition between good and evil and this is particularly pronounced in the imperialist spy thriller (best exemplified in the James Bond movies) where the conspiracy is often a "monstrous" - abnormal, pathological - incursion which threatens the complete overthrow of the natural order of things. This is the major point of contact between the thriller and the horror movie.

There are other points of contact though, for both the thriller and the detective story. One of these involves the way in which a film which initially mobilises the typical reading strategies associated with detective fiction may progressively move towards horror and climax with the revelation of a supernatural (rather than a criminal) agent of disruption. **Angel Heart** is an almost diagrammatic representative of this strategy. The same strategy may operate in reverse with the revelation of apparently supernatural phenomena as an elaborate screen for more prosaic human activities, a fabrication designed to deter intruders, to cast doubt upon the protagonist's sanity, etc.

Such devices, common into the 1960's, are now rather archaic, largely relegated to the area of childrens' TV cartoon serials, etc. The similarities in narrative strategy which make possible these systematic fusions though, also give rise to more localised analogies in situation, as, for example, in the burial alive scene in **Blood Simple**. These, in turn, facilitate extensive mutual borrowings; in **Blood Simple** this is particularly evident in the mise en scene.

Many detective stories and thrillers involve a conventional sub-plot of heterosexual romance. This is prominent in film noir and in the Hitchcock "romance thriller" - essentially a more violent and suspenseful extension of the domestic detective story. The romantic sub-plot may be at the core of the mystery itself (as in **Vertigo**, many film noir, etc). At the other extreme (ie. in the imperialist spy thriller) it may become as perfunctory as it is misogynistic, reduced to a cynical series of "conquests" - of the hero's associates or enemies - which figure as part of his overall strategy or as the rewards of success. Alternatively, romance may be used to enhance the thriller's generation of suspense, particularly where the final union of the lovers, or the survival of the love-object, is made conditional upon the outcome of the central conflict. (Hitchcock's **Torn Curtain** and Polanski's **Frantic** are examples; the horror movie sometimes - though less so recently - operates a similar strategy with the monster itself threatening the protagonist's romantic aspirations, the lover's survival, etc.) It is natural that a romantic complication should be used to intensify suspense here as it

is a distinctive feature of the thriller that it has, as its "core strategy" the generation of suspense, quite often involving - as Neale points out - the placement of the protagonist in such a position as to be threatened from both sides of the law (by the law enforcement agencies and the criminal underworld). In the imperialist spy thriller this may be achieved by placing the hero in a position where he is threatened by both superpower blocks, or by the bureaucratic inertia of his own superiors as well as the insidious machinations of an international conspiracy, etc. Again one may note comic or parodic elements as well as links with other genres - the character Jaws in **Moonraker** is a parodic link with the horror genre while major chunks of the narrative structure and mise-en-scene are clearly related to science fiction. That the conspiracy which sets the narrative rolling involves, in this case, a misanthropic madman/genius who plans to take over/destroy the world indicates the extent to which it can legitimately be regarded as belonging to both.

Science-fiction is perhaps the hardest of the genres discussed so far to define, particularly as the name by which the genre is known in not necessarily a pointer in the right direction. Indeed, many writers of science-fiction, especially in the post-war period, have preferred to refer to their work as fantasy or speculative fiction. (Mellor, in Pawling(ed), 1984, p28.) The "speculative" nature of science-fiction is useful in this context as the discourses central to the genre still owe something to the metaphysical preoccupation with defining the "human" and the "monstrous" which characterises horror but are, in this case, often

organised around conceptions of "progress". Thus, what is monstrous in the science fiction film is usually an exaggerated extrapolation of the present and involves a selective or distorted projection of present trends into an uncertain future. The "monstrous" is therefore the "human" developed in an unfamiliar and one-sided manner and the generic archetypes from which the term science-fiction arises are an instance of this relating to the mundane technology of today rendered monstrous and all pervasive.

Technology is, in this sense, an alienated human attribute manifested as external threat or power and the restrictiveness of many definitions of science-fiction arises from the fact that many other aspects of our society, as well as technology, can serve this narrative function. Notions of conformism and individuality (whether or not related to technological domination) have a prominent place within the genre. One thinks of **Invasion of the Body Snatchers**, for instance, which is invariably claimed for science-fiction, despite having a far more tenuous "scientific" basis than **Frankenstein**, which stands at the very centre of the horror tradition. The repeated convergence of what is considered "monstrous" in the two genres has given rise to a long and productive cross-fertilization between them. It has also meant that the classificatory disputes between partisans of either genre are both endlessly renewed and ultimately insoluble. This is not to suggest that the differences between horror and science-fiction genres are negligible or unimportant, rather that the classification of individual examples is a sterile exercise compared with the delineation

of the historical relationship between the two tendencies. It is clear, for example, that the different types of narrative that were historically specific to the genres by the late 1940's allowed the science-fiction tradition to virtually eclipse the horror film for most of the 1950's, proving more responsive to the major ideological questions of the era.

I am concerned here with the relationship of science-fiction to horror but it should be noted that science fiction has an equally problematic interface with a number of other genres: its relationship to the thriller has already been touched upon and its relationship to the war film is only too obvious when considered in the light of Anthony Easthope's comment that in this genre the "enemy" is always defined as "inhuman" and "other" (ie. "monstrous"). It is also related to a vast range of other genres including costume dramas, epics, travel and adventure films and even certain aspects of the documentary tradition. And while my concern with the relationship between horror and science-fiction necessitates an emphasis on science-fiction's dystopian visions the genre is broad enough to encompass various forms of social optimism and a good case has been made for considering the origins of the genre to lie in this area (at least as far as literature is concerned) with the decisive shift towards "social discontent and cosmic despair" only taking place in the late 1950's and early 1960's. ("Science-fiction and the Crisis of the Educated Middle Class", Adrian Mellor in Pawling(ed), 1984.) It is also the case that although one tends to think of science-fiction as being predictive or future-oriented it can (through the mechanism of, say, time travel, or the nuclear annihilation of the bulk of humanity and a social

relapse into primitivism) be backward looking, and to some extent the specific temporal/geographical locations are arbitrary, sharing a similar distancing function with notions of exoticim or antiquarianism in the Gothic.

I propose to examine the nature of the horror genre by looking at its (literary) Gothic prehistory, and the relationship between horror and the other genres mentioned above through the interactions of their various literary antecedents with(in) this Gothic tradition. As the term Gothic has been applied in a variety of ways outside the field of literary (and later film) criticism, and as the rise of the Gothic novel was only one aspect of a set of broader cultural changes, I shall discuss this wider context before narrowing the focus down to deal with its specifically literary manifestations and the legacy of these in the horror film.

Devendra P. Varma describes the origins of the term Gothic as being "usually associated with the frost-cramped strength, the shaggy covering and the dusky plumage of the northern tribes", commenting, on the pejorative connotations of the term, that "...the Gothic ideal wrought in gloomy castles and sombre cathederals appeared dark and barbarous to the renaissance mind". He says that by the close of the "so called Dark Ages" (which I shall take, rather uncertainly, to mean "by the sixteenth century") the term had become one of "unmitigated contempt", implying barbaric backwardness and, in aesthetic terms, all things vulgar, uncouth and ugly. The history of the middle ages was not well known but its very obscurity aided the reputation of "darkness" (ignorance)

and cruel primitivism. However, the progress of eighteenth century rationalism prompted, as a kind of incoherent groping for alternatives, a renewed interest in, or "re-discovery" of this period, and this is reflected in the subtly changing connotations of adjectives like "gothique" or "medieval". In the second half of the eighteenth century the "Gothic" seems to have two distinct but related sets of meanings/connotations, one connected with violent barbarity and the other connected with the "medieval", or rather with a romantic nostalgia for medieval chivalry, poetry, etc. By the late eighteenth century the rise of the Gothic novel had added a third set of connotations to these and one could say that during the heyday of these novels the term Gothic involved an interconnection of the following three notions - the barbarous, the medieval and the supernatural. (Varma, 1959, pp10-12.)

Early Gothic novels aimed to create a medieval atmosphere mainly through deploying an extensive medieval paraphernalia of castles, towers, dungeons, knights and marvellous happenings. Horace Walpole, author of the first Gothic novel (**The Castle of Otranto**, 1764) is credited with reversing the popular image of the term Gothic "from an adjective of opprobium into an epithet of praise" (Varma, p13) and with effecting "a shift of meaning in the most common use of the word Gothic from the architectural denotation of medieval buildings to the emotional effects of wierd, supernatural, fantastic and terrifying events in a work of literature in which the medieval castle or cathederal served as the theatre for such events." (Thompson(ed), 1974, p4.)

The connection between the architectural and literary

Gothics is underlined by the revivalist interest of a number of early Gothicists in both fields. Walpole was well known as an eccentric figure who virtually turned his own home at Strawberry Hill into a bizarre medieval "castle". Similarly, William Beckford, author of the extravagant Gothic novel **Vathek** (1786), which fuses the whimsical orientalism of **The Arabian Nights** with the more typical trappings of the Gothic (particularly its driven tyrant-hero) was responsible for the building of Fonthill Abbey, an enormous and useless Gothic structure which collapsed in 1800. In both cases the tendency is towards an atmosphere of picturesque medievalism rather than the serious antiquarian interest we associate with later figures such as Ruskin and Morris. Most early Gothic novels were also steeped in the shadowy and romantic archaism which gave the genre its name, but later examples, from the 1790's onwards (eg, **The Monk**, 1796) dispensed with medievalism altogether, accentuating instead the violent and supernatural events which typified the genre's plots. The term began to lose its original (historical) connection, becoming "a synonym for the grotesque, ghastly, and violently supernatural or superhuman in fiction". (Varma, p13.)

The emphasis on setting and atmosphere remained though. This is particularly striking in what Elizabeth MacAndrew calls "the most famous of all Gothic devices" - the identity of the Gothic castle or house with its owner - the most visually suggestive features of which are evident in Varma's phrase about the castle becoming the "passive agent of terror", essentially an extension of its villainous inhabitant who is the "active agent". (p19.) David Pirie

takes up this "castle question" in his study of the Hammer films, noting how often the settings are expressive of character, seemingly impregnated with the alienated human attributes of their occupants. In an early scene of **Dracula - Prince of Darkness**(1965) Dracula is absent and when four travellers seek shelter in his castle, finding the fire lit, the table laid, etc, the setting itself must stand in for the growing sense of threat that the characters feel. Prawer(1980) comments that the best known sequence in the film features a travelling shot along the corridors which "suggests an unseen presence prowling the house" (P225) and Pirie(1973) admires these distinctive camera movements because they bring out, "...with a poetic grandeur, the unseen presence of the absent host".(p90) This example illustrates the way in which some aspects of Gothic literature translate particularly directly into film through exploiting the properties of a certain kind of imposing dereliction in architecture in conjunction with appropriate lighting, camera movements, etc. As with the early Gothic novel, the use of setting extends beyond architectural manifestations to encompass dramatic landscapes (vividly green pastoral scenes giving way to heavy chiaroscuro renderings of moonlight or candlelight) and dramatic displacements of the persecuting power of evil onto the elements(storms, lightning, etc).

The scene from **Dracula-Prince of Darkness** mentioned above deploys such imagery in a casual, half satirical way; the ironic significance or the travellers' toast to their "dead" host ("May he rest in peace") being underlined by the addition of a clap of thunder to the soundtrack. It would be

a mistake to ientify the Gothic tradition too closely with this kind of superficial "machinery". Not only does the Hammer cycle include films of enormously variable quality but a similar unevenness is evident at the level of individual films, from scene to scene. Genuine extensions of the psychological insights of their literary sources are mixed, in the Hammer films, with dull recyclings of motifs that were cliched even in the eighteenth century - where their familiarity also bred various types of parodic contempt and critical impatience. (1) Indeed it was the proliferation of satirisations of the eighteenth century Gothic and the recurrence of its most typical narrative structures and motifs in the "shilling shockers" of the nineteenth century that was largely responsible for the sheer distance - the scope of the necessary innovation - which separates the original Gothic from its most significant derivitives in nineteenth century literature. A similar imperative can be seen in the horror film in the 1960's, the "distance" opening up between films like **Psycho**, **Peeping Tom** and **Repulsion**, on the one hand, and the traditions of the genre on the other, blinding most critics to their essential, if innovative, Gothicism. Carlos Clarens is not alone in being misled by the mise-en-scene of these films into seeing them as clinical, indeed almost documentary, "case histories" and missing their relation to Gothic motifs and attitudes. The censors were lenient with **Repulsion** on precisely these grounds - they felt it was scrupulously "accurate" - and David Pirie saw **Psycho** as a break with the Gothic tradition. However, David Punter has convincingly demonstrated such a relationship, even in

terms of their use of "modern" settings:

"Each of them, in the search for a visual equivalent for a psychological state, finds a setting which relates closely to traditional imagery: in **Psycho**, the house, with its cellars and mysterious doors, is pure American Gothic, as Hitchcock of course intended; in **Peeping Tom**, the film-processing laboratory which is a substitute for the hero's homelessness, shot as it is in half-tones and impossible as it is to discern its physical limits, is the laboratory of generations of Frankensteins, in which the endless attempt is continued to discern the secrets of (the hero's own) creation; Catherine Deneuve's apartment, in **Repulsion**, albeit outwardly contemporary, is nonetheless capable of sprouting supernatural apparitions worthy of the direst secrets of Udolpho." (Punter, 1980, p363.)

This use of the setting and of the elements is of immense importance to both the most innovative examples of the tradition and to the most formulaic, although in opposite ways. This is because the setting can serve as a metaphorical extension of character development, justifying Elizabeth MacAndrew's claim that there is a curious "lateral shift" in Gothic techniques, through which "settings turn out to be part of characterisation and methods of narration to be principles of structure", but can equally well serve as an evasion of psychological exploration, a substitute for characterisation. In a generally positive account of the Gothic tradition, such as MacAndrew's, the problems of decorative uses of setting and of the flattened one dimensionality of characters conveyed through external manifestations do not arise; characters are assumed to be essentially symbolic, almost allegorical, embodiments of abstract qualities or mixtures of qualities (innocence, wisdom, lust, etc) rather than representations of individuals. While she makes out a good case for this reading of a number of Gothic novels it is sometimes quite clear that characters are not being used in this way. Elizabeth Napier

has, for example, described a number of instances in which characters "suddenly exhibit behaviour that has no relationship to their previous actions" for the simple reason that characterisation is being opportunistically sacrificed to the demands of plot. (See Napier, 1987, pp34-36.) Napier complains that the practitioners of Gothic fiction "became adept at retreating from a full exploration of the characters they create" and suggests that many early Gothics are far less interested in character than in plot, moral or sustained evocations of atmosphere and setting.

There are a number of reasons for accepting - at least partially - this verdict. One such reason is indicated by the connection between the architectural and literary revivals which have both come to be known by the appellation "Gothic". Examples have already been given of the involvement of important figures in both fields and a certain transposition of attitudes can be assumed. It is therefore significant that at this stage there was little interest in Gothic architecture as such, more a fascination with the mood and atmosphere associated with it. Some examples of the architecture of this revival were follies, often incomplete by design and intended to resemble ruins. Such ruins, whether genuine, or deliberate evocations of decreptitude, were associated with an atmosphere of mysterious archaism which Gothic authors also sought to achieve through the use of mediated narrations. The most common forms of these were the claim that a narrative was a translation of an ancient manuscript, the use of such manuscripts within the text as "tales within the tale" and the use of concentric framing devices (the monster's tale in **Frankenstein**, for instance,

exists within Frankenstein's narration which, in turn, exists within Walton's narration). The prediliction for the archaic and the ruined was part of the romantic reaction against classical sensibilities; Varma quotes Walpole's own contention that a Greek temple expresses "satisfied completeness" as opposed to the expression of "aspiration" in a Gothic cathederal (p16) and elaborates on this to the effect that while neoclassical architecture came to be seen in terms of a static, symmetrical beauty, the Gothic increasingly came to be perceived as expressive of "the grandeur of wildness and the novelty of extravagance".

The romantic interest in the wild, the gloomy and the awesome took a number of forms and fed into the Gothic via a number of distributaries. Much of the specific imagery of the Gothic, as well as the intermittent evocations of an atmosphere of elegaic melancholy, derives from the Graveyard poets of the 1740's with their twilight meditations on solitude and mortality and their imagery of ivy-clad ruins, flickering bats, sightless skulls, etc. However, the Gothic generally lacks the quiet, contemplative tone of the Graveyard poets and the dramatic vigour of its most intense passages would be more closely linked to the revival of interest in Elizabethan drama which occurred in the eighteenth century, particularly in the decades preceding the emergence of the Gothic novel. Varma describes the scale of this revival as it affected a number of authors, noting that fifteen of Shakespeare's plays were acted on the London stage in 1773 alone (see pp29-31). The influence may have been superficial but it was certainly extensive - many Gothic

novels include quotations from Shakespeare and Radcliffe commonly uses such quotations to preface her chapters. Despite their claims that they valued Shakespeare for other reasons the Gothic authors were probably mainly interested in Shakespeare's wild and eerie scenery (the blasted heath, the castle ramparts and the forest in **Macbeth**, the tomb in **Romeo and Juliet**, etc) and his use of witches, ghosts, portents and other fear inspiring devices.

Another contributory source for the imagery of the Gothic, one which again suggests the prime importance of mood and atmosphere, is a tradition in painting that was preoccupied with the "picturesque", with ruins and with the untramelled "sublimity" of nature, a sensibility close to that of the architectural revival. In particular, Ann Radcliffe (**The Mysteries of Udolpho**, 1794, **The Italian**, 1797), who was enormously influential, made up for the fact that she had never travelled by basing her romantic/exotic settings on the landscape paintings of Claude Lorraine, Nicolas Poussin and Salvator Rosa, among others, (Hennessy, 1984, p22) and other aspects of her settings on the picturesque architectural fantasies of Piranesi (Howells, 1978, p24). It is for this reason that her landscapes are recorded in precise, painterly detail and have a strangely visual quality and topographical exactness which could only facilitate their reconversion into other visual media. Indeed, following the publication of her best known work three different paintings of the castle of Udolpho were exhibited at the Royal Academy between 1797 and 1799. (Howells, 1978, p38.) Her use of landscape is part of an emphasis on atmospherics that extends to every aspect of the natural environment and it is not for nothing that

Brendan Hennessy comments that "She uses the weather as Hollywood much later learned to use it. (Hennessy, 1978, p23.)

The inspiration behind Radcliffe's use of landscape is sometimes quite transparent. In **The Mysteries of Udolpho**, which is set in the year 1584, she follows one of her landscape descriptions ("barrenness...here and there interrupted by the spreading branches of the larch or cedar...) with the remark that "this was such a scene as Salvator would have chosen, had he then existed, for his canvas". (Vol 1, p30.) At other times she seems to be trying to translate the painters' chiaroscuro into a form of words:

> "The sun had just sunk below the top of the mountains she (Emily) was descending, whose long shadow stretched athwart the valley; but his sloping rays, shooting through an opening in the cliffs, touched with a yellow gleam the summits of the forest that hung upon the opposite steeps, and streamed in full splendour upon the towers and battlements of a castle that spread its extensive ramparts along the brow of a precipice above. The splendour of these illumunated objects was heightened by the contrasted shade that involved the valley below..." (**Udolpho**, Vol 1, p230.)

The scale of the scene is monumental and the impact of the sun's dying rays "shooting through an opening in the cliffs" is presumably intended to be awe-inspiring, quasi-religious, encouraging humility before the majestic vastness of nature. As the description proceeds more conventionally Gothic elements are introduced; the "Gothic greatness" of the castle with its "mouldering walls of dark grey stone" and its "clustering towers". The careful handling of light and shade is maintained and Radcliffe adds an enlivening touch of colour to the otherwise sombre scene now and again, much as she might imagine a contemporary landscape artist would have done: "As she (Emily) gazed, the light died away on its

walls, leaving a melancholy purple tint, which spread deeper and deeper as the thin vapour crept up the mountain, while the battlements above were still tipped with splendour". The conventional nature of the image will facilitate a ready "visualisation" on the part of the reader, allowing it to remain vivid and at the same time to be wreathed in "duskiness", "obscurity" and "thick shade". Radcliffe habitually allows the solidity of her scenes to dissolve into a vague formlessness so as to blend the terrors of the imaginary with the terrors of the "real". As the carriage descends "...the extent and darkness of these tall woods awakened terrific images in her (Emily's) mind..." The castle itself is described with a similar blend of precise details, such as "the pointed arch of a huge portcullis surmounting the gates" which gives Emily the sense of entering a prison, and shadowy suggestiveness such as the "gloomy court" into which she passes, confirming her feeling of entrapment so that "her imagination, ever awake to circumstance, suggested more terrors than her reason could justify". (p231.) Allowing the ominous power of landscape and architecture to fuel the forebodings of the imagination is one of Radcliffe's most typical techniques for creating atmosphere. Heightening the vividness of these evocations of hostile environments through the inclusion of precise and well chosen details she sometimes achieves some quite striking successes. Describing the progress of a storm (and eventual shipwreck) on the Mediterranean she writes:

"A red sulphurous tint overspread the long line of clouds that hung above the western horizon; beneath whose dark skirts the sun, looking out, illuminated the distant shores of Languedoc, as well as the tufted summits of the nearer

woods, and shed a partial gleam on the western waves. The rest of the scene was in deep gloom, except where a sunbeam, darting between the clouds, glanced on the white wings of the sea-fowl that circled high among them, or touched the swelling sail of a vessel which was seen labouring in the storm." (**Udolpho**, Vol II, p155.)

The controlled power of such descriptive passages goes some way towards explaining why Radcliffe's work should have so outlasted that of most of her contemporaries and imitators. However even here the imagery is fairly conventional, especially when one thinks of the popularity of stormy seascapes, shipwrecks, etc, as subjects for contemporary paintings. Of the Gothic novelists, Maturin alone proved capable of developing her way of using architecture, landscape and the elements to any great effect (eg, in the shipwreck scene in **Melmoth the Wanderer** where the fury of the elements is rendered yet more sinister by Melmoth's demonic laughter from the cliffs above, his revelry in the carnage) and the main evidence of her influence is in the survival of that imagery which, in her work, is already the most heavily conventionalised. In particular, the use of trapdoors, concealed passages, dungeons, flickering candles, etc, compounded the element of repetition so far as to more or less ensure the decline of this phase of the genre's development. With the partial exception of Stoker such imagery was sparingly used, or rendered unrecognisable through subtle modification, in most of the influential Gothic literature of the later nineteenth century and beyond, in fact until the rise of a mass audience for the horror film in the 1930's.

Radcliffe and the major writers of the eighteenth century Gothic are often charged with over conventionalising

the iconography of terror in this way and cannot be entirely absolved: in her better passages it can be granted that Radcliffe's use of setting amounts to more than the deployment of "stock elements", and if her work has served as a quarry from which a vast number of later writers have availed themselves of "raw material" it may be regretted that they worked so narrow a seam in preference to so many others; however the invitation to do so is unmistakably present. While much of her use of setting is accomplished with skill and subtlety the "cue" for a "stock" usage of it exists, only too obviously, in the heavily conventionalised responses of the characters to their environment and sometimes also in intrusive authorial commentary. Radcliffe invariably includes scenes of travelling and often makes a point of describing expansive views of mountainous country to which her heroines always respond with a langourous, contemplative ecstacy. Most common among the feminine accomplishments displayed by a Radcliffe heroine is a love of sketching and the ability to respond correctly to imposing landscapes becomes a mark of spiritual, if not literal, nobility. Her heroes display a similar sensibility; thus Valancourt, in **Udolpho**, declares that "These scenes...soften the heart like the notes of sweet music and inspire that delicious melancholy which no person, who had felt it once, would resign for the gayest pleasures." (Vol 1, p47.) Such a response is elicited by the "distant perspective" of a valley "lost in the yellow mist of moonlight" while the enclosed cragginess and wild weather of a mountain pass will inspire an anxiety bordering on terror and imaginings of "banditti", "assassins", etc. A similar set of responses apply to architectural environments, the most

important of which, in this context, have to do with the darkened chambers and labyrinthine passages of the castle/abbey.

Radcliffe's mysterious interiors are often associated with vague but terrible events long past, preserved untouched under the dust of ages because of their fearful reputation. In the exploration of such passages and chambers the heroine is often accompanied by a servant whose comically exaggerated terror partially undermines the heroine's professed disdain for superstition, allowing the terrors of the imagination to be exercised at the slightest pretext. (2) These scenes, which mingle conventional suspense with heavy intimations of supernatural terror, usually climax in a shocking incident or revelation, causing the heroine to scream, flee or swoon. The delicacy and modesty of a Radcliffe heroine, in fact, leaves fainting as the only possible response to many extreme situations, particularly if there is a hint of sexual threat, and these frequent losses of consciousness have been a popular target for satirists, being the most theatrical of a set of emphatic gestures used to convey feeling (sighing, groaning, shuddering, weeping, screaming, etc). It is this conjunction of the primacy of setting/atmosphere with the predictability of the characters' responses to their environment and the events that unfold in it - often read as a "cue" to the reader's own reactions (3) - that motivates the most substantive negative criticisms of the eighteenth century Gothic as a genre. While positive assessments speak confidently in terms of psychological exploration and use Freudian analytical techniques Elizabeth Napier argues that

no matter how psychologically suggestive much of the imagery may seem to a modern reader the characters within the fiction lack sufficient depth to support this interpretation. It is certainly the case that (as she argues) it is difficult to differentiate between the heroines of Radcliffe's various works and that a similar observation would apply to many of her other characters, the main exceptions being her great villains, Montoni in **Udolpho** and Schedoni in **The Italian**, who arouse an ambivalent fascination with evil and traces of paradoxical attraction.

Napier's negative assessment of the eighteenth century Gothic is a persuasive corrective to set against many recent "over-readings" of the genre in terms of psychological exploration. However, her contempt for the shallow predictability of much of this writing (Maturin seems to be, to some extent, exempted) leads her to downplay the links between this tradition and later nineteenth and twentieth century fictions that have traditionally been regarded as Gothic. A number of writers simply date the Gothic novel as spanning the years 1764 (**The Castle of Otranto**) to 1820 (**Melmoth the Wanderer**) and Donald Ringe says that even **Frankenstein**(1818) "...cannot really be called a Gothic romance". (Ringe, 1982, p66.) Napier also disputes the propriety of employing the term "Gothic" to describe later works (pxiii) and is particularly at pains to deny the utility of any system of classification broad enough to encompass Ann Radcliffe alongside writers like the Brontes, Melville and Faulkner. She insists that any attempt to isolate the distinctive qualities of Gothic narratives will eventually come down to a single characteristic: "...a

standardised, absolutely formulaic system of creating a certain kind of atmosphere in which a reader's sensibility toward fear and horror is exercised in predictable ways." (p29.) Thus, to include modern works like **Wuthering Heights**, **Moby Dick** and **Sanctuary** in the same category with Ann Radcliffe on the grounds that they share "a distinctive and pervasive atmosphere of evil" is to overlook the primacy of such a system, allowing the psychological or moral complexity of later works to dignify the eighteenth century Gothic through a critical sleight of hand in which, retrospectively, various "devices" necessarily become signifiers of some deeper meaning. Fair enough, on one level, and I am not concerned to argue the "quality" of Radcliffe's work. However there is no shortage of examples that demonstrate a continuity with later works of accepted importance. Of the examples quoted, it is not difficult to detect the fusion of the "over-reacher" with the "wanderer" in the protagonist of **Moby Dick** and the ramifications of this in both the narrative structure and particularly in the use of the ship itself and the elements. **Wuthering Heights** is even more clearly related to the Gothic tradition and Heathcliffe, modern perceptions notwithstanding, is essentially a vampire figure. In some cases a debt to a specific work by Radcliffe can be detected. Wilkie Collins' **The Woman In White**(1860), for instance, shows a clear family relationship to **The Mysteries of Udolpho**; Laura Fairlie is, on close inspection, an almost perfectly innocent Gothic heroine, her delicacy and love of landscape, even her propensity to sit outdoors and sketch, recalling Emily St Aubert. Count Fosco is a remarkable re-working of

the fascinating/monstrous Gothic tyrant represented by Morano and Montoni in **Udolpho** and Sir Percival Glyde is a lesser figure of evil but nevertheless bears a striking resemblance to Montoni, **Udolpho**'s main villain. In both novels the narrative hinges upon the machinations of a ruined nobleman attempting to improve his fortune through a cynical marriage and in both cases the failure of the heroine to comply with his plans leads to a nightmarish ordeal of incarceration and a threat to her health and her life.

In **Udolpho** there are a number of bitter confrontations in which Montoni tries to force Emily to sign away her estates to him:

"(He) offered her a pen. She took it, and was going to write - when the design of Montoni came upon her mind like a flash of lightning; she trembled, let the pen fall, and refused to sign what she had not read. Montoni affected to laugh at her scruples, and, taking up the paper again, pretended to read; but Emily, who still trembled on perceiving her danger, and was astonished that her own credulity had so nearly betrayed her, positively refused to sign." (Vol II, p49.)

The same situation inevitably arises in **The Woman in White**, with Sir Percival pressing Laura to give her signature:

"..."Come! Come! Sign your name, and let us have done as soon as possible."
"I ought surely to know what I am signing, Sir Percival, before I write my name?"
"Nonsense! What have women to do with business? I tell you again you can't understand it."
"At any rate, let me try to understand it. Whenever Mr Gilmore had any business for me to do he always explained first, and I always understood him."
"I dare say he did. He was your servant and was obliged to explain. I am your husband, I am **not** obliged." (p221.)

One could argue such similarities at length although Collins' brilliant succession of character viewpoints and his careful domestication of the Gothic's overwrought imagery make the relationship much less apparent.

That such a relationship exists neither "upgrades" the

importance of the eighteenth century Gothic nor "downgrades" the importance of those various tendencies that are influenced by it although it does call into question any schema involving a separation of "popular" and "high" culture which might enter into such an assessment. The distance between the original Gothic and the later works that Napier mentions may be partly of this order. The rise of the Gothic novel significantly coincided (as Napier herself points out) with a massive expansion of literacy, particularly among the middle class, and the original Gothic can be seen, not only as an unprecedentedly "popular" form but perhaps also as a transitional one. Coral Ann Howells claims that "between 1790 and 1820 the Gothic novel was the most popular kind of fiction in England" (Howells, 1978, p1) and Varma amplifies this with the suggestion that it "may well have established the popularity of the novel form." (Varma, 1959, p3.)

While one might well want to describe the genre's emphasis on dramatic gesture and action as "theatrical" in a loosely pejorative sense it is worth noting that this designation also has a more precise and neutral application. The reader was offered an experience similar to that of the theatre spectator, particularly as fiction dealing with "emotional and imaginative awareness" was previously considered to be the domain of poetry and drama and the Gothic marks its first entry into the novel form. The reliance upon dramatic external manifestations to convey interior states was a product of the tremendous mutual influence that drama and the novel had upon one another in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century. Howells explains that "at no other period has the English novel been so close to drama as it was

between 1790 and 1820" (Howells, 1978, p16.)

As with the interaction of architectural and literary interests, this mutual interest is reflected directly at the level of the authors themselves, some of whom actually wrote more plays and melodramas than novels (eg. M.G. Lewis, author of **The Monk** and C.R. Maturin, author of **Melmoth the Wanderer**). While the later works which Napier cites illustrate a growing move away from this theatrical tradition, it is often in works which maintained this link that one finds the most specifically "popular" elements that have persisted into, and helped to shape, the popular culture of the twentieth century. The indebtedness of the Gothic novel to dramatic forms facilitated the adaptation of such works for the stage; not only were there many adaptations of Radcliffe but a visitor to the London Opera House in October 1826 could see a double bill of **Frankenstein** and **The Vampire** (adapted from Polidori), a programme which, as Prawer comments, was to become "...over a hundred years later, the most celebrated double bill in the history of the cinema: the reissue of James Whale's **Frankenstein** along with Tod Browning's **Dracula**..." (Prawer, 1980, p1). Of course, Browning's **Dracula** was adapted from Broadway rather than directly from Stoker and its theatricality, though much diminished in more distinguished later horror films, undoubtedly helped to establish the dramatic presence of a certain type of Gothic hero/ villain in the cinema.

This theatricality in the Gothic novel is only one instance of a strategy of soliciting strong affective responses which marks it as an insistently popular genre. In

this it is similar to romantic fiction. In modern film culture the horror movie merges, in one direction, with the detective story/thriller and in the other direction with science-fiction; in the late eighteenth century Gothic horror was tied up in a similar interchange with popular dramatic/melodramatic forms on the one hand and "sentimental fiction" - a precursor of the romantic fiction of today - on the other. The overlap between Gothic horror - still known as "romances" at this time - and "sentimental fiction" can hardly be overstated; the development of the "persecuted woman" in the Gothic goes hand in hand with the development of the heroine of "sentimental fiction" to the extent that the two are virtually indistinguishable at this stage:

> "...many Gothic novelists spoke openly about the sentimental nature of their endeavours. Many, like Clara Reeve...showed themselves adept at both genres, and many sentimental novelists...in turn made free use of Gothic devices. The link, indeed, between Gothic and sentimental fiction is strong: both modes assume the primacy of feeling, and the pleasure of exercising it vicariously, and gain their effect by encouraging particularly strong emotional responses from their readers. The forms can overlap because it is the intensity of the response and not the type of experience eliciting the response (pleasurable, terrifying) that is in question..." (Napier, 1987, p26.)

It is this hybrid nature of the early Gothic - with one or other tendency foregrounded in individual works - which accounts for its divided legacy. Today the term "Gothic" has two popular applications: firstly to the literature of supernatural terror with which I am concerned and secondly to the "Du Maurier school" of womens' fiction that seems like the dark underside of the Mills and Boon or Harlequin romance, offering heavily conventionalised fantasies of persecution at the hands of a fearsome but magnetic husband/suitor. The main feature that the original Gothic has

in common with such "pulp" fiction is what was referred to at the time as its "frankly sensational" character.

Novels by Radcliffe and Clara Reeve tended to be relatively restrained but, nevertheless, had their share of colourful and horrific incident, while many later novels revelled in the description of taboo subjects and images. The evocation of remote periods and distant settings makes such images possible, not only as a strategy for making them publicly acceptable but also, as Pirie says, as a stimulus for the writers' own imagination and as a means of evading the deep-seated inhibitions which many writers would feel when confronting a contemporary social milieu. (Pirie, 1973, p138.) Incarceration, mental cruelty/ torture and murder are recurring motifs in all these fictions. Radcliffe builds up a charged atmosphere with overtones of sexual threat. Maturin has the innocent Immalee married to the demonic Melmoth by the spectral form of a dead monk in a midnight ceremony and she later bears his child. But Lewis extends the fascination with taboo sexual imagery furthest with his images of rape and incest (and the hint of necrophilia) in **The Monk**. The fascination with taboo images is also particularly evident in the level of visual detail with which Gothic authors present scenes of horrific suffering and gruesome putrescence. In Radcliffe the description of such scenes is kept relatively perfunctory, as in this scene where Emily St Aubert discovers a corpse in a screened recess. It was stretched upon a low couch

> "...which was crimsoned with human blood, as was the floor beneath. The features, deformed by death, were ghastly and horrible, and more than one livid wound appeared in the face. Emily, bending over the body, gazed, for a moment, with an eager frenzied eye; but, in the next, the lamp dropped from

her hand, and she fell senseless at the foot of the couch." (**Udolpho**, Vol II, p18.)

When she is describing similar images which are clearly signalled as unreal, as in the dream of Adeline in **The Romance of the Forest**(1791), she becomes slightly more expansive in an exaggerated, almost surreal, way:

"...lifting the pall, she saw beneath it a dead person,..his features were sunk in death but they were yet serene. While she looked at him, a stream of blood gushed from his side, and descending to the floor, the whole chamber was overflowed; at the same time some words were uttered in the same voice she heard before; but the horror of the scene so entirely overcame her, that she started and awoke." (**The Romance of the Forest**, p109.)

In each case the fascination of such imagery ("an eager frenzied eye") is abruptly curtailed by the typically Radcliffian reaction of the heroine. In Lewis' **The Monk** there is no such inhibition and the sheer physical detail of his treatment of the sufferings of (especially female) characters has been criticised as being so strong as to elicit an overwhelming horror to the exclusion of pity. Agnes, one of the novel's heroines, is locked in the subterranean vaults of her convent when it is discovered that she is pregnant and is left to rot. The child she bears starves to death before her but, unable to part with her sole object of comfort, she clings pathetically to its corpse long after its features become unrecognisable under "the living corruption with which they were overspread".

"Sometimes I felt the bloated Toad, hideous and pampered with the poisonous vapours of the dungeon, dragging his loathsome length along my bosom: sometimes the quick cold Lizard rouzed me leaving his slimy track upon my face, and entangling itself in the tresses of my wild and tangled hair: Often have I at waking found my fingers ringed with the long worms, which bred in the corrupted flesh of my infant..." (**The Monk**, p415.)

Maturin, on occasion, also rivals the modern horror film with

vivid and explicit climaxes of violent physical horror:

"They dashed a mangled lump of flesh right against the door of the house where I was. With his tongue hanging from his lacerated mouth, like that of a baited bull; with one eye torn from the socket, and dangling on his bloody cheek; with a fracture in every limb, and a wound for every pore, he still howled for "life - life - life - mercy!" till a stone, aimed by some pitying hand, struck him down. He fell, trodden in one moment into sanguine and discoloured mud by a thousand feet..." (**Melmoth the Wanderer**, p255.)

So far I have mainly dealt with the settings/atmosphere of the Gothic, its "theatrical" mode of characterisation and its fascination with taboo imagery: it is possible to move from this to a more thorough treatment of its recurring thematics and the major features these give rise to. To return to the "castle question" for example; the typical architectural setting of the Gothic novel is intimately connected with the type of hero/antihero to be found at the centre of the narrative. As the setting suggests, one of the hallmarks of the Gothic - and a point of contact with the wider movement of romanticism - is the protagonist as social outsider, isolated from the rest of humanity. The recurrence of the monastery as setting is one instance of this of this separation, with the hero being literally cut off from the community in a mysterious, cloistered envoironment, (and one conducive to the formation of extremes of sexual repression, guilt, religious terror, etc).

This separation of the hero from society - drawing on the figure of the Wandering Jew from popular culture - took the specific form of the Byronic "fatal man" or Shelleyan "doomed seeker", literary figures that pre-date the writers they have become associated with to the extent that Byron could be said to have modelled his persona on such fictions rather than the other way around. (4) This figure had assumed tremendous

stature by the time that **Melmoth the Wanderer** was published. The obvious correlate of this concentration on the overwhelming stature of the individual protagonist is a consequent reduction of interest in the depiction of social milieu and context, commonly reduced to vague and abstract masses. At climactic points in the narrative these masses often take the form of a riot, a blind, elemental force. (The passage quoted from **Melmoth the wanderer** above is one example of this and a remarkably similar instance occurs in **The Monk** (pp355-357). This tradition persists, most notably in Universal's 1931 **Frankenstein** (though not the novel) and a number of Hammer versions. In **The Monk** and **Melmoth** the placement of the riot scenes, and the build up to them, suggests a justified outpouring of aggression against a repressive institution which escalates into an ugly and indiscriminate bloodbath. In the Universal **Frankenstein** the riot scene, though placed to achieve a similar climactic excitement, resembles - though it is more sympathetic - Hollywood's typical presentation of an ignorant lynch-mob.) It is interesting in this context that Judith Wilt should argue that "as a social impulse, it is not revolution that the Gothic celebrates, not even reform, but riot..." (Wilt, 1980, p46.)

Wilt's comments arise in the context of a debate about the social attitudes of the Gothic, which has been seen as one manifestation of a spirit which found its greatest expression in the French revolution, and much has been made of the popularity of translations of the English Gothic in revolutionary France. Such readings emphasise the subversive,

transgressive aspect of the Gothic and its liberation of the imagination. Less positive assessments point to the nature of the isolated, heroic individual - the psychic battleground for warring moral impulses - as being ultimately a barrier to any serious consideration of social themes, as well as to a strong stabilising tendency, a strenuous effort towards closure (sometimes at the expense of narrative plausibility) in which the norms transgressed are emphatically restored. Wilt's comments are particularly apposite: the imagery of "riot" evokes the combination of explosively liberating and brutally destructive urges; that is, it clarifies the necessary connection between the moment of transgression and the moment of suppression in Gothic fiction. That the unstable unity of such contradictory impulses is at the heart of the Gothic is nicely clarified in Coral Ann Howells' description of "a profound unease and fear of anarchy which runs side by side with expressions of frustration at conventional restraint in Gothic fiction." (Howells, 1978, p6.)

It would perhaps be too vague, too all encompassing, to posit this very instability as the main thematic of the genre. However, the central pattern of Gothic fiction is what David Punter calls a "dialectic of comfort and disturbance" or "a continuous oscillation between reassurance and threat" (p423) and the importance of this seems to extend way beyond the purely formal level. The Gothic, in its sudden and vivid dramatisations of the barbaric and the taboo, calls into question the reliability of commonplace perceptions. Thus, Emily's journey from St Aubert's chateau "on the pleasant banks of the Garonne" to the dark, labyrinthine castle of

Udolpho is the culmination of a series of precipitous changes occasioned by the arbitrary whims of those in authority over her. The fall of Ambrosio is equally precipitous. Initially presented as a figure of idolisation, a monk so pious that "He Knows not in what consists the difference of Man and Woman", the movement from his initial seduction to his crimes of incestuous rape and matricide follow a relentless logic. Again, Jonathan Harker, a plain solicitors' clerk from London, finds himself, a mere fifteen pages into **Dracula**, staring up at the "frowning walls and dark window openings" of Castle Dracula. "Was this a customary incident in the life of a solicitors' clerk sent out to explain the purchase of a London estate to a foreigner?...I began to rub my eyes and pinch myself to see if I were awake." (**Dracula**, p24.) The instances could be multiplied; the usual pattern is for the innocent protagonist to be caught up in the storm of the Gothic tyrant's ambition (**Udolpho**, **Dracula**) or to find his or her own aspirations bear "monstrous" or malevolent fruition (**The Monk**, **Frankenstein**). As Punter says "Aspiration and fall are the abstract topics of Gothic fiction; where realism sees these things, if at all, in terms of gradual movement and equilibrium, the Gothic sees them as sudden, dizzying, violent..." (p421.)

The most celebrated instances of this involve the dramatisation of sexual repression and desire. Most commentators agree that sexuality is one of the central concerns of the genre and Punter describes the Gothic as being "erotic at root". All vampire literature has an implicitly sexual dimension and **The Monk** envisions the

breakdown of a level of sexual repression so extreme that the consequences of expression are inevitably disastrous. However it cannot be claimed that all Gothic literature "dramatises" such issues. In the more "sentimental" Gothic of Ann Radcliffe, for instance, the persistence of an atmosphere of latent but unfocussed sexual tension arises precisely from her refusal to dramatise such themes while continually creating situations where one might expect them to arise. Her heroines, invariably young and beautiful, usually suffer the persecuting attentions of a male figure(s) in the imposing form of the Gothic hero-villain. However they conventionally display such a sense of social propriety as to be inordinately fearful of any situation which would leave them alone in a room with a man (very close acquaintances apart) and, as "literary responses to the century's idealisation of the virgin Mary" they necessarily "remain ignorant of their sexual nature". (Nicholls, in Fleenor(ed), 1983, p192.) So, on her first meeting with Montoni, Emily St Aubert "felt admiration, but not the kind of admiration that leads to esteem; for it was mixed with a degree of fear she knew not exactly wherefore". (**Udolpho**, vol 1, p125.) Her fear is later given a fairly prosaic justification and her admiration extinguished, though when she suffers the unwanted attentions of Count Morano she is, for once, unhappy at Montoni's absence "for she considered his presence a protection, though she knew not what she should fear." (Vol 1, p189.) Thus the Radcliffian Gothic follows the same oscillation of threat and reassurance but the fears (sexual vulnerability) inevitably remain shadowy and the movement of reassurance is dominant, asserting itself particularly in endings where the triumph of

virtue complements the downfall of the unjust.

For Punter, this relationship between threat and reassurance "renders most of the directly political arguments about the "subversiveness" of the Gothic irrelevant" (p417) because the genre performs the dialectical function of most art in its ambivalent movement between confronting socially intractable problems and offering "modes of imaginary transcendence". In Napier's more negative account these opposing currents lead to a "formal unevenness" (p4) within the genre, the ambivalence figuring as an unresolved deadlock between "opposing currents of moral and structural stabilising", giving rise to an unstable genre, "essentially a genre of imbalance". (p5). So, in Radcliffe's work, the idealisation of feminine passivity and fortitude which is evident in her heroines means that they cannot actually **do** anything much and the real energies of the narrative tend to be displaced onto the striking male anti-heros (structural stabilising). At the same time the drive towards closure motivates a more or less arbitrary tidying up of social and moral imbalances in which the punishments and rewards meeted out amount to the restoration of "social and moral equilibrium" (moral stabilising). Similarly, in **The Monk**, the strength of the initial sympathy encouraged with the erotic desires of Ambrosio is answered by the awesome punitive violence which is visited upon him at the book's conclusion. Napier argues that this disjunction between the affective and the moral is symptomatic of the genre's strong "self corrective" tendencies: "the affective may be used to break the bounds of the moral and the moral to repress the flights

of the dramatic". (p133.) For Napier this fruitless deadlock leads to the eventual decline and failure of the form although she does not seem entirely confident in arguing this. At one point she states that if the later Gothic stabilises it does so "...only with difficulty - in aesthetic failure, as in Shelley's **St Irvine** or in the superficial shock of horror-Gothic" (p149). Elsewhere, she comments that it is only in the later, more psychologically complex works (Godwin, Mary Shelley, Hogg) that the urge towards stabilisation can be comfortably relinquished and that "their works gain a coherence, a sustained unity of tone that much earlier Gothic fiction lacks." (p43.)

It seems to me that the question of whether or not the original Gothic "stabilises" becomes less important if we grant that the balance between repetition and innovation in the genre had slipped so far in the direction of the former as to prompt a series of considerable leaps in the opposite direction on the part of later practitioners. Viewed in this light the year 1820 is also significant, not as marking the end of the Gothic but because, from about this point onwards the Gothic began to be dispersed and fragmented into a number of other genres. Taking this broader view one need not adopt such a pessimistic tone about the potential of the genre for significant insight either; if the work of the early Gothic novelists leads one to suspect that the concentration on atmosphere and settings often serves to evade psychological exploration, then the work of Edgar Allan Poe can only lead one to conclude the opposite. In Poe, elaborate descriptions of exterior architectural form are explicitly used as metaphors for the internal mental processes of the

protagonists. The isolation of the protagonist is often built up through evocations of encircling walls and enclosed spaces while labyrinthine interiors with many locked doors clearly relate to the inner recesses of the mind. As Poe himself put it with regard to one of his poems: "...by the haunted palace I really mean to imply a mind haunted by phantoms - a disordered brain." (Poe, quoted in Ringe, 1982, p136.)

Examining the diffusion of the Gothic influence from the 1820's onwards what one finds is that, rather than the Gothic legacy forming a straightforward linear progression which leads us to the horror film as a genre, which is then influenced by and recombined in various ways with thrillers, detective stories and science fiction; all these genres have their origin in the Gothic tradition and have only existed in a state of mutual interaction, with a constant transposition and reabsorbtion of elements and the retention of many underlying structural similarities. Once again, this process was facilitated by the fact that the practitioners of one genre would often be equally active in another. So, Poe is, of course, equally well known for his "detective stories" as for his Gothic horror and it has even been claimed that "if Jules Verne is the father of modern science-fiction, Poe is the grandfather." (Hennessy, 1978, p39.) Similarly, Sheridan Le Fanu, author of **Carmilla** (a lesbian/vampire fantasy little known today although it was the inspiration behind Dreyer's **Vampyr** and a number of the sex-vampire movies of the 1970's) was also a writer of detective fiction and has been claimed to be "a link between the Gothic and the psychological horror of modern times". (Hennessy, 1978, p42.)

The way in which I intend to briefly indicate the basis of the changes in the Gothic novel though, is by looking at the two texts that have been most influential upon the horror film, Shelley's **Frankenstein** and Stoker's **Dracula** (1818 and 1897 respectively) and their relationship to other genres. In particular I will pay attention to the way in which the Gothic protagonist is developed in these two novels. In **Frankenstein**, a theme most powerfully expressed in **Melmoth the Wanderer** is developed in the direction of science-fiction. Donald Ringe makes the link clear in his summary of **Melmoth**'s concern with "the fate of one who, in seeking forbidden knowledge and power, raises himself above his fellows, but who, in doing so, cuts himself off from their saving communion." (Ringe, 1982, p66.) This issue of the separation of the individual from the community is inflected in a different direction in **Frankenstein**:

> "In the eighteenth century the place of separation is the monastery, and the tyrannising force is passion, or superstition. When Mary Shelley comes to write **Frankenstein** in 1816 the place of separation, though it is a "tower" like Schedoni/Marinelli's, is now a laboratory, and the tyrannising force is reason. But the structure is still the same and so is the conflation of monk and priest in the separated one. Victor Frankenstein raises his hands over the mortal scraps on his table and calls down into them the ideal." (Wilt, 1980, p62.)

The character Schedoni/Marinelli, referred to here, was a sinister monk in Ann Radcliffe's **The Italian** who later turns out to be the infamous Count de Marinella, a man guilty of various murderous intrigues and suspected of many more. It is around this comparison that Wilt argues that what had gone under the name of hypocrisy in the eighteenth century Gothic, enters the nineteenth century as "schizophrenia - the actual detatchment of multipersonalities" and that **Frankenstein**

"stands right at the tipping point in presentations of this dilemma". (p66.) Thus, although Victor Frankenstein is unmistakably a man of science, he nevertheless manages to remain, to some extent, a "cloistered monk", a "flawed God" and an "anti-husband" (p69). The Van Helsing figure in **Dracula** is more clearly a composite scientific/mystical figure although in this case the presentation tends more in the direction of the detective story/thriller.

Wilt once again puts her finger neatly on the issues involved when she notes that "the black genius always has his opposing white king". (Wilt, 1980, p94.) So, the positions occupied by Van Helsing and the Count in Stoker's novel are structurally similar to those occupied by the arch criminal and the sleuth in late nineteenth century detective literature and much of Van Helsing's activity is geared towards anticipating and understanding the Count's motives and actions. One can also sketch a tentative structural link between Dracula and later science-fiction literature. The opening of the novel takes the form of Jonathan Harker's first person narration of his journey into the remote and mysterious Carpathian region. He is an invited guest, ostensibly on a business trip, and there is no sense of a voyage into the unknown, more a mounting sense of unease. Harker tries to dismiss his own inkling that something is not quite right - his sense of the uncanny - seeing himself as the bearer of a modern, pragmatic culture in a superstition-laden backwater. Nevertheless, it is his venture into this dark and incomprehensible world which brings about the awesome visitation of the powers of darkness upon modern civilisation. Wilt summarises the link with science-fiction

as being modulated through the intermediate "wierd tales" form in which this "penetration-with-counterattack" pattern became "the spine of Gothic fiction in a century of imperialism and world war." (p92.) She sees science-fiction as "this century's special branch of the Gothic". (p295.)

These accounts of **Frankenstein** and **Dracula** suggest some of the ways in which the Gothic was fragmented and recombined to become the basis of a number of other genres. The elements of it were gradually redistributed and can be traced as far as, say, the imperialist spy thrillers of Ian Fleming. (Bennett and Woolacott point out that the Bond figure, and the language in which he is described, is distantly related to the Byronic hero and has a distinct relationship to the male characters in romantic fiction - 1987, p222.) In what follows though, I will be interested specifically in the continuation of the Gothic tradition in the science-fiction/horror/detective genres and the thematic consequences of each of these divergences.

B. Divergent Tendencies.

i). "Gothic" or "Gothics".

It is not really enough to demonstrate that the various genres in question (romantic fiction and particularly the science-fiction/detective/horror genres) to a common origin in the Gothic as though the matter were primarily of genealogical significance. Although doing this does a) avoid the obvious pitfall of identifying the Gothic too closely with "horror" (and some writers do this and then go on to contrast the Gothic with science-fiction, for example) and b) open out the possibility of a subtler approach to the

relationship between genres, in which the singularity of one strand of development will consist in the relative prominence of elements also present in others; there is a danger with a tradition as diffuse and pervasive as the Gothic that it may become possible to describe virtually anything as Gothic. The term becomes so full as to be empty. Describing something as "Gothic" may no longer tell us anything about its specific properties, instead obscuring these behind an imprecise label or confusing us with a multiplicity of possible referents to which the term may apply.

This is what has happened in the case of much writing about the horror film. Partly because of David Pirie's work and partly because of the Hammer films' reliance upon the two best known works of Gothic fiction, the notion of "Gothic" has become popularly associated with period/costume horror films (set in the era in which these books were written) or with an atmosphere, mise-en-scene and conventionalised social milieu which were established through such films. The term is also casually and idiosyncratically used, though, to refer to various other types of film. So Stephen Farber, writing in 1966, tells us that he is using the term Gothic "...to describe arresting distortions in both tone and cinematic technique" in his characterisation of films such as **The Collector** and **Bunny Lake is Missing** as "The New American Gothic" (in Huss and Ross(eds), 1972, p95) while Phil Hardy's horror "encyclopedia" refers to **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre** - a very different kind of film - as representetive of "a genuinely radical strain of American rural Gothic films". (Hardy(ed), 1985, p216.) And while the unrelenting pace and

contrasted with the "...clinical, almost surgical" horror of David Cronenberg (Hardy(ed), 1985, p298), Pam Cook, looking for a description of Cronenberg's **The Fly**(1986), also settles upon the word "Gothic". She tells us that Cronenberg's emphasis

"...on the individual detatched from society and institutions clearly puts (his) work outside the "progressive" strand of modern horror identified by Wood and others in, for example, George Romero's films. It belongs rather within more extreme Gothic traditions in which the human body becomes the external site of an internal struggle between ego and id, "good" and "bad" psychic forces, providing a metaphor for modern anxieties about the loss of individual identity in a distorted, divided self." (Cook, 1987, p46.)

She is undoubtedly right and the mention of the "divided self" immediately brings to mind the tradition that can be traced from Mary Shelley's **Frankenstein** through Stevenson's **The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde** and beyond. However this "extreme" Gothic tradition is only one derivitive of the eighteenth century Gothic that can be detected in modern film and literature; it would be equally legitimate to trace the (presumably less extreme) tradition that runs from Ann Radcliffe through to authors like Daphne Du Maurier and Victoria Holt and which is unmistakably present in some of Alfred Hitchcock's "romance-thrillers". Joanna Russ notes that these "modern Gothics" tend to have a female protagonist and "...a handsome, magnetic suitor or husband who may or may not be a lunatic and/or a murderer." (Russ, in Fleenor(ed), 1983, p32.) The problem is that while it is undoubtedly both possible and instructive to place a given text in relation to the Gothic, there are, in fact, in Fleenor's words, "not just one Gothic but Gothics". (Fleenor(ed), 1983, p4.) The term no longer has any analytical utility if it is made to serve as a

shorthand for grotesquerie, atmosphere, etc and if it is to be used it should be to place a film in relation to an identifiable trend of Gothic development with distinctive thematic concerns, character types, etc, as in Pam Cook's usage above.

In what follows, therefore, I will not be concerned to delineate the development of any "pure" Gothic to the exclusion of some of the more disparate trends that are related to it in one way or another. This has often been the approach of those literary critics concerned exclusively with the eighteenth century English Gothic and has tended towards the identification of a "decline" of the tradition taking place in the 1820's, leading to a perception of the Gothic novel as something of an aberation, a dead end or wrong turning, standing outside the mainstream literary tradition. Instead, I shall take my cue from the extensive literature generated by the revival of scholarly interest in Gothic fiction in the late 1970's and 1980's. Much of this writing has been concerned with tracing the multiple legacies of the genre and situating them in relation to social developments. A bewildering variety of "Gothics" have heen described and analysed; English and American Gothics, "high" Gothics and "trash" Gothics, "male" Gothics and "female" Gothics, etc, all of which have entered into an unceasing mutual exchange with one another and with other traditions. A tangle of intersecting genealogies has been uncovered: the title of Judith Wilt's study - **Ghosts of the Gothic: Austen, Eliot and Lawrence** - speaks for itself; Cynthia Griffin Wolff finds that the truest "translation" of Ann Radcliffe's work into the major fiction of the nineteenth century is in "the work

the major fiction of the nineteenth century is in "the work of the Brontes, in general" and "**Jane Eyre**, in particular" (in Fleenor(ed), 1983, p217); other writers have traced the "high" Gothic from **Melmoth the Wanderer** through Melville's **Moby Dick** and Conrad's **Heart of Darkness** to Faulkner's **Sanctuary** and beyond; and Radcliffe's Gothic has been traced not only in the "high" Gothic of the nineteenth century and the "pulp" Gothic of the "Du Maurier school" but also in the development of both horror and detective novels. And this is to leave aside the development of science-fiction, the thriller, etc.

The area is both inviting and intimidatingly vast. For example, placing **Heart of Darkness** within a particular literary tradition also sheds light upon Coppola's **Apocalypse Now**(1978) with Willard and Kurtz in structurally complementary roles, one a "monstrous" inversion of the other, as expressed in Willard's fascinaton/loathing relationship with the general. Interestingly, an early draft of the script has Willard stepping into Kurtz's role after his death. **Apocalypse Now** is notoriously generically eclectic and such a consideration of it would have to recognise that various "reading strategies" are brought into play in the course of the narrative, foregrounding those associated with horror fiction in this case.

A similar case of generic eclecticism, in which we find the intersection of various "Gothics" is David Cronenberg's **The Dead Zone** (1982). The film mobilises a number of reading strategies associated with the detective story/thriller, the horror movie and science-fiction in a peculiarly episodic narrative. The solution of the enigma posed by a series of

brutal murders forms a major element of the narrative but the hero (Johnny) is far from typical of the detective stoey/thriller. He is a withdrawn and perhaps somewhat feminized character, symbolically emasculated and shown to have a sympathetic association with children, particularly against figures of (male) authority. Cursed with an unwanted psychic ability to see glimpses of the future (past, present), he is haunted by visions that are gradually sapping his life. It is his reluctant use of his "powers" which enables him to solve the Castle Rock murders (by mentally "re-living" one of them) but which also gives him a prescient vision of the nuclear holocaust which would be unleashed should a particular presidential candidate secure election. The army of zealous campaigners who support this figure are more reminiscent of the vacantly enthusiastic crowds of such films as **The Candidate** than of the science-fiction tradition's automatons, and the film's climax, in which the hero resorts to asassination to avert catastrophe, is clearly related to the thriller. However, the hero's "powers" do owe something to science-fiction while his actual characterisation has, if anything, more in common with the "persecuted woman" of the "female Gothic (despite being male). Christopher Walken's drained performance in this role has led one critic to describe him in terms of "the hero as terminal case". (Boss, 1986, p17.)

While **Apocalypse Now** gives new life to the device of the "monstrous" double **The Dead Zone** interestingly elaborates upon the connection between the "female Gothic" and detective fiction. In the latter film Martin Sheen, though occupying

the screen for very litle of the film's duration, gives a performance that captures the charismatic malevolence of the Gothic villain but links this with a type of contemporary political leader. However, the submerged attraction which this anti-hero for the persecuted figure (traditionally associated with a heightened imagination, delusory fears, apparitions, etc) is shattered, allowing Christopher Walken's Johnny to bring his ambitions tumbling down. The price paid for this particular wish fulfilment/fantasy is the climactic completion of Johnny's own lingering slide towards the grave - the messianic consummation of his part willed, barely resisted rendezvous with death.

Hellraiser(1987) involves a similarly extensive modernisation of a number of Gothic themes. The most striking feature is the "doubling" of the brothers Frank and Larry, with Frank representing adventure/ mystery/ sexual transgression and Larry representing stability/ respectability/ family. The doubling is at its most insistent in an editing strategy that disrupts temporal linearity in such a way as to suggest that it is Frank who consummates Larry's marriage to Julia, and later parallels Larry's rapt involvement in a televised boxing match with frank and Julia's lovemaking. Frank can, the scene implies, be seen as embodying all that Larry represses; however, it may be more useful to read the doubling effect as a function of the triangular relationship itself, with the two brothers as embodiments of Julia's contradictory desires. It is significant, in this context, that Frank's dabblings in the mysteries of the occult have brought about his death and that for most of the film he exists only in memory/flashback

sequences from Julia's point of view, being "resurrected" in her mind before being literally reconstituted - as a monster - through his brother's blood. The monster can legitimately be seen as the outcome of Julia's sexual desires and the grisly "reconstitution" marks her descent into a nightmare world of supernatural terror. Both the monstrousness of Frank and the increasing monstrousness of Julia (who takes on strong connotations of vampirism) involve a traditionally Gothic association of sexuality with death and decay. There is also a striking recrudescence of this in the films of David Cronenberg.

These examples suggest some of the ways in which a consideration of various developments within the Gothic tradition may be of use in understanding not only the horror movie but also its relationship to other genres. However, the field is vast and it will be necessary to restrict the scope of this analysis in order to make the subject manageable. My main interest will be in tracing the development of the horror tradition in relation to detective stories/thrillers and science-fiction. But, in view of the striking contrast between the oigins of Gothic horror in such close association with a tradition of womens' fiction, and the reputation of the horror film as a particularly "male" genre (Steve Neale asserts that it is "underpinned by the problematic of castration") it seems to me to be most interesting to look at these developments in relation to the evolution of "male" and "female" Gothics. (5) I shall therefore be concerned to look at the reasons why the horror tradition developed in the particular direction in which it did, and at the typical diferences, in terms of sexual politics, between the three

genres with which I am particularly concerned. Most horror films will be inflected in the direction of one or other of these genres.

ii). Ann Radcliffe, the "Female Gothic" and Detective Fiction.

"It is now becoming a critical commonplace that one of the important features of Gothic is that it was in its inception a "womens' fiction", written by and for women, and this is true. It is no accident that many of the most important Gothic writers of the last two centuries - Radcliffe, Mary Shelley, Dinesen, Carter - have been women; nor is it any accident that many of the male writers associated with Gothic - Lewis, Collins, Wilde, Stoker, Lovecraft - display in their works and in their lives a tangential relation to socialised male norms; nor, again, is it an accident that in Gothic occur some of the finest acts of female impersonation in literature - in Collins, in Le Fanu, in Henry James..." David Punter. (1980, p411.)

The term "female Gothic" seems to have originated in Ellen Moers' **Literary Women** (The Womens' Press, 1978) and the definition she offers is simply "the work that women have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic". (p90.) Moers examines Mary Shelley's **Frankenstein** in the light of a wealth of biographical detail which would tend to connect the novel to Shelley's experiences as a woman, particularly the trauma of losing her first child at the age of 17. **Frankenstein** is described as a "birth myth" and Moers draws attention to the passages in Mary Shelley's journal where she records a dream that her child came back to life again, "that it had only been cold, and that we rubbed it before the fire, and it lived", connecting these morbid passages with the theme of the novel. (p96.) The reading is considerably more subtle and sensitive than any summary would convey, as are her subsequent discussions of **Wuthering Heights** and Christina

Rossetti's poem **Goblin Market** in terms of the nightmare of growing up female in Victorian times. Moers extends her analysis of the monstrous in womens' fiction with a brief survey of the twentieth century, particularly Carson McCullers.

Radcliffe's work is only mentioned in passing here and yet it is this tradition, with the figure of the young, beautiful but "persecuted" heroine as its main recurring feature, that has come to be associated with the "female Gothic", particularly in the chapter on Gothics in Tania Modleski's **Loving With a Vengeance: mass produced fantasies for women**(1984) and in the collection of essays edited by Juliann E. Fleenor under the title **The Female Gothic**(1983). The persecuted heroine does not originate with Radcliffe though, but was derived, via Clara Reeve's domestication of Walpole, from the "romance" tradition and, as the strong link with "sentimental fiction" makes clear, should be seen as the darker side of the cult of chivalric romance.

The "romance" and the novel have usually, since the mid eighteenth century, been considered as separate literary "forms" or "genres", one being associated with mystical and heroic subjects, the rise of the other being linked to the emergence of bourgeois realism. Clara Reeve, writing in 1785, was certainly clear about the distinction: "The Romance is an heroic fable, which treats of fabulous persons and things. - The novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written." (Quoted in Spencer, 1986, p182.) However, there has been some dispute as to whether the novel displaced the romance or the romance swallowed up the novel; Northrop Frye has argued that the novel tends to make

use of "the same general structure" as the romance, but adapted to "a demand for greater conformity to ordinary exoerience." (Quoted in Spencer, 1986, p181.) Varma's view that Gothic literature played a major part in establishing the popularity of the novel as a form has already been mentioned; this may have chiefly been accomplished through the incorporation of many elements of the earlier romance; most Gothic novelists considered themselves to be writing "modern romances" and subtitled their works "A Romance" and Walpole was explicit that **Otranto** was written partly in response to the growth of naturalistic literature and in an attempt to produce "a new species of Romance". Romances had been popular with a courtly female readership in Elizabethan England and perhaps the most striking feature of them is this cult of "chivalric romance" and the importance of women and the power of love:

> "In the seventeenth-century French romance the lover's humility and his lady's despotic power were legendary...of course this kind of thing was not new: it had long been an accepted poetic convention that in the love relationship (when idealistically viewed) the normal hierarchy of the sexes was reversed, and the woman reigned; but the romance writers of seventeenth century France pretended that this convention had a decisive power in real life. They related historical events with the stress on romantic love as the cause of actions that changed the world..." (Spencer, 1986, pp183-4.)

The heroine of such romances survives, in modified form, in Walpole's **Otranto**. The plot centers upon the despotic Prince Manfred of Otranto who, when his son is struck dead by a strange supernatural force on the day he is due to get married, decides to take the bride intended for his son as his own wife so as to ensure the continuation of his line. He attempts to imprison her in his castle but she - Isabella -

escapes down a subterranean passage. A door opens mysteriously to aid her escape, but without her being able to see who is responsible for this. Her candle extinguished by a sudden gust of wind, she wanders alone in the darkness until, experiencing "a kind of momentary joy" at the sight of "an imperfect ray of clouded moonshine" from the roof above, she advances "eagerly" and then perceives "a human form standing close against the wall."

"She shrieked, believing it the ghost of her betrothed Conrad. The figure advancing, said in a submissive voice, Be not alarmed, lady; I will not injure you. Isabella, a little encouraged by the words and tone of voice of the stranger, and recollecting that this must be the person who opened the door, recovered her spirits enough to reply, Sir, whoever you are, take pity on a wretched princess standing on the brink of destruction: assist me to escape from this fatal castle, or in a few moments I may be made miserable for ever. Alas! said the stranger, what can I do to assist you? I will die in your defence, but I am unacquainted with the castle,..." (**The Castle of Otranto**, in Praz(ed), 1970. p63.)

The stranger - a "peasant" with a suspiciously prince-like manner - later comments that he does not value his life and would find it some comfort to lose it delivering Isabella from Manfred's tyranny. The romance heroine and her power of love survive here in the typically Gothic setting of the mysterious castle with its darkened passageways and creaking doors on rusty hinges, although in a very subsidiary position to the predatory and tyrannical male. In the writings of Ann Radcliffe the male figure is less explicitly presented as a direct sexual threat to the heroine (Walpole's story makes it quite clear what Manfred wants) but what is lost in terms of narrative is made up for in terms of description.

Radcliffe evokes the brooding terror of the persecuting male in descriptions of him and his environment but either carefully refrains from any implication that this has a

sexual dimension (as with Montoni in **Udolpho** and Schedoni in **The Italian**) or casts the sexual threat in terms of a coercive proposal of marriage (as with Morano in **Udolpho** and the Marquis de Monalt in **The Romance of the Forest**) rather than potential rape. That the one may well be a virtual metaphor for the other is suggested by the fact that the Marquis kidnaps and imprisons Adeline and that at one point he throws his arms about her "...and would have pressed her towards him, but she liberated herself from his embrace, and with a look, on which was impressed the firm dignity of virtue, yet touched with sorrow, she awed him to forbearance." (p163.) In **Udolpho**, Count Morano forces his way into Emily's bed chamber at night in order to press his proposal of elopement and she "...sprung from the bed in the dress which surely a kind of prophetic apprehension had prevented her, on this night, from throwing aside." (Vol 1, p265.) In those cases where the sexual threat is less apparent, as with Montoni in **Udolpho**, there are strong (presumably unintentional) indications that the heroine is attracted to the striking and persecutory male figure (see Napier, 1987, pp107-8, for a good analysis of this) but, as Napier says, such insights are "quickly stifled", usually through having the male figure commit a crime so heinous as to eclipse any appealing features and by allowing the female figure to enter a virtual delirium of terror.

The main development from Walpole to Radcliffe is that the persecuted woman has become the protagonist and the male threat is perceived through her eyes. The popularity of Radcliffe's Gothics with a female readership may be accounted for, then (as with the earlier French romances) by the

relative importance of women within them. This has certainly been argued by Jane Spencer as a counter to notions that women have been - and are - necessarily attracted to fiction that is "unreal" and "romantic", noting that the social institutions of the day often did cut women off from what is referred to as the "real world" and that the fiction they enjoyed had a definite - if submerged - relationship to their lives. "What was "unreal" about the romance was precisely womens'importance in it", she claims, perhaps overstating the case a little. (p183.)

The significance of Radcliffe's Gothic for a female readership would, of course, extend well beyond the mere prominence of female characters. Modleski has argued, as a kind of counter to Barthes' suggestion that classical narrative is based upon male "oedipal drama", that the female Gothic provides at least one instance of a type of story based upon female "oedipal drama". In **Udolpho** Emily loses her mother in the first chapter and her father shortly thereafter (vol 1, p84), finding herself thrown upon the mercy of distant and unsympathetic relations, eventually imprisoned in Montoni's castle and only restored to a position of happiness after a protracted trial of her virtue, her fortitude and, indeed, her sanity. Modleski correlates the growing popularity of the female Gothic with the consolidation of the nuclear family, "in part because it portrayed, in an extremely exaggerated form, a family dynamic that would increasingly become the norm". (Modleski, 1984, p20.) By this reading the early scenes of loss and mourning are to be connected with the "separation anxieties" experienced on the

brink of marriage and the subsequent scenes of fear and persecution are an indirect reflection of the fact that, for many women, their potential husbands would be virtual strangers placed in a position of great authority over them. The overall drift of this argument, though convincing, is overly speculative, and would be difficult to substantiate. It seems equally likely, for example, that the development of the female Gothic could be connected less to the novelty of the tensions that it dramatises than to the expansion of a particular reading public (middle class women) making possible a sharp rise in the number of women working as professional writers and, therefore, able to articulate a female experience. This is a development of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; far fewer women had worked in the profession prior to this period and their preponderance declines again from mid-century onwards. (See below.)

The sudden and terrifying changes in Emily's situation, over which she has no control, will be recognised as one instance of the instability which I have argued - following Punter - is a central feature of the Gothic. While Modleski connects this experience of instability to womens' experience of powerlessness there is good reason to suppose that it also has a wider socio-political dimension. Radcliffe's work, though not strictly "historical Gothic" has a certain historicising tendency which is evident in the contradictory idealisation of the manners of the landed gentry alongside the depiction of feudal barbarity. The former aspect is tied up with a longing for the stability of outmoded hierarchical forms of social organisation and Radcliffe often equates

spiritual "nobility" with literal rank/title, as though one were a guarantee of the other. With a typical reliance on external manifestations, such "nobility" is often described as being apparent at a glance, shining through in an elegance of deportment, an open gentility of countenance, etc. This rhetorical insistence covers an underlying uneasiness, a sense that any social position is, to some extent arbitrary, and therefore vulnerable. Her plots therefore tend to depend on sudden reversals, usurpations, mistaken identities and other devices which betray the deceptiveness of appearances. This incipient awareness of the instability - perhaps the untenability - of the social values she propounds fuels the tendency towards endings in which closure is achieved through the obsessive re-creation of situations of social and ethical equilibrium.

Such a restoration of social stability commonly involves sudden and unexpected discoveries of paternity, the unravelling of complex and ingenious schemes centering on the loss of wills and other important documents, the use of blackmail, the deliberate casting of wrongful suspicion, etc. In this unravelling process one can clearly see the development of some of the characteristic features of detective fiction. There are two other elements in Radcliffe's work which facilitate a development in this direction. The first is the current of rationalism in her thinking that prompts her to carefully explain away all the apparently supernatural mysteries with which she fills her narratives. (6) In **The Italian**(1797) the final solution of the mystery is even presented in the form of a conversation

between two characters, one of whom has noticed and deduced more than the other and must relate the details in order to satisfy the curiosity of the second, less gifted character (and the reader). The second element pointing in the direction of detective fiction is, paradoxically, the ideological equation of femininity with passivity which Radcliffe so scrupulously observes. The heroine, in Radcliffe, rarely actually **does** anything and, being confined to her chamber for large parts of the narrative, is forced to interpret what is going on around her from the slightest scrap of information that comes her way: the passing of various figures under her window, intelligence conveyed in brief conversations with the servants who attend her; and various sounds - the noise of revelry from the great hall, the clash of arms upon the castle ramparts, distant strains of music, etc.

That these aspects of the Radcliffian Gothic contributed towards the development of detective fiction implies an unprecedented degree of influence on the part of a woman novelist. And this does seem to have been the case: one contemporary reviewer of **The Mysteries of Udolpho** considered it "the most interesting novel in the English language" (quoted in Miyoshi, 1969, p33) and Ellen Moers describes Radcliffe as "the most popular and best paid novelist of the eighteenth century." (Moers, 1978, p91.) Any account of the "female Gothic" must therefore deal with the reasons why it became possible for women writers to rise to such positions of pre-eminence within their profession. The reasons are inevitably complex and can, in part, be explained by the "female oriented" legacy of the romance. This legacy also

partly accounts for the initial disreputability of the novel form - and, indeed, of fiction in general - which in this period was commonly despised by male critics for its feminine preoccupations. Even leaving aside the influence of French romances, the rise of the novel involved the absorbtion of many previously personal writing practices associated with women into a form of professional activity. In Jane Spencer's succinct phrase, "writing, at the same time as it was being professionalised, was also being domesticated." What she means by this is spelled out in the following passage:

> "There was not only the general change from a system dominated by private circulation and aristocratic patronage to a more open literary market, the world of Grub Street; but a simultaneous movement of certain kinds of writing especially associated with women - the familiar letter, the diary, the domestic conduct book - out of the private and into the public arena. The rapid growth of the novel, which drew on all of these modes, is the best example. This meant not only that women could make a living out of what was thought of as an essentially feminine accomplishment like writing pretty letters; but that the public world itself could be affected by the values introduced to it by these hitherto private modes of writing." (Spencer, 1986, p20.)

This was reflected in the form of the early novel, the "epistolary novel" being popular in the late eighteenth century, with a preponderance of female writers, and exerting a strong influence on literature in general. Traces of this influence can be seen in both **Frankenstein** and (via Wilkie Collins) in **Dracula**. Bram Stoker's rendering of his female characters in **Dracula** is heavily dependent on the "feminine" style of the letters he has them exchange with one another, an evocation of a privately feminine discourse. These traces of the novel's origins, then, persist well into the period when the critical estimation of the form was much more assured. And while the influx of women into the writing

profession proved to be permanent, their preponderance was never so great as in this early period. The rise in the status of the novel was accompanied by a corresponding increase in the amount of serious critical attention paid to it, which often involved a concern over what were considered to be fitting and decorous subjects for women to write on. So, when the outcry against sensation novels was in full swing in the mid-nineteenth century many critics were disturbed at the number of women writers who were producing them:

> "In spite of the notable precedent set by Mrs Radcliffe at the end of the eighteenth century and the popularity of her Tales of Terror, mid-nineteenth century publishers seemed to feel there was something peculiarly indelicate about tales of crime or criminals being written by a woman, and were reluctant to print them, though stories of social and domestic life were readily accepted." (Murch, 1969, p69.)

It is perhaps for this reason that the development of the "horror" strand of the Gothic moves away from its "female" forms, so that the major precursors of modern horror fiction are Lewis and Maturin and the resurgence of the genre with the "decadent Gothic" of the 1890's is dominated by four male writers. However, against this general tendency one has to set the enormous and seminal influence of Mary Shelley's **Frankenstein**, a book which does not really belong in the tradition of the "female Gothic" as I have described it but is also at some distance from the works of the male writers discussed; it is a text sufficiently innovative as to be more profitably read in terms of the sets of conventions it brings into existence than those it transforms/displaces. It is also an "exceptional" work in terms of the tendency for women's writing to be channeled away from "sensational" themes and towards social and especially domestic issues. As **Wuthering**

Heights demonstrates, this tendency was never more than partial and even the social and domestic melodrama surreptitiously incorporated many themes to do with mystery and crime. In this, as Murch's survey of "Women Writers of Detective Fiction in the Nineteenth Century" shows, they prepared the way for what has become known as the "domestic detective story". (Murch, 1968, pp152-166.) The Gothic themes are adapted to their setting and the attributes which the protagonist of such a novel requires in order to penetrate to the heart of a mystery include such things as "...a quick eye for such informative details as sudden changes in household routine, an unusual choice of items on an invalid's breakfast tray, or the talk of a frightened child." (Murch, 1968, p166.) This development was one of the strands leading into the more "psychologically" oriented detective fiction of the twentieth century.

While the development of the "horror" strand of the Gothic involves a (problematic) distribution of the qualities of "good" and "evil" between what is "monstrous" and what is "normal", in the detective story there is a move towards a simpler, more prosaic, distribution of these qualities as they come to be inscribed within a legalistic framework. In Radcliffe the former development seems almost to have been cut short by her leanings in the latter direction. It is not unusual for the destruction/ incorporation of the "monstrous" and the resolution of a crime or enigma to be parallel tendencies of equal importance within the narrative. This is inevitable in Radcliffe, where the Gothic tyrant never achieves a truly monstrous or demonic stature and is often

brought down in quite an anti-climactic fashion. It is also the case in Sheridan le Fanu's **Carmilla**(1872), which is clearly a ghost/vampire story in the Gothic tradition but, written by an author more noted for his "detective" writing, it has obvious leanings towards the latter. This is particularly evident in the tone of the narrative's conclusion:

> "My father related to the Baron Vordenburg...the story about the Moravian nobleman and the vampire at Karnstein churchyard, and then he asked the Baron how he had discovered the exact position of the long-concealed tomb of the countess Millarca. The Baron's grotesque features puckered up into a mysterious smile; he looked down, still smiling, on his worn spectacle case and fumbled with it. Then looking up he said:
> "I have many journals, and other papers..." (LeFanu's **Carmilla**, in Volta and Riva(eds), 1965, p93,)

While notions of "good" and "evil" tend to conform to a discourse of "law and order" in detective fiction this is obviously not true of early adaptations of the Gothic in that direction. And although there is a tendency for the genre's discourses to converge with the socially established discourses of law and order it remains more important that the reader's moral sympathy is enlisted on the side of the "detective" figure whatever his/her precise relationship to the law. In one early Gothic influenced work that exerted a considerable influence on the detective novel - William Godwin's **Caleb Williams**, which appeared in the same year as **The Mysteries of Udolpho** - the hero's investigative activities are directed towards uncovering his wealthy employer's guilt (of murder) but he operates entirely outside any legal framework and associates, for part of the story, with a gang of thieves, whose activities are depicted without any taint of moral censure as a form of redistributive justice. Having established the guilt of his adversary the

hero himself becomes the object of persecution, the law being presented as essentially corrupt and a tool of the rich. In early crime fiction it was less unusual for criminal activities to be perceived from the viewpoint of their perpetrators or related for their own intrinsic fascination. Even with the establishment of a regular police force this viewpoint does not significantly alter as the police were generally regarded with resentment and hostility from their inception. Only after a considerable period of ideological tension did acceptance of their role become socially and ideologically "naturalised".

It was only at this historical moment - in the 1890's - that the various trends that I have been describing were united in the particular configuration that we call the detective novel with the success of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories. A century earlier many of the elements were already present in the work of Radcliffe and Godwin; with **Caleb Williams** Godwin even introduced the method of plotting the whole mystery backwards, writing the end first and working back towards the beginning. This method was to be indispensable to Conan Doyle and later writers of detective fiction. In the 1840's several of Poe's short stories have more or less developed the overall structure of the detective novel but this seems to have occured almost incidentally as a by-product of the author's interest in all things strange and abnormal. As Jerry Palmer puts it: "To Poe, crime and detection were processes that were typical of the relationship between reason and the bizarre, between the normal and the mysterious, a theme that runs throughout his

work..." (Palmer, 1978, p112.) It was only in the ideological climate of the 1890's that it was possible for these elements to form the basis of an entire fictional genre, around the "detective" figure (whose development is associated with the popularisation of an ideology of competitive individualism, according to Palmer).

The contribution of female writers to the genre persisted - one thinks of later writers like Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers, for example. However, with the development of the thriller - essentially an extension of the detective story tradition - the ideology of competitive individualism becomes explicit to the point of shrillness and is invariably invested in the male protagonist. One could hazard the generalisation that the thriller is far more a "male" genre than detective fiction. But then, in what does the difference between the two consist? According to Palmer, nothing at all. Or merely a difference of emphasis - a matter of degree rather than of kind: "If there is a difference between Holmes and his modern counterparts it is in the balance between logical inference and physical intervention in the course of events..." (Palmer, 1978, p102.) This, in fact, makes a massive difference when one thinks of the ideological construction of femininity; while powers of "emotive sympathy" would be more in keeping with this than powers of "logical inference" there are a number of ways in which it is possible to combine the two, as was demonstrated by the women writers who created the "domestic detective story". For the physically interventionist hero of the later thrillers, though, the characterisation tends to move back towards the male hero of the "heroic" romance - although without any

similar deference to women or the power of love - and Palmer comments that the "conspiracy" is always met with heroic resistance. (Palmer, 1978, p203.) Palmer tells us that this conspiracy is always of such proportions as to be "monstrous", implying an interface with the "horror" strand of the Gothic and inviting a structural comparison of the two:

> "The malevolence of the Gothic tyrant changes its sense when it is imported into the thriller. In Gothic the pathological irruption instituted by malevolence, although conceived as unnatural and irrational, invades the whole world. It constitutes a total subversion of the secular order, especially where the tyrant is the protagonist, as in **The Monk**; the focus on his actions, the "demonic energy" so often the subject of comment, combine to suggest that disorder might, perhaps be superior to order. In the thriller it is the disruption of an otherwise ordered whole. The Gothic hero, or more usually heroine, is defined by innocence and incapacity in the face of this malevolence; in the thriller the opposite is the case..." (Palmer, 1978, p146.)

So, the "pathological irruption" which destabilises the entire secular order in the Gothic has its counterpart in the thriller, which Palmer refers to as "the opacity of the conspiracy-ridden world". (p128.) But, in the thriller, the uneven process of secularisation which marks this development out of the Gothic has not only dissipated most of the metaphysical overtones but, in a concomitant ideological adaptation, has shed the atmosphere of repressed sexuality in favour of a feeling of social, political. or even cosmic paranoia. (In this latter case it stands close to the science fiction tradition.) And where, in the Gothic novel, this all enveloping power is balanced, rather unequally, against the vulnerability of the "persecuted woman", in the thriller it is tested against the assured professionalism of the male hero. While in the "horror" tradition women are mainly

represented as victims, in the thriller they are simply absent or peripheral, providing sexual conquests for the hero or engaging in ineffectual actions that only serve to demonstrate his superiority. This is directly related to the ideological orientation of the thriller. The ideology of competitive individualism is undoubtedly present in the detective story - Sherlock Holmes is also a solitary figure who languishes uncomfortably when not confronted with a challenging case, and feels a compulsion to repeatedly demonstrate his pre-eminernce in his field - but reaches a peak of restless intensity in the thriller which is incompatible with notions of "the feminine", "the domestic", etc.

The clarity of this schema is complicated in the genre's transition to film although the "imperialist spy thriller" still clearly demonstrates the "male" orientation of the thriller. However, the tendency of Hollywood's narratives to include a sub-plot of heterosexual romance facilitates a greater involvement of women in the narrative (as in Hitchcock's "romance-thrillers", which are more complex in this respect, more generically eclectic) and from the film noir of the 1940's onwards the ideological orientation associated with the interventionist male protagonist has suffered a series of significant disruptions/modifications.

iii). M.G.Lewis, the "Male Gothic", and the Horror Story.

"Like **The Mysteries of Udolpho**, **The Monk** was a response to an oppressive social milieu, but it is much more aggressive than **Udolpho** with striking extensions into criminal pathology as Lewis explores male sexual guilt rather than female sexual fear. Lewis does not write sentimental fiction illustrating the triumph of female virtue but a savage story about the forces of destruction." Coral Ann Howells (1978, p69)

The most important differences between Lewis' **The Monk** at the close of the eighteenth century, and Stevensons **Jekyll and Hyde** in the late nineteenth, apart from the reticence of the latter work, are well summed up in Judith Wilt's phrase about the difference between "hypocrisy" and "schizophrenia - the actual detatchment of multipersonalities". **Frankenstein**, she believes, occupies a pivotal position between the two and in terms of the relationship between creator and monster - separated yet inseparable - one would want to link **Jekyll and Hyde** directly back to **Frankenstein**. This symbolic distribution of divergent moral or psychological tendencies between two physical beings - one "monstrous" - is certainly a turning point and yet in many other respects the link is more directly back to **The Monk** and Stevenson's and Lewis' work shed considerable light upon each other.

Frankenstein's monster is certainly not inherently evil - in fact he is gentle, compassionate, and craves "love and fellowship" until the violent rejection he suffers forces him to "make evil his good". Hyde inspires a similar horror of "monstrosity" ("...none could come near to me at first without a visible misgiving of the flesh") but deservedly so: "Edward Hyde, alone in the ranks of mankind, was pure evil". (p106.) Frankenstein is a Faustian over-reacher on a grand scale, consumed by energies he can no longer control, seeking a kind of immortality (the creation of a whole race that would bless him) and yet his major crime is not the creation of the "monster" so much as the failure to accept responsibility for it. The monster finds rejection the harder to bear in that Frankenstein should have rightly been his

"lord". In **Jekyll and Hyde** the relationship is not one between a negligent God and his twisted creation; rather it is one of complicity between a father and an unruly, vicious child: "Jekyll had more than a father's interest; Hyde had more than a son's indifference". (p112.) In **Frankenstein** any implication that the monster's violence is an acting out of Victor Frankenstein's darker desires is complicated by an intricate multiplication of the doppleganger effect which was not to be repeated on this scale till Hitchcock's **Psycho**. As George Levine says, all the characters in **Frankenstein** can be seen as "fragments of a mind in conflict with itself, extremes unreconciled, striving to make themselves whole". (Levine and Knoepflmacher(eds), 1979, p16.) In **Jekyll and Hyde** the simpler contours of Ambrosio's hypocrisy are clearly discernible in the relationship between the doctor and his alter ego.

In **The Monk**, then, the expression of Ambrosio's desires takes a form whose spectacular monstrosity is in direct proportion to the severity and duration of their previous suppression. At the beginning of the book he is introduced as a figure who, at the age of thirty, has never stepped beyond the monastery walls, with a reputation so stainless that "The common people therefore esteem him to be a saint". (p17.) Towards its conclusion he can only describe himself as "an Hypocrite, a Ravisher, a Betrayer, a Monster of cruelty, lust and ingratitude." (p385.) The progression is as logical as it is dramatic. Ambrosio does not begin as one thing and end up as another; the two sides of his personality are present all along and the first breaking of his monastic vows opens the way for what follows. Even the acclaimed oratory of

his first public sermons is partly an expression of his personal vanity and ambition: "When he remembered the Enthusiasm which his discourse had excited, his heart swelled with rapture, and his imagination presented him with splendid visions of aggrandizement". (p39.) That these ambitions have a decidedly sexual turn is evident in the feelings inspired in him by what he then believes to be a picture of the Virgin Mary. The acts which, at the time of his initial seduction, are described as "luxurious and unbounded excesses" within a week make him "sigh impatiently for variety" (p234-5); the quest for this variety leads him to the commission of greater crimes for his own concealment and, incident piling upon incident, one sees his dark side - an unbridled urge towards sexual domination - taking over.

Stevenson's Dr Jekyll follows a similar pattern of development although the novel is crucially different in that the progression is no longer inscribed in the very structure of the work (which is a fraction of the length of **The Monk**). Nor are the indulgences of Mr Hyde lingered over or described; in fact, quite the reverse. It is difficult to know exactly what pleasures Dr Jekyll experiences as Mr Hyde because Stevenson is deliberately evasive on the subject. Jekyll admits that from an early age "...I concealed my pleasures..." (p101) but gives the impression that these were not of any particularly terrible nature: "Many a man would have blazoned such irregularities as I was guilty of, but from the high views I had set before me, I regarded and hid them with an almost morbid sense of shame". (p102.) He later speaks of plunging into "shame" and describes how he would

shed the weight of his respectable public position and "like a schoolboy...spring headlong into the sea of liberty." He admits that his pleasures were "undignified" and adds that, in the hands of Edward Hyde, "they soon began to take a turn towards the monstrous", so much so, in fact, that he was often "plunged into a kind of wonder at my vicarious depravity". However, the closest we come to any detail of what these undignified pleasures may be is the revelation that Hyde will perform any act of cruelty to others in the service of their satisfaction, that he is capable of "drinking pleasure with bestial avidity from any degree of torture to another..." (p108.)

One cannot be in much doubt about the nature of Hyde's pleasures though, and the subtle adaptation of the Gothic's symbolic geography would vividly convey them to a Victorian readership. Jekyll lives in a square of "ancient, handsome houses" of which his is the only one not to have been converted into flats or chambers and "wears a great air of wealth and comfort". (p30.) Hyde's residence, appropriately enough, is approached through a "chocolate-coloured" pall of London smog and is located in a dingy street with a "gin palace", a "low French eating house" and other unappealing Dickensian details. "The dismal quarter of Soho seen under these changing glimpses, with its muddy ways, and its slatternly passengers, and its lamps, seemed...like a district of some city in a nightmare". (p44.) These are the haunts of vice and it is clear that Hyde regularly entertains here as he has furnished his lodgings with "luxury and good taste", keeping a closet filled with good wine, etc.(p45.) Given the unreasoning revulsion that is felt by every

character who meets with Hyde in the course of the novel, it is odd that he should be able to freely indulge his pleasures in this district unless the inhabitants of it were immune to the fear of him. One has to infer that Jekyll's transformation leaves him quite at home here and that the "reversion of the species" which Punter speaks of has a distinctly "class" component.

Initially Jekyll takes the transformative draught at will, safely returning to the refuge of his original persona upon the satisfaction of his passions. However, the more that Hyde is allowed free rein, the more powerful he grows, and Jekyll begins to find that the change comes upon him involountarily and can only be reversed with ever greater doses of the potion. Jekyll, like Ambrosio, finds his dark side taking over, he feels the "throes and longings" of Hyde struggling for freedom and eventually cannot sleep or doze for a moment without waking up as Hyde. In both cases the temptation is a total surrender to this darker side, a surrender which Ambrosio symbolically makes (he sells his soul to the Devil) and which Dr Jekyll only averts by suicide, taking Hyde to the grave with him.

This dark side cannot be reduced simply to a matter of lust, and has a wider application to the social limitation of individual fulfilment, however the dynamic of suppression and ever more violent expression confirms that, in Punter's phrase, it is "erotic at root". Stevenson's reticence did not stop Mamoulian, in an early (1932) film version from envisaging Jekyll's darker side in terms of his barely suppressed sexual desire for a prostitute, played by Miriam

Hopkins. Connotations of this relationship between Man and Monster have become inherent in any use of the device and, despite the differences betweeen **Frankenstein** and **Jekyll and Hyde** discussed above, the image of the monster lurking behind Elizabeth (dressed in a white wedding dress) has become "one of the dominant icons of the film versions". (Levine and Knoepflmacher(eds), 1979, p9.) While it is not horror films of this period that I am concerned with (or literary adaptations) the recurrence of this "doubling" effect between characters in the modern horror film, such as **Sisters**(1972), and **Hellraiser**(1987), is usually indicative of a similar concern with the relationship between conventional restraint and violent gratification. The main development which is evident here is a greater willingness to deal with female desire in this way .(The Gothic tradition has dealt with it in a number of othe ways, often using the iconography of vampirism.)

In **The Monk** desire is insistently masculine and Lewis evades the question of female desire by making the temptress Matilda an emmisary of the Devil in female form. While **Jekyll and Hyde**, in many ways, follows the pattern of the detective story ("If he be Mr Hyde, I shall be Mr Seek", says the lawyer, Utterson) climaxing with the revelation that the two characters are in fact one, **The Monk** follows the processs of masculine sexual desire from the inside. The awakening of Ambrosio's desires is sympathetically presented, but then, with their gratification, we are abruptly plunged into his feelings of disgust that follow satiety and invariably extend to the object of his desires. This pattern is repeated in an upward spiral of sexuality corrupted into violence. Miyoshi

notes that it is "the unfailing energy of the sexual alone that sustains the pace of the story", which is substantially true, although it does not necessarily justify his dismissal of the book as an adolescent "sexual fantasy". (Miyoshi, 1969, p32.) The book is uneven, parts of it bearing out this description, others justifying Robert Spector's defense of it as a "fine psychological study" (Spector, 1984, p15). It remains both influential and controversial and its importance, from the point of view of this discussion, lies in its explicit dramatisation of some of the Gothic's sexual concerns.

David Pirie talks of how "**Psycho** swept aside the devices of the Gothic and replaced them with a sophisticated manipulation of audience voyeurism" (**Movie**, No 25, p20), the statement being curious in its implication that the treatment of such concerns lies outside the scope of the Gothic. The "sophisticated manipulation" is clearly a reference to the medium itself but the question of voyeurism has long been important in the Gothic and **The Monk** is notorious for its implication of the reader in the voyeurism of the central character. (See particularly Napier, 1987, p115-118.) However Lewis is not alone in this and there are passages even in the "female Gothic" which undoubtedly solicit a similar response from the reader. Chloe Chard notes that the dramatisation of lust and cruelty in the Gothic often involves focussing attention sharply on the body of the heroine/victim and that "the reader is implicitly invited to scrutinize her through the eyes of a male spectator" (introduction to Radcliffe, 1986, pxvii). So, Adeline, in **The Romance of the Forest**, on

her first meeting with the hero, is described as follows:

"Her beauty, touched with the languid delicacy of illness, gained from sentiment what it lost in bloom. The negligence of her dress, loosened for the purpose of freer respiration, discovered those glowing charms, which her auburn tresses, that fell in profusion over her bosom, shaded, but could not conceal." (p87.)

In **The Monk** this imagery of veiling/unveiling is a repeated motif, closely associated with the overall pattern of repression and release. The first temptation of Ambrosio occurs when a young novice confesses that (s)he is in fact a woman and has entered the monastery inspired by a devotion to him. Ambrosio, secretly flattered, orders her (Matilda) to leave the next day but she draws a knife and threatens suicide:

"The Friar's eyes followed with dread the course of the dagger. She had torn open her habit and her bosom was half exposed. The weapon's point rested upon her left breast! The moon-beans, darting full upon it, enabled the Monk to observe its dazzling whiteness. His eye dwelt with insatiable avidity upon the beauteous orb. A sensation till then unknown filled his heart with a mixture of anxiety and delight."(p65.)

Such scenes are repeated, invariably making similar use of darkness/veils and the "dazzling whiteness" of the flesh. After Ambrosio's seduction, during his growing involvement (via Matilda) with the demonic, he even acquires a magic mirror which allows him to indulge his voyeurism in a manner unprecedented before the advent of modern technology. A "confused mixture of colours and images" gradually resolves itself into a view of the "small closet" in which the beautiful Antonia is preparing to bathe. (p271.) The reader is encouraged to empathise with the hero in his voyeurism, and in his early sexual encounters, although his readiness to project the disgust he feels after the sexual act onto his partner, and the increasingly sadistic nature of his desires,

brings about a gradual disengagement of sympathy.

There is no doubt that Ambrosio is a handsome and striking figure. Indeed, on his first appearance he is described as "uncommonly handsome" and Lewis goes into some detail about his physical appearance. (p18.) His early religious fervour - and there are strong suggestions that his sexuality has been channeled into this peculiar outlet - gives him a certain severity though and his religious oratory is such that every hearer trembles for his past sins: "The thunder seemed to roll, whose bolt was destined to crush him, and the abyss of eternal damnation to open before his feet". (p19.) This handsomeness, coupled with an air of severity and command, is very similar to the physical presence of Radcliffe's tyrant figures and the "fiery and penetrating" gaze virtually completes the resemblance. The vulnerability the Radcliffe heroine feels in the presence of the persecuting male has its counterpart in the lustful rapaciousness of Ambrosio; these two strands of Gothic fiction answering to each other from opposing positions.

iv). H.G. Wells and the origins of science-fiction.

The science-fiction tendencies with which I am most concerned (ie. those most closely allied with a tradition of Gothic horror) can be traced back to Mary Shelley's **Frankenstein** but begin to take generic shape in a series of remarkable variations upon the Frankensteinian scientist theme in H.G. Wells' novels of the 1890's:

The Time Machine	1895
The Island of Dr Moreau	1896
The invisible Man	1897

H.G.Wells referred to these early novels as "scientific

romances" and both **The Time Machine** and **The Island of Dr Moreau** seem like re-castings of the Frankenstein story in, as Bergonzi puts it "a post-Darwinian guise". (p108.) He was, however, disappointed that **Moreau** should be reviewed in precisely these terms; **The Times** referred to it as an example of "...the perverse quest after anything in any shape that is freshly sensational" and Wells complains that it was dealt with as "a mere shocker". (Both quotations from Bergonzi, pp97-98.) **Moreau** is, indeed, the most clearly Gothic of the three novels; in **The Time Machine** the debt to **Frankenstein** and **Jekyll and Hyde** is partially obscured by its place in a Swiftian tradition of social satire. However, it is not difficult to detect the split between monster and creator applied to the polarised social classes of Victorian society through the dubious appropriation of Darwinian theory.

The island itself, in **Moreau**, is very clearly a place of isolation, dominated by the obsessive/visionary doctor himself who functions as a spiteful or negligent God to the race of beast-men he creates. The character of the doctor stands clearly in the Gothic tradition and the island functions like a vast extension of Frankenstein's laboratory with the "experiment" similarly expanded and given a disturbing social dimension. But the device of an undiscovered island, which simply does not exist as far as cartography is concerned, also links back to an adventure/exploration tradition which provided another of the contributory sources for modern science-fiction, principally through the works of Jules Verne. At least until the 1860's the remote and unexplored corners of this world served both

as the destination of the picaresque "fantastic voyage" and as the "alternative society" of the socially satirical or utopian variations on this theme. It was only after Verne's **From the Earth to the Moon** (1865) that voyages to other worlds started to become a common literary convention, one which was crucial to the development of modern science-fiction. But for some time after this the adventure mode commonly remained earthbound, as is evident in the fact that five years later Verne published **20,000 Leagues Under the Sea** (1870).

While **The Time Machine** is a social satire using the device of time-travel to present an exaggerated extrapolation of some of the most "monstrous" features of Victorian society and **Moreau** uses a tropical island as a novel variation on the Gothic "place of separation" **The Invisible Man** locates its Frankensteinian over-reacher in a contemporary English milieu, capitalising on the contrast between naturalistic descriptions of mundane locations and activities and the bizarre incidents that disrupt this "normality". (The book does, though, have a - very minor - equivalent for Frankenstein's "workshop of filthy creation".) Baldick comments that, in this, his third variation upon the theme, Wells has exhausted this particular vein in Victorian fiction by giving his hero an "unaccountable" ambition of world conquest, allowing it to "collapse into the predictable form of the mad scientist cliche". The "cliche" has, however, had a good deal of life in it, particularly in Hollywood films. Many of these use it in the predictable ways that Baldick implies but there are exceptions, subtle modifications that have allowed it to be used in genuinely modern ways. The more

interesting examples tend to involve a dramatisation of fears about the bureaucratic secrecy of publicly funded institutions of scientific research or of the abuse of advanced medical technology. This theme recurs in most of David Cronenberg's films made between 1976 and 1986, for example, and is recapitulated in **The Fly** in a way which remains remarkably close to the Shelley/Stevenson/Wells tradition while giving this an ominously modern inflection and an unprecedented visceral explicitness.

These three works by Wells illustrate the persistence of a Gothic tradition as the basis for much modern science-fiction. But there is another strand of science-fiction writing which is also very inportant in its relation to the modern horror film and this is best represented in a fourth novel by the same author, **The War of The Worlds**(1898). This story uses the same combination of naturalistic setting and fantastic events that I have remarked on in **The Invisible Man** but the lynchpin of the narrative seems to be a straightforward reversal of the "quest" or "fantastic voyage" idea. From Verne (1865) onwards voyages to other planets (usually Jupiter or Mars) became more common but these other worlds were usually found to be more primitive than our own until the much publicised "discovery" of the so-called "canals" on Mars in 1877: "The public responded enthusiastically to the implication that intelligent life had produced artificial waterways on Mars, and writers began to capitalise on this enthusiasm as early as Percy Greg's **Across the Zodiac**(1880)." (Hillegas, in Parrinder(ed), 1979, p16.) In **The War of The Worlds** the "quest" is inverted, making

Earth the scene of a "monstrous" invasion from space - a device which set the precedent for a considerable body of science-fiction writing. This "invasion" strand is strongly represented in the modern sci-fi/horror film with Carpenter's **The Thing**(1982) and Romero's "dead" trilogy representing two very different derivatives of it. Romero comes closest to the scenario of this "invasion" fiction in its original form while dispensing with the device of "invasion" itself, the "zombies" evidently being the result of a scientific accident. A number of Cronenberg's movies, borrowing from Romero, have their "invasion" scenario arise from a bacteriological plague arising from scientific malpractice, thus uniting the "over-reacher" and the "invasion" themes in a single vision of apocalypse.

Notes.

1. See Robert Donald Spector (1984) for a detailed discussion of hostile or dismissive critical literature, and also Varma (1959), especially pp176-185. Also see Napier (1987) for a discussion of parodies of formulaic Gothic romances, especially pp26-31.

2. This use of lower-class characters as a kind of "comic relief" (often justified by reference to Shakespeare) virtually disappears from most later Gothic fictions (though there are traces of it in Stoker) but survives in the "shilling shockers" and in theatrical tradition, persisting into both Universal and Hammer cycles of the horror film.

3. Noel Carrol argues that, in he horror film, the character's responses to the monster inform the audience's perceptions of it. He notes that (visually) similar monsters in science-fiction films are sometimes treated, by the characters, as harmless or even friendly, and therefore elicit a different audience response. He is careful **not** to argue that audience responses **duplicate**, or constitute an "identification" with, those of the characters

4. "...it is a testimony to the power of her art that her fancy first conceived a type of character that subsequently passes from art into life. The man that Lord Byron tried to be was the invention of Mrs Radcliffe." Walter Raleigh, 1894,

quoted in Napier, 1987, p46.

5. The definition of any genre as "male" or "female" is at best a reference to a **tendency** (no Hollywood genre has an audience exclusively of one sex) and at worst downright misleading. While it is clear that, for example, the melodrama was primarily marketed as a "women's picture" and that the war film, at the other extreme, probably had a predominantly male audience, the situation of the horror film is nowhere near so clear cut. There seems to be an assumption that those strands of the horror film that frequently feature violence against women are catering largely for a male audience but Vera Dikka's study of the "stalker film" - a sub-category of the "slasher" movie which she defines - finds the audiences for it to be 52% female. (in Waller(ed), 1986.) The "cult" status of certain types of horror film does seem to be connected with a male audience but it is doubtful whether the same principle applies to popular "teenage" horror such as **Friday the 13th**, often among the most perniciously anti-feminist examples.

6. This "stagey terror" (Miyoshi) which is so offputing to modern readers leads to the supernatural being treated in the manner of a "detective" mystery - much as in Hollywood's haunted house B-movies of the 1940's

3. PSYCHO AND THE GOTHIC TRADITION

A. The "Castle Question".

This account of **Psycho** will be, at least in part, an extension of my consideration of the Gothic tradition and of the relationship between the horror movie and other genres. Naturally one could start with a different film, say, **The Curse of Frankenstein**(1957), and this would certainly produce a different account of - and involve following a different "route" through - the various strands of the genre's development, with corresponding differences of emphasis. To trace the Gothic tradition through a series of films which derive directly from Gothic literary antecedents - as do many of the films discussed in David Pirie's **A Heritage of Horror** - is a project quite different from the attempt to trace it from **Psycho** through **Halloween** and beyond. However, my aim is partly to demonstrate the importance of **Psycho** and its legacy to that tradition and, implicitly, to question the predominant identification of that tradition with the Hammer films and related developments. My second aim is to examine the links between **Psycho** and the "slasher" cycle which, by the early 1980's, had achieved a quantitative (if not qualitative) dominance in the genre. This trend will then be used as a pole against which other trends of development will be compared and contrasted.

It is worth noting, though, that **The Curse of Frankenstein** was the "breakthrough" movie for the entire horror genre in the postwar era (Hardy(ed), 1985, p107) and that it was the commercial viability of the genre in the wake of such successes, and in particular the profitability of A.I.P's

horror "B" movies in America, that motivated the shift towards horror that **Psycho** represents when considered in relation to Hitchcock's oeuvre as a whole. **Psycho** can, in fact, be seen as the point of convergence of a number of generic trends and then subsequently as a rich body of natural resources from which various elements have been used, recombined and transformed during the later history of the genre. I shall not therefore be concerned with analysing **Psycho** as such, but rather with looking at those elements which have been most influential upon subsequent developments or which form the most pointed and interesting contrasts with them. There are, of course, already a vast number of written accounts of **Psycho** - of which James Naremore's **Filmguide to Psycho** is probably the best - and a recent article on the film is prefaced with an acknowledgement that "...it would seem there can be little to add to what has already, in many thousands of words, been written about it." (Matthew-Walker, 1986, p26.) It is partly for this reason that my account will only concern itself with **Psycho** to the extent that later films reposition elements taken from it and alter the scope of their potential meanings. I have therefore broken my account down into sections dealing with these various elements, thereby abstracting from the coherence of **Psycho** as a text in a way which might be questionable if the intention were to give a systematic reading of that particular film, but which is, however, suited to my purpose.

Psycho's most visible iconographic tie to the Gothic is the Bates mansion itself, its prominence in so many dramatic shots announcing it as the seat of the film's enigma/monster, the setting for the climactic revelation. Pirie's "castle

question" originates with the preponderance of imposing Gothic castles as settings in the early Gothic novel, although the "abbey" was as important a location as the castle and, with **Frankenstein** and the beginnings of the science-fiction trend, the "laboratory" enters the genre. As late as Universal's 1931 **Frankenstein** the visualisation of this setting refers back clearly to the origins of the convention, although in the literary tradition a far wider range of settings had been developed. By the 1890's, for example, the emphasis on "place" can equally well be served by a forest, a ship or a variety of urban settings. The 1931 **Frankenstein** did much to establish the conventions of the horror movie's mise-en-scene while a similar thematic has been expressed through rather different visual conventions in the science-fiction tradition. If that tradition is traced as far as the films of David Cronenberg it is possible to find examples in which the significance of the Gothic castle is more or less perfectly negated; while the darkened castle was **expressive** of the persecuting power of the human tyrant the laboratory can be **oppressive** of humanity in general, souless and impersonal in its harshly lit sterility.

But the significance of the "castle question can be equally modified by the intensification of elements present as early as Radcliffe's **Udolpho**: in the early Gothic novel the castle takes on many of the alienated attributes of its sinister inhabitant; in Shirley Jackson's **The Haunting of Hill House** the house itself has become the agent of terror, seemingly taking on a life of its own, and the heroine is no longer imprisoned there against her will but drawn there by a

peculiar fascination. Thus, **The Haunting of Hill House** straddles the boundaries of a "supernatural" horror in which the dead weight of past evil overshadows the present, and a tradition of the uncanny in which inert objects inexplicably achieve a kind of malevolent animation. Alternatively, the journey (quest, pursuit) becomes an increasingly important aspect of one development out of the Gothic and can come to dominate the structure to the virtual exclusion of the "castle question", as happens in **Caleb Williams** and later in many thrillers.

The use of the Bates mansion in **Psycho** has usually been considered in the following ways: a) as the borrowing of a traditional generic icon from the Universal tradition as a kind of connotative shorthand for atmosphere, b) as a more complex metaphor in which "...the various levels of the house are like layers within the mind of Norman Bates" (Gough-Yates, 1972, p27) and c) as a clever and self-conscious manipulation of a generic convention - the old, dark house being used to set up audience expectations which are then deliberately shattered by the staging of Marion Crane's murder in the brightly lit shower. (See Charles Derry's **Dark Dreams**.) In fact the house is a particularly concentrated repository of meaning and is quite capable of sustaining all these readings at various points in the film, as well as Hitchcock's speciously innocent assertion that Northern California is full of such houses, all these effects being essentially a by-product of his desire for "accuracy" (Naremore, 1973, p44).

The Bates mansion is also capable of conveying a more concise and specific meaning though. In the first two shots

we see of it (a long shot and a rather closer one intercut with Janet Leigh's perplexed upward glances)it is significant that the house should be placed in isolation up on a hill and that in one corner there are two brightly lit windows (in the closer shot we see a thin female form pass across one of these windows). These windows - which in another context might signify shelter and a warm haven on a stormy night - seem to immediately communicate the fact that the terrors of this house will be domestic and familial, perhaps because the image itself is so specifically redolent of terrors which are distinctively feminine and familial:

> "Anywhere paperback books are sold you will find volumes whose covers seem to have evolved from the same clone: the colour scheme is predominantly blue or green, there is a frightened young woman in the foreground, in the background there is a mansion, castle or large house with one window lit. There is usually a moon, a storm, or both, and whatever is happening is happening at night.
>
> These are the Modern Gothics. If you look inside the covers you will find that the stories bear no resemblance to the literary definition of "Gothic". They are not related to the works of Monk Lewis or Mrs Radcliffe whose real descendents are known as horror stories. The Modern Gothics resemble, instead, a crossbreed of **Jane Eyre** and Daphne Du Maurier's **Rebecca**." (Russ, in Fleenor (ed), 1983, p31.)

Such images have become a heavily coded symbol for the concerns of this type of literature; as one publisher of Modern Gothics once put it: "A piece of Gothic art came in once that didn't have the light. You don't tamper with a winner. Of course I sent it back". (Quoted in Fleenor (ed), 1983, p58.) They also have a lengthy history prior to achieving this kind of rigidity and sometimes seem to strive for an air of archaism which **does** refer back to Ann Radcliffe (if not Lewis). The house in **Psycho** conforms closely to some aspects of the description quoted above.

The interior of the mansion is used to reinforce this

impression, particularly the interior of Mrs Bates' bedroom in the scene in which that room is explored by Lila Crane before she decides to hide in the basement. Prior to her search of this room there is the strangely dreamlike sequence in which she approaches the house. "Lila seems to be gliding, not walking, towards the house", as James Naremore says (p66), an effect achieved by the intercutting of closer and closer tracking shots looking up at the house from **her** point of view with a series of shots looking down at her from **its** point of view. The impression of "gliding" is dependent upon the fact that once she has set off for the house we never see her legs in motion; she is framed from the knees upwards and then in progressively closer shots. In the shots with which these are intercut the Bates mansion moves from virtual silhouette to a close-up of the portch, taking in patches of an unkempt garden suggestive of neglect.

The views we are given of Mrs Bates' bedroom partly reinforce, partly contradict this impression: the room is hardly neglected, rather it is preserved like a museum, but has a similar air of forlorn antiquity. As James Naremore observes:

> "Hitchcock has crammed Mrs Bates' bedroom with Victoriana, even though the nineteenth century trappings are distinctly anachronistic. According to the sheriff, Mrs Bates has been dead for only ten years, but her house and her possessions belong to a different age..." (Naremore, 1973, p67.)

In narrative terms this is a little odd; in terms of the mise-en-scene the connotative impact is irresistable, mobilising the whole weight of a Dickensian tradition to express the stale presence of the past in the present and the morbid nature of this arrested development. The sense of a

room that has escaped the passage of time is less strikingly signalled in the case of Mrs Bates' room than it is with Miss Havisham's (where all the clocks have stopped at twenty minutes to nine) and the advancing years seem to have left Mrs Bates' room in a state of cluttered and orderly preservation (in contrast to the sense of literal decay which Dickens conveys with his descriptions of cobwebs, fungus and "speckled-legged spiders with blotchy bodies") but the feeling that Mrs Bates might also exist in some state of withered preservation is conveyed through the deep indentation of a human form in the bedclothes as though she has lain there motionless for years.

These are two of the scenes in which the old house features prominently and is used to great effect, but shots of it are inserted at many points in the film to achieve the effect that its gloomy presence somehow presides over all the action. For example, after Marion Crane's arrival at the motel she overhears a bizarre shouted conversation between Norman and "Mother", the sounds emanating from the house, which she observes from her window, its dark roof standing out against a sky which is heavy and grey above but suffused with a livid glow towards the horizon. Later, during the visit of Arbogast - the private detective - to the motel, another shot of the house is included but this time it is bathed in an unnaturally harsh glare of light down one face, the light also picking out the zig-zag irregularity of the path leading up to it, while the rest of the house is plunged into even more profound shadow. This gives the building a stark angularity, more threatening than mysterious. Finally, both after Norman's "discovery" of Marion's body and after

the sheriff's telephone call to Norman, there are shots of the house, its windows ablaze with light, under an agitated sky of rolling cloud.

So the Bates mansion is one of the key elements used to create a pervasive atmosphere of terror, as in the early Gothic, but it no longer symbolises the impregnable power of any Gothic tyrant; the images are inflected towards a more contemporary, domestic horror which is crystallised in the two scenes discussed in detail above. I shall make three basic points about this.

i). **Oedipal themes.** This domestic imagery reinforces the oedipal themes of the film. The psychiatrist eventually says of Norman that "...he never was all Norman, but he was often only Mother" and the house can be seen to function, in some ways, as a symbolic representation of his mind. Such a reading might, in some cases, seem forced or arbitrary but, given that Lila Crane's investigation of the house moves from an abortive search for Mrs Bates, to a tantalising but eventually unproductive inspection of the clues in Norman's bedroom, to the final horrors of the fruit cellar, it seems justified in this case. This part of the film does relate to a wider set of references to stifling familial relationships in the opening scenes although Robin Wood, writing more than a decade before committing himself to the idea of the family as a "master-figure" in the modern (post-**Psycho**) horror film, identified "the dominance of the past over the present" as the leading theme. The family - as a social institution necessarily concerned with the transmission of values from one generation to the next - may well have emerged both

incidentally and, so to speak, spontaneously, as a presence within the film. Whether this entitles us to a retrospective view of it as an anticipation of developments a decade or so later ("family horror") is open to question. The most serious objection would be that the family - as an institution - does not seem to have been so systematic a focus of tension in the 1970's horror film as has been claimed. Family life itself does become more visible within the genre but this seems to have been largely a consequence of the decisive shift towards mundane and contemporary settings inaugurated (though not without precedents) by **Night of the Living Dead** and **Rosemary's Baby.**

These two films have been cited as precursors of "family horror". However, while expectant motherhood does become the occasion for horror in **Rosemary's Baby** the film does not seem particularly concerned with family relationships. It is significant that Rosemary is betrayed by Guy to the satanist coven but I think that this is best understood as a re-working of the "persecuted woman" theme. What is shocking is the divergence from those Gothic antecedents in which the heroine suffers through the machinations of a visibly "evil" figure of male authority; Rosemary is betrayed by her apparently innocuous husband for mundane reasons to do with career advancement. Because of **Night of the Living Dead**'s engagement with the conventions governing the representation of various relationships (friction between siblings, young love, matrimonial conflict) it does become more plausible to detect a savage kind of poetic justice in the film's treatment of its nuclear family. The Coopers' empty marriage,

the film implies, was probably only held together for the sake of the daughter who later kills her mother and partially devours her father. The figure of the "evil child" as it emerges in **The Exorcist**, though, has no such context and seems calculated to produce a frisson through exploiting the traditional association of childhood with innocence, purity, vulnerability, etc. As in **Rosemary's Baby**, the "monstrous" is conjoined with the innocuous and commonplace. When **The Exorcist** does depict family life (Chris MacNeil as a single mother and career woman, Father Karras' guilty neglect of his mother) this seems to be tied in with a suggestion that it is the decay of traditional values that has opened the door to the forces of evil. All of this seems a long way from **Psycho**'s treatment of - and allusions to - the family. Nevertheless, Phil Hardy's horror "encyclopaedia" goes so far as to say that "...its (**Psycho**'s) true significance would only emerge in the 'seventies at the head of a new tradition of American horror film-making which took for its subject the family", (Hardy(ed), 1985, p128) and I shall discuss the claim further in section B below.

ii). **Rural life.** Wood's identification of "the dominance of the past over the present" as a leading theme is no dry abstraction. This theme finds concrete expression in the Gothic tradition in the dark house - originally castle - which contains the terrible secret (the proverbial skeleton in the closet) that overshadows and poisons the present. **Psycho** is remarkably faithful to this. What is so modern - and has provided the springboard for so many interpretations - is that the "secret" should be of so blatantly oedipal a

nature. The traditional use of setting is now invested with an air of unwholesome isolation and arrested development; Wood finds the atmosphere of stagnation so stifling that "...one can almost smell it". (Wood, 1966, p111.) However, this atmosphere does not seem to be entirely confined to the Bates mansion and in a sense it becomes symptomatic of the vast backwardness of rural America. James Naremore mentions some of the conceptual oppositions that operate in **Psycho** (money against sex, realism against expressionism) and includes the observation that "City is played off against country". When Norman tells Marion that nobody stops at the motel "since they moved away the highway" she says "I thought I'd gotten off the main road" and he replies that "nobody ever stops here any more unless they've done that". This could be regarded as the reiteration of a generic cliche (I mentioned the convention of the lost traveller(s) who unwittingly seek shelter in the evil castle in the previous chapter in relation to **Dracula - Prince of Darkness**). However, by its placement within a theft-and-flight sequence indebted to crime fiction, and its modernisation to encompass a world of highways and motels, it is rendered almost unrecognisable.

The significance of the motif remains largely unaltered though, except in that Marion's fatal detour is no longer into a remote and exotic backwater; instead, it takes her into the off-the-beaten-track world of a small-town and rural America that has been "left behind". This is evident in the disquieting contrast between the mystery of the Bates mansion and the bland homeliness of the sheriff and his wife which is emphasised in their ritualised Sunday observance. It is also

subtly intimated in the dialogue. Loomis is unable to find Norman at the motel and the sheriff tells him that "He wasn't out when you were there. He just wasn't answerin' the door in the dead of night, like some people do". This attitude to rural life remains essentially an undercurrent in **Psycho** but re-appears with increasing force in a number of horror films of the 1970's.

The atmosphere of repression and arrested development was taken up by a number of films after **Psycho**, most immediately in the cycle inaugurated by **Whatever happened to Baby Jane** (1962) and particularly by **Hush...Hush, Sweet Charlotte** (1963). It is sometimes - though not always - associated with a small town/rural setting, something which comes to prominence in a very different set of films from the mid 1970's. **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre** (1974), **Race With The Devil** (1975), and **Eaten Alive** (1976) are the most prominent examples while **The Hills Have Eyes** (1977) goes beyond rural backwardness to picture some of America's human detritus descending into savagery on the continent's semi-desert margin. **Motel Hell** (1980) is basically a parodic re-working of some of this material and **The Beast Within** (1982) (a compendium of horror conventions, by its director's admission) presents an incestuous and backward rural community bound together by a shared guilt over the "monster" at its heart. This is done in a manner so heavily conventionalised as to be a testament to the impact of its predecessors.

iii). Genre and domestic imagery. The adaptation of the imagery of horror towards domestic and contemporary themes in

Psycho is facilitated by the generic makeup of the film. Many detective stories/thrillers link their enigmas to twisted familial or sexual relationships (eg **Double Indemnity**) as do a number of Hitchcoch's earlier films (eg **Vertigo**). So while the impetus behind the making of **Psycho** is probably connected with the successes of Hammer and A.I.P, as well as films like William Castle's **Macabre** (1958) and **The House on Haunted Hill** (1959) **Psycho** represents a move towards horror on the part of a director of "romance-thrillers" and the Gothic imagery is inflected by its incorporation into a narrative which remains, in many respects, a detective story/thriller. I shall discuss **Psycho** and genre further in section C below.

B. Psycho and the Family.

The sheer distance between our initial perception of Norman Bates and our final glimpse of him in his cell casts a shadow of doubt over all the familiar surface appearances of social life with which **Psycho** has presented us. When Norman makes his first appearance in the motel he seems to be, in Raymond Durgnat's words, "an engagingly naive country youth...almost a symbol of rustic virtue and country contentment". (Durgnat, in La Valley (ed) 1972, p129.) But this scene is almost immediately succeeded by the wildly hysterical exchange between Norman and "Mother" which is heard - almost impossibly, considering the distance between the mansion and the motel - by Marion Crane in her cabin. What this juxtaposition represents is concretised in the looming form of the old house, but this image is only the overt culmination of an undercurrent of petty and demoralising family tensions that have been present in the

film from the opening scene. There is hardly a character in these scenes who does not allude to a network of domestic relationships which are conveyed as being both unquestioned and unfulfilling. These references have been described and analysed so many times that a brief listing will suffice.

Marion Crane is initially presented spending her lunch hour with her boyfriend in a hotel room - presumably the only time she can get to see him. She complains of her dislike for these secretive meetings but he has relegated any prospect of marriage/respectability to the indefinite future as most of his income is taken up with paying off his dead father's debts and his ex-wife's alimony. She leaves, this desultory exchange unresolved, and returns to what Durgnat describes as "...the sane, shallow, superficial people of the office where she works". Shortly afterwards she deals with a customer, a boastfully offensive oil man who flirts with her while drunkenly flaunting a $40,000 wad of notes under her nose. The money is to pay for a house, a wedding gift to his daughter. His boast that his "baby" has never had an unhappy day and that his wealth allows him to "buy off unhappiness" rings hollow, recalling the popular wisdom that money cannot buy either happiness or love. But popular sentiment also has it that that those who've got it don't know how to enjoy it the way we would - given the chance. We are invited to sympathise with Marion's impulsive theft, not only because the previous scene demonstrates that her need is so much the greater, but because the stifling existence evoked in this scene almost seems to justify the risk. Marion's colleague in the office seems actually to be jealous that the wealthy

customer's attentions are not directed towards her ("He must have seen my wedding ring") and, from the routine way in which she lists the telephone calls she has had (her husband, her mother) a vapid, clockwork existence is conveyed.

In Marion's exchanges with Norman she sees, in his predicament, an exaggerated reflection of her own and it is the subtly wearying effect of these opening scenes which allows the viewer to perceive it too. The script gives Norman a calculated little monologue on the subject of entrapment, having him describe the futile urgency with which we try to escape our "private traps" and conclude that "...we scratch and claw, but... only at the air - only at each other. And for all of it we never budge an inch". This dialogue encapsulates two themes that have already been strongly developed. Firstly, there is the sense of entrapment conveyed through the claustrophobic mise-en-scene of the hotel room in which we first encounter Marion and Sam Loomis, amplified in the dialogue of the office scene. Secondly, there is a Kafka-esque sense of the impossibility of escape conveyed in the shadowing presence of the highway patrolman. Even if escape were (physically) possible, the guilt and fear induced by his well intentioned questioning convince us of its (psychological) futility. The course of the conversation is abruptly disturbed by Marion's question about "Mother" but Norman eventually masters his bizarre little explosion of sentiment (...it...it...it's not as if she were a...a maniac,...a raving thing...") with the suggestion that "She just goes a little mad sometimes. Haven't you?" We have not yet encountered Norman's version of "going a little mad" but its applicability to Marion's situation would be clear enough

even without her "Yes. And sometimes just one time can be enough". This response indicates her decision to return the money while her heartfelt "Thank you" is like a final underlining of the parallels between the two.

These insistent analogies between the various characters are sustained throughout the film and a number of critics have remarked on the resemblance between Marion and Lila and the careful compositions that bring out the similarities between Norman and Sam Loomis. What this amounts to is an insistent multiplication of the doubling effect virtually unprecedented since Mary Shelley's **Frankenstein**, an effect so strong as to provoke Robin Wood's claim that "The characters of **Psycho** are **one** character and that character, thanks to the identifications the film evokes, is us". (Wood, 1966, p110.) I share Noel Carroll's reservations over this notion of "identification" (which I will discuss further in chapter 4) and it seems more plausible to see this doubling effect as expressing the pervasiveness of the "entrapment" to which the dialogue explicitly refers. It will be readily conceded that this entrapment largely (and revealingly) figures, in **Psycho**, as a constraining web of familial relationships. However, in view of its association with images of ineluctable pursuit and with characters who helplessly act out a logic inappropriate to their situation - a situation of which they cannot be aware - what becomes apparent is not so much a tension centered on the family, as the expression of a radical pessimism about the prospects of human relationships and endeavours in general. Something similar is true of most of the films cited as examples of 1970's "family horror",

with Larry Cohen's **Its Alive** (and sequels) as the main exceptions.

The Hills Have Eyes (1977) is an example. Tony Williams tells us that the film "uses a binary family structure in a story that owes a lot to **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre**" (**Movie** 27/28, p126) and D.N.Rodowick bases his entire reading of the film around this suggestion, arguing that there is a "structural correspondence" between the "normal" and the "monstrous" families, that they are "two sides of the same coin". (Rodowick, in Grant (ed), 1984, p324.) The implication seems to be that the two families are presented through a "doubling" strategy analogous to that described above in relation to **Psycho**. The film offers little evidence of this in the presentation of its characters - elsewhere it has been criticised for its "inability to confront the inference that the depraved family of marauders are the dark mirror image of the "typical" middle American family they attack" (Hardy (ed), 1985, p322) - and the argument revolves entirely around the way in which the violence of the representative suburban holidaymakers duplicates that of their primitive mutant assailants. Through "the imagination and excessiveness of their vengeance" they are degraded to the level of the cannibal family so that "instead of celebrating the triumph of the bourgeois family, the final moments only serve to inscribe them in the place of their victimisers". Fair enough, but such a conclusion has no necessary connection to the family: **Witchfinder General** (1968) develops a conflict between two individuals towards the same inexorable denouement. What is evident in both cases is the dramatisation of an axiom akin to the assertion that "power

corrupts" - violence degrades. Given the bestial nature of the desert family, I would argue that any "structural correspondence" fosters the implication that "civilised" norms of behaviour are merely the veneer over an archaic heritage of lustfulness and aggression. (If this conclusion is banal then it is no more so here than in Golding's **Lord of The Flies**, where it achieves the pretentious dignity of "Art".) There is an ideological dimension to this: apologists for the existing social order habitually justify it as the expression of an innate human disposition; a text like **The Hills Have Eyes** concurs, while emphatically dispensing with any positive endorsement of the situation. This constitutes a different order of pessimism to that of **Psycho**, but nevertheless militates against the "social" readings proposed of "family horror".

My argument is that the exploration of family tension is not the primary project - conscious or unconscious - of such a film; I am not arguing that such tensions do not figure here at all - it would be altogether surprising if the presentation of family life escaped this stripping away of the conventions of "civilised" behaviour. Thus, it is possible to endorse Charles Derry's observation about the mother of the "normal" family, who he describes as:

> "...a simpering housewife with virtually no personality whose death is mourned less emotionally and less extensively than the death of the family dog. In fact, so little is the mother respected that her body is set afire and used by her son as a weapon against an attacker." (in Waller (ed), 1986, p168.)

This scene is one example of the easy abandonment of the conventions of acceptable behaviour. Interestingly, **Night of the Living Dead**'s treatment of the same theme tends in the

opposite direction. A television announcer's insistence that the dead should be unceremoniously burned without "the dubious consolation of a funeral" suggests that it is the retention of outmoded sentimental attachments, standards of propriety, etc - not their breakdown - which constitutes a threat. (This is almost an index of the ideological distance between the two films.)

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre is another film in which the conventional standards of "civilised" behaviour suffer irreparable breakdown, and which has figured prominently in discussions of "family horror". It is easy to see why. The cannibal household exhibits both the closeness and the consequent tensions of any family unit. There is the obvious deference to a half-dead "grandpa". Leatherface's behaviour amounts to a kind of domestic routine, even if he stocks the freezer with human corpses rather than supermarket groceries. The hitch-hiker is punished like a delinquent child, his activities occasioning a beating accompanied by the angry "I thought I told you to keep away from that graveyard". And so on. This continuity with the social norm enhances our sense of the situation's obscenity, as do accounts of the happy and uneventful family lives of torturers, nazi war criminals, etc. Again, the conjunction of the monstrous and the commonplace. On the other hand, I think that any implication of a "binary family structure" - an implicit mirroring of "bourgeois" and "monstrous" families - would be tenuous. Robin Wood's account is excellent here, too accurately observed to offer anything so schematic, but the implication is present in some accounts and it is worth stressing that,

strictly speaking, **Chainsaw Massacre** presents us with only one family. The teenage victims do not constitute a family unit and the tensions that are evident between them arise mainly from the superfluousness of the third male character from the point of view of the two couples, particularly when that character's disability makes demands upon their time. What can be accepted is that their consequent bickerings and petty jealousies do offer grounds for a comparison with the cannibals.

I would not wish to quarrel with Robin Wood's attempt to extrapolate a social dimension from the apocalyptic perspective of the film; such a vision must have a social basis even if, as Andrew Sharrett so elaborately demonstrates, it finds expression in a kind of cosmic pessimism (in Grant (ed) 1984). The problem lies, rather, in his adherence to his "return of the repressed" thesis so that the cannibals are necessarily equated with a release of "sexual energy" perverted from its functions into sadism, violence and cannibalism. Wood himself notes that the cannibals never show the slightest sexual interest in their victims. Rather than implying that the "liberation" and "permissiveness" that the teenagers represent is too little and too late to withstand the legacy of long repression, the film suggests, once again, that "civilised" behaviour is merely a mask over underlying barbarity. The teenagers are representatives of a suburban complacency which exists only as a fragile enclave within a sea of violent backwardness - the apocalypse is the triumph of the primitive. (I shall discuss this further in chapters 6 and 14.)

If the cannibals were real individuals psychoanalysis

would, no doubt, uncover the unconscious sexual roots of their "sickness". But they are not. They are fictional characters (ie. assemblages of traits disclosed in the course of a narrative) and, as such, they do not have "unconscious" minds. It therefore seems safest to frame readings within the terms of a conceptual schema deducible from the text itself and consequently available to audiences. I do not think that a reading of **Chainsaw Massacre** in terms of sexuality and repression can be sustained in this way, although there are other films in which such concerns are explicit. **The Beast Within** offers a clear example of a film concerned with both the family and extremes of sexual repression. It is set in an isolated and incestuous rural milieu in which a single family - the Curwens - monopolise all positions of authority (judge, newspaper editor, etc) and maintain a conspiracy of silence about the monster at the community's heart. The judge is eventually forced to reveal the monster's origins. He tells the story of his brother Lionel, Lionel's wife Sarah, and the man - Billy Connors - with whom she has an affair:

"My brother Lionel...he wouldn't even touch Sarah, his own wife! And you know why? 'Cause he thought it was sinful. You think that Sarah ran off with Billy don't you? Well, she didn't. She never got the chance...When he caught her and Billy together he like as went crazy. He killed her alright...yeah, but that wasn't good enough for her. He had to take Billy and lock him up in that cellar, and he kept him there...and he kept him there...and he kept him there...and he kept him there till Billy couldn't stand it any more, till Billy was starving. And Lionel, he opens up that cellar door and he says "Billy...Billy, you still want her? Well now you can have her." And he throws the body down. After that it was easy...Lionel, the town undertaker, robbing his own coffins to feed Billy the flesh - the human flesh - Billy needed to live. It was easy..."

The film is a self conscious pastiche and this explanation is significant in its conventional assumptions about rural

backwardness, the family, sexual repression, and the dark secret in the cellar. The link between rural backwardness and repression has already been mentioned with regard to **Psycho**. The specifically rural emphasis, though, applies only to a limited number of (mainly 1970's) films; the link between the family and sexual repression is as likely to be found in a suburban context, as **Carrie** shows. **The Beast Within** is also atypical in producing a literal, lumbering "monster" out of an ordeal of incarceration (though this helps to extend the scope of its pastiche); a "psycho" would be the more conventional result. Andrew Tudor notes a strong family and/or sexual repression - psychosis link in a body of 1970's films as well as some films from the 1980's. (Tudor, 1989, pp57-58 and 70-71.)

This seems largely to reflect a more prosaic conception of madness than in earlier films; the "psycho" not always readily distinguishable from the norm, rarely visibly and extravagantly different. Something similar is true of films in which the family harbours the monster (eg. **The Omen**) or is assailed from without by it (**The Amityville horror**); with the genre's declining interest/confidence in traditional figures of protective authority (mystical, scientific, military, etc) individuals and small groups - often families - confront the monster more directly. The family comes to prominence in the horror film as the monstrous is increasingly assimilated to the commonplace and the traditional defences against it are absent or ineffectual.

This does not necessarily mean that the family - as an institution - becomes the true subject, or even a kind of subtext or "hidden agenda" within the genre. Indeed, given

the importance of **Psycho** to the argument that the story of the 1970's horror movie is the development of "family horror", it is surprisingly difficult to find a film from that decade that both deals with the family in any systematic way and bears the traces of **Psycho**'s influence. (Alfred Sole's **Communion** is something of an exception; see Hardy (ed), 1985, p310.) However, in the late 1980's there have been two films which quite explicitly do both, **The Stepfather** (1986) and **Fatal Attraction** (1987).

The Stepfather, like **Psycho**, straddles the borders of the thriller and the horror movie. It's (anti)hero is pathologically committed to an ideological fiction of the family in which the atmosphere is like Christmas every day and all tensions are erased. Unable to tolerate any minor infringement of his conception he brutally murders his own family when they fail to live up to it and starts over again, insinuating himself into the life of a young widow and her daughter. Suspense derives from the build up to a potential repetition of the horrific opening scene, the final conflict making heavy use of an imagery drawn from **Psycho** but filtered through eight years of "slasher" movies. The film deploys a number of symbols of the "happy family", including a bird house every bit as tongue-in-cheek as **Blue Velvet**'s clockwork robin. Elsewhere, it shows a macabre sense of humour, having the hero explain his position at an estate agents in terms of his love of families and commitment to finding homes for them. The comic aspect of many scenes has led to a good deal of negative critical comment although, at the time of its release, its use of comedy was positively restrained by the

prevailing standards of the genre.

Fatal Attraction is essentially a Hitchcockian thriller - rather than a horror movie - but is, again, explicitly concerned with the family and visibly indebted to **Psycho**. (See A.N. Morris, "In Defence of **Fatal Attraction**", **Movie** 33, Winter 1989.)

C. Psycho and genre.

I have already said that the development of the Gothic features in **Psycho** towards a more naturalistic and domestic form was facilitated by the film's relationship to the detective story/thriller. In the horror strand of the Gothic themes of power/ambition/transgression are often associated with vast metaphysical preoccupations; in the detective story they tend to be reduced to a question of mundane personal ambition, petty sexual jealousy and, above all, money. These questions often take on an exaggerated global dimension in the thriller where, as Palmer has demonstrated, the "opacity of the conspiracy ridden world" can be seen as analogous to the "pathological irruption" that subverts the entire secular order in the horror Gothic. The film noir of the two decades preceeding the release of **Psycho** fall somewhere between the downbeat naturalism of the detective story and the sense of a "world out of control" of the thriller. The motivations of the characters in film noir are often as mundane as in any detective story but the evocation of a dark, claustrophobic, rain-soaked world, through the manipulation of both mise-en-scene and cinematography (unsettling camera angles and compositions, a strong use of chiaroscuro lighting, etc) places them in a context where they achieve a kind of sordid,

furtive compulsiveness.

Many of the shock effects in **Psycho** derive from the disruption of reading strategies associated with thrillers/detective stories by the Gothic enormity of the horror which lies at the centre of **Psycho**. Or, expressed another way, most of **Psycho**'s characters act out a logic appropriate to the world of the earlier film noir only to find that logic savagely disrupted. Arbogast, the detective, is clearly related to the "hard boiled" detective figure who acts on his shrewd "hunches" about the typical and commonplace motivations of criminal characters ("You see, if it don't gell it isn't aspic. And this ain't gelling. It's not coming together. Something's missing", he tells Norman.) Engaged in the routine business of searching the old Bates house for clues he meets a sudden and bloody end halfway up the staircase, his face as he falls expressing not so much the agony of death as a hopeless bafflement in the face of the unexpected. Similarly, even while Lila Crane is searching the bizarre interior of the Bates mansion, Sam Loomis is pressurising Norman to admit to a crime that pales into insignificance against the reality of his actions ("I bet your mother knows where the money is and what you did to get it. I think she will tell us"). And right at the end of the narrative the sheriff is still asking "And the forty thousand dollars. Who got that?"

Only the police psychiatrist realises that the swamp got the money: "These were crimes of passion, not profit". The psychiatrist has been referred to as "the most intimate of private eyes" and the presentation, in this case, places him in the position of the detective hero as well. Not only does

his "explanation" occupy the same structural position as the "solution" supplied by the detective as the culmination of the mystery, but it is presented with the slight theatricality (the expressive gestures of the psychiatrist's arms, the forefinger raised in front of the face to underline a point) which is indicative of the detective's pride in his deductive ability. Also, rather than the cathartic release of emotion which one might expect from the cessation of the narrative's horrors, Sam Loomis and Lila Crane listen in a curious, attentive and unemotional fashion throughout, despite the fact that one has lost a sister, the other a lover. Thus, the tone of this ending is more typical of the detective story than the horror film.

It is partly because **Psycho** occupies this interstitial position between the two genres that its influence can be felt in both. The film-makers whose earlier work had perhaps influenced Hitchcock's choice of material quickly moved into the territory opened up by **Psycho**. William Castle's **Homicidal** (1961) was an early American venture in this direction while Hammer were even quicker off the mark with **Taste of Fear** (1960), the first entry in a cycle which James Carreras (Hammer's president at the time) actually referred to as "mini-Hitchcocks" (McCarty, 1986, p95). A less direct influence is evident in Robert Aldrich's "menopausal murder mysteries" and to trace the wider impact of the film would take many pages. But, despite a divided legacy across two genres the film has had very few successors which aspire either to its complexity, or to the thematic seriousness which underlies its playful humour. Those that do tend to

appear at the interface of horror with the "art film", as in the case of some of Brian Da Palma's work and, most notably, Polanski's **Repulsion** (1965). The most pervasive and lasting influence of **Psycho** occurs, in fact, at the opposite extreme of the genre in the "exploitation" slasher movies of the late 1970's to mid-1980's and takes its inspiration mainly from a single scene - the shower murder. The long-bladed, stabbing knife becomes a significant instrument of horror during the 1960's and 1970's but the legacy of the shower-murder only crystallises into a whole new sub-genre in the wake of **Halloween** (1978).

4. PSYCHO AND HALLOWEEN.

A. The Shower Scene

The critical reception of **Psycho** has followed a pattern similar to that of many innovative horror films, moving from often hostile reviews towards a more positive reassessment over the years (from Peter John Dyer's "of course it is a very minor work" (**Sight and Sound**, Autumn 1960, p195) to Robin Wood's contention, six years later, that "**Psycho** is one of the key works of our age" (Wood, 1966, p113)). But critical judgements are rarely an adequate barometer of the impact of a film upon subsequent film culture; **Psycho** was heavily influential from the outset and its impact is well captured by James Naremore's phrase about it being "not only a classic film but a minor social phenomenon" (Naremore, 1973, p75). This judgement still stands: the current (1990) advertising campaign of a major cigarette manufacturer still uses the image of a shower head and curtain - no caption - with evident confidence that this will be universally comprehensible. This example also indicates the particular sequence that has been most influential. The shower scene is one of the emotional climaxes of the film and its omission from the schematic account given so far, rather than being an oversight, reflects the need to deal with its influence separately and at length. The significance of this scene is inseparable from its narrative context and yet in these terms any influence one could speak of is negligible - it **appears** to be the force of the imagery itself that has exerted such a strong influence on subsequent developments. This is perhaps

misleading.

In genre terms the shower scene appears as the irruption of the horror movie into the narrative structure of the detective story/thriller. In terms of audience involvement everything in the earlier part of the film is geared towards focussing the viewer's attention upon Marion's predicament, considering the options open to her, anticipating her desperate choices. The $40,000 may be a red herring but the camera repeatedly places it before our gaze, diverting our attention onto the consequences of this theft. As Durgnat says, "We can't believe she'll get away with it, especially as criminals never do in American films" (Durgnat, in La Valley (ed), 1972, p128). The shower scene therefore comes like a bolt from the blue, a sudden and disorienting frenzy of irrational violence, the extinction of reason. The rest of the film can be seen as an anxious probing of this terrifying void; this takes the form of two movements, the first involving Arbogast, the second Sam and Lila. **Psycho**'s resolution restores an elaborate - but naggingly incomplete - sense of order and coherence.

On a second viewing the shower scene retains its savagely disruptive power but no longer seems to come out of nowhere; its imagery takes up visual and thematic threads that are finely woven into the texture of the film. The earlier movement of Marion's windscreen wipers against the driving rain anticipates the key visual element of the scene, the conversation with Norman takes on a new significance, and the repeated imagery of birds keys in with the discordant shrieks of the violin score. Naremore has detailed all of this at length and V.F.Perkins pays tribute to the "extraordinarily

complex layers of interpenetrating meanings and effects" (See Perkins, 1972, pp107-115). Desite its jolting impact the shower scene is, in fact, integral to **Psycho**'s design. Furthermore, subsequent scenes move towards retrieving some sense from this disruption. The film is deeply paranoid but its starkest moment of paranoia is partially contained within the stable conventional structures of classical cinema.

For all the influence of **Psycho**, this most striking scene had virtually no influence until the late 1970's, perhaps because of the sheer narrative complexities entailed in containing such a rupture - unmotivated and apparently anonymous violence - within the horror film's (and the Hollywood cinema's) prevailing world view at that time. **Halloween** and the cycle it initiated, though, take up not only the imagery of the shower scene but also the sense of irrational malevolence which it conveys, because this constitutes the essence of **their** world view. This is one of the major developments of the intervening period and I shall discuss some of the films involved in chapters 6 and 7. The force of the shower scene in **Psycho** is largely dependent upon its narrative placement and its full impact could not be successfully duplicated. Later films, though, transpose its imagery to a radically different narrative context and develop particular aspects of it:

i). The use of the shower curtain - or other veiling device - to simultaneously conceal the killer's identity and create an instantly readable image of horror in the form of a looming silhouette. (The use of the silhouette itself has long been associated with horror, as, for example, in the

appearance of Dracula's caped form at a window or doorway with moonlight behind.)

ii). The use of montage to further conceal the killer's identity. In **Psycho** the pace of the editing effectively withdraws the killer's image from us before we have had a chance to inspect it thoroughly. In later films a variety of devices tend to perform the same function, which, in itself, remains important. Perkins notes that Hitchcock's editing allows him to "maintain the impression of suddenness and violence whilst actually extending the duration of the incident on the screen" (Perkins, 1972, p109). This is necessary because the (initial) audience would have been psychologically unprepared for the impact of the scene; in later films it is the build up of tension, the orchestration of suspense itself, which is extended, with the violent incident as its conclusion/release. Hitchcock's editing, Perkins argues, is also an aesthetic strategy geared towards creating an **impression** of violence where a head-on depiction of it in a single shot would tend to be "nauseating". This, however, is close to the strategy of a movie like **Friday the Thirteenth**. It is only in the alternation of "sadistic" and "vulnerable" viewpoints that later films remain close to the editing strategy of the shower scene.

iii). The frenzied jerkiness of the stabbing knife, accentuated through shrill, rhythmic music, reinforces the ferocity and relentlessness of the attack while adding an undertone of macabre humour by bringing out its slightly mechanical awkwardness. It is interesting that Perkins should refer to "...an element of the grotesque in the movement of the knife, like a spiteful child lashing out in a fit of

temper" as this aspect is foregrounded, in quite different ways, by **Don't Look Now**(1974) and the prologue to **Halloween** (1978).

Much of this imagery, as Perkins describes, has a very specific function in **Psycho**. The element of "ritual sacrifice", for instance, is underlined by associations with the puritanical rantings of "Mother" in a previous scene ("She'll not be appeasing her ugly appetite with my food or my son") while the element of symbolic rape comes from associations with Norman's voyeurism and the use of implicitly sexual imagery within the scene itself. Further layers of meaning accrue in the recurrent imagery of birds, particularly birds of prey (swooping, pecking). Such specific intersections of meanings are usually absent in later films inspired by the shower scene. Fleeting and fragmentary glimpses, and brief silhouettes or eccentrically lit images of the killer, stabbing imagery, etc, in **Halloween**, no longer have a precise narrative function in a particular scene; they have become, instead, a). a means of structuring the entire film (the psychotic threat does not erupt into the film but is a diffuse and omnipresent aspect of the fictional world, periodically intensified to a climax) and b). a defining characteristic of the film's monster. I use the word "monster" here not only to indicate that the knife-killer performs that narrative function but also because his (rarely her) visual elusiveness itself builds up to a more or less supernatural invulnerability. In the denouement, when the monster appears to have been killed and to have fallen out of a window, there is no body to be seen underneath. Nor is

there any attempt to explain this; we are left with the impression that the monster has become an indestructible manifestation of evil.

In the opening scene - the prologue - of **Halloween** we find the familiar pattern of a furtive act of voyeurism followed by a murder committed with a large knife, that is essential to the shower scene in **Psycho**. But, while the shock value of this combination in **Psycho** derived from its narrative context, here the voyeuristic prowling camera sets up the expectation of an act of violence and the surprise element is the final twist which is added at the end of the scene when the camera pulls back and reveals the killer to be a young child. As John McCarty notes:

> "We never know why little Michael knifed his sister on Halloween night in 1963. Nor do we know why he escapes from his assylum and proceeds to launch a campaign of fear in his old hometown on Halloween night fifteen years later. Using what amounts to standard horror-movie shorthand, scriptwriters Carpenter and Debra Hill simply dub Michael as psychotic and let it go at that. Why does he kill? He just **does**, that's all." (McCarty, 1986, p162.)

The child as a figure of evil was a common feature of the big-budget "demonic possession" cycle of the 1970's - almost what McCarty would call a "standard horror-movie shorthand" - and this is registered, in **Halloween**, in the psychiatrist's realisation that "What was behind those eyes was, purely and simply...evil". The psychiatrist is called Loomis after Marion Crane's boyfriend in **Psycho** and, from the theological terms used here, we can see that, in contrast to **Psycho**'s psychiatrist-as-detective what we have here is an (ineffectual) psychiatrist-as-exorcist. So, in place of character motivation and explanation within the film (which, as McCarty makes clear, is strikingly absent) we have the

convergence of the devil-child and the psychopath-as-monster to provide an explanation at the level of **genre**, a (non-) explanation relying on the audiences' expectations of the defining characteristics of this monster. Other aspects of this monster - which McCarty calls The Shape - contribute to his ability to function in this way. Firstly; he appears on a particular night of the year (Halloween, when bad things traditionally appear - the film makes much use of the traditional imagery of pumpkin faces, etc) in a particular place (Haddonfield, where he is associated with the old Myers house, scene of the original killing, now deserted and dilapidated, very recognisably what Stephen King would call a "bad place", which is almost analogous to "haunted"). Secondly; that he wears a Halloween mask which serves to make his appearance more "monstrous", less "human". (The mask has a long history of concealing/signifying monstrosity (from **The Phantom of the Opera** to the psychotic sex-killer in **Dirty Harry** to Leatherface in **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre**.)

So **Halloween** successfully fuses the imagery of **Psycho**'s shower scene with heavily coded imagery drawn from other sub-genres of the horror-film. It does this within a context of a narrative which observes two of the principles which underly many of the most successful modern horror films: i). Dramatically restricting the spatial and temporal scope of the action (Kim Newman points out that films as diverse as **Night of the Living Dead**, **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre**, **The Evil Dead** and **Halloween** restrict most of their action to a single place on a single night, thus allowing for a complete consistency of atmosphere and a relentlessly linear narrative building to a sustained climax of terror (the "rollercoaster

effect"). ii). The shock/reverse ending. This is used (in narrative terms) to suggest the immutability of "evil", and (in commercial terms) to open the way for a sequel. The popularity of this type of ending dates from Da Palma's **Carrie** (1976) in which the penultimate scene suggests the revival of a corpse that has already been buried; in **Halloween** this is re-worked in terms of mystery/suspense and we have a physical form that, however often killed, will not become a corpse.

Halloween, in other words, is a very different film to **Psycho**, linked to it chiefly by some common imagery around the idea of a knife-wielding killer. Separated by almost two decades, each can be seen as representative of - or particularly influential within - the horror genre at two very different historical moments. (**Halloween**, according to McCarty, earned back over a hundred and fifty times its cost, making it the most financially successful independent film ever. Simply in terms of this success it becomes a phenomenon in the same way that **Psycho** was and, like **Psycho**, its influence upon subsequent horror films was proportionate to this success.) In the following section I shall compare the two films, paying particular attention to the distance between **Psycho**'s retentions from the traditional Gothic and **Halloween**'s development of the "terrorising narrative".

B. Gothic Structures: Psycho and Halloween.

I have already described two features of **Psycho** which suggest a relationship between its concerns and those of the Gothic tradition: firstly, in its mise-en-scene, and secondly, in the characterisation of its leading figures. The

two are only theoretically separable (as the manipulation of mise-en-scene is as much an aspect of Norman's characterisation as Anthony Perkins' performance, for instance) but the purpose of drawing attention to characterisation in this context was to note the (subtle) doppleganger relationship between the various characters and the (explicit) presentation of the "divided self" or "split personality" familiar in Gothic literature from **Jekyll and Hyde** onwards. This would perhaps be suficient to place **Psycho** in relation to Gothic literature and is what prompts the casual application of this description of it in some writing on the horror movie. However, the film is also treated with some respect in books concerned with Gothic literature itself. Brendan Hennessy and David Punter deal with it as an excellent example of the transposition of a literary genre into film, implying a deeper structural link between a long established literary tradition and a film that has often been described as strikingly innovative.

It would, given the tremendous diffusion of the Gothic form from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, be unsurprising to demonstrate such a relationship with regard to almost any horror film. The Gothic - like the "melodramatic" - should, in this sense, be seen as a broad sensibility or outlook which, it is increasingly being recognised, is as definitive of much twentieth century popular culture as it was for the nineteenth century. But the claims made for many horror fictions are more specific than this, placing them into a fairly direct relationship with the eighteenth century classics. As David Punter says:

"Most of the available definitions of Gothic have been elaborated by critics strictly in connexion with the "original Gothic" of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; yet as we look at later material, they often remain relavent as critical parameters." (Punter, 1980, p402.)

Charlene Bunnell centers her essay "The Gothic: a literary genre's transition to film" on **The Haunting** (1963) and **The Shining** (1980) for definite reasons:

"These particular stories were chosen because, in both novel and film form, they represent the continuation of the traditional terror/horror Gothic initiated in the eighteenth century by Walpole, Lewis and Radcliffe." (Bunnell, in Grant (ed), 1984, p79.)

One might expect such statements about films which purport to base themselves on classic Gothic texts by Stoker or Shelley; Bunnell, though, is clearly not concerned with such material. Yet her demonstration of significant continuities remains convincing. Further, as I shall argue, they could be applied to **Psycho** equally effectively. First, I shall examine her definition of the Gothic, which, while broadly in agreement with my own, offers a tighter description of the conventions specific to the original Gothic and its close derivitives. She argues that there are "three distinctive and interrelated characteristics which distinguish the Gothic as a literary genre and which, through their imagery, facilitate its transition to film".

i). Firstly, she argues, a crucial characteristic is "the Gothic's ability to actively engage the reader's participation in the story". In this she echoes other critics' emphasis on the Gothic's striving for powerful affective responses, the calculated way in which it aims to provoke intense feelings of shock, alarm, horror and pity. However, unlike many critics, she does not see the

emotionalism of the Gothic as precluding "moral or intellectual reason", claiming that although the Gothic can be taken as an obscure kind of revolt against eighteenth century rationalism, "...a close study of the characters in many early Gothic novels reveals that the writers present these two dichotomous faculties as complementing and controlling, rather than obstructing, each other".

ii). Secondly, she argues that there are "two worlds co-existing in the genre's portrayal of reality; a diurnal one and a nocturnal one". One world is external (cultural and institutional); it is light because it is familiar and commonplace. The other is internal (primitive and intuitive) and is dark because it is unfamiliar or unknown, though not necessarily "evil".

iii). The third identifying characteristic of the Gothic which she discusses involves:

> "... the use of four particular stock elements to reveal themes and motifs and to enhance characterisation: the setting, the journey, the double (a reflection or shadow figure) and the supernatural. The setting, be it a castle, forest or ship, is crucial in establishing the mood and atmosphere that set the tone, heighten characters' sensibilities, and engage audience involvement. It is the setting that suggests the existence of the two worlds that are in themselves double images: a castle, church, school or city street all represent the familiar cultural and social world; the dungeon, subterraneous passage, dark forest and alley symbolise the unknown primitive world. The journey - which may be physical or psychological or both - illustrates the characters' movements between these worlds and facilitates the reader's and the characters' awareness that these worlds exist simultaneously in each person's realm of experience...The two other elements - the double and the supernatural - act to allow the characters to move into or at least perceive the nocturnal world. The double motif represents the dual nature of one's self and existence. A doppleganger, shadow figure, or a mirrored reflection are all devices which allow a character to perceive more clearly or personally both worlds and both sides of his or her self." (Bunnell, in Grant (ed), 1984, p83.)

Any problems with this formulation are probably the price

to be paid for conciseness and brevity, though the conventions are actually rather more flexible than might be implied by the phrase "stock elements". For example, the dual worlds which are so evident in all the works of Ann Radcliffe are much less so in **Vathek** or **The Castle of Otranto**. Indeed, in the latter, more or less all of the action takes place inside the castle which, as Elizabeth MacAndrew points out, becomes so completely identified with the overbearing personality of its inhabitant that his moral fall is even mirrored in its sudden collapse in defiance of all physical laws. However, Bunnell's account is excellent in bringing out the complex inter-relations of all the elements that go to make up the Gothic. The evocation of "setting", for instance, is inseparable from "characterisation" and both are inseparable from the "dual worlds" structure. As Elizabeth MacAndrew puts it: "There is a curious lateral shift in the techniques of the Gothic. Settings turn out to be part of characterisation and methods of narration to be principles of structure". (MacAndrew, 1979, p109.) Of all the elements of the Gothic that Bunnell discusses the only one which appears to be absent in **Psycho** is the "supernatural" but, as she makes clear in a footnote, her use of the term "supernatural" is more in line with Todorov's "fantastic" than with popular usage and is certainly broad enough to encompass Radcliffe's "explained supernatural"; the "psychological" occupies this position in **Psycho** and is in many ways similar to the "explained supernatural", even down to the unsatisfying nature of the explanation offered. (1)

Much of what Bunnell describes as typifying the Gothic is already present in my account of **Psycho**, particularly in

relation to the "castle question" and the device of the "double". But, in view of Bunnell's account it is possible to go further and suggest that the whole of **Psycho** is structured around the co-existence of two worlds and that the journey between them is crucial on more than one level. Its importance in terms of the theft and subsequent flight is clear; Marion is literally running away from the stifling existence that is her "world". However, the images in this section are also those of a passage into another "world" or, as Naremore puts it, "a gradual breakdown of psychological control, a descent into terror." Naremore's description of **Psycho**'s dual worlds cannot be bettered:

> "The Marion Crane story involves the city, the America of the fast buck; the Norman Bates story involves the country, the America of "rural virtue" and sexual repression. The difference between these two worlds is roughly the difference between the Bates Motel and the massive Gothic building behind it, or, as many critics have observed, between a film by Godard and a film by James Whale. **Psycho** is all the more remarkable for the way in which it plays these entirely different modes off against one another without falling apart, as if to suggest a relationship between daytime America and a night world of baroque terror." (Naremore, 1973, p37.)

The journey between these two worlds is presented as a descent into nightmare and a mounting sense of paranoia is evoked through images of pursuit (the highway cop) and then through the growing darkness, Marion's hallucinatory imaginings (on the soundtrack) and the flashing of car headlights and windscreen wipers as the storm grows. The storm itself is part of a very traditional imagery of terror, here enhanced by by the music and Hitchcock's editing. Seen from this perspective - of the basic oppositions which give **Psycho** its power - the film remains close to the traditional Gothic while registering an important shift in the tone of

the American horror film in the imagery of the two worlds it contrasts and the degree to which it implicates each in the other.

Suspense in **Psycho** is accompanied by a mounting sense of paranoia. This paranoia is sometimes a consequence of our sympathy with a character (as in Marion's running away) and is sometimes excited by the extent to which our knowledge exceeds that of a character (as in Arbogast's venture into the Bates mansion). But, as is common in the Gothic, paranoia is linked, in either case, to feelings of guilt or perverse curiosity. It is our awareness of Marion's sense of guilt, encouraged through point-of-view shots, which facilitates a "paraniod" reading of the incidents with the traffic cop and the used car salesman. It is our sympathy with Norman (caught between the hysterical voice of prohibition which we take to be "Mother" and the guilty desire that drives him to voyeurism) that sustains the sense of paranoia while he covers up "Mother"s crime, particularly when the car refuses to slip smoothly into the swamp. From this point on a feeling of paranoia surrounds the Bates mansion and is activated by any attempt to penetrate its mysteries. It is associated with a sense of the vulnerability of any character that does enter the place, which is in tension with the desire to have the enigma resolved; there is a simultaneous desire to know/fear of confronting the secret of the mansion.

In **Halloween** paranoia is no longer primarily associated with curiosity (the attraction/repulsion of the dark world of the unknown) or with a perception of reality distorted by guilt. Instead, paranoia becomes a response to an external

world overshadowed by the presence of an elusive, ever-present and threatening "something". The first scene establishes "it" (Michael/The Shape) as a psychotic killer and the second establishes his escape from a mental hospital on the fifteenth anniversary of his initial Halloween killing. From this point onwards the succeeding action is overshadowed by our knowledge of the potential presence of The Shape and our paranoia stems from a continual anticipation of violence. Our views of the characters are troubled by the use of framing devices and tracking shots which imply that they are the subject of The Shape's voyeuristic gaze. We are constantly aware of this threat hanging over the characters but, as Steve Neale points out, our certainty of The Shape's presence is frustrated by our ignorance of his precise whereabouts. The sense of paranoia becomes all-embracing as the threat of violence could be translated into reality at any moment from any point outside the frame, outside our field of vision.

There is no "journey" into this nightmare world nor any significant relation between it and the world of diurnal normality; the daylight scenes are marked by an mounting sense of The Shape's persecuting presence and the onset of darkness completes his invisibility, hence invulnerability. One "world" has entirely eclipsed the other so that the entire fictional universe is pervaded with the menace of the persecuting figure, in a way analogous to (though radically different from) the early Gothics that evade Bunnell's schema. On Halloween night He comes into his own and the threat of violence becomes actuality. This is not related to the actions of the characters except insofar as Halloween is

traditionally a night of safe "scariness" and they are using it as the occasion for adolescent sexual experimentation.

Both films are marked by a sense of incomplete closure. In **Psycho** closure is achieved through the imprisonment of Norman and the "explanation" of his behaviour, this closure being partially undermined by the inadequacies of the explanation offered and the penultimate scene in which Norman is seen, pathetically wrapped in a blanket and vehemently blaming himself for the murders in "Mother"s voice. The momentary superimposition of "Mother"s skeletel features over his is a disturbing vision of treacherous surface appearances and hidden depths. Closure in **Halloween** is achieved through the climactic shooting of Michael but is undermined by the disappearance of his body and the suggestion that he is still out there somewhere. Closure, in **Psycho**, is subject to an essentially conceptual disturbance; we are left in no doubt about the safety of the surviving characters, although the stable world they inhabit (in one sense, the world of late classical cinema) has begun to come unstuck. In **Halloween**, on the other hand, it is the continuing threat of actual violence which is asserted in the final scene. The former ending, then, suggests that the "monster" can no longer be so readily separated from normality as to be simply disposed of at the end of the narrative, while the latter ending suggests the irreducibility of external evil and a continuing threat of random and unmotivated violence.

Notes.

1. The unsatisfactory nature of **Psycho**'s resolution is not elaborated upon here because it has already been so widely discussed. See Wood (1966, p112), Naremore (1973, pp68-71)

and Durgnat (in LaValley (ed) 1972, pp134-5).

5.WOMEN, TEENAGERS AND PSYCHOPATHS; HALLOWEEN AND FRIDAY THE THIRTEENTH.

"Starting with its title and continuing through its characters, construction and even visual devices (like the shadow effects when the heroine hides behind the slatted door of a closet at the climax) **Friday the 13th** appears to be quite a bare-faced duplication of John Carpenter's **Halloween**." (**Monthly Film Bulletin**, July 1980, p132.)

These comments, which appeared in Tim Pulleine's review of **Friday the 13th** when it was released, are substantially correct. **Friday the 13th** is as close an imitation of **Halloween** as any film could be of an earlier generic model without encroaching on that minimum margin of variation which Steve Neale insists is necessary to guarantee meaning and pleasure. From a theoretical standpoint it is impossible for generic development to be reduced to absolute repetition - duplication - although Andrew Britton argues that the Hollywood film comes far closer to this in the 1980s than it did during the heyday of the studio system and the genre picture. In the classical "cinema of genres", he claims, what one is most aware of is "significant variation, inflection and development".

"By contrast, the differences between **The Poiseidon Adventure** and **The Towering Inferno** are primarily decorative, and when we turn to **Jaws I** and **Jaws II** or **Rocky I** and **Rocky III**, even the superficial novelty involved in staging the purification and resurrection of capitalism in a burning skyscraper rather than a sinking liner have been reduced to a minimum. The structure, narrative development, pattern of character relations and ideological tendency of **Star Wars**, **Tron**, and **Krull** are identical in every particular..." (Britton, 1986, p3.)

As far as **Halloween** and **Friday the 13th** are concerned, it would be difficult not to agree, particularly as Britton offers a thoughtful and persuasive account of what is implied by this as a social symptom. Even Kim Newman, who is prepared

to find positive qualities in films that other critics pass over in silence, writes - of these movies - that eventually "they coalesce into one endless film". He nevertheless takes the trouble to delineate different trends within the subgenre and to sift out those films that rise above the average. Robin Wood has argued that, in terms of their sheer popularity and durability, these films urgently demand this kind of critical enquiry. (This has become less pressing; Wood's comments were published in 1986 when the cycle, though slackening, had not run out of steam to the extent that it has today.)

As well as finding a couple of works of some merit, Wood offers an approximate topography of the cycle by dividing it into two strands, the "violence against women" movie and the "teenie-kill pic". Both strands develop out of **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre** and **Halloween** (and can ultimately be traced back to **Psycho**). As a distinction between (and a description of) the two trends he offers the following: in the "violence against women" picture the victims are terrorised essentially because they are female while in the teenie-kill pic teenagers are the object of violent retribution because they are "promiscuous". This is useful as a rough guide to the core examples of the cycle although on its periphery there are films which do not answer to the description (**The Funhouse**, **The Driller Killer**) or which invert the basic premisses of the sub-genre (**Angel of Vengeance**). In any event, the two trends are only theoretically separable, with both movies under discussion here falling into the "teenie-kill" category, **Friday the I3th** as the nearest thing to a pure example and **Halloween** leaning in the direction of the

"violence against women" picture.

This suggests a possible way of talking about **Halloween** and **Friday the 13th** without simply listing structural similarities and opportunistic borrowings. However, this basic relationship at the level of repetition needs to be sketched out first. This can be done almost diagrammatically: just as Robin Wood suggests that **Halloween** is "a resourceful amalgam of **Psycho**, **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre**, **The Exorcist** and **Black Christmas**, so McCarty offers the more simple equation that **Halloween** plus **Dawn of the Dead** equals **Friday the 13th**. Cunningham, he suggests, has simply amalgamated the suspenseful narrative structure of **Halloween** with the inventive gruesomeness of **Dawn of the Dead** in the hope of duplicating the box-office performances of two of the most successful horror films the preceeding years (1978 and 1979 respectively). It is worth noting at this point that by following the narrative structure of **Halloween** so precisely **Friday the 13th** alters its basic function; what is suspenseful in the model is necessarily familiar in the successor - while suspense in **Halloween** derives partly from disjunctions in the access to knowledge of audience and characters (as Steve Neale has demonstrated), suspense in **Friday the 13th** is almost entirely dependent upon this. What, then, is the basic narrative structure that **Halloween** and **Friday the 13th** have in common?

Firstly, they begin with a prologue in which an act of extreme violence is associated with a specific place and occasion. Secondly, there is a scene which functions to alert us to the fact that the anniversary of this initial scene is

imminent or that the place associated with the initial incident is about to be the scene of actions which will provoke a repetition. In **Halloween** the scene in which Donald Pleasance witnesses the escape of Michael Myers from the mental hospital serves this function; in **Friday the 13th** the scene in which Annie stops in a cafe to ask directions to Camp Crystal Lake and is warned by Crazy Ralph that it has a "death curse" plays an analogous role. Thirdly, a series of sightings/attacks/murders serve to build up tension and eventually lead to the elimination of all but one of the major characters (customarily a female one). In **Halloween** this main section of the narrative is orchestrated relatively subtly, with the series of murders only occuring as the culmination of a lengthy process of suspense-building in which the monster is repeatedly glimpsed but does not act. In **Friday the 13th** the murders punctuate the narrative in a more regular fashion. Finally, the films end in a climactic confrontation between the remaining protagonist and the "monster", variable elements consisting in whether the protagonist is/is not assisted by another character(s) and the degree of certainty - rarely total - with which the monster is defeated.

Having set out this underlying narrative structure shared by both films I propose to examine the differences between them, starting where the films themselves start, with the prologue, which is, in both cases, a brief and concentrated exposition of what is to follow. I shall describe the main features of both prologues in some detail, extending my examination of the differences that emerge from this to include the entire action of their two narratives.

Halloween opens on a night-time image of a house. The whiteness of its walls is accentuated by the lighting, giving it an eerie luminescence. An owl hoots on the soundtrack. The house is viewed straight on from a slightly low angle and the camera moves unsteadily down the garden path to look through the curtained glass in the front door (figures can be seen) and then around to the side of the house, where it is a little darker and the walls are dappled with leaf shadows. Through a window a young couple can be seen kissing and embracing on a sofa. The young man asks whether they are alone and the girl replies "Michael's around somewhere", laughing. They fool around, the boy putting on a Halloween mask and the girl telling him to "take off that thing", and he suggests they go upstairs. "O.K." (More laughter.) As soon as they begin to move the camera darts very rapidly back to the front of the house and at the precise moment the upstairs light is switched off a high-pitched, tremulous note is struck up on the soundtrack - a sort of warning sound. Then the camera moves through the darkness around to the back of the house; as it enters the house a very simple repeated piano motif is added to the soundtrack. The camera enters the kitchen and a blurred image of an arm (filmed so as to almost suggest it is the viewer's own) extends into frame to remove a large knife from a drawer, the underlying note on the soundtrack being modulated to a deeper and slightly louder tone as this happens. Further roving camera movements culminate in a static viewing position at the foot of the stairs.

On the soundtrack a brief exchange:

"Look Judy, it's really late. I've got to go."
"Will you call me tomorrow?"
"Yeah, sure."
"Promise?"
"Yeah..."

This exchange serves its narrative function; no more, no less. One would not have expected the young man to be leaving so soon (barely enough time has elapsed for him to take his shoes off, let alone engage in the sexual activity that has been clearly implied) but plausibility is sacrificed to a suspense strategy which involves keeping the camera continually on the move. After the boy closes the front door behind him the camera glides around in the darkened hallway and begins ascending the stairs. The soundtrack is used to great effect during this ascent, a high, continuous note being used to convey urgency once again but this time integrated with a number of other sounds; the chiming of a clock, the girl's humming of a tune upstairs, the footsteps themselves. For a few moments the camera ascends jerkily through almost total darkness and then at the top of the stairs a white door stands out to the left of the frame - an almost abstract composition. The camera moves rightwards and after a few moments of near darkness enters a pool of light shining upon bare floorboards. We see the same hand reach out and retrieve the discarded Halloween mask. Scattered clothes. The breathing of the intruder is added to the soundtrack.

The camera moves into the doorway of a bedroom in which the figure of a girl, combing out her hair, is almost silhouetted against the light from a lamp on her dresser. It pans right to take in the crumpled bed-sheets. With the dim lighting it is hard to know precisely when the lens has been obscured but the images are now perceived through the

subjective "eyeholes" of the mask. A pan to the left takes the camera in closer behind the girl, who turns towards it in irritation, exclaiming "Michael!" The moment she cries out a deep, vibrating note is struck up on the soundtrack, over which her gasps can be heard. Much of the precise action of the stabbing is lost in a blur of darkness and camera movement, its violence conveyed through a soundtrack of screams and stabbing sounds. As the girl crumples backwards the camera pans right, the masking of the lens causing this movement to be perceived as a succession of blurry patches of diffuse light, into which intrudes the flashing of the blade, clear and bright for one stroke but almost immediately out of focus as the camera edges forwards, experienced as a whirl if agitated light and movement. Screaming continues on the soundtrack - she calls her boyfriend's name - and the camera alights momentarily upon the naked body before an extremely jerky, rapid movement away, the screen again being reduced to a flurry of indeterminate shapes and images for about seven seconds before resolving itself into a high angle view down the stairway.

The movement down the stairs is smooth and very fast, the breathing on the soundtrack now amplified until, for a moment, it almost competes with the urgency of the music. As the camera moves out of the door and into the night other sounds are added, in particular the sound of a car pulling up and its door being slammed. Little can be seen in the darkness apart from a momentary image of a male figure; a voice on the soundtrack enquires "Michael?" Cut. A hand removes the Halloween mask to reveal a young boy, in festive

costume, awkwardly holding out an enormous knife, blade downwards. As the camera tracks backwards the boy is framed between the male figure seen earlier (on the left) and a female figure who comes into view from the right. The camera only comes to rest when the initial long-shot of the house, looking down the garden path, is more or less duplicated. The three figures hold their tableau until the final, drawn-out note on the soundtrack signals the end of the prologue.

Many of the ideas which will be developed in the course of the film are present in this brief scene and it is worth noting how carefully constructed it is, particularly this final image. The scene as a whole achieves a pleasing formal symmetry - a fluid circular movement - while this last image is a virtual summation of the tendency of the 1970's horror film, with the suburban home looming out of the darkness and the family group composed in front of it with the "evil child" at its centre. Hitchcock's shower scene is eventually followed by the revelation of the identity of Norman and "Mother"; here, the revelation draws upon the image of the "devil-child" developed through the "demonic possession" cycle. **Halloween** assumes that this figure is sufficiently established as a monster for the focus to shift away from its monstrosity, which is simply assumed, and onto its actions; it has become a narrative function.

This scene also develops a consistent mise-en-scene for the unfolding of these actions. While not all of the action of the movie takes place at night, this scene sets the basic visual tone and colour range, of which the daylight scenes are a continuation in a lighter shade. The colours are muted, with greys, dull greens and shades from dull brown through to

orange predominating. The first scene (after the prologue) sets the mood with its use of autumnal imagery. The inter-titles (HALLOWEEN... HADDONFIELD) appear over a low angle shot of a tree lined street, with brown leaves falling and settling on the ground in the foreground. **Friday the 13th** is very different in this respect, abandoning this consistency of mise-en-scene for an alternation between sunlit woodland and lakeside scenes and darker scenes at night. Neither mise-en-scene is consistently associated with the monster's attacks although only the first murder (prologue apart) is staged in a bright green woodland setting, the climax taking place at night while an exaggeratedly sun-bathed coda is used to stage a shock-within-a-dream ending in the manner of **Carrie**. The sequels systematise variations upon this alternation of mise-en-scene into a corresponding alternation between scenes of comedy and scenes of violence, scenes of youthful night life and violence, etc.

The main function of **Halloween**'s prologue which should be noted, however, is its careful elaboration of the visual and sound motifs which are associated with the potential presence of the monster. I have detailed these at some length because they are vital to the film as a whole, their careful manipulation being the main strategy for the building of suspense, and because they demonstrate an inventive repertoire geared towards the twin functions of creating an aestheticised impression of violence and concealing the killer's identity. **Halloween** develops these motifs as a shorthand for the threat of violent attack and **Friday the 13th** simply takes them up and deploys them (rather clumsily)

in the build up to each of its climaxes of bloody murder. (There is very little explicit bloodletting in **Halloween** but **Friday the 13th** compensates for the familiarity of its plot with the variety and explicitness of its slayings - a knifing, an axe murder, a decapitation, etc.) **Friday the 13th** both repeats and simplifies the visual language developed in **Halloween**, the alternation between positions of vulnerability and sadistic omnipresence being shifted decisively towards the latter so that a virtual fetish is made of the subjective camera during murder scenes involving female victims. The first murder scene after the prologue typifies this.

The camera stands in for the driver of a vehicle that pulls up to offer a lift to a teenage girl called Annie. Her comments, initially about her destination, later increasingly anxious as the turning is passed, are therefore addressed directly to camera. There are no replies, perhaps because of the difficulties involved in attributing a "voice" to a camera; perhaps because conversation would be inappropriate for an implacable figure of violence. Some music reminiscent of the soundtrack of **Psycho** is added to the soundtrack as the car accelerates and Annie eventually jumps from the speeding vehicle into a ditch. Most of the pursuit of Annie through the roadside forest is also in point-of-view shot, the strength of the association between the camera and the stalking figure being implicit in the use of more neutral shots to signify her momentary escape. The threatening music on the soundtrack ceases and she is seen, walking more slowly towards the camera, which tracks backwards, away from her. It is the cut to a fixed camera position, a fragment of her pursuer intruding at he right hand edge of the frame as she

advances, which signals the renewed threat of violence. The actual killing, almost the antithesis of **Psycho**'s aestheticising strategy, nevertheless consists of seven shots, the first showing the upwards movement of the knife and the seventh showing the blood beginning to pour as the girl raises her hand to her throat and sinks out of frame. The intervening five shots are cut rapidly together, barely distinguishable at a cursory viewing, the overall effect being both graphic and perfunctory, privileging the sudden lunging motion and the answering flow of blood.

This emphasis on the physical mechanics of violent death typifies the way in which **Friday the 13th** kills off both its male and female characters, although the most significant killing of a male character takes the form of a "shock" attack rather than a protracted stalking. The camera is positioned above a young man lying on a bed smoking a cigarette when a hand suddenly reaches out from under the bed and grabs his head, holding it down firmly to the bed. A blade skewers his neck from beneath, the point appearing before his startled gaze as blood sprays out over his chin and onto his chest. I shall have more to say about this scene later but, for the moment, the point I want to establish is that something which is implicit in **Halloween** (Steve Neale notes that the killing of **Halloween**'s sole male victim is a perfunctory prelude to the more elaborate murder of his girlfriend) is here systematised into a more consistent pattern of variation along gendered lines. The exclusive use of subjective camera in **Halloween** is restricted to the prologue and serves to conceal the killer's identity, in

Friday the 13th it features more persistently throughout the film and the killer's identity is concealed until the denouement.

This systematisation of the visual language of **Halloween** which takes place in **Friday the 13th** is taken further by the sequels to that film. This seems to follow from the discovery that the formal devices which signify the presence of the "monster" can equally well signify the presence of a harmless practical joker or even a pet dog, thus allowing for a play of variation between suspense scenes that are dissolved in laughter and those that culminate in murder. The trajectory of **Friday the 13th part II** is largely an escalation of the former type of scene into the latter and the sub-genre is developed in the direction of both soft pornography and the 1980's horror-comedy. One scene which is indicative of both these tendencies has a long subjective view of a pair of female buttocks constrained within a pair of tight shorts and culminates in the firing of a pebble from a catapault (reminiscent of the crude, sexist humour of the "carry on" films).

I am not advancing this argument in order to "convict" **Friday the 13th** of a variety of cinematic crimes of which **Halloween** is innocent. Almost everything in the latter film has a more discreet correlate in the former, and there is enough there to prompt Steve Neale's contention that underneath the formal inventiveness of **Halloween** lies an endlessly reiterated ideology of women. However, **Halloween** does have a quite evident sympathy with its heroine while its successors within the cycle show (as Kim Newman says) a "deep callousness" towards the casts of characters which they set

up merely in order to be knocked down again in various ways. (The heroine of **Friday the 13th** is rapidly eliminated to provide a prologue for part II.) This is not to say that **Halloween** actually devotes more space to characterisation although, with fewer characters involved each demands greater attention, and the performances are, in any case, far stronger. This is surely a matter of economics; the **Friday the 13th** films develop a narrative proceedure which requires the expense of only one major actress and few demands are made upon the unknowns that fill out the other roles. The relative freedom from interest in the characters themselves complements the growing interest in the physical detail of their destruction, the abandonment of any "aestheticising strategy".

Friday the 13th, in abandoning **Halloween**'s controlled amplification of vulnerability and violence in favour of the schematic "alternation" of scenes described above, also destroys at a stroke the formal/stylistic elegance which has been the main feature of that film singled out for critical praise. It would be possible to elaborate on this by returning to the structure of **Halloween**'s prologue. The scene is certainly realised with the choreographical meticulousness of a dance routine; camera movement, character placement and the control of mise-en-scene combining in a carefully controlled flow of continuous but varied motion which is abruptly ended by the reverse cut that reveals the killer's identity. Even this cut is only the most extreme point of tension in a closed circle of movement which comes to rest exactly where it began. The same point can be supported by

looking at any scene in **Halloween** and the film does have a certain economy of construction in which every scene is significant in one way or another (the possible exception being the scene in which Loomis stops to make a call from a payphone and discovers evidence of Michael having stopped in the same spot).

One of the best known examples involves the investigation of a break-in at a hardware store, from which only a Halloween mask, some rope and a knife have been taken. The primary function of the scene is clearly to acquaint the audience with conclusive evidence of Michael's preparations to repeat the prologue's violence. The inclusion of the heroines themselves within the action of the scene allows this function to be adequately served without constituting a digression or otherwise belabouring the point. Its incorporation into the flow of the narrative in this way also prevents any diminution of the palpable - visible - threat to the heroines themselves. The scene serves the additonal function of introducing Loomis to the sheriff so they can now be seen to be working - or not working - in tandem in subsequent scenes. The construction is as follows.

Laurie (the eventual heroine) and Annie (a friend) are seen driving along sharing a joint. The camera is placed to view them through the front windscreen with the shadowing presence of the car associated with Michael intermittently visible through the rear window. Annie spots her father - the sheriff - up ahead and asks Laurie to dispose of the joint. After a brief shot of Laurie, a cut to a roadside vantage point has their car diminishing into the distance while the car associated with Michael pulls over and stops in

a position where it occupies the image's foreground. The car, concealing its occupant, also conventionally stands in for his faceless malevolence, a device taken to its limit by **Duel** and **Christine**. Here, the momentary privileging of the vehicle for the viewer's attention is a final visual reinforcement of the threat to the heroines before that attention is diverted towards their dialogue with the sheriff. The following shot is from a subjective position within the girls' car as they pull in at the hardware store, the sheriff on the pavement outside. The exchange in which the theft is described is constructed in shot-reverse shot but culminating in a shot with the sheriff occupying the left hand side of the screen while the girls' car pulls out and recedes into the background on the right. At this point Loomis - Donald Pleasance - advances into the vacant right hand side of the frame to introduce himself to the sheriff, the camera panning round until they are framed opposite each other, one either side of the image in medium close-up.

This plotting and formal construction interweaves disparate elements of characterisation, narrative information, etc, into a flowing linearity. The scene could be said to function rather in the manner of a relay race, with the baton passing from the two girls, to the sherriff, and on to Loomis, the preference for this type of linkage also contributing to the ominously "closed" ambience, the sense of a restricted number of characters moving in small circles that often intersect. On one level this may have to do with making a virtue of necessity; on another level it distantly echoes the dark, enclosed environments of the early

Gothic. The relative emphasis on particular elements (on the girls' light hearted banter as they smoke the joint, or on the shadowing vehicle in the background, for instance) allows for subtle variations of tone within a carefully maintained mood of anxious suspense. Compare, as a contrast, the alternation of a stilted, frankly juvenile humour (eg. the "strip-monopoly" game) with suspense and violence in **Friday the 13th**, and even the inclusion of completely superfluous scenes (eg, Christie's visit to the diner).

Although this change is most evident at the formal level there is more at stake than simply a declining formal quality stemming from a desire to cut costs and maximise profitability. These changes cannot be completely attributed to such pressures; extremely tight budgets and shooting schedules have been known to lead to positive innovations and this is a critical commonplace in the case of much 1970's "exploitation" horror. In the case of the "teenie-kill" pic the most important factor (apart from changes in the general ideological climate) seems to be the gravitation of the cycle towards a teenage milieu viewed with some cynicism by the film-makers themselves. The calculated way in which **Friday the 13th** appeals to a teenage audience will be evident from an analysis of the film itself. I shall begin with the prologue as I did for **Halloween**.

The film begins with a panning shot which opens on an image of the moon and comes to rest upon a cluster of isolated lakeside buildings. There is the sound of an acoustic guitar leading a sing song on the soundtrack before the visual cut to the interior. Despite the incorporation of various sounds connoting rural tranquility (distant wildfowl,

etc) the following interior scene avoids the tone of communal revelry usually associated with the campfire singalong by framing the gathering in long shot from the other side of a large room, the young people occupying only the top left corner of an image whose edges are obscured by a "frame" of dark beams and pillars. Returning to an exterior view, the building is now seen in a closer shot, mainly obscured by foliage but with a red door clearly visible. More ominous "rural" sounds (the rhythmic buzzing of cicadas) accompany an exaggeratedly "subjective" tracking shot up to this door, which seems to open of its own accord, accompanied by the creaking of a rusty hinge on the soundtrack.

As the camera passes through the door a drawn-out synthesiser note is added to the soundtrack, a move familiar from **Halloween.** However, the jangling discordancies of the piano notes which then overlay this sound are quite different to the playful, almost lullaby feel of the corresponding music in **Halloween.** While Carpenter achieved a (retrospectively appropriate) fusion of menace and dreamy innocence, the soundtrack in **Friday the 13th** is used simply to signify the threat of violence, as is the strikingly lit dormitory into which the camera moves, with its elongated triangular strip of light falling down the aisle between the beds. The camera lurches from side to side in a series of searching pans, taking in the sleeping forms of the adolescents to either side as it goes. As it disappears through a further door we cut back to the sing-song.

The presentation of the sing-song involves a mixture of shots from the original "framed" vantage point, and closer

shots which place us in amongst a gathering of healthy looking youth in black and yellow sportswear. An alternation of shots gives us an exchange of looks between two of them which indicates sexual desire. This couple leave the gathering as the singing resumes. When they kiss there is a cut to a shot of clouds passing over the moon. When a further cut restores us to the scene of the action the two are seen heading off into a darkened corner (the girl protesting "Somebody'll see"). The camera follows them up a flight of wooden stairs and witnesses the beginnings of sexual activity. There is then a cut back to the floor below, the camera facing up towards the beamed ceiling (with the sounds of the young couple above added to the soundtrack) before tilting downwards and ascending the stairs for a second time, this time as voyeur/attacker (the music on the soundtrack clearly signalling this).

The intrusion of the camera/voyeur prompts the girl to whisper "Somebody's there" and as it advances round the corner of the stairs the couple are caught straightening up, the girl buttoning her blouse, the boy his flies. The boy gets to his feet and as the camera tilts to follow he shamefacedly adresses the camera/voyeur directly: "Ah...we weren't doing anything, we were just messing ar..." What happens to him is lost in a rapid camera movement and a sudden escalation of the music on the soundtrack. After a quick pan the camera settles upon the girl (backing away towards a corner) but then there is an abrupt cut back to the boy as he falls among some scattered lumber, both hands clutched to his stomach with blood pouring out between them.

Cut back to the girl. She dances backwards around a table

and among numerous stacked boxes, imploring the camera "Oh! please,..Oh...Please stop!...Oh!..." The soundtrack is a pastiche of Bernard Herrman's violin score to the shower scene from **Psycho**. As the camera closes in on her she begins pulling down boxes and throwing then in its direction. Then she hesitates, one moment looking towards the camera in terror and the next moment turning around as if there were somewhere to run; finally caught in a freeze frame of a screaming face reminiscent of the filmic records which Carl Boehm used to keep of his victims in **Peeping Tom**. The camera zooms in to an extreme close-up of this frozen image from which the colour drains away until the **Friday the 13th** title appears, at which point the image appears to shatter, to the accompanying sound of breaking glass. There are two basic aspects of this prologue that I shall comment on and compare with **Halloween**.

Firstly: from what does suspense derive in **Friday the 13th**? The basic pattern of **Friday the 13th**'s prologue is quite different to that of **Halloween**. Here, a variation upon classical parallel editing simply allows us to follow the progress of the the young couple towards their sexual rendezvous and the progress of the "monster" through the camp until the two movements converge in the double ascent of the wooden staircase. This construction differs markedly from the single subjective movement which Carpenter pursues until the reverse cut that reveals Michael's identity. Suspense, in **Halloween**'s prologue derived, at least partly, from the spectator's lack of control over the narrative, a genuine element of uncertainty about the significance and outcome of

events. Nevertheless there is a voyeuristic treatment of sexual behaviour and an anticipation of violence. In **Friday the 13th** these two elements become separate lines of action and, even for viewers who have not seen **Halloween**, any uncertainty about the outcome of events has been removed by the crosscutting. An anticipation of sexual activity is set up, as is an anticipation of violence, and it is only a matter of how far the one will be allowed to proceed before being curtailed by the other. One might expect suspense to also derive from uncertainty about the identity of the monster. The use of subjective camera in **Halloween** certainly served to conceal Michael's identity and this is the convention that **Friday the 13th** adheres to; however, there is little evidence of any interest in the identity of the killer, an impression confirmed by the lack of suspense in the climactic (and revelatory) scene. There is no shock of recognition, such as that which, at the end of **Psycho**, forces one to reassess the entire preceding narrative; the revelation here simply does not reflect backwards in this way and appears hasty and implausible.

Secondly: why are sex and violence related in this way in the "teenie-kill" pic? I shall approach this question via the more widely discussed implications of the "violence against women" movie. Critical opinion has generally favoured an understanding of these films as being, at least in part, a response to the social changes most forcefully expressed in the rise of the womens' movement. Robin Wood finds this reading plausible just so long as it is made to account for the repetitious intensity of this particular cycle rather than for the preponderance of female victims across the genre

as a whole. The ideology that conventionally ascribes active and passive (aggressive and submissive) dispositions along gendered lines favours, in itself, the placement of women in vulnerable positions as a strategy for the generation of suspense. The charge levelled at **Halloween** though, is that it has served as a model for a sub-genre that goes further than this, investing the monster with a punitive function, independent and sexually active women being favoured as its victims while the role of monster-slayer is reserved for a more conventionally virtuous heroine. Further, it is argued that the habitual use of point-of-view shots from the aggressor's position solicits an "identification" with the sadistic male figure.

Halloween offers only partial confirmation of this thesis. The prologue suggests that Michael's psychosis is triggered by some obscure reaction to sex. The sexual overtones of the scene are so strong as to inevitably affect perceptions of the entire narrative. However, the film offers enough evidence to support Robin Wood's assumption that it is the - apparently "innocent" - Laurie who, through some maniacal compulsion to repeat, becomes the killer's real quarry. And there is little doubt about the sympathy with which the film presents **all** of its female characters. They are all "appealingly characterised" and "very likeable", as Andrew Tudor says; nor is there any opprobium attached to their sexual conduct.

The issue is not, of course, resolved by exonerating this particular film over a number of specific criticisms. There is no doubt about **Halloween**'s preference for female victims,

and when we come to **Friday the 13th** the punitive connotations of the violence are blatant (as my account of the prologue to the film makes clear). In this film, so aptly described as a "teenie-kill pic", it is promiscuity - here synonymous with any spontaneous sexual encounter - which brings an escalation of the omnipresent psychotic menace into violent assault. The attitude to female sexuality in particular is manifest in a conventionally specific handling of the build-up to attacks on female victims.

It would not be easy, though, to sustain this argument so far as to suggest that the use of first-person camera during such attacks fosters "identification" with the aggressor. Rather, this line of argument tends to expose the inadequacy of the concept of "identification" as it is routinely employed in film studies. In a recent book on horror fictions Noel Carroll has demonstrated that this word is loosely used to designate a number of relationships between spectator and fictional protagonist ranging from a sympathetic understanding of a character's situation to an emotional and perceptual identity between spectator and character. Carroll has no quarrel with the notion of sympathy or concern - except insofar as this is misleadingly described by the word "identification" - but finds the more common idea of a symmetry or duplication of emotional response - the assumption of "identity" - to be quite insupportable. In order to feel suspense **on behalf of** a character, for example, it is unlikely that one should have to experience a situation precisely as that character does. In fact, suspense is often promoted by the spectator's awareness of circumstances of which the characters remain ignorant. In any case, even the

most basic of narratives will usually involve some division of sympathy between a number of (sometimes contending) characters.

As Carroll says: "With many of the best known types of relations between audiences and protagonists - such as pathos and suspense - there is an asymmetry between the emotional states of characters and those of audiences." (Carroll, 1990, P91.) He goes on to insist that "...what we do is not identify with characters but, rather, we assimilate their situation". (p95) I would add that a strategy for enlisting intense sympathy with a character will commonly involve presenting the visual manifestations of that character's emotions (physical demeanour, facial expression, etc; hence the importance of close-ups). Look, for example, at **An American Werewolf in London**'s underground station murder. Much as we have been constrained to sympathise with Kessler this scene does not serve to promote sympathy with his lycanthropic attack. It is still less likely that the same repertoire of formal devices (camera placement and framing, erratic movement, etc) should engender "identification" with a faceless and necessarily elusive "psycho". Rather, it is likely that these devices enhance our anxiety for the victims through providing a visual demonstration of the relentless proximity of physical threat.

However, the recurrent critical conviction that women are somehow degraded through the use of such imagery cannot be lightly disregarded. It seems likely to me that our anxious sympathy with the victims can be undermined by a use of these devices which endows the "psycho" with virtual omnipotence

while correspondingly underlining the victim's humiliating and undignified incapacity. In the killing from **Friday the 13th** which was described above, for instance, it is significant that the shot immediately following the renewal of the monster's attack should take the form of a cut on movement as Annie stumbles, the camera tilting upwards - the girl prostrate, the attacker's foot intruding at the bottom of the frame - to follow her doomed attempt to regain her footing on time. The "psycho", in contrast, effectively transcends time and space, being conjured out of nowhere by the appropriate formal signifiers. This foreclosing of the possibility of escape, coupled with the unappealing physical detail of the killing itself, invites - as one critic has charged Lewis' **The Monk** with doing - a terror and revulsion so strong as to be incompatible with pity. This is compounded by the sub-genre's lack of concern with characterisation and the growing familiarity of its narrative procedures (which tend to involve an arbitrary reversal of the situation just described in the denouement).

The fears that **Friday the 13th** plays upon are a reflection of the heightened anxieties surrounding sexuality during adolescence. Many of the changes which I have described between **Halloween** and **Friday the 13th** are a consequence of the latter film discarding any elements in the former which are not directly related to the fears of its teenage audience to concentrate on the basic dynamic of titillation and punishment. At certain points this is explicitly signalled . In the prologue, for instance, the girl's fears that "Somebody'll see" and the boy's remarkable plea made directly to the camera/voyeur ("We weren't doing anything") indicate

the shared assumptions of film-makers, characters and audience. This clearly goes beyond the merely "formal symmetry between sexual behaviour and subsequent attack" that Tudor describes. Few other films are so explicit. But that is not necessarily the issue; the association of sexual behaviour with variously unpleasant consequences may be routinely articulated regardless of whether these consequences are seen to be deserved or not.

The later scene (which I have already described and which is loosely modelled upon an analogous scene in **Halloween**) is revealing in a similar way. The killing of the young man, while he is lying back smoking the traditional post-coital cigarette, instinctively amalgamates the childish fear of "something" under the bed with the idea of punishment for sexual transgression. The girl remains in ignorance of what has happened, engaging in a game of "peek-a-boo" with what she imagines to be her boyfriend when she hears a noise. This time the horror of the situation is deflated in a humourous play upon expectations; she eventually declares that it "must be my imagination" just as the magnified shadow of an axe falls across the wall behind her. This is essentially pantomime humour. The final confirmation of **Friday the 13th**'s perception of its audience is that, in seeking for an alternative to **Halloween**'s revelation of its child-as-psycho the film opts for a maternal looking woman in a chunky sweater, which makes it hard to stage the set-piece climax convincingly. Given the similarity with the climactic duel of many a swashbuckler, there is something absurdly undignified in the image of this middle-aged woman being wrestled to the

ground and decapitated by the teenage heroine.

That the film ends with such an emphatic destruction of its monster indicates that the popularity of the cycle and the possibility of sequels was not necessarily anticipated. A similar thing was to happen when **Friday the 13th part IV** was released with the subtitle "The Final Chapter" in 1984. When this assessment of the future viability of the series was proved wrong there was no alternative but to release **Friday the 13th part V** under the title "A New Beginning" in 1985. And this series was only the most obvious manifestation of the unprecedented success of the "slasher" films; looking through the **Monthly Film Bulletin** for the years 1980-83 one finds at least six films a year which relate fairly closely to this trend, adding up to 30 films over the four year period (slightly less if one were to exclude borderline examples like **The Funhouse**). And the cycle certainly continued well after that date; even the **Nightmare on Elm Street** films which started in 1985 being only a partial departure from the "teenie-kill pic".

Though these films inherit - even amplify - the paranoia of the 1970's horor movie, the continuity is mainly a matter of a general ambience of traumatic insecurity, the detail of the films' preoccupations being quite different. Ideologically, they mark something of a departure, although this took some time to become apparent. Robin Wood, writing a year after **Halloween**'s release, writes, of its prologue, that:

"The long killer's point-of-view tracking-shot with which the film begins establishes the basis for the first murder as sexual repression; the girl is killed because she arouses in the voyeur-murderer feelings he has simultaneously to deny and enact in the form of violent assault. The second

shot reveals the murderer as the victim's bewildered six-year-old brother. Crammed into these first two shots ...are the implications for the definitive family horror film...Not only are these implications not realised in the succeeding film, their trace is obscured and all but obliterated." (Wood, in Grant (ed), 1984, p196.)

This reading is clearly - and understandably - informed by earlier precedents, particularly **Psycho**. Hence the confident summation of the killer's psychological motivation. The film itself offers no such grounds for certainty; initially fostering the expectation of an adult male assailant, the second shot introduces a sudden retrospective indeterminacy. Precocious punitive violence? A childishly malicious prank with fancy dress but - fatally - a real weapon? (**The Funhouse** later re-stages this scene using a toy knife with a flexible blade.) An undisclosed psychological trauma? It would be reasonable to expect an answer from the ensuing narrative. The explanation offered - that of innate and inexplicable evil, as in **The Bad Seed** - is one aspect of **Halloween**'s importance for the 1980's horror cinema. While inadequately conceptualised as a retreat from (or repression of) an initial implication of "family horror", it does show the reduction of an (already limited interest) in characterising the "psycho" accompanied by an escalation of his persecuting power.

These are the main features giving rise to the paranoia that is so effectively conveyed through **Halloween**'s consistency of tone, careful build-up of suspense, etc. This paranoia pervades the sub-genre as a whole but **Halloween** constitutes more of a high water mark than a beginning. Later films tend to opt for more limited, less representative settings (a train, a school, a summer camp, etc), to offer

implausibly prosaic explanations of their "psycho"s motives and, progressively, to incorporate comic elements. I shall deal with some of these developments - particularly the use of comedy in modern horror films - later.

Before doing so I shall consider some influential films of the late 1960's and 1970's. The legacy of **Psycho** in the post-1978 "slasher" movie is obviously only one aspect of the genre's development and leaves most of the 1970's unexplored. In section 6 I shall be concerned with some low-budget "exploitation" movies of the period and in section 7 I shall look at some of their more mainstream counterparts. Sections 9-13 will be mainly concerned with the 1980's.

6. LOW-BUDGET CANNIBALISM: NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD and THE HILLS HAVE EYES.

Most critical accounts of **Night of the Living Dead** make inroads into the film from two different but related directions. Firstly, there is the film's complex generic heritage, which draws on diverse precedents from both science-fiction and horror genres, recasting them with an impressive ideological incisiveness. And secondly there is the motif of cannibalism; the film not only introduces this motif but does so in a context which, for all the traditionalism of its lumbering monsters, is downbeat and contemporary. I will concentrate on the significance of cannibalism within the film, while outlining the issues connected with genre and ideology. These will then be pursued in the course of a comparison with another "cannibal movie" - **The Hills Have Eyes** - made almost a decade later.

Night of the Living dead was the first film to introduce cannibalism as a major aspect of the monster's threat to either horror or science-fiction, although precedents could be cited, such as the "morlocks" of **The Time Machine** (1959). In that film cannibalism figures as the relationship between a subterranean race of monstrous workers and a leisure class devoted to mindless consumption. The hero finds himself living in the culturally blank world of the "eloi" and is not only unable to ascertain how that society feeds and clothes itself but horrified to find that its citizens are equally ignorant and quite unconcerned. He eventually solves the riddle with the discovery that the eloi are bred and fattened like cattle to feed the morlocks, who have relapsed into a grotesque sub-humanity. Cannibalism is never presented as

spectacle; one sees the eloi being herded and whipped towards a passage from which they are not intended to return, although in this instance the intervention of the hero saves them from their fate. The real horror of the film lies in the idea of a society in which consumption is the only goal, and culture - even the power of active thought - has become dormant. It is this situation (crudely symbolised in the inability of the eloi to understand the word "read" and their view of books as some kind of relic) which accounts for their willingness to submit to their fate.

Here, cannibalism seems to have a curious connection with "consumption" in its wider sense, although any implication of social allegory is complicated by the fact that it is the leisure "class" that are cannibalistically consumed, and that this is only disclosed fairly late in the narrative as a revelation intended to shock. One of the claims that has been advanced for the "cannibal movies" of the 1970's is that this metaphorical potential is - whether consciously or otherwise - more consistently exploited. Referring to **Night of the Living Dead**, **Death line** (1972), **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre** (1974) and **The Hills Have Eyes** (1977) Robin Wood writes that:

> "It is no accident that the four most intense horror films of the 'seventies at "exploitation" level are all centered on cannibalism, and on the specific notion of present and future (the younger generation) being devoured by the past. Cannibalism represents the ultimate in possessiveness, hence the logical end of human relations under capitalism." (Wood, in Nichols (ed) 1985, p213.)

The contention is, at first sight, bold and rather perplexing. It is easy to see how this metaphorical potential **could** be exploited. After all, the symbolic dimension of vampirism has been developed in a number of directions, from occasional dramatisations of Marx's view that capitalism

lives, vampire-like, upon the blood of the working class, to connotations of youth culture, drug-dependence and outlawry (in **Near Dark**). These, however, are isolated instances which never come close to eclipsing the dominant uses of the convention. Cannibalism, unlike vampirism, does not have a lengthy pedigree as a convention within the genre and it seems likely to me that, as it emerges, it carries with it various extra-cinematic associations; sub-human primitivism, a ritualised destruction of outsiders involving both awe and execration, etc. There is certainly an undercurrent of this in **Chainsaw Massacre**, one that rises closer to the surface in **The Hills Have Eyes**. This concern with the primitive undercuts any suggestion that the films should be read in terms of capitalist social relations, however justified - in its own right - Wood's observation that **Chainsaw**'s cannibal family take the logic of the system, that people have a right to live off one another, to its logical conclusion.

It is possible that the context of rural backwardness entitles us to understand the cannibal families of **Chainsaw Massacre** and **The Hills Have Eyes** as the exaggerated horror of a savage past overwhelming the suburban present. Past against present does not seem to figure strongly as a conceptual opposition within the films though. Only **Death Line** seems to approximate somewhat to Wood's description. That film envisages - in a similar way to **Quatermass and the Pit** - a horrific relic of the past buried deep below the modern city. ("Above" and "below" are significantly symbolic locations in many films all the way from **The Time Machine** to **Poltergeist**.) In **Death Line** the narrative premiss is that, during the

construction of the London underground, a number of workers, assumed to have all perished in a blocked and abandoned tunnel, actually survived by consuming their own dead, later finding passages leading to the main tunnels where the passengers became their prey. The implication that the visible surface of our culture's architectural landscape covers an invisible residue of the suffering and exploitation of those who physically built it would be quite in line with convention; it could be argued that the film gives monstrous form to that which is normally invisible, and this would be in keeping with its sympathetic treatment of its cannibal "monster". Once more, though, the argument about social relations, possessiveness, etc, is unconvincing.

These three films fall squarely within the horror genre. **Night of the Living Dead**, on the other hand, in which the motif comes to prominence, must be understood as much in terms of science-fiction as horror and the use of cannibalism must be examined in this context. The film derives from an "invasion" tradition of which Wells' **The War of the Worlds** is the outstanding progenitor and, particularly when Romero's two sequels (**Dawn of the Dead**, 1979, and **Day of the Dead**, 1985) are included as part of a sustained project, bears a family resemblance to Wyndham's **Day of the Triffids** (Penguin, 1959). That Wyndham and Romero have produced variations that have such different ideological implications can only heighten the interest of their parallel narrative situations and development.

The Day of the Triffids opens with a brilliant display of green lights and flares in the night sky, popularly explained as the debris from a passing comet but with indications that

it may have resulted from the disintegration of a faulty weapons satellite. Not only are the majority of the population - all those who watched the "fireworks" - rendered blind the following day but this calamity is rapidly succeeded by the spread of hordes of escaped triffids, a species of awkwardly mobile vegetable with a venomous sting, originally the product of "biological meddling" in the interests of better grade vegetable oil. Isolated pockets of the sighted, with groups of blind dependents, struggle for their existence, devising a variety of contending social arrangements in the process. Most of chapter 7 is spent discussing a proposal that, in view of the limited numbers of the blind that can be saved, these should be selected from among women capable of producing a new sighted generation, with a polygamous system for the sighted males. Splits and divisions appear and communities spring up based on various principles from fundamentalist Christianity (chapter 10) to a system of military-feudal seigneuries with blind serfs (chapter 17). The hero remains unattached to these larger communities though and forms a surrogate nuclear family with a young woman - Josella - and an orphaned child. They revert to a simple, agrarian existence, Josella telling him: "So. Im to be a farmer's wife. Anyway, I like being married to you Bill - even if it isn't a very proper, authentic kind of marriage." (p228) They settle in a small farmstead encircled by an electrified fence against the massed triffids, until the threat from the feudal "Emergency Council" prompts them to decamp for the Isle of Wight, where a larger community of like-minded people have settled, clearing the island of

triffids.

The most significant feature of this kind of narrative is that, while the monstrous "invasion" is described in detail its main narrative function is as the catalyst for a social breakdown that paves the way for the elaboration of alternative strategies for survival, and sometimes for models of a new social order. The horror genre's conflict between normality and the monster is skewed towards a conflict between the survivors of a disrupted normality. **Night of the Living Dead** conforms to this schema although it is quite limited in scope. A handful of survivors are barricaded in a farmhouse and these characters - whose differences in outlook inevitably carry social overtones but are expressed through explosive clashes of temperament - tend to bring various genre stereotypes to mind, even as their actions undermine the consequent expectations. The military-scientific authorities appear only through television broadcasts of dubious value, at least until the film's conclusion.

Dawn of the Dead, with colour and a larger budget, widens the scope considerably. The opening scenes present wholesale social collapse in all its violence and confusion, a narrative focus emerging around four characters who take flight in a stolen helicopter. It is significant that this group does not function as a stand in for the family unit, as it does in **The Day of the Triffids**. Fran - the only woman among the four - upsets traditional gender roles in her insistence upon learning to pilot the helicopter and use weapons, convincing her companions that the survival of the group demands that they each acquire these skills. The point is underlined by her refusal of her partner's ring, such

trappings having lost their meaning in the changed situation. The precariousness of the group is continually reinforced by the threat of a cannibalistic zombie around every turn, these creatures serving something of the function of the triffids which lurk behind every hedgerow in Wyndham's book, bringing instant death with the sudden whiplash of their leathery stems.

The haven which the group establish in a fortified shopping mall is eventually breached by the intrusion of a marauding band of armed bikers and **Day of the Dead** shifts the focus to a larger grouping of survivors who have established more secure defences against the external threat. Again, the image of a perimeter fence restraining the zombie hordes. Inside; a military-scientific team, essentially a survival of the old order, with the structures of authority and coercion degenerating into virtual gangsterism in the worsening situation. No utopian alternative is possible here; internal conflicts tear the group apart until a despairing individual opens the gates to the ravening zombies. The three characters least implicated in the futile military-scientific conflict escape but the paradise island on which the coda imagines them smacks of wish-fulfilment. The detail with which this film elaborates its scenario (and the emphasis on dialogue and characterisation) are unusual for the middle of the Reagan era but what is most striking is the sheer bleakness of the vision.

Insofar as the zombies function as an external threat within the science-fiction scenario cannibalism must be seen as a particulaly unappealing aspect of that threat. The major

departure of **Night of the Living Dead** is that the zombie's bite is also contagious, threatening not death but life-in-death, in the manner of the vampire. Much of the paranoia that **Night of the Living Dead** is capable of evoking stems from the uncertain status of the living dead: alive and yet dead; human and yet not human, those who succumb to this plague both remain and cease to be themselves. In **Dracula** Van Helsing is asked "Is this really Lucy's body or only a demon in her shape?" and begins his reply with "It is her body and yet not it..." (Stoker, p218). A similar observation could be made of the little girl who, in **Night of the Living Dead**, partially devours her father. Like the vampire, the zombie can only be destroyed in a prescribed manner ("Kill the brain and you kill the ghoul"). It might almost be said that the zombie is a democratised version of the vampire, the un-dead stripped of their foreign, aristocratic pretensions and lethal charm; unspectacular and even shabby, they are drawn from every social class; easily destroyed without recourse to arcane ritual as individuals, they overwhelm through sheer force of numbers. The loss of the sexually symbolic dimension is compensated for by the rise of the social apocalypse drawn from the science-fiction tradition. The links with the vampire tradition are sufficiently strong, though, for the film to have been included in two books concerned with vampire fiction.

One of the distinctions obscured by including **Night of the Living Dead** in the same category as the three cannibal movies discussed earlier is that between cannibalism as a purposive human activity, and cannibalism as one of the attributes of a more traditional (less completely human) monster, something

the werewolf movie comes close to envisaging. **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre**, for instance, is quite different in this respect. One of the most appaling things about Leatherface and the "hitch-hiker" in **Chainsaw** is their sadistic tormenting of their final victim. Sally is tied down to a chair with human "arms" at a sick dinner party in which she is on the menu. The more she cries, screams and begs for mercy the more animated her persecutors become, greeting each new outburst with a babble of excited noise and mimicking her most heartrending pleadings with their own childishly exuberant sing-song repetitions. It is this puerile/sadistic pleasure gained through the destruction or violent humiliation of others that makes the characters of **Chainsaw** so terrifying on both a tactile and a sociological level. The film is quite explicit that its monsters remain, in however degraded a sense, human; something most evident in the remarkable gallery of their artistic efforts (largely accomplishad using leftover parts of their victims as raw materials).

Romero's zombies function quite differently. They are no longer fully human and do not arouse that "emotional ambivalence" which Wood describes (with the exception of "Bub" in **Day of the Dead**); in fact, one of the dangers they present is the occasional sentimental confusion between a character and the creature that he or she has become. This is evident in **Night** and in the opening scenes of **Dawn**; it is a staple of vampire fiction. The zombies actually tend to function like a force of nature run wild. This is something which is implicit in my comparison with **The Day of the**

Triffids and is given a similarly tentative rationale in both cases (a faulty Venus probe; a disintegrating weapons satellite). It is also evident in the much observed correspondences between **Night** and Hitchcock's **The Birds** (1963). This does not imply the lack of any significant relationship between the characters and the forces that threaten them; the relationship, though, is quite specific, and Robin Wood has proposed one version of it in a reading of **The Birds** in which external attacks are triggered by - or are a displaced expression of - tensions between the characters. The reading is extended to **Night of the Living Dead**, and a promotional synopsis for that film perhaps offers indirect support for it: "The attacks grow stronger as the bond among the remaining survivors weakens; the doors burst open and the flesh eaters reign". (Russo, 1985, p33.) This is ambiguous but, on the evidence of the films themselves it seems mainly to be the external threat which exascerbates internal tensions rather than the other way around. This is certainly the case in the 1970's disaster movies which make use of an essentially similar structure to **Night**, while substituting narural disasters for the zombie hordes. This 1970's cycle is convincingly, if disparagingly, compared to Romero's film by Newman (1988, p76: "bloated caricatures...floundering in their titanic budgets").

Wood's "ambivalence" between normality and the monstrous is quite different to the (essentially intellectual) comparison which, in **Dawn**, likens the mindless compulsions of the zombies to the behaviour more normally to be found in a shopping mall, which here becomes a virtual temple to consumerism. This is an instance in which cannibalism does

become linked to a notion of consumption under capitalist social relations in a way that is likely to inform audience perceptions, and as such it is unusual. It is worth stressing that this element of explicit social critique in Romero's work is atypical; it is certainly jettisoned by his Italian imitators. A better starting point for a discussion of cannibalism in **Night of the Living Dead** would be the link with the vampire tradition (the script derives from an allegorical short story by Romero which re-works Mattheson's **I Am Legend**) and in this context it constitutes an adaptation in the direction of greater "realism" in the depiction of the monster and a more literal and horrific imagery in the depiction of its attacks. **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre**, while deriving largely from a different source (one concerned with human psychosis and traceable, ultimately, to **Psycho**) takes up the fascination with horrific imagery but, perhaps more interestingly, also incorporates conventions associated with "realism".

I am using the term realism (perhaps inappropriately) to refer to what Steve Neale calls the "codes of verisimilitude" or "legitimating discourses" of the films concerned. Arguing from the premiss that "realism" has little to do with any approximation to the "real", he claims that certain genres tend to be associated with realism because their discourses have some overlap with those of news reporting, documentary, etc. So, the gangster movie often takes its premiss from newspaper headlines, court proceedings, etc, while the war movie may incorporate maps and diagrams as well as likenesses of historical figures and even borrowed battlefield footage.

The horror movie, at the opposite extreme, has tended to be characterised by discourses associated with fantasy, its "regime of credibility" supported by occult lore, ancient mystical texts, popular superstitions etc. **Night of the Living Dead** edges closer to realism than most horror films. Its extensive use of television broadcasting derives from conventional expository devices in science-fiction and, while these have a calculated satirical edge, they also assimilate the format of national and regional bulletins, detailed information about local "rescue stations", etc, more faithfully than is usual. Other allusions to realism involve exploiting budgetary restrictions to the film's advantage; this applies to the use of black and white stock itself, the volounteer extras who served as zombies or supplied their own firearms and formed the "posse", and the almost cinema-verite camerawork in some scenes. Most striking of all though is the remarkable closing sequence which uses a series of stills to convey the clearing-up operation and the disposal of the corpses. These unflinching juxtapositions of bodies, meathooks and fire look like the photographic expose of some atrocity.

The Texas chainsaw Massacre has a number of similar features without actually going to the lengths of **Deranged** (1974) which is intended as a dramatic reconstruction of the Ed Gein case. **Chainsaw** opens, nevertheless, with a text and voice-over attesting to its veracity, the heavy-handed expression of sympathy for the victims striking an unintentionally comic note. Much of the soundtrack of the opening scenes is taken up with radio news broadcasts which amount to a catalogue of disasters and grisly incidents.

Again, the participants' accounts of the conditions of production offer a fairly prosaic explanation for the air of realism detected by many critics. Such features are not unique to the low-budget cannibal movie though. **The Amityville Horror** claimed (absurdly) to be based on a true incident while **The Entity** and **The Legend of Hell House** dramatise "scientific" investigations of paranormal phenomena, complete with captions giving the time (down to the minute) at which various phenomena occur, this documentary convention uneasily incorporated into the "haunted house" traditionalism of the narratives. This strategy involves only a small number of films of the 'seventies and the early 'eighties and is nowhere near as prevalent in this period as parodic treatments are from the early eighties onwards; it nevertheless indicates something of the shifts of emphasis within the genre.

The opening scenes of **Dawn of the Dead**, a major success in 1979-80, retain some of **Night**'s attitudes to the media but the garish use of colour dramatically changes the emphasis and the narrative moves in the direction of an action-adventure story. The survivors are closer to a combat team than a family unit. **The Hills have Eyes** (1977) shows a similar tendency, equalising the balance of forces between the cannibals and their victims (in comparison with **Chainsaw**) and abandoning the "massacre" for an escalating attack/counter-attack pattern. In this case the development tends towards the western but, despite the "ambush" scenario the primary model is **Chainsaw** and the significance of cannibalism within the films remains similar. The cannibal

family are as recognisably human as their potential victims, the one group perceiving the other as merely a welcome source of food and setting out to take advantage of their vulnerability.

For the cannibals the prize is the other family's baby which, as one is reminded by the dialogue, is about the size of a thanksgiving turkey and, judging from Jupiter's instructions on when it should be cooked, and the universal anticipation of its succulence, probably has a similar significance. This mutant/degenerate family are not exclusively cannibalistic - they are not above eating dog, as the Carters find out - and also trade for food. In the opening scene, set at an isolated gas-station, the most presentable of their number (Ruby) is seen attempting to barter for food with a male character who, it later transpires, is a progenitor of the whole cannibal clan, and their sole link with "normal" society.

The film opens with the credits over a rocky wilderness landscape seen in half-light. A second shot reveals some semi-derelict buildings set in arid scrubland, a scene instantly reminiscent of the western and featuring details such as wind-blown paper and debris which, in this generic context, connote isolation and inhospitability to human life. Thus by the time we move to the interior scene in which Ruby tries to trade for food she is already cast in the role of an "Indian" while the gas-station proprietor takes on the role of a white trader. Such a character will usually have an understanding of the Indians without actually being accepted by them, while standing in an equivocal relationship to his own people because of his dealings with "savages". These

expectations are fully met in the scene as it develops, particularly the dialogue. The "trader" asks Ruby "Don't you make a noise when you walk?" when she appears, startling him, and then reminds himself "...oh, no, you don't...uh huh..." The reference is to the legendary stealth of the Indians but also, in this context, connotes the silent, stalking gait of the panther-woman. This prefigures two of the sets of connotations through which the cannibal family are developed: i. "Indians"/savages, and ii. "animals". I shall discuss a third set of connotations that accrue around them later.

Ruby fails to obtain food:

> "I'm sorry Ruby. I know you're starvin' but I got nothin' else to trade. No more gas, no more cartridges, no more food. And the folks in Corn Creek have cut me off already. There's even talk of blocking off this whole section and marching the national guard through...see what they can find. You coyotes better watch your P's and Q's for a spell..."

The reference to coyotes is taken up later in the scene when the Carter family pull in at the gas station on the way to California. They are told not to go on in the direction they are heading and assured that "There's nothin' back there but animals". It soon becomes apparent that the cannibal family also perceive the Carters as animals - as game to be hunted; affluent and well fed, when they venture from the city into the wilderness the Carters become nothing but a tantalisingly vulnerable supply of fresh meat. Their vulnerability is apparent the moment they pull into the lonely gas station, a motif from **Psycho** and **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre** that **Hills** takes up and develops in the direction of the western. It is reinforced by repeated warnings to "Stay on the main road"

(by now a self-conscious cliche), and later long shots of the Carters' luxury caravan stranded in the desert (a scenario familiar from **Race With The Devil**, 1975).

While the Carters' caravan is stranded a number of minor incidents are used to build up tension and to set the scene. The Carters' two alsatian dogs are the first to be aware of the watchfulness of the surrounding hills, and one of them slips its lead and disappears into the growing darkness. The audience is already aware that "something" is out there, not only because the situation is a familiar one in the genre, but also because of the inclusion of long-shots marked as being from the point of view of the hostile watchers by the use of framing devices, and by a crackly soundtrack on which the cannibals converse with each other over walkie-talkies as though carrying out military reconnaisance. Later, the Carters receive something which they think sounds a little like an "obscene phone call" while tuning in their radio. "What the hell was that?" "Sounded like some kind of animal." "Well, if the animals around here are smart enough to use radios..." This idea recurs as a visual joke when the alsatian ("Beast") captures one of the cannibals' walkie-talkies and comes running back with this prize in its mouth.

"Animals smart enough to use radios" seems to be one of the film's perceptions of its "monstrous" family and perhaps also of its "normal" one. The desert cannibals are a relapse to the most primitive level of behaviour imaginable but casually incorporate the most modern technology into their practices. The walkie-talkies are the most obvious examples but the cannibals also give evidence of a debased creativity similar to, if less elaborately imagined than, that of their

counterparts in **Chainsaw**. They wear, for example, an eclectically "tribal" dress which makes use of spent ammunition in necklaces that could equally well consist of teeth, bones, etc. The Carters, on the other hand, despite all the trappings of civilisation, soon demonstrate an aptitude for sadistic killing once the situation arises; the film closes with a scene in which Ruby is left cowering in horror with the "tenderloin baby" while Doug Carter hacks frenziedly at the corpse of one of her brothers. Ruby is in the act of defecting from "the pack" with the baby; this rare concession to a character's humanity presumably involving an understanding of maternal behaviour as innate and primitive.

Any ambivalence between the two groups arises from a conflict between the structural necessity of investing the film's sympathies with the Carters, in the interests of suspense (despite an evident lack of sympathy for them) and the greater interest afforded by their monstrous assailants. The Carters are sufficiently comfortable and conventional that audiences can be expected to appreciate Jupiters oft-quoted "Don't you come out here and stick your life in my face." The mutant family, on the other hand, have variously repulsive attributes but also exhibit mastery of the kind of survival skills which are familiar from other genres and evoke a paradoxical admiration. This is blatant in some commando movies but is also evident in the problematic heroes of such films as **Taxi Driver** and **Badlands**. In the case of **Taxi Driver** and **The Hills Have Eyes** this appeal is enhanced by the unconventional and inventively anti-social dress sense associated with the films' monster heroes.

The relentless action of **Hills** leaves little scope for character development on either side but this deft visual presentation of the cannibal family at least gives them some kind of grisly fascination in comparison with the Carters' conventionality. (This is particularly so in the case of Michael Berryman, who became something of a cult icon after this performance.) This visual presentation makes use of a rich shorthand associating the cannibal family with the "Indian" - perhaps contributing an implicit element of revenge to the conflict - and at times seems close to suggesting an alternative set of beliefs, or at least primitive religious or superstitious notions. During a meal cooked from one of the Carters' dogs ("Beauty") Ruby is disturbed by the howling of their second dog ("Beast") and breaks off her meal, spitting out a mouthful. When "Mama" asks if she "don't like dog any more" and curses "Maybe dog's too good for a runaway slut like you" Ruby replies: "Dog's ghost is out there talking tonight..." Both women are clearly squaw figures and are dressed appropriately; headbands and necklaces decorated with bones, a wrapping made of dark fur enlivened by the draping of an entire racoon pelt, etc.

This primitivism and the references to "animals" relate the cannibal family to a degeneration of the "civilised" on the one hand and a degeneration of the "human" on the other, without ever entirely stripping away the positive connotations of their tenacious outcast existence. There is, however, another set of connotations - of literal monstrosity - which is attached to them, and in particular to the leading figure of Jupiter. There is something ape-like in the demeanour of this character and his face is darkened with

concealing grime and severely scarred from a childhood incident. The father (encountered at the crumbling service station) describes his origin as follows. So large as to kill his mother in childbirth, Jupiter is found to also be "as hairy as a monkey..."

> "When he was ten years old,..he was big as I was. Accidents was happening all the time...dogs fallin' in the well...I even found chickens with their heads bit off...Then in August '39 I was in town gettin' supplies and the whole damned house burned to the ground. My little baby girl was a cinder when I found her but this monster kid wasn't even singed. I knew he done it and I hit him with a tyre iron and split his face wide open..."

This is a half hearted invocation of the concurrent devil-child cycle as an explanation of the origin of the film's monsters. However, it does have some purchase within the logic of the film, particularly as Jupiter seems, from time to time, to be presented as an embodiment of evil incarnate. As soon as the old man has completed the story of Jupiter's birth (speak of the devil...) the subject of his narration bursts in and murders him with a tyre iron, then pins him to a swinging door in a horrific shot later borrowed by **Friday the 13th**. Big Bob had commented, on the old man's story, that it had all taken place "a long time ago", to which the reply had been "Long enough for a devil-child to grow up to be a devil-man". As big Bob makes his way back across the wasteland in the dark Jupiter appears again, as if from nowhere, to destroy him.

There is enough here to offer grounds for a wholly negative assessment of the cannibals and some critics have been led to dismiss them as "garishly repulsive" (Hardy (ed), 1985, p322.) I think audience responses would have been more equivocal but there is no doubt that the cannibals' actions

are repulsive; this repulsiveness has been most succinctly expressed in a brief listing of the three things they are after - they want to kill the men, rape the women and eat the baby, an all embracing agenda of transgressive impulses one might associate with xenophobic paranioa. This is significant insofar as the cannibals take on some of the characteristics of the western's "Indians". (Robin Wood has mentioned, in a similar context, the puritans' association of the "Indian"/savage with the demonic, and of the demonic with unbridled promiscuity, as a perception that sheds light on a great many classical westerns.)

One thing which unites **Night of the Living Dead** and **The Hills Have Eyes** - as well as **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre** - is the sense of irreparable breakdown which is present at various points (and to a different degree) in all three narratives. In **Night of the Living Dead** Barbara's mental world crumbles after the death of her brother in the opening scene; she takes on a glazed and childish look of incomprehension and is incapacitated for the rest of the film. Judith O'Dea's performance in this role has a passing similarity with that of Catherine Deneuve in **Repulsion** (1965) and has been described, by Kim Newman, as the first example of a horror-movie heroine reacting credibly in this kind of situation. In **Chainsaw Massacre** the opposite happens; Sally somehow survives an unprecedentedly harrowing ordeal but appears, in the moment of escape, to have lost her mind. And when big Bob's body is discovered in **The Hills have Eyes**, his wife (Virginia Vincent) reacts with a hysterical refusal of reality, crying and repeating "That's not my Bob, that's not

my Bob..."

In each case though the narrative context is different. In **Night** the film's outcome is curiously unconnected with the characters' actions: Ben's resourcefulness, Harry's stubborn siege mentality, Tom's simple unconcern for personal danger; none proves to be of any more consequence than Barbara's hopeless incapacity in the end. The film's high point comes when the zombie hordes overrun the farmhouse; the ending is anti-climactic, its quiet fatalism enhanced by the dispassionate stills that lend it the irreducible quality of a documented occurence. **Chainsaw** could not be more different, its sense of breakdown well described in Andrew Britton's phrase about "the apocalypse as visceral high", its ferocity experienced as a momentum which is far from exhausted in the final image of Leatherface whirling, chainsaw in hand, against the sunset. This momentum takes a different form in **The Hills Have Eyes**, where its climax is the culmination of a cycle of vengeance. This is less a matter of counterpoise between "normal" and "monstrous" families than a simple concentration on the action-reaction pattern of the violence, which is played out until the balance has shifted irreversibly in the Carters' favour, then broken off at the point where revenge passes over into pathological aggression. Though indebted to **Chainsaw** the film is not apocalyptic in the same way. Where **Chainsaw** concludes with an image of insatiate malevolence still at large **The Hills Have Eyes** has genuinely exhausted the potential of its conflict, the abruptness of the final cut making this less apparent than it would otherwise be. In effect, the traditional defeat of the monster is reinstated but the terms in which this is to be

understood are reversed: formally the Carters' triumph but it is the savagery which the cannibals represent that triumphs over the superficiality of their lifestyle.

7. BIG BUDGETS, DANGEROUS CHILDREN: ROSEMARY'S BABY and CARRIE.

This chapter will be concerned - in an oblique way - with the "demonic possession" films of the 1970's; **Rosemary's Baby**, though not integral to that cycle, is often connected to it as its most significant precursor, and **Carrie**, again, stands at some distance from the cycle but has been linked to it through its use of an adolescent girl as its monster/heroine. In discussing **Night of the Living Dead** and **The Hills Have Eyes** a third movie - **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre** - served as an implicit point of reference and it is almost inevitable that **The Exorcist** (1973) should serve the same function here. These films are mainstream products but reflect, to some degree, the influence of the European "art" tradition in post-classical Hollywood. In **Rosemary's Baby** this is evident in the bizarre dream-sequence and reflects the influence of the avant-garde, particularly surrealism, on Polanski's earlier work. In the case of **Carrie** the influence is less direct but is perhaps reflected in the use of devices like split-screen. On the whole though the aesthetic of these films is that of an expensive Hollywood production with graceful camera movements, carefully controlled lighting and well known character actors: **Rosemary's Baby** cost $1.9 million in the same year that **Night of the Living Dead** was made for $125,000. Visually, Polanski's film is in sharp contrast to Romero's, particularly in its flamboyant use of colour (the suffusion of yellow light in the Woodhouse's apartment, the gaudy costumes of the Castevets', the red roses that Guy brings home, etc).

It would, however, be misleading to present the

relationship between the two films entirely in terms of a contrast. The thoroughgoing paranoia with which both films invest dramas situated in unremarkable contemporary settings suggests a shared underlying sensibility. Nor do I detect a violent contrast between the kind of value-systems which can be inferred from their respective narratives: the identification of independent film-making with "subversive" or "progressive" values, and of mainstream productions with the re-affirmation of tradition, finds little confirmation here, although **Night of the Living Dead** has a more explicitly "social" orientation.

This opposition of "mainstream" and "independent" productions, most clearly expressed in Robin Wood's table of oppositions drawn from **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre** and **The Omen**, is of fairly limited value as a generalisation. It is true that the "independent" sector may be more conducive to the expression of oppositional values at certain times but this is dependent upon a number of social factors as well as the changing relationship between these two sectors of the industry (which are less clearly separable than some accounts would have us believe). As a crude generalisation it could be said that in the late 1960's the Hollywood majors were anxious to recruit talent from the "independent" sector as a response to the rise of the youth audience, European competition, etc, while by the 1980's many figures starting out in the "independent" sector were doing so in a bid to get into a mainstream that was more secure and confident though a good deal harder to enter. The 'seventies were largely a decade of transition.

If one compares the "paranoia" of **Night of the Living Dead**

and that of **Rosemary's Baby**, then, there is an essentially similar tendency underlying the contrasting production values and generic orientations. By "paranoia" I am talking about a kind of heightened fear occasioned by not only the magnitude of the monstrous threat but also its indeterminacy (the difficulty in identifying/comprehending it) and the absence of traditional figures of authority and expertise to turn to for help. **Psycho** has already been cited as an example of an "expert" (in this case drawing upon the detective figure) who becomes an early victim of the monster. **Night of the Living Dead** draws upon a science-fiction tradition in which it is common for expertise to be vested not in a single figure but in a variety of state agencies; in that film these authorities are found in a state of panicked unpreparedness, falling back upon hasty improvisation or the evasion of responsibility, and emerging in a decidedly un-heroic light at the end of the film. In the "supernatural" tradition to which **Rosemary's Baby** belongs the "expert" figure, though rarely a representative of organised religion, is the bearer of the knowledge and authority necessary to defeat the supernatural threat. (**The Devil Rides Out**, as it too involves a satanist conspiracy, would be the closest precedent here, although its expert is not dissimilar to the Van Helsing figure of vampire fiction.) In **Rosemary's Baby** the potential "expert" clearly lacks the stature for such a confrontation.

"Hutch", the character who - generically - has the potential to defeat the coven, dies offscreen about midway through the film and his posthumous gift of a book ("All Of Them Witches") to Rosemary, though alerting her to her

danger, is not enough to avert her fate. Although he does show a mastery of certain kinds of arcane knowledge (he is able to relate the entire history of events at the Bramford, which has a long connection with satanism) "Hutch" is eccentric rather than heroic. An older man with a protective attitude towards the heroine, he is essentially an "uncle" figure (Rosemary tells Dr Hill that he was a writer of "stories for boys"). His air of elderly benevolence is enhanced by his English accent and the bookish atmosphere of the study in which Rosemary goes to see him - various shades of brown predominate and there is endless clutter; shelves of books behind "Hutch", books and papers out on a table, a globe in a corner and what appears to be a small, framed portrait of Churchill. "Hutch" is genial and relaxed, sitting back in an armchair, no shoes on his feet, thoughtfully smoking a pipe. One would be tempted to simply describe him as ineffectual if it were not that the Devil-worshippers are similarly unremarkable.

The film exploits the enormous disparity between this surface impression of the coven and our growing awareness that they have caused Donald Baumgart's blindness, murdered the Castevets' former lodger and somehow brought about the mysteriously sudden death of "Hutch". This disparity is more totalising than the one which **Psycho** works through in the character of Norman Bates, involving the entire social world in which Rosemary moves. On the other hand it lacks a clear social referent. American films have so often used the warmth and simplicity of "country folk" as a positive representation of national "character" that (whether intentionally or otherwise) **Psycho**'s revelation of twisted sexuality and

violence beneath the surface has a deep symptomatic force. It is not clear that the unmasking of a circle of garrulous, fussy (but essentially amiable) middle-aged New Yorkers as "satanists" constitutes a similar subversion; its impact is more existential; its paranoia involves a radical distrust of perceptions and appearances in general.

The sheer force of innovation in a film like this often engenders a critical blindness to the traditional elements involved. There are exceptions though. Virginia Wexman's demonstration of the film's iconographic ties to Polanski's earlier **Repulsion** is convincing and links in with Colin McArthur's observation that the focus upon Rosemary's subjective awareness allows Polanski to "...tease the audience with the possibility that it is a study in sexual hysteria". Both these critical accounts lend weight to Newman's conviction that **Rosemary's Baby** is essentially a re-working of the "vulnerable woman" theme. The treatment here is closer to those "modern Gothics" in which the heroine feels threatened by a handsome and apparently conventional male figure who may or may not turn out to be a lunatic/murderer, than to the more traditional Gothic in which she is literally imprisoned or terrorised. Indeed, Rosemary is not imprisoned in any conventional sense; she is "invisibly" trapped within a conspiracy whose outward manifestation is a smothering over-attentiveness, and is only physically restrained (by Dr Sapirstein's sedatives) as a last resort. Her Husband Guy is not the main agent of persecution but is nevertheless a significant character. He is related to a conventional treatment of "ambition" in the

Gothic which, in its most extravagant early forms, sometimes involved selling one's soul to the Devil in exchange for massively extended longevity, immunity from natural justice, etc. Guy is a particularly shoddy variant; the ambition for which he is prepared to scheme and kill is merely for success as an actor and he "sells" nothing of his own, but colludes while his wife is subjected to a horrific supernatural violation.

This sense of the banality of contemporary mores may also be partly responsible for the absence of any effective force to oppose the satanist conspiracy. Neither "Hutch" nor Rosemary, in their growing conviction that witches' covens are a reality, shows any concomitant interest in their Christian antithesis - organised religion. Rosemary may be embarrased, while at dinner with the Castevets, by their pointedly irreverent discussion of an impending papal visit ("Well, that's showbiz...") but admits to agnosticism and can only counter with "Well, he is the Pope..." as though her upbringing demands that she be at least mildly scandalised. Christianity is absent from **Rosemary's Baby** except in its most vulgarised commercial forms (red cloaked santas ringing bells on street-corners, shop window christmas displays, a television broadcast of the papal visit) and in the shape of Rosemary's uneasy conscience. The film, as Newman points out, "fortuitously coincided with the "Is God dead?" controversy" which is referred to by the inclusion of a **Time** magazine cover which poses that question.

The Exorcist could not be more different in this respect, and it is worth questioning the popular assumption that films as different as **It's Alive** and **The Exorcist** are, in some way,

sequels to **Rosemary's Baby**, following this monstrous pregnancy with equally monstrous children. If this film's success had been the factor that paved the way for the subject matter and the big-budget respectability of later films like **The Exorcist** then the five year gap between the two would be curious. Indeed, it seems likely that the success of **Rosemary's Baby** would have been attributed to Polanski's undoubted directorial skills and the in-built advantages of a best-selling literary source rather than being taken as an indicator of the wider mainstream potential of the horror film. In fact, it took, once again, the success of W.P Blatty's novel to prompt the unprecedented investment in the horror movie that **The Exorcist** represents. (The precedent of **Rosemary's Baby** may have played a part here.) The earnest traditionalism and the apocalyptic tone of **The Exorcist** derive directly from its source. Blatty's book is prefaced by a page of quotations; one from the Bible, two describing torture and murder as committed by the Mafia and the "communists" respectively, and finally the words "Dachau", "Auschwitz" and "Buchenwald". This is intended to give the events of the novel the sense of being a microcosm of an evil age and functions in a similar way to the catalogue of atrocities that is broadcast over the radio in an early scene from **Chainsaw Massacre**. (To invoke the holocaust in the service of a piece of minor fiction is surely more distasteful than anything in that film.) In **The Exorcist** the representatives of traditional christianity are taken seriously as a bulwark against "evil" while in **Rosemary's Baby** they are absent. Another reason for this

absence is that the satanists are presented, in the final scene, in the form of an ingeniously precise parody of conventional religion.

This scene fully vindicates Rosemary's paranoia while preserving the utterly "ordinary" aspect of the conspiracy in the familiar conventions of religious observance with which they greet their triumph. Rosemary has been told that her child has not survived but hears the sound of a baby crying from the Castevets' apartment. Feeling certain that the baby has been kidnapped for some ghastly purpose she makes her way into their apartment, grimly holding aloft a carving knife. Voices can be heard from within and, as she enters, the gathering turn, one by one, to look at her, falling silent, until a scream (from a character called Laura-Louise) brings proceedings to a halt entirely. All the explicit "evidence" that has been withheld falls into place: the picture of a church in flames which Rosemary passes on the way into the apartment, the portrait of Adrian Marcato displayed prominently over the mantlepiece, the black cat slinking from the lap of one of the coven members, etc. This final unmasking prompts a conclusive reassessment of the characters and it is a measure of the film's dramatic effectiveness that a "sinister" understanding of formerly ordinary characters is conveyed without any change in the performances.

Minnie Castevet, who seemed, at worst, nosey and crone-ish before, now seems grotesque and spiteful, her mouth set in a hard line upon which the wrinkles of age converge. Laura-Louise, on the other hand, suddenly becomes what the narrative (and the girlish name) had subtly implied she was all along. When she was first introduced to Rosemary she

seemed like an "old maid aunt" figure; a dumpy woman dressed in a shapeless pair of green trousers not quite long enough in the ankle. There had been a hint of grotesquerie in her over-friendliness and the way in which she was barely inside the apartment before settling down to her sewing as though no social occasion could possibly justify putting it aside. Now she emerges as a monster of sexual repression, her childlessness clearly motivating her clumsily maternal behaviour towards the "baby", her resentfulness of Rosemary culminating in her sulky demeanour when Roman orders her - like a child - to allow Rosemary to rock it. When Roman counters Rosemary's horrified disbelief in the nature of the child with "Just look at his hands..." Laura-Louise adds "...and his feet!", peering out from behind her trembling hands with a childish mixture of pride and terror.

The climax of terror comes at he moment when Rosemary peers into the enormous black-draped cradle, and is largely created through the use of music. Throughout the film two main types of music have been used, the opening lullaby which uses Mia Farrow's own voice (and those variations upon it which exploit both its whimsical and its menacing possibilities) and a jazz based score that is used in moments of mounting tension. The best example of this is in the scene in which Rosemary eacapes from Guy and Dr Sapirstein in the elevator and locks herself in the apartment. The rhythmic jazz score serves a traditional function of underscoring her haste but as her desperation mounts the balance shifts from the more structured to the more chaotic elements within the music, the bass performing more complex and erratic figures

while the trumpet sound becomes an accelerated and discordant wailing. The use of the clear semantic elements within the score climaxes at the moment when Rosemary first sees the "baby" - she recoils, wide-eyed, and clasps a hand over her mouth while the music stands in for the scream she wants to utter, conveying the hysteria raging behind her boyish features.

This peak of hysteria is sustained through Rosemary's screamed confrontation with the coven in which her failure to grasp the full enormity of what has been done to her is answered by Roman's thunderous insistence that "Satan is his father, not Guy". But this leads into a speech ("He shall redeem the despised and wreak vengeance in the name of the burned and tortured...") which, as it becomes less strident, takes on the call-and-response pattern of high-church ritual ("His power is stronger than stronger, his might shall last longer than longer...). As the tension winds down the more mundane aspects of the scene are played up. Rosemary is told to go to bed: "You know you're not supposed to be up and around". Minnie makes Rosemary a cup of tea and Laura-Louise squabbles over who is to rock the "baby". This sequence is full of elements parodying the christian nativity, from Minnie's "He chose **You**..." to Roman's "Come, my friend. Come see him - come see the child". As the shocked silence surrounding Rosemary's entrance is dissipated one is no longer aware of the characters' grotesquerie so much as of their appearance of normality. The rituals of satanism are treated as an everyday practice and the coven - mainly composed of old and middle-aged figures - begins to seem pretty much like the congregation one would find at any other

church.

The studied air of normality through the earlier scenes is vital to this final effect. (It would be fair to say that the implication of cultural superficiality remarked upon earlier may be largely a consequence of this consideration.) The unmasking of this "normality" generates a violent tension without sacrificing details which expose the absurdity of the situation. An intimation of the absurd is evident in some of Polanski's earlier work but the occasion for it here is provided by Levin's novel. It is evident in the dialogue ("Just look at his hands...and his feet!) which makes no attempt to conceal the fact that Rosemary has, as Stephen King observes (of the novel), given birth to "the comic book version of Satan, the L'il imp". (King, 1981, p203). It is for this reason that the monster itself cannot be shown and must be conveyed through the superimposition of its demonic yellow eyes. This is also why both the film and the book end here; the situation could hardly be dramatised further except as outright comedy. In the "demonic possession" films the evil child is either insidiously human in appearance or, where it becomes monstrously repulsive, this is attributed to the possessing "demon" with the child's underlying innocence being stressed and serving as the basis for dramatic conflict.

This is what happens in **The Exorcist** and, in place of Polanski's audacious fusion of the mundane and the diabolical **The Exorcist** presents us with a more conventional polarisation of "good" and "evil". Early manifestations seem like minor disruptions of an ordinary household - odd rapping

sounds, misplaced articles, etc - which, as far as the characters are concerned, are susceptible to perfectly innocent explanations. For the viewer, they are indications of something seriously amiss. The film's prologue, set in a scorched, biblical landscape, features dramatic images of an aged priest confronting the statue of a leering demon; they are composed so as to almost suggest that the two are locked in mental combat. The mounting disruptions of Chris MacNeil's household, and the altered behaviour of her daughter Regan, are read within the wider context of this cosmic clash of forces. Every branch of modern science is given the chance to offer an explanation and a "cure" until the representatives of psychology themselves abdicate in favour of an exorcism. Regan's body is revealed to be the Devil's chosen point of entry into an indifferent modern world, the site of his conflict with the representatives of God. **The Exorcist** is unusual in that its positive resolution is relatively unqualified, even the deaths of the two priests amounting to the consummation of a vocation and a kind of martyrdom respectively.

Andrew Britton has argued that "Implicit in the image of the devil-child" is the problem of what happens to the concept of "innocence" if the Freudian theory of infantile sexuality is true..." (**Movie**, No 25, p17.) While much of the esoteric detail of his reading would be equally hard to substantiate or refute, the idea quoted above does connect interestingly with the abusively sexual rantings of the "demon" that possesses Regan, and its irrepressibly blasphemous attacks on all symbols of authority and religion. This, in turn, connects with the wider anxieties around

generation conflict which are mentioned in many critical accounts as one of the informing contexts of that film. Britton's account suggests a wider sense of instability than this, manifest in the horror films' tone of apocalyptic inevitability. Certainly, there is much in **The Exorcist** to support this reading, from the enigmatically portentous prologue, to the particular emphasis on the failure of rational explanation, to the unprecedented vortex of vomit and filth that dominates the final conflict.

Robin Wood writes from a similar perspective, identifying the horror film's "monsters" with a liberating release of repressed sexuality which is necessarily - within the ideological framework of our culture - presented as horrific and ultimately destroyed. It is probably in this sense that he assesses **The Exorcist** as "reactionary" though not entirely worthless: "It's validity is in direct proportion to its failure convincingly to impose its theology". This "failure" is conventionally held to be evident in the degree to which the manifestations of the "demon" can be experienced with a sense of vicarious release or inadvertent sympathy. Audiences - I infer - are assumed to respond positively, at some level, to the submerged content of the film; hence the growing repulsiveness of the monster is necessary to enlist our sympathy for its destruction.

The controversy surrounding **The Exorcist** was a factor used to generate audiences and the events and images which it presents as horrific and disgusting became one of its main attractions, as its detractors were quick to point out. However, it is not clear that the transgressive pleasures

afforded by the film-makers' brinkmanship with taboo subjects and imagery necessarily entail a sympathy with the fictional character's violently transgressive behaviour. Even where this is plausible (in some of the early scenes) it may not involve a sense of liberating release so much as a salutory assault on complacency. In this respect Regan may have something in common with the agent of humourous disruption in a comedy; we "understand" the signs of the demonic presence while the characters see only an affront to manners and decent behaviour. Once the demonic assault commences in earnest it assumes unambiguously repulsive forms and the film becomes barely comprehensible except in terms of its own "theology". This is not to say that the audience accept this "theology", merely that they are likely to understand the fictional events within the terms that it lays down. If the film fails to impose its theology convincingly this is because the narrative emphasis encourages a lasting impression of ragingly malevolent fury - and helpless incapacity, on the other hand - rather than its defeat.

One of the interesting things about **Carrie** is that it runs contrary to this trend insofar as its final conflagration does involve a sense of release. There is more to it than this, of course; the bitter romanticism of the "prom" scene imparts an air of tragedy to the events immediately following, and the indiscriminate destruction of the innocent and guilty alike prevents the carnage from being viewed with unmixed pleasure. All the same, Carrie's fury is a savagely cleansing force, the element of "release" figuring even at the formal level as the resumption of momentum after the slow-motion agony of the "coronation". This is a consequence

of the "fierce sympathy" which, as David Pirie says, the film extends to the figure who he rightly describes as its "heroine", but whose actions would be more conventionally associated with the "monster" in horror fictions. In Andrew Britton's account of **The Exorcist** the child's transition from "angel" to "demon" is associated with the sexual awakening of puberty and, he remarks, it is this "impeccable logic" which **Carrie** "submits to analysis".

This is perhaps an extravagant claim. The products of popular film genres are not usually construed as critical investigations of one another. Admittedly, this would not be entirely unprecedented, and it does have a certain logic in terms of,say, the incisive transformation of earlier generic models in **Night of the Living Dead**. The conventions that are involved in **Carrie** simply do not refer back to **The Exorcist** in this way though. **Carrie** draws together elements from at least three genres in an unusual fusion that effectively by-passes that film altogether; audiences would therefore be likely to understand it within a rather different conceptual framework. It may even be that it is this which is partly responsible for its articulation of a world-view that does, at times, seem like a direct inversion of **The Exorcist**'s "theology".

The first manifestation of Carrie's telekinetic power is associated with her dawning sexuality (it coincides with her first menstrual cycle) and the film is quite explicit that the destructive use she makes of this power is partly a consequence of the severe sexual repression she suffers at home. Her fanatically religious mother reacts to her period

by reproaching her for becomming a woman. She forces her - through a mixture of verbal and physical intimidation - to join in a chanted ritual of purgation in which she begs God to make Carrie see the error of her ways and realise that, had she remained sinless, "the curse of blood would never have come upon her". She concludes by telling Carrie "I can see the sin as surely as God can" and locks her in a tiny closet to pray to a figure of Saint Sebastian pierced with arrows, a bizarre object of sado-masochistic veneration which is (metaphorically) the house's most indomitable support and the last item to perish when Carrie finally destroys it. In a later confrontation before the prom De Palma resorts to a strikingly Gothic imagery to convey this clash of darkness and enlightenment. Carrie's home - seen from the outside - is an unremarkable, if old fashioned, timbered house. In this scene it is lit up with periodic lightning flashes; inside, a large reproduction of "The Last Supper", brought to flickering animation by the same flares, presides over a dinner-table confrontation. Carrie insists that she will go to the prom with Tommy Ross and her mother rages: "After the blood come the boys, like sniffing dogs...running and slobbering..." Eventually this provokes a display of Carrie's powers. "That's Satan's power!" her mother accuses and Carrie pleadingly responds that "It has nothing to do with Satan, mama...it's me...**me**..."

It is easy to see how this dialogue could be seen as a direct engagement with the theme of "possession". Some caution is in order though; the sheer excessiveness of Carrie's mother's fanaticism constrains us from seeing it as emblematic of religion in general, although it may betray an

alarm at contemporary revivalist tendencies. There is a tendency for horror fictions to dramatise through overstatement and the intensity of religious repression is, to some extent - like the rigours of monastic confinement and celibacy in **The Monk** - a structural necessity later complemented by the corresponding violence of expression. Traditionally, it has been male sexuality and aggression that is treated in this way but **Carrie** places the science-fiction device of "telekinesis" in the service of this older thematic and inverts its sexual orientation so that Carrie's emotions acquire an explosive physicality. The presentation of this power - the shattering lightbulb, objects hurled through the air by sheer force of will power, etc - are visually similar to some of **The Exorcist**'s instances of demonic malevolence.

This indicates two of the generic precedents which meet in **Carrie**. The film's evocation of milieu draws upon a third body of conventions, conventions that are not restricted to a literary or filmic genre but have a more diffuse representation across American popular culture. David Pirie talks about "the dreamy, intoxicating world of middle-class, small town adolescence" and mentions precedents from comics, magazines and popular music. This is also the "world" of a number of 'seventies American movies (John Travolta was to revisit it in **Grease**) and it recurs in some horror films of the 'eighties (most prominently in **Nightmare on Elm Street 4**). There are also some precedents in late 'fifties teenage-horror but **Carrie** seems quite distinctive in retaining the frothy, high-spirited ambience while at the same time probing the dark side of this dream, the conformism and petty

competitive spite which, in this film, amount to a ritual humiliation of anybody a little "different". The film takes its cue from Stephen King's novel, which dramatises his stated belief that children are capable of perpetrating the most inordinate acts of cruelty against one another, even if this is not visible through the filter of adult nostalgia. Such a treatment of this milieu does not recur until **Heathers** (1988), which stands right at the periphery of the genre.

So, in some ways, does **Carrie**. Note, for instance, that it would be difficult to analyse the film within the terms suggested by the "normality is threatened by the monster" formula. Unless, that is, one is prepared to follow up Bruce Babbington's suggestion that the real "monsters" of the film are Carrie's mother, on the one hand, and the insidious collective "monster" of high-school society (with its debilitatingly limited vision of life in terms of dating, proms, etc) on the other. There are other ways in which the film could be conceptualised. The shadowy outline of the Gothic's dual worlds, for example, can be discerned behind the contrast between the hellfire-and-brimstone horrors of Carrie's home and the superficially carefree world of the high-school which duplicates its persecution of her. This pattern is far from fully elaborated though and, as many critics have pointed out, the film's plot has the simplicity of a fairy tale.

Peter Wollen has proposed a "Proppian" reading of **Psycho** in which "the princess is killed by the ogre"; one could suggest, more reasonably, of **Carrie**, that Cinderella attends the ball, which turns out to be a sham at which she is ridiculed and humiliated in her aspiration for the prince,

whereupon she is transformed into an avenging fury and destroys the whole rotten mess. This is not an arbitrary abstraction; the music, mise-en-scene and dreamy slow-motion of the prom, particularly the "wedding" imagery leading up to the "coronation", give it an impossibly over-sweetened fairy-tale atmosphere in violent tension with our anticipation of its inevitable denouement. But this is no ordinary fairy-tale: it is savage repression that Cinderella is fleeing when she goes to the "ball" - and the disappointment of her hopes ultimately leads to a miniature apocalypse.

It is this that prompts David Pirie's assessment of **Carrie** as a film in which two basic strands of the modern horror film are reunited; the first, exemplified by **Night of the Living Dead**, deals in "massive apocalyptic destruction"; and the second, exemplified by **Psycho**, deals in "unnatural family relationships". I think that it is reasonable to invoke the precedent of these two films. But what of the other two films which I have discussed in this chapter? I have suggested that the relationship between them is somewhat tenuous but it is worth discussing the features that they have in common, and the aspects of them that have been influential upon later films. Most importantly, all three films locate their horrors in unremarkable contemporary settings. **Rosemary's Baby** takes paranoia to its limits by making its "ordinary" characters simultaneously the agents of the Devil. (**The Exorcist** has a more traditional use for its setting but **Carrie** stands close to the tradition of **Psycho** in taking an imagery which is so intrinsically American and making it the focus of horror. The romanticism of this imagery is both heightened and rendered

fragile through the connotations of the fairy-tale.) Of course, **Rosemary's Baby**'s paranoia is evoked through a strategy of subtle suggestion while the most influential feature of **The Exorcist** was its graphic "gore" and violence, something which is continued - if in a more restrained way - in **Carrie**. When we come to this last film, though, there is little in the narrative or thematic that has been influential. The use of "telekinesis" is continued in De Palma's own **The Fury** (1978), it is true, and some of David Cronenberg's films deal with the "externalisation of rage" (particularly **The Brood**, 1979), albeit through a very different imagery. The one thing about **Carrie** that has had a deep impact, though, is its "shock" ending.

Some critics have argued that the effectiveness of this ending is achieved at the expense of narrative coherence and, while I would agree that this is often the case with later re-workings of this ending (including many of Wes Craven's films, eg **Deadly Blessing**, 1981, and **A Nightmare on Elm Street**, 1985) I cannot agree that it is so here. A repentant Sue Snell lays flowers where Carrie is buried only to be confronted with a bloody hand suddenly reaching out for her from beyond the grave: the scene is revealed to have been a dream. This is not an arbitrary reversal of our sympathy for Carrie: Sue Snell had been implicated in the persecution of Carrie in the opening "shower scene" and it was her attempt at reparation that proved to be the catalyst for the final disaster - that she should be haunted by the fate that she alone has escaped follows a perfectly coherent logic. It also functions as a virtual commentary upon Mrs Snell's whispered assurance that "She's young enough...so that she'll forget

all about it in time" (as Regan conveniently had). From **Halloween** onwards it becomes less and less common for the "horror" to simply evaporate and it is partly for this reason that **Carrie**'s ending becomes perhaps the most influential in the genre's history.

8. THE MONSTER AND THE "NEW WOMAN": ALIEN.

In discussing **Alien** (1979) I am returning to the horror/science-fiction interface discussed in relation to **Night of the Living Dead**, although this film draws upon somewhat different precedents with regard to both genres and belongs to a different era - the era of **Halloween** (1978) and of the second instalment of Romero's zombie apocalypse, **Dawn of the Dead** (1979). Despite the dissimilarity of these three films they have all been seen as motivated (to varying degrees) by the sexual politics of the era and they all feature (again, in vastly different ways) positive and resourceful heroine-survivors. If feminism, then, provides part of the informing context of these narratives, the affinities in the characterisation of Fran (**Dawn of the Dead**) and Ripley (**Alien**) constitute a different order of response to that involved in the characterisation of Laurie (**Halloween**). The basic narrative structure of **Alien**, on the other hand, has been seen by some critics to be heavily indebted to the post-**Halloween** "terrorising narrative".

Alien's perceived relationship to both horror and science-fiction has occasioned a good deal of negative critical comment on both counts. Its relationship to **The Thing** (1951) and **It: The Terror from Beyond Space** (1958) have been sufficiently obvious as to prompt much questioning of whether the science-fiction of this era deserves to be so expensively revisited. On the other hand, its (alleged) relationship to the post-**Halloween** films has invited descriptions of it as "a gigantic "Boo!" set in outer space" (Hardy (ed), 1985) and "an outer space blueprint for **Friday the 13th** bloodbaths" (Newman, 1988) as well as Robin Wood's contention that while,

at first glance, "**Alien** seems little more than **Halloween** in outer space..." it does have "...several distinctive features that give it a limited interest in its own right". (Wood, in Nichols (ed), 1985.) These "distinctive features" relate to the characterisation of its heroine and the sexual imagery of its mise-en-scene and have provided the material for elaborately intellectual readings by Kavanaugh (1980), Creed (1986 and 1987) and K and G. Grabbard (1987). Kavanaugh's reading presents a remarkable contrast with the comment quoted from Hardy (ed) above: "The film organises a complex set of heterogeneous ideological and cultural semes into an overdetermined visual text that produces disparate, even contradictory ideological effects, making it a terrain of potential ideological struggle..."

K and G.Grabbard provide the most persuasive account of the functioning of sexual imagery within the film. Like Creed, they discuss the "womblike confines of the mother ship" within which the astronauts are symbolically "born" at the beginning of the film, to the accompaniment of "unformed and atonal noises, reminiscent of intrauterine experience". They go on to discuss the remarkably detailed biologigal imagery of the alien ship's interior and the peculiar and indeterminate fusion of "oral" and "phallic" imagery in the presentation of the monster, as well as a number of other interesting aspects of the film. I shall not go into the minutia of this imagery here as it is picked over in some detail in the accounts cited. What I do wish to note is that in the Grabbards' reading this imagery is geared towards the evocation of a paranoia associated with an infantile sense of

helplessness and dependence; something which is strikingly apt in view of the astronauts' dependence upon their enclosing computerised environment. As they say: "Just as there is no place to hide from the monster, there is no familiar, consoling institution to give meaning to the persecution of the characters" (p231), a situation clearly congruent with the developing paranoia of the horror film as a whole.

This reading is fundamentally different to Creed's attempt to ground the film's imagery in "postmodern" anxieties which entail the body - particularly the female body - becoming a signifier for "the spaces of the unknown, the terrifying, the monstrous" (Creed, 1987). This reading, which cannot be satisfactorily integrated with the themes the film develops through its characters (though Creed tries), will be further discussed in chapter 13. For the moment, it is sufficient to note three objections to it that can be framed within the terms of the paranoia that the Grabbards are concerned with. Firstly, there is nothing necessarily new or "postmodern" about the connotative subtext which they describe; they note that a number of 'fifties science-fiction movies mobilise similar anxieties for which the prototype may well be a sense of infantile powerlessness. Secondly, the Grabbards are careful not to imply - as Creed does - that the features they discuss give the film any coherent or univocal meaning; they argue that certain infantile anxieties are "strongly suggested" but not that the film "...works out a one to one correlation between its plot and these anxieties". (p239) This is crucial to the third objection that I would raise, namely that if the film does tap into this kind of

"unconscious anxiety" it does so in the service of a wider set of more broadly social fears. These are articulated at the accessible "surface" level of its handling of generic conventions and are wildly at variance with Creed's reading.

It is worth, for a moment, leaving aside the possible sexual associations of "the monstrous" in **Alien** and considering its monster's relationship to the developing conventions through which monsters are generally presented. Here, the starting point would be that it is clearly some form of malevolent animal life, much of its effectiveness deriving from our uncertainty about its precise nature/appearance. Phil Hardy's horror "encyclopaedia" describes it as first "prawn like" and then "biomechanoid" while Stephen King sees it as a "gelatinous crab-thing" (King, 1981, p34). In its function as a horrific endo-parasite it develops the paranoid potential of a monster that can attack both "internally" and "externally" (as in the "possession" or "transformation" films), recasting this idea in a biological form. Further; it shares an ability to change its form with a number of classic screen monsters. This ability is conceived in a shockingly original way through being modelled on the ovum-larva-pupa-imago cycle of the insects. By the time that we are allowed to inspect the remains of the "crab-thing" the monster has already developed into the gruesomely toothed serpentine form in which it gnaws its way out of John Hurt's chest and erupts from his body. Again, this creature rapidly develops into something quite different, leaving its old, slimy skin to be found by Brett (Harry Dean Stanton). The final strategy for ensuring the

monster's elusiveness involves allowing us only fleeting and fragmentary glimpses of its "adult" form, a strategy familiar from the "slasher" movie.

It is this strategy which accounts for the monster's effectiveness, allowing it to evoke biological and technological and sexual terrors. At some points the monster appears to be a compromise between the "animal" and the "human"; at other times it appears to straddle the "biological" and the "mechanical". Ash - the science officer - unhesitatingly attributes a considerable intelligence to it; however, its appearance at the time is of a monstrous crustacean. Later, when it attacks Dallas in the air vent, we only glimpse it for approximately half a second but it appears decidedly human, giving the impression of a "face" like an armoured black skull with gleaming teeth, and a pair of arms momentarily reaching out towards him. One of the climaxes of the film is its attack on Lambert and Parker, in which the monster is presented in a montage of images. Firstly, it towers over Lambert, not clearly visible but giving an impression of great size. We then see a shot from behind the creature, a shining black clawed limb hanging at its side. There are shots of its tail thrashing and of its jaws, which are always running with fluid like some piece of industrial machinery in need of constant lubrication. When the jaws open there are several sets of teeth, receding one behind another. The final image of movement gives the impression that it has some kind of retractable extension to its jaws which flies out at its victims.

It is probably this final set of images that prompts the various descriptions of the monster as "phallic". In the

final scene when the monster attacks Ripley the creature's jaws are seen extending, like some mechanical drillbit, in a way that could obviously be construed as erectile. Ripley, believing herself alone, has partially undressed in preparation for sleep and is at her most conventionally feminine and vulnerable. Stephen King contrasts this scene with the rest of the film, describing how "Ms Weaver is dressed in bikini panties and a thin T-shirt, every inch the woman, and at this point interchangeable with any of Dracula's victims in the Hammer cycle of films in the sixties." (King, 1981, p76.) It is this which informs our perception of the monster as "phallic" (such connotations must always depend on narrative context) and, although King's negative assessment of the scene's sexual politics is correct, it is worth remarking that Sigourney Weaver does **not** become "interchangeable" with the conventional Hammer version of the female victim: she retains the alertness and the resourcefulness to defeat the monster. Even here, the monster does not become **only** a "phallic" threat; it retains its technological associations and, as it draws itself up to its full height, it is implicitly likened to the tubing and wiring that snakes all over the ship, among which it has been invisibly concealed.

The social world in which the drama unfolds is designed to maximise our paranoia, just as the monster is. "The Company" - the shadowy corporate body that owns the ship and employs the astronauts - is progressively implicated in a conspiracy to sacrifice their lives to the monster, so as to study the creature for the benefit of its "weapons division". As they

are confined to the ship, their entire social and physical world appears to conspire against them, engendering an all-encompassing paranoia of a similar order to that of **Rosemary's Baby**. Again, the traditional figures of expertise and authority offer no protection; the two most senior members of the crew are the first to fall victim to the monster and the science officer - Ash - is revealed to be a tool of The Company. This aspect of the film - what has been referred to as its "vague anti-corporatism" - is interesting in relation to earlier generic tradition. The "vagueness" may indicate a reticence about the contemporary social grounding of this sentiment (compare **Night of the Living Dead**) but is equally likely to indicate that the world-view entailed has become a pervasive conventional assumption which is routinely invoked without any pressing topical stimulus. The conventions concerned originate with the post-Watergate political thriller and the Grabbards astutely note that the conspiracies of these films provoke a disbelieving indignation on the part of the characters while the characters of **Alien**, though outraged, are already cynical.

Outer space is not a final frontier so much as a fresh avenue for commercial exploitation. Space itself is conceived of as empty and boring (as it was in **Dark Star**, an earlier movie scripted by Dan O'Bannon) and space-travel resembles not so much a voyage of discovery but an endless motorway journey in the back of a removals van. The Nostromo is described, at the beginning of the film, as a "commercial towing vehicle" containing twenty million tons of mineral ore and its occupants are conceived of purely in terms of their occupations as employees of The Company. When the crew are

not needed for the running of the ship they are held in a state of sleep-like suspension, to be awakened by the ship's computer, "Mother", as and when required, or upon their arrival home. The film begins with such an "awakening", ostensibly in order to answer a distress signal; in fact, as the commencement of a scientific experiment which involves setting a lethal and rapacious organism loose among the crew.

It is the monster's systematic elimination of the characters that has prompted comparisons with the post-**Halloween** "slasher" movie. There may well be a relationship here; the film does invite a "who's next?" reading strategy as well as adopting the severely limited spatial and temporal scope of that sub-genre. But, pressed further than this, the comparison becomes misleading. In those films in which the monster serves a simple terrorising/punitive function there is little impetus towards significantly individuated characterisation beyond those traits that provoke its attacks. **Alien** stands closer to a science-fiction tradition in which the tendency is towards a more or less stereotypical diversity in characterisation, with characters occupying various positions across a social spectrum, their differing values and competences tested against the monstrous threat. In this it is closer to **Night of the Living Dead.**

The characters the film develops are heavily coded as specific social types; the most commented-on aspect of this being Sigourney Weaver's portrayal of Ripley as a tough, independent woman whose values and qualities mark her out as the film's "survivor". Although there are instances where this presentation is compromised Robin Wood's contention that

the film "creates its image of the emancipated woman only to subject her to massive terrorisation" is beside the point (what horror film does not test its protagonist in this way?) and his view that Ripley is "enlisted in the battle for patriarchal repression" is wilfully perverse. What is true is that the film's attempts to envisage a strong, independent heroine (which, whether or not motivated by cynical commercial concerns is - quite evidently - wholeheartedly embraced by Ms Weaver herself) is undermined by some of the assumptions that are evident in the script and direction.

The incident in which Ripley returns for the ship's cat in a moment of extreme danger was undoubtedly conceived in terms of suspense-building and of the need to demonstrate that Ripley is "caring" as well as merely efficient. It is equally certain that it can be read as a lapse into "feminine" sentimentality and it betrays an impulse to "feminise" the character in a traditional way. This is more evident in the final confrontation in the shuttle. While Ripley's (un)dress is given clear motivation (she is about to go into "suspension") it also seems to involve conceptualising the independent woman as a matter of external characteristics, a shell of hardness under which a core of "femininity" remains immutable. The tough exterior is maintained while the other characters are present. Alone - and privileged for the viewer - Ripley is stripped down to her underlying womanhood in a manner reminiscent of one underwear manufacturers' advertising slogan: "Underneath they're all loveable". This demonstrates an urge to make the Ripley character "safe" but cannot entirely efface the fact that she has been presented as the most intelligent and resourceful character throughout

the film. More serious is Kim Newman's complaint that this (positive) character is balanced against a negative one: "Sigourney Weaver may be an independent, gutsy heroine, but the spaceship "Nostromo" also carries Virginia Cartwright as a representative of red-nosed sniffing and feminine panic at their most demeaning". (Newman, 1988, p174.)

I do not think that these two characters - Ripley and Lambert - can be explained simply as a "splitting" of the female role into two different (opposing) sets of characteristics. They also need to be considered in relation to the other five (male) characters, particularly as the crew as a whole seem to have been conceptualised more or less in terms of a sociological "cross-section" from which only the uppermost social layers are absent, being experienced (as in life) in an indirect form - as a prescribed set of objectives, duties, power relations, rewards, etc.

In the opening scene two characters, Parker and Brett, are heavily signalled as representatives of the manual working class. Parker, assuming that the ship is almost "home", says that "Before we dock, I think we ought to discuss the bonus situation..." and indicates that he feels he is not getting a full share. Brett re-phrases this with a hint of trade-union formality ("Mr Parker and I feel that the bonus situation has never been on an equitable level") but is told that "Well, you get what you were contracted for like everybody else". ("Yes, but everybody else gets more than us.") This business of the "bonus" situation is never resolved - it is soon overshadowed by the alien - but recurs a number of times and seems to be viewed by the rest of the characters as an

irritating selfishness; at one point Brett goes so far as to tell Ripley "Look, I'm not doing any more work until we get this straightened out" and she impatiently tells him that he's "guaranteed by law to get a share". At other points the intransigence of these two characters is treated with indulgent humour: they are making repairs to the ship when Ripley asks "How long till we're functional?" and Brett says to Parker "Seventeen hours, tell 'em" which is relayed as "At least twenty-five hours..."

These characters are also commonly associated with a different mise-en-scene than the others. In the scene in which they are making repairs to the ship the mise-en-scene is clearly industrial (the sparking of broken circuitry, the noisy jets of steam that are blowing out during their conversation with Ripley, etc) as is the characters' dress and manner (Brett lighting a cigarette from some welding tool..). From early on this is made the subject of comment in the dialogue, Brett complaining "Listen, you ever notice how they never come down here? I mean, this is where the work is, right?" although his remarks clearly involve a homourous caricature and this one is eventually answered by Parker's insistence that "It's because of you. You ain't got no personality..."

At the opposite end of the spectrum, Dallas and Kane represent a "managerial" level, although in the case of Kane this is never significantly developed (as he is killed off too early). Dallas is developed not so much as an unsympathetic character but as an ineffectual one. He breaks the very quarantine regulations which, as captain, he should be enforcing, thus allowing the alien onto the ship. The

audience is invited to feel ambivalent about this (neither taking his side or Ripley's) as he is clearly acting out of humanitarian motives (to save Kane's life) and the consequences of this act are not yet apparent. The confrontation runs as follows:

Ripley: "What happened to Kane?"
Dallas: "Something has attached itself to him; we have to get him to the infirmary right away."
Ripley: "What kind of thing? I need a clear definition."
Dallas: "An organism...Open the hatch!"
Ripley: "Wait a minute; if we let it in the ship we could be infected. You know the quarantine proceedure - twenty-four hours for decontamination."
Dallas: "He could die in twenty-four hours. Open the hatch!"
Ripley: "Listen to me. If we break quarantine we could all die."
Lambert: "Look, would you open the goddam' hatch. We have to get him inside."
Ripley: "No, I can't do that and if you were in my position you'd do the same."
Dallas: "Ripley, this is an order: open that hatch right now! D'you hear me?"
Ripley: "Yes."
Dallas: "Ripley, this is an **order**! D'you hear me?"
Ripley: "Yes, I read you. The answer is negative."

Ripley has been countermanded despite the fact that, as she later reminds Ash, "When Dallas and Kane are off the ship, I'm senior officer". Dallas later allows Ash to take responsibility for what is thought to be the "alien" (in fact, the remains of its first, larval, stage) despite Ripley's warning that they should "get rid of it". Dallas defers to the company and passes the buck. Ripley is amazed:

Ripley: "Just tell me how you can make that kind of decision?"
Dallas: "Look, I just run this ship. Anything that has to do with the science division, Ash has the final word..."
Ripley: "How does that happen...?"
Dallas: "It happens, my dear, because that's what The Company wants to happen."
Ripley: "Since when was that standard proceedure?"
Dallas:"Standard proceedure is to do what they tell you to do."

In his negligence Dallas clearly becomes partly

responsible for the characters' danger and it is possibly an indirect acknowledgement of this that he takes it upon himself to try to destroy the alien. The narrative gives no other indication of his reasons for this and one has to assume that such a senior figure would not normally be put in this situation. In terms of narrative construction the motivation is clear; the two most senior figures are dispensed with early on so that Ripley may assume command, demonstrating her superior skills and commitment.

Lambert, the other female crew member, can be bracketed together with the two male "working class" characters. Her function is not clearly defined but is obviously subordinate to that of Dallas, Kane or Ripley, possibly involving navigation or programming. Her reactions to the crisis brought about by the rapacious alien mirror those of Parker; the "working class" characters always react in an emotional, impulsive manner which is contrasted with Ripley's more considered responses. After Dallas' death Parker simply shoulders a gun and announces "I'm for killing that goddam' thing right now!" while Lambert proposes the opposite - that they simply abandon ship in a shuttle and take a chance on being picked up. (Ironically, this course of action is later vindicated.)

Ash, the science officer, represents the scientific/technical establishment and is conceived of in terms of a). an abjectly mechanical subservience to what "the company" wants, and b). a survival-of-the-fittest anti-humanism so jaundiced that he is prepared to see the characters slaughtered one by one in order to study the

effects. (At one point Ash asks Dallas to come to the infirmary right away because there has been a change in Kane's condition. "Serious?" asks Dallas. "Interesting", replies Ash.) These two characteristics are summed up in Parker's astonished discovery that "It's a robot. Ash is a goddam' robot. How come the company sent us a goddam' robot..." Robin Wood points out that the relationship between Ash and the alien is similar to that of Dr Carrington and The Thing in the 1951 film of that name, particularly in that science, in both cases, regards the alien as a superior life form to which humanity must be subordinated. This is true, although there are also crucial differences. While Carrington's enthusiasm for The Thing does have a sinister aspect, on the whole he emerges as an unwitting villain because he is both a liberal and an intellectual: "There are no enemies in science, only phenomena to be studied", he says. Against this the film posits the military approach: shoot first, ask questions afterwards. Ash, on the other hand, is not only identified with the alien but also quite explicitly describes what he admires about it, from which emerges a clear metaphorical equivalence between The Company and the alien itself.

It is Ripley who, upon assuming command after Dallas' death, unlocks the secret that "Mother" has withheld from Dallas: The Company's first priority is to get the alien back for study and the crew are expendable. Ash describes the alien as a "perfect organism", its "structural perfection" being matched only by its hostility, and, confronted with the charge that he admires it, admits that "I admire its purity. Survival...unclouded by conscience, remorse...morality..."

This sounds like a statement of the principles of laissez-faire economics and would certainly seem to be an adequate description of the policy of The Company.

Ash and the alien are subtly paralled throughout the film and the rather non-specific uneasiness that the character comes to provoke is confirmed with the revelation that he has been protecting the creature all along. While Dallas, Kane and Lambert are out on the planet's surface Ripley finds that "Mother" has decoded part of the transmission and "it doesn't look like an S.O.S. ...it looks like a warning". Immediately deciding to go after the others she is cut dead by Ash's cold response: "What's the point?" Hurriedly re-casting this statement of his/its true feelings Ash elaborates: "I mean, by the...the time it takes to get there, you'll...they'll know if its a warning or not, yes?" Later, after Kane's apparent "recovery", and just moments before the monster bursts forth from his chest, Ash appears to be studying him, although at this point in the film he could equally well be simply surprised at his appearance of well-being. When the alien bursts forth it is Ash who responds quickly with "Don't touch it!" while Parker, typically, has raised a knife and is about to take it on. Again, when the tension is at its height during the alien's attack on Dallas in the air-vent (the monitors indicating its convergeance on his position) shots of Ash looking calm, stony faced even, in close-up profile, are intercut. Ash later confirms that bringing back the "life form" was priority one - "all other priorities rescinded" - to which Parker replies "That's the damned Company. What about our lives, you son-of-a-bitch...?"

Ripley fits into this network of relationships as an example of independent minded professionalism. Unlike Dallas, she is not simply a subservient tool of The Company and her willingness to take it on when it seems to be acting against the interests of the crew is contrasted with his deference. Similarly, she is free of the sectarian narrowness of outlook that the film makes a characteristic feature of its "working class" characters - Parker in particular. While the film allots her to a definite place within the class/command structure of the vessel ("When Dallas and Kane are off the ship I'm senior officer.") she is not, in fact, treated as though she were in an **intermediate** position within this structure, rather as though she **transcends** it altogether. Her ability to "see" the correct situation when the other characters cannot (she is correct that the transmission is a warning, not an S.O.S; and in her insistence on quarantine proceedure; and in her impulse to "get rid" of the alien; and in her suspicions about Ash - and is vindicated by her ability to force "Mother" to disclose the truth) seems simply to be a mark of her professionalism. Robin Wood, determined to see the monster as the "return" of repressed sexuality, argues that Ripley is given "the most reactionary position of the entire crew" in her opposition to letting it on board, even to save Kane's life". That she is "in the film's terms, quite right", for him "merely confirms the ideologically reactionary nature of the film, in its attitude to the Other". The circularity of this argument illustrates the problems of assuming anything more than a provisional validity for very general propositions about the genre, and the need to, at some level, engage with the film's own

"terms". In these terms Ripley, while not without compassion ("I'm going to go out after them..."), remains a model of calm pragmatism. While Ash, at one point, has recourse to straightforwardly hypocritical emotionalism ("Look, what would you have done with Kane?") she manages to uphold a less obviously "caring" solution for the collective good.

While Parker and Lambert are insisting on a straightford choice between either fighting or running away, Ripley insists that they **think**:

"Well. O.K, let's talk about killing it. We know it's using the air-shafts - will you listen to me, Parker, shut up!...It's using the air shafts - that's the only way! We'll move in pairs; we'll cut off every bulkhead and every vent until we have it cornered, and then we'll blow it out into space. Is that acceptable to you?
Parker: "If it means killing it it's acceptable to me."

What Ripley seems to embody is a perception of the "new" middle class, not as a class, but as somehow above class, occupying its position through demonstrable merit/expertise and possessed of an ability to "see"/rationalise, free from outworn prejudices. She certainly seems to represent an aspiration to be free of The Company but also of the stubborn, defensive intransigence of characters like Parker. That she is female attests to the "progressiveness" of the film's liberalism and if she embodies a feminist viewpoint it is that of the upwardly mobile "career woman". The liberalism which extends to this positive representation of the "new woman" is not however - as demonstrated earlier - entirely free of the suspicion that underneath the professional exterior, there remains, somewhere, the "old" woman - "feminine" as ever.

9. HORROR AND COMEDY (1) : THE HOWLING.

The tendency for horror films of the 1980's to be broadly comic has been much commented on by critics, and is even offered by Philip Brophy as an essential constituent of the modern horror sensibility, part of the "textuality" of contemporary horror. Humour is, he says, "one of the major features of the contemporary horror film, especially if used as an undercutting agent to counter-balance its most horrific moments." (**Screen**, Vol 27, no 1, p12.) The latter part of this statement seems particularly apposite: while one would want to quarrel with any notion that the horror-comedy is distinctively "modern" (it is much in evidence in the 1940's, for instance) it does seem reasonable to distinguish between this "under-cutting" use of comedy and the obvious presence of comic elements in films whose intentions are wholly serious. From **Psycho** to **The Hills Have Eyes** there is a tradition of black humour which is often used to **intensify** rather than counter-balance the film's horror, precisely the opposite of the phenomenon Brophy is describing. Brophy himself describes **The Hills Have Eyes** as "an unabashed horror-comedy" (though I think this is an exaggeration) and **Psycho**'s macabre humour has been much commented upon, but the most revealing example would be the case of comedy in **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre.**

Aside from the odd comic line ("Look what your brother did to that door", "He's only the cook", etc) the entire dinner-party scene in **Chainsaw** can be read as a comedy and Grandpa's repeated failures to smash Sally's head with his hammer are horribly reminiscent of the absurd and stubborn resistance of the physical world in a number of Chaplin comedies. However,

this type of "comedy", in which a horrific situation becomes simultaneously absurd, has increasingly given way to overt parody in the 1980's, with even the most effectivcely gruesome effects being used to virtually slapstick effect in films such as **The Evil Dead**(1982) and **Re-Animator**(1985). By the time that **Day of the Dead** appeared in 1985 Kim Newman could comment that its seriousness of tone seemed exceptional within the genre at the time, and this despite the fact that the film is not above using slapstick touches of its own. (Newman comments on the use of a soldier's head as "a gory bowling ball with eyesocket fingerholes.")

While Brophy usefully **describes** the function of comic elements within 1980's horror films he is at a loss to **explain** their preponderance. Implicitly, his account of the horror-comedy is linked to his definition of the "textuality" of contemporary horror and to a wider conception of the recent history of American film genres, He argues that:

> "The Seventies heralded a double death for genre in general, as critically and theoretically it became a problematic which more and more could not bear its own weight, and, in terms of audiences and commerciality, it was diffused, absorbed and consumed by that decade's gulping, belching plug hole: realism." (**Screen**, Vol 27, No 1, p4.)

Despite the colourful language I cannot see the function of "realism" in relation to the process Brophy is describing. There certainly is an underlying process here: as the number of films produced declines the budgets of individual films rise massively and there is a tendency towards ever greater generic complexity within the mainstream and - often - an opposite tendency in certain marginal areas, such as the "exploitation" horror film. That this is a process of some complexity sems to account for Brophy's unwillingness to

contend with the issue of genre except to virtually dismiss it. However, looking at his comments on the horror film there emerges a definite conception of the nature of genre:

> "It is not so much that the modern horror film refutes or ignores the conventions of genre, but it is involved in a violent awareness of itself as a saturated genre. Its rebirth as such is qualified by **how** it states itself as a genre. The historical blueprints have faded, and the new (post 1975) films recklessly copy and re-draw their generic sketching. In this wild tracing, there are two major areas that affect the modern horror film: (i) the growth of special effects with cinematic realism and sophisticated technology, and (ii) an historical over-exposure of the genre's iconography, mechanics and effects. The textuality of the contemporary horror film is integrally and intricately bound up in the dilemma of a saturated fiction whose primary aim in its telling is to generate suspense, shock and horror. It is a mode of fiction, a type of writing that in the fullest sense "plays with" its reader, engaging the reader in a game of textual manipulation that has no time for the critical ordinances of social realism, cultural enlightenment or emotional humanism..." (**Screen**, Vol 27, No 1, p5.)

The notion of genre that is deployed here can be traced back at least as far as Andre Bazin. Bazin believed that the processes of genre in the studio system led to a continual refinement of generic elements until a more or less perfect balance - a peak of classical maturity - was reached. Beyond this point further development becomes impossible except through the incorporation of elements extrinsic to the genre or through "baroque" stylisation. Thus Bazin comes up with a category of westerns which includes those that use the generic form essentially as a vehicle for contemporary political concerns (**High Noon**) or which import alien elements into the genre (eg. eroticism), or which treat its formal elements as a more or less abstract patterning to be played with. Brophy's notion that a genre can somehow become "saturated" seems to be related to the concept of a deadlock preventing further development and his notion that a

"saturated" genre can only engage its reader in a "dialogue of textual manipulation" is analogous to the idea of "baroque stylisation".

While for Bazin the post generic film often became a vehicle for tendentious political and social themes, for Brophy it is apparently emptied of social content ("...has no time for the critical ordinances of social realism, cultural enlightenment or emotional humanism"). It is hard to know what to make of this as the horror genre always, in any case, existed outside the bounds of "social realism"; it has no more formed part of a project of "cultural enlightenment" than any other popular genre, and its current lack of "emotional humanism" seems to be a major part of its ideological function. In fact what one recognises in Brophy's description is a phenomenon that Andrew Britton and Robin Wood have described in relation to the Hollywood cinema as a whole, Britton talking about "Reaganite entertainment" and Wood referring to "the Lucas-Spielberg syndrome" to characterise what he calls "the era of sequels and repetition". Britton discusses the compulsive "repetition" and the endless "textual manipulation" (he prefers the word "solipsism") in terms of a cinema of conservative reassurance in which the audience's familiarity with narrative proceedure is crucial, allowing for the contradictory phenomenon of intense involvement in the fiction legitimated by the continual awareness of its artifice.

The significance of comedy in Brophy's account seems to lie in its place within this "play" of textual manipulation and perhaps as a function of what he refers to as "an

historical over-exposure of the genre's iconography, mechanics and effects", allowing the audience to simultaneously enjoy and laugh at certain cliches. (It is not clear to me that the conventions of horror have been significantly more "over-exposed" than those of other popular forms, and the concept itself seems dubious.) What is striking in Brophy's account is the way in which a post-structuralist notion of textual organisation (the endless play of difference) becomes amalgamated with an account of certain features (comedy, pastiche, reflexivity) to produce an account of contemporary horror which is clearly similar to the accounts given by "postmodernist" critics of a number of other areas of cultural practice. Since his article was published a number of writers have taken the plunge and attempted to claim the 1980's horror film for "postmodernism" (see chapter 13). This is a dangerous critical precedent as the "postmodernist" critic will commonly set great store by the act of naming a practice or artefact as "postmodernist", mistaking such description for analysis. In the following account of **The Howling** I shall aim to offer a reading that disputes the usefulness of such a proceedure and examines the use of humour in that film in the light of Britton and Wood's propositions.

Before doing this, though, it is necessary to briefly consider the importance of "spectacle" in contemporary horror, as spectacle and humour are closely linked in this film (and a number of others). Once again, I do not want to go along with any notion that "spectacle" ("showing" as opposed to "telling" in Brophy's terms) is a specifically a "modern" feature of the genre. It is clearly important as far

back as **King Kong** and it needs to be remembered that the "horrific" is a matter of conventions so, while we may not find the make-up in the 1931 **Frankenstein** convincing or horrific, contemporary audiences undoubtedly did - one only has to look at reviews of the period to see this. Something similar is true of the Hammer films although "gore" as spectacle only becomes significant from **Blood Feast** (1963) onwards, entering the mainstream about a decade later. This has to do with a number of factors, including the relaxation of censorship and the development of make-up and special-effects technology, but I could not agree that the interest in special effects in their own right has to do with the "saturation" of the genre. It seems to me to be better explained by Steve Neale's account of the function of genre in the Hollywood cinema. Arguing against a conception of the Hollywood movie as a film which is "transparent", effacing/concealing the signs of its own production, Neale draws attention to the more subtle alternative proposed by Stephen Heath - rather than effacing the evidence of its own constructed nature, the Hollywood film "contains" it:

> "Moreover, such containment does allow for (regulated) forms of excess, and (regulated) forms of the display of its process: part of the very function of genres is precisely to display a variety of the possibilities of the semiotic processes of mainstream narrative cinema while simultaneously containing them as genre..." (Neale, 1980, p31.)

It is only by noting that the process Steve Neale outlines **motivates** the development of ever more spectacular "effects" that one can avoid the outright technological determinism of seeing the narrative forms as determined by the technology itself. It may still remain true at the level of individual

examples that the narrative is motivated primarily as a showcase for the possibilities of particular effects and there is a strong element of this in the brief 1980's werewolf revival. However it is crucial that not only is such "spectacle" a part of the industry's self-promotional discourses but that it also has considerable ideological implications, as is evident in Richard Dyer's use of the notion of "abundance" to analyse the musicals of the depression. The types of display/excess/spectacle which are provided by the "exploitation" genres tend to be those that are excluded from the mainstream: there is, of course, a vast difference between an extravagance in set design, costume and feminine beauty (the 1930's musical) and an extravagance in the detailed evocation of bodily destruction (the 1980's horror-comedy). The spectacular transformation of the werewolf lies somewhere in between.

I shall therefore concentrate on the relationship between spectacle and humour in my discussion of **The Howling**. These qualities are strikingly absent from the opening scene, which is played entirely "straight" and seems calculated to generate suspense - in contrast with the narrative which develops out of it. The scene is mainly set in two locations, a television studio and a sleazy downtown setting dominated by sex shops, pornographic movie-houses, etc. The two locations are linked by rapid and complex crosscutting as well as providing a kind of mutual commentary upon each other. In the television station the broadcast is of an interview with a Dr George Waggner (Patrick Macnee) who declares that "repression...repression is the father of neurosis" and goes on to discuss "stress", "animal magnetism"

and "natural man", eventually concluding that "...we should never try to deny the beast, the animal within us..." In the same studio some footage of a murder victim is being watched on a monitor and discussed by a number of technicians and other staff. Out in the city one of the station's presenters, Karen White (Dee Wallace) is being used as bait to capture "Eddie the mangler", a killer responsible for a series of sexual murders. When Karen 'phones the studio to give her location the message is relayed to the police. The shots of the patrolmen cruising the streets after receiving this message are reminiscent of **Taxi Driver** and this "urban hell" image is reinforced by the dialogue;

"Boy s'there a lot of flotsam and jetsam out tonight."
"Seems like there's more of 'em every time we get out here."
"I wonder where they come from,..y'know. Wonder where they're goin' to...?"
"I don't know where they've come from but they've got to where they're going."

Karen passes through the strikingly red interior of a sex shop to a private booth where she meets Eddie, whose appearance is withheld from both Karen and the viewer - he initially appears behind her and when he is shown it is as a silhouette lost against the burst of light from a movie-projector. The film he is showing for her is sadistically pornographic; a girl is tied down, spreadeagled, on a bed, gagged and forcibly undressed. As this action progresses he tells her "She didn't feel a thing, Karen..."

"...none of them do. They're not real, the people here, they're dead...They could...they could never be like me. But you're different Karen. I watch you on T.V. And I know how good I can make you feel. I'm going to light up your whole body Karen, Turn around now, Karen; I want to give you something..."

Bruce Kawin comments on the perceptiveness of this dialogue;

the rapist/murderer asserts his superiority by denying the reality (the humanity) of his victims, a perception of them shared by the patrolmen who see only "flotsam and jetsam". He goes on to argue that Eddie has singled out Karen for his attentions because she is "real" to him because of her association with the medium of television, and in particular with television news, making this the starting point of a reading which sees the film as a reflexive commentary upon the modern mass media, upon "dangerous knowledge and dangerously failed communication". (Waller(ed), 1987, p106.) There are some grounds for such a reading although James Twitchell's feeling that any such commentary is "buried beneath all the contrivances" points up the problems involved in any effort to present this aspect as the film's primary project. (Twitchell, 1985, p218.) After the film's first few scenes its increasingly comic development - particularly when this takes the form of elaborately referencing other films - seems like a calculated resistance to any "serious" consideration of the narrative (a problem which Robin Wood has described in relation to the **Star Wars** films and **E.T.**). Kawin is able to construct his reading by discussing those references (**The Wolf Man** and a Disney cartoon of the "big bad wolf") which could be construed as contributing to this "reflexivity", and ignoring those that simply draw attention to the film makers' knowledge of the recent history of the horror genre and invite the "knowledgeable" audience's complicity.

When Eddie invites Karen to "turn around" because he wants to give her something, she screams at the sight of his

appearance, which brings two armed patrolmen onto the scene and leads to Eddie being shot. (It will later turn out that what he had wanted to give her was "the Gift", the wolfbite that would give her access to herself - to the "animal" within.) Afterwards, looking dazed among the cameras and reporters, Karen says that she "doesn't know what happened in there", she "can't remember". However, when she appears on television to describe her experience she looks into the camera and "sees" the pornographic film again (the "symbolic high point of the film" for Kawin) and comes close to breakdown. This leads her to contact Dr Waggner (Macnee) for help and he prescribes a theraputic break at a country clinic known as "The Colony" where "seminars", and "group therapy" will help her to overcome "this amnesia thing" and (in a more sly vein) help her to "get back to what you really are". With only a brief linking shot to stand in for the journey itself, the scene shifts to "The Colony".

This rapid change of scene is not important in Kawin's account, which assumes a thematic consistency in the film, but seems to me to be crucial. Unlike **Psycho**, which uses the "journey" to make the transition from diurnal normality to nocturnal horror, **The Howling** (as well as, say, **King Kong**) uses the "journey" to make the transition from urban "reality" to exotic "fantasy". Where Hitchcock exchanges the mise-en-scene of Jean Luc Godard for that of James Whale, Dante moves from the world of Martin Scorsese to that of George Waggner's **The Wolf Man**(1941). The atmosphere and mise-en-scene of **The Wolf Man** cannot be convincingly sustained with a cast of sophisticated "modern" characters but is lovingly re-created in the night time scenes, giving a third

level of distantiation to the symbolic geography of the film: if the retreat of The Colony is at one remove from the "reality" of the opening scenes then it, too, has a surface "reality" and a "night" world. Although the act of travelling is not important to the narrative the change of location is; the arrival of Karen and her husband at The Colony is also the film's transition to the "comic" mode.

The first scene set at The Colony involves Karen and her husband meeting its various inhabitants at a barbecue. Most of the humour stems from the oblique intimation of the characters' lupine personalities under the guise of Macnee's straight-faced psychologising. He describes a character called Marsha as a "very elemental person" and disagrees with the instant translation of this as "a nymphomaniac", saying, No...it's just that it's too unchanneled..." This kind of humour would clearly not be viable in the opening scenes. It "works" in this context because the title and the publicity for the film set up certain expectations which can, in themselves, become the pretext for humour, until they are actually met (in the transformation scenes). At this point in the film the audience has no clear evidence connecting any character in the film with lycanthropy, with the exception of Eddie. An earlier scene has presented Eddie's urban lair: two of Karen's colleagues from the T.V. station - Chris and Terry - had investigated a seedy apartment decorated with a variery of press cuttings about the murders, various pieces of bone and skull, and a set of sketches (some suspiciously hirsuite portraits, a drawing of Karen herself, and a coastal landscape that will later turn out to be near The Colony).

After the first scene at The Colony there are two basic lines of action to the narrative which are played off against each other. One involves the various goings-on at The Colony. The other involves Chris and Terry's journey of discovery, the evidence they piece together gradually convincing them of the existence of werewolves. Firstly, they go to the morgue to inspect Eddie's body and find that it has vanished, the visual evidence suggesting that it has clawed its way out from its storage locker. Uncertain whether to assume a criminal or an occult connection they visit a bookshop specialising in such matters. (The proprietor tells them "The Manson people used to hang around here and shoplift. Bunch of deadbeats...") They ask him if he knows of any groups that are "into stealing corpses". "Body snatching?" he re-phrases,and supplies them with the appropriate volume. Handing over the book, he goes back to his business, casually picking up (from among a number of odd artefacts around the shop) a stuffed armadillo which is then prominently displayed under his arm. This is a visual icon from **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre** which, in its first scene, includes a long take of a roadside in which a dead armadillo is priviliged for the viewer's attention.

At The Colony Karen's husband - Bill - joins a hunting party and returns with a rabbit dangling in his hand. He meets a character in the woods afterwards (Eddie, in fact) who tells him that it is wrong to kill wastefully - just for sport - sending him up towards the old wooden house where his (Eddie's) sister livs, so that she can cook it for him. The sister turns out to be Marsha ("a very elemental person") who, after some dialogue filled with oblique references to

werewolves and jokes about vegetarianism, makes an open attempt to seduce Bill. He leaves. Crosscutting with scenes involving Chris and Terry is used to humourously anticipate the development of the narrative: they are seen watching **The Wolf Man** on T.V. and shortly afterwards Bill is bitten by a wolf. The consequences of this begin to become apparent in his sudden enthusiasm for eating meat. Later that night he has a strange compulsion to wander the moonlit woods and is drawn to a secret tryst with Marsha. What starts out like a mildly erotic scene develops into a showcase for Rob Bottin's special effects as the couple are transformed, during the sexual act, into werewolves.

Phil Hardy's horror "encyclopedia" sees this as the most effective sequence of the film, so effective that it "leaves no further shocks in reserve for the ending". (Hardy(ed), 1985, p350.) In a way this is clearly true; the element of surprise in the unveiling of a new set of special effects cannot be duplicated in the following scenes. However, if one compares the film with Steve Neale's categorisation of effects-dominated science-fiction, it is clear that the film does not attempt to create a climax from the "best" of its effects (like **Close Encounters of the Third Kind**) but drives towards the point where they are "multiplied with greatest intensity" (like **Star Wars**). (See Neale, 1980, p31.) This point is reached during the climactic scene at The Colony in which virtually every character connected with the place, including the local sherrif (Slim Pickens) is revealed as/transformed into a werewolf. Until that point the plot offers a pattern of repetition and variation in its

"transformation" scenes, varying the balance between narrative and spectacle and also varying the way in which the monster is presented. In this scene the emphasis is on spectacle (there is little narrative development aside from Bill receiving a number of scratches on his back which will later motivate a row with Karen) and the monster is equated with unbridled libido. Subsequent scenes generally provide more narrative development (with one exception, which I shall discuss) and vary the designation of the monster from the "big bad wolf" of fairytales to the ravening pursuer more in keeping with generic tradition.

The next significant scene involving a werewolf culminates in a partial reverse-transformation (wolf into man). Terry, disturbed by the growing conclusiveness of the evidence, comes up to The Colony herself. She discovers the spot from which the landscape sketch seen in Eddie's apartment was drawn. As she walks back to The Colony through the woods the mise-en-scene is cleverly used to re-create the mist-wreathed forest ambience of **The Wolfman** (although re-create might not be an entirely appropriate word; the degree of stylisation gives the film a relationship to its model which could be compared with the relationship between a "spaghetti western" and classical studio western). The forest is pervaded with a deep blue mist and the shots commonly reduce the backdrop to an almost abstract, slightly out of focus pattern of vertical striations and moonlight. One carefully composed shot has a fern obscuring the foreground to the left while the main space of the frame is dominated by a burst of moonlight from the broken canopy above, all detail obliterated by this violent chiaroscuro. Terry walks into this "picture" as a

virtual silhouette. She is drawn (by subjective voices calling on the wind) to the timbered house deep in the heart of the woods. This is clearly the Hansel-and-Gretel motif of the discovery of the "evil house" which Sharrett mentions in connection with **Chainsaw Massacre**; the imagery locating it closer to its original "fairytale" context in this instance.

Given that the scene, as it develops, makes use of a number of elements from **Chainsaw Massacre**, it does not seem inappropriate to analyse it by way of a comparison with that film. Terry's final approach is conveyed by a low-angle shot tracking forward towards the house, answered by a corresponding low-angle shot of Terry walking towards the camera, and completed by a shot of her approach, taken from an upper window of the house, with what looks like a chicken's foot dangling ominously at one side. **Chainsaw Massacre** features no equivalent of this final shot, the audience's mastery of the situation being generally as restricted as the characters': Where **Chainsaw** works towards jolting shocks **The Howling** offers a more conventional build up of suspense. However **The Howling** borrows heavily from **Chainsaw**'s mise-en-scene. The various pelts and remains affixed to the walls as Terry moves around to the side of the house are reminiscent of similar decorations behind the front door and up the stairway of the cannibal household. Again, the dangling "mobile" of bones which startles Terry when she brushes against it is very similar to one of the grisly ornaments that shocks Franklin when he looks up to see it suspended from the lintel of a door in his father's old house in **Chainsaw**.

The mise-en-scene of the interiors are also similar in a number of specific details, particularly **The Howling**'s use of an enormous open-mouthed lupine skull in place of Chainsaw's human skulls. However, if there is a relationship between the two films it is one of parody. The various pictures drawn by the werewolf show evidence of a conventional artistic talent; Patrick Macnee having earlier declared that "It's very unusual for a killer to draw as well as that". **Chainsaw**'s cannibals live among far more elaborate and inventive sculptures in human flesh and bone, unconventional furnishings and fittings in similar materials, and the occasional surrealist artwork (a watch with a nail through it dangling from a bush...). These are unrelievedly gruesome but show evidence of a far greater creativity. Ironically, **Chainsaw** is able to offer images of human degradation and alienation in a rural context which are every bit as urgent and compelling as the "urban hell" imagery in the opening scene of **The Howling**. **The Howling** makes use of **Chainsaw**'s imagery for entirely different purposes though; the sculptures in fur and bone never function as more than "clues" to the werewolf's nature and the drawings serve a similar function (eg. the landscape) as well as parodying the idea of an obscenely degraded creativity.

Terry's predicament in the werewolf house is rapidly outlined: a cut to a monstrous pair of hairy feet in the forest conveys the sense that the "wolf" is away from home but returning. Its reappearance is announced by a lot of roaring and by shots of the walls shaking, intercut with shots of Terry's panicking retreat. Like Sally in **Chainsaw**, Terry escapes through a window as the "monster" enters, and

like Leatherface, the wolfman smashes his way through a door to get at her. The manner in which the character escapes is more or less commensurate with the degree of terror evoked by the narrative: Sally dives through the window in desperation, shattering the glass on impact but heedless of the pain, Terry forces the window open and jumps in the nick of time as the creature enters. Terry falls to the ground close to a fallen log, the axe with which it was felled lying close to hand. When the creature reaches out after her she hacks off a hairy limb which slowly reverts into the form of a human arm and lies writhing, the hand clenching and unclenching, before her. She backs away and runs.

Terry's flight from the werewolf's house is still sufficiently reminiscent of Sally's flight from Leatherface in to make the comparison viable, but in its overall effect is markedly different. The main similarity lies in the way that a backdrop of trees, branches, foliage, etc, is blurred, through camera movement, into a rush of semi-abstract motion that conveys the urgency of escape. However, in **Chainsaw** this movement is continually halted and interrupted by the tangled confusion of branches and undergrowth; not only is a violent suspense created through keeping pursuer and quarry within a few feet of each other all the while, but the audience is further involved in the feeling of absurd and excruciating entrapment as the branches are often interposed between characters and camera, partially obscuring the action. Sally appears to be virtually running on the spot, perpetually on the verge of a horrific dismemberment which can be neither accomplished or averted. This sense is amplified by the

lighting which has Sally and Leatherface caught in a frontal flashlight glare quite different to the more controlled and multi-directional diffusion of light used in **The Howling**. In the latter film editing and camera movement contribute to an impression of fluid and irresistible movement which is completed by the soundtrack. The sequence ends with Terry reaching the (temporary) haven of a cabin (with a telephone).

The line of action involving Terry and the werewolf is resumed after a brief scene in which Karen confronts Bill over whether or not he has slept with Marsha. If the scene described above borrowed heavily from the structure and mise-en-scene of scenes in **Chainsaw**, while eliminating the sense of traumatic futility, then this next scene carefully undercuts its presentation of a potentially horrific situation (Terry's death) through the use of pre-emptive humour and in its visual language. Terry telephones her boyfriend (Chris) who is watching a cartoon involving the three little pigs and the big, bad wolf on television. Not only does the cartoon tell the audience more or less what it can expect to happen to Terry in advance (the opposite of **Chainsaw**'s shock tactics) but the correctness of this supposition is underlined when Chris telephones the Sheriff who blandly assures him "I'm sure she's alright". The staging of the scene takes its cue from these humourous references and when the wolf breaks into the cabin and attacks Terry much of the action takes place in silhouette against a slatted blind which lets in a golden light. The effect is rather like that of a pair of shadow puppets although a more horrific undercurrent is kept going through the intercutting of shot- reverse-shot alternations between the wolf's

snarling face, and the terror of its victim. The wolf is enormous, sweeping Terry off her feet as though she were a child, and her struggle for life is conveyed by shots of her legs kicking helplessly against the air, her death by a shot of them dangling still.

This scene is linked to the next "transformation" scene by a brief sequence (2 shots) in which Chris, suspecting what is happening at The Colony, returns to the occult bookshop to equip himself with a set of silver bullets he had previously seen on display there. This "transformation" scene seems to me to be the film's (technical, rather than narrative) climax, featuring a display of special effects as clearly separated off from the rest of the narrative as a "song and dance" routine in any musical. Neale descrives such moments in a musical as "moments of intense gratification and pleasure, realising the desire for coherence and process simultaneously, in a harmony of bodily movement, voice, music and mise-en-scene". (Neale, 1980, P30.) Something similar could be said of **The Howling**'s werewolf transformations. The scene begins with Karen entering the cabin and finding Terry's body. She is alone in the room and is startled by the sudden reappearance of Eddie (no longer in wolf form) when he suddenly sits bolt upright from underneath a white sheet (a reference to **Halloween**). Eddie greets Karen (who protests "I saw you die!") and eventually tells her that he wants to give her a "piece" of his mind - something he does by prizing the fatal bullet from his brain. The graphic shot of the bullet being prized free is followed by the first shot of the "transformation" proper. The status of this shot is signalled

by the addition of dramatic music to the soundtrack in what virtually amounts to an introductory fanfare.

The "transformation" sequence is a complex construction involving 40 shots, if we include the final shot in which Karen retaliates by throwing some corrosive liquid over the creature. Most of this sequence takes the form of a montage in which various anatomical close-ups (the growing snout, the extending digits with claws, etc) and medium shots (Eddie's entire body becomes more hirsuite and muscular) add up to a spectacular physical change. However, it is clear that this lengthy "spectacle" sequence cannot be entirely separated from narrative considerations, which demand that Karen remain present throughout (rather than availing herself of the opportunity to escape) and that her reactions "cue" those of the audience. Out of the 40 shots, therefore, 8 are "reaction" shots of Karen witnessing this "spectacle", which serve as markers of the point at which narrative development was suspended and then ease its resumption. Out of these 8 reaction shots the first 5 simply convey terror through facial expression; all are close-ups but there is a tendency for them to get consecutively closer. The sixth is a tilting shot starting out on a close-up of her face but moving downwards to take in her hand as it gropes behind her for a bottle. The seventh moves from a close-up to an extreme close-up of the eyes. In the eigth - a medium-shot of Karen - she empties the contents of the bottle over the completed werewolf.

Throughout the sequence the musical soundtrack orchestrates the "transformation" itself, with the exception of the last 3 shots. For shot 38 (the seventh reaction shot)

the soundtrack is softened and a dreamy, tinkling motif is used to belatedly suggest that her immobility is due to some kind of mesmeric enthrallment. During shot 39 the holding of a single, drawn-out note suggests that the transformation is complete and the girl is about to be attacked. And during shot 40 (the final reaction shot) a strident, escalating rhythm is instituted which signals the closure of the "spectacle" and the return to narrative development. This rhythm has a function in bridging the gap between the two and is sustained into the following sequence (composed of a further 5 shots) in which the werewolf is engulfed in smoke and Karen runs from the room.

This scene constitutes the film's high point in terms of its showcasing of "special effects" and the only possible development is the multiplication of these effects to produce an entire "pack" of werewolves for the climactic escape scene. The narrative builds towards this situation by huourously presenting a conflict between rival werewolf factions, a hardline separatist faction led by Marsha and a cautiously integrationist wing led by Dr Waggner (Macnee):

"We should have stuck to the old ways. Raising cattle for food...where's the life in that?"
"Humans **are** our cattle."
"Humans are our **prey**! We should eat on them like we always done. Screw all this "channel your energies" crap!"
"But the danger of exposure! We need this shelter to plan, to catch up with society. Times have changed and we haven't...not enough."
"Shut up doc!..You wouldn't listen to me, none of you. We can fit in, you said; we can live with them. You make me sick..."
"Marsha!"
"Oh, you're through, doc. She's ours now..."

Dr Waggner is attacked and Karen is clearly about to be devoured. The climactic mass "transformation" takes place but

Karen is rescued by Chris who turns up with a gun loaded with silver bullets. After a number of shootings Karen and Chris escape by driving their car through a besieging force of werewolves. But Karen is bitten.

That Karen has finally received "the gift" provides the basis for the concluding (and essentially anti-climactic) scene. Determined to "expose" the werewolf menace she contrives to ensure that she undergoes her own transformation on live T.V. Shots of some typical audience reactions underscore the futility of the endeavour; a child enthuses to his mother about what a lady on television just did while a man tries to find out what he is watching from a newspaper. In a bar one man cynically puts the whole thing down to "special effects" while another suggests, without any noticably greater degree of interest, that it was for real (presumably by virtue of being on television). The final "reverse ending" involves a panning shot which reveals Marsha to be seated at the end of the bar ordering her meal. Asked how she would like her burger done she slowly savours the word "rare", turning round so as to offer a sly grin to the audience.

Andrew Tudor has described the evolution of the horror film in terms of a development from "secure" to "paranoid" horror. The former category includes films in which there is a stable (and hierarchical) social order, this, in turn, giving rise to figures of authority and expertise who oppose the "monster" and usually win, relegating its potential victims to a peripheral role. In paranoid horror the reverse holds true, and the opening scene of **The Howling**, with its human "flotsam and jetsam", its frantic and desensitised

media world, and its roaming sexual killer, is among the strongest statements yet of the world of paranoid horror. The ending described above also reproduces all the features associated with paranoid horror, at least in a formal sense. There is the mass transformation which indicates the spread of the lupine plague throughout society, even the sheriff "going over". Then there are the reactions to Karen's transformation, which indicate that there is nothing standing in the way of the monster. Finally, that monster, in the person of Marsha, is clearly "back in town", thus echoing the ending of **Halloween**. However, the effect is quite different: Steve Neale describes **Halloween**'s ending as that film's final assault upon its audience whereas what we see here merely confirms our suspicions, an effect reinforced by the superiority of the viewer's knowledge to that of the oblivious drinkers in the bar.

This is the culmination of the film's overall trend of development, which has two distinct aspects. Firstly, there is the strategy of reflexive pastiche (Kawin's "commentary" upon the role of the mass media) which cumulatively foregrounds the narrative's own proceedures, producing the disjunction in "knowledge" with which the film concludes. Secondly, there is the retreat from the world of the opening scene, which is figured in two different ways: 1. in the transition to the comic mode (this being associated with the features discussed above), and 2. in a literal change of geographical location. It is only this latter aspect which is reversed, to provide an ending which "answers" the opening in an almost classical fashion. Both heroine and monster are

returned to the world of the opening scene, the one bringing the lupine scourge to the airwaves, the other returning to haunt the city's sleazy streets and bars. But it is not the same monster that returns - it is his sister! The opening scene audaciously proposes the werewolf as an expression of male sexuality and violence, even associating it with prostitution and pornography. During the mid-sections of the film this monster is transposed into the fairytale "big bad wolf" (although a horrific undercurrent is maintained) and a second monster, the "very elemental" Marsha - with whom the film is to conclude - is introduced. Thus, the enigma with which the film is initially concerned - the case of "Eddie the mangler" - is, by a sleight of hand, returned to us in the form of Marsha's conspiratorial grin. **The Howling** reproduces the world of paranoid horror but seems determined not to face up to it.

10. SURVIVALS AND INNOVATIONS: A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET and HELLRAISER.

I have selected these two films for a discussion of some aspects of the horror-film in the mid to late 'eighties partly because they were both extremely popular (**Nightmare** appeared in 1985 and has already produced four sequels; **Hellraiser** appeared in 1987 and has produced one sequel so far) and partly because they relate interestingly to the "slasher" cycle of movies of the late seventies and early eighties. **Nightmare**, with its teenagers under threat from a maniac-on-the-loose, can be seen both as a continuation of that cycle and, in its handling of this theme, as a significant break from it. This latter aspect takes the form of an unpredictable slipping between "dream" and "reality" sequences, an innovation possibly prompted by the waning popularity of the "slasher" films. I say "possibly" because Craven has been quoted as saying that the script originates as far back as 1979 - a year after **Halloween** - although it will undoubtedly have been re-worked during his successive attempts to secure major finance for it. Its innovative aspects may well have been developed as a response to ongoing developments and would have been the main "selling point" but the "slasher" films had persuaded the major companies that "...the dream element made the film too complex for the average horror audience". (Hardy (ed), 1985, p395.) **Hellraiser**, on the other hand is interesting in its complete avoidance of the territory of the "slasher" cycle; this involves it in recombining a number of strands from the horror films of the 1970's in a story that, unusually, really would merit the designation "family horror".

Nightmare on Elm Street opens with a close up sequence in which we see the fashioning of a murder weapon - a glove equipped with razor talons for each finger. In the scene that follows a teenager - Tina Gray - is stalked by the owner of this macabre instrument through a dark, steamy labyrinth of rumbling pipes and machinery which we later learn to be the boiler room underneath a school. A mise-en-scene dominated by sombre greys and browns is used to enhance the forest-like "aliveness" of the setting in which the pipes tremble, wisps of steam are emitted and the presence of the menacing figure is initially communicated by a shot of the feline flexing of his oddly armoured set of digits from behind a pipe. However, the scene ends - after the "monster" menaces Tina - in the revelation that the entire sequence was a dream.

This note of reassurance is undercut when it transpires that three of her friends have also experienced the dream. The characters themselves make light of this until Tina's dream recurs, with horrific consequences. Tina's boyfriend - Rod - is awakened as she thrashes about in the grip of the nightmare and he shrinks away in terror as she begins to show the physical manifestations of what is going on in her mind. Razor wounds appear upon her body and she not only bleeds but is hurled around the room by an unseen presence and eventually killed. This is not simply the introduction of a narrative disturbance to this particular film; it involves a subtle disturbance of the more general conventional functions of dream sequences. Such sequences have been used in a number of ways, from the reassuring ("it was only a dream") to the ominous and uncanny (dream becoming reality), and have often,

since, **Carrie**, served as a means of delivering jolting shocks. But even the most effective play upon the perceptual ambiguity between "dream" and "reality" sequences has usually relied, to some extent, upon the distinction between the two, a distinction that comes closest to breaking down in instances involving "predestination".

This enormously physical blurring of the distinction is another instance of the paranoid potential of a monster that can attack from "within". It also involves the re-working of another convention that has been long established. In a variety of films where the monster is "supernatural" the characters are powerless against it either because they will not accept its existence (**Night of the Demon**, 1958) or because they cannot convince others that it exists. A character in Stephen King's **Salem's Lot** outlines this situation, warning a friend not to talk about his close brush with a vampire; "People are going to start tapping their foreheads behind your back when you go by in the street..." he begins, going on to list an escalating series of consequences, and concluding with "...They'll turn your life into a nightmare, They'll hound you out of town in six months." (King, 1976, p176.) The handling of knowledge/belief at the end of **The Howling** involves a related situation; as does the entire narrative of **Fright Night** (1985) which will be discussed in chapter 14. **A Nightmare on Elm Street** achieves an intensification of this dilemma as its monster is, by definition, "subjective". Further; the monster's potential victims become the main suspects for its attacks.

Drawing the logical inference from his situation - Tina

was killed while alone with him in a locked room - Rod goes on the run. With the death of Tina the focus of narrative interest shifts onto a second female figure, Nancy Thompson, whose father is a local police lieutenant. Nancy is furtively approached by Rod as she makes her way to school one morning and her father, having anticipated and waited for this development, moves in to arrest Rod for murder. The sequence which culminates in this arrest also serves to re-introduce the threat of violence, this time against Nancy, using the "...classical structure of shot-counter shot" described in Steve Neale's article on **Halloween**. As Nancy is walking along the road she sees - and we see, in point of view shot - a figure with a strange, scarecrow-like stillness, odd, angular proportions and a bald, distorted head shielded by dark glasses. We see Nancy walk a little further down the street and then turn to look again but when the point of view shot is repeated the figure has vanished. This presentation of the figure re-introduces the threat to Nancy while undermining her certainty that it was **seen** , not imagined.

This confusion of perception and imagination is further exploited in the scene thet takes place when Nancy arrives at school. Sitting at the back of a class, her descent into the world of the imagination is signalled by the manipulation of the soundtrack, in which the noise of the lesson's progress becomes muffled and indistinct while she "hears" a voice calling her from outside the classroom. Looking through a door which opens onto a corridor she has a vision of Tina, sealed up in a blood spattered plastic body bag, but distinctly moving, struggling. She walks out into the

corridor but now the body bag appears to be some distance away, in a position, in fact, where it could not possibly be visible from the classroom. As she moves towards it an unseen presence drags it away down another passage off to the side but before Nancy can follow she is accosted by a prefect demanding "Where's your pass?" Exasperated, she mutters "Screw your pass" and continues rushing along the passageway, only to turn, when she is called back , and find the prefect partially transformed into the dream figure, brandishing the same razor-clawed glove and speaking in a deep, masculine voice.

Nancy's complete descent into the dream state coincides with her descent into the school boiler room where she begins to re-live Tina's dream of being pursued by a disfigured character in a hat who attacks her with animal-like claws. She burns her arm on a hot water pipe in her haste to escape. Once again, the sequence ends with the sudden reversion to "reality" as Nancy is revealed to be still seated at the back of the classroom, screaming hysterically. And once again the blurring of dream and "reality" persists; her arm shows visible signs of the burning suffered in the dream.

There is no need to pursue a sequence-by-sequence analysis of the film further as the two basic principles which govern the narrative - Firstly that the "monster" is a dream figure whose characteristics may be distorted or superimposed on other characters (as in the incident with the prefect) and secondly, that he may become "real", ie. inflict real physical violence - are already clearly established. These ideas recur throughout the narrative but undergo very little development until near the end of the film. The nature of the

"monster" as a dream figure, exaggerated by our very fear of him, for example, is perhaps better expressed in the scene in which he chases Nancy, his arms outstretched and outrageously extended to about twice their normal span in an image of monstrous, inescapable pursuit, than in the scene described above. Similarly, the idea of dream becoming "reality" is possibly expressed most concisely (and wittily) in the sequence in which Nancy emerges from a dream still grasping the hat which she has torn from the head of her assailant in her sleep.

But it is only when the narrative is nearing its conclusion that these ideas are significantly developed, in the scene in which Nancy's realisation that the "monster" is "only a dream" hardens into the conviction that to destroy it she need merely withdraw the mental energy with which she bestowed life upon it, and that, conversely, by denying it life she can restore life to those that it has killed: "This whole thing is just a dream...I want my mother and friends again...I take back every bit of energy I gave you. You're nothing, you're shit..." This is obviously a crucial turning point in the narrative. It is the moment at which the film attempts to define exactly what its monster is, and therefore the ways in which it can be defeated. In some ways, the "explanation" offered can be seen to refer back to the problematic of **Halloween**, bypassing post-**Friday the 13th** derivitives of that film entirely. **Halloween** had, in fact, offered no coherent "explanation" for The Shape but had proceeded from a conventional invocation of vague sexual trauma, via a terrorising process through which He acquired

an ever greater immunity, to grant its monster a virtually supernatural status as an indestructible "boogeyman". It is this aspect which is being taken up here, with the implication that the monster is simply the characters' own nightmares given flesh.

Of course, the Gothic is littered with examples of characters pursued by one or another aspect of themselves which has "escaped" and become an agent of terror. (Poe's **William Wilson** is the classic example here.) The conventional logic of the genre has been that, in destroying the persecuting force they realise (too late) that they have destroyed themselves. **Nightmare** has its characters employ a different kind of reasoning: deny the monster and it will cease to exist. This is both supremely logical and self-deluding; the nightmare does cease to exist if the attention is forcefully distracted from it for a moment but it always comes back. This is precisely what happens in **Nightmare**, generic precedent and commercial imperative reinforcing the narrative's own logic. In this sense, then, **Nightmare** takes the dilemma of the 1980's horror film to its limits, producing a monster that is both illusory and lethal and then attempting to juggle the resultant contradictions. What is surprising is not that the film is ultimately self-contradictory and incoherent, but that it achieves passages of a remarkable surrealistic lucidity.

There is another way of looking at this. In several of the films I have discussed there is a tendency to combine the characteristics of several monsters and this can be conceptualised in more than one way. On one level it is a matter of maximising appeal by combining the winning features

of previous successes. But there are two other factors at work. The paranoia of the contemporary horror film seems to demand the breakdown of every vestige of security and solidity; the monster attacks from within and without, as well as through other characters, thus denying us any secure conceptual foothold. Secondly, though, there is a countervailing trend, involving repeated references to other films, thus directing attention to the narrative proceedure itself and restoring a measure of familiarity to a treacherous world. This often involves comedy and I shall attempt to theorise some of the issues involved in this in chapter 11. For the moment I wish to note that **A Nightmare on Elm Street** has not resolved these tensions and gives a strong impression of instability - conventions in a state of flux.

The central feature of the monster in **Nightmare** is its ability to slip in and out of the characters' dreams. However, the film also draws upon the "slasher" films and a further "explanation" of the monster is given when Nancy's mother recognises the dream apparition as a notorious child murderer who had been lynched by angry parents some twenty years before. "Freddy Kreuger" also shares characteristics with some supernatural monsters in that he imparts a malevolence to the environment. Rod, for example, is "hanged" by his own bedsheet while locked in his prison cell, an incident probably modelled upon similar attacks by inanimate objects in **The Evil Dead.** Similarly, when Nancy has "destroyed" Freddy and "restored" her friends at the end of the film (thus casting doubt over the status of dream and reality throughout the story) all four of them are trapped

helplessly in their car and spirited away. At the same time Freddy reappears in the form of an arm lunging out for Nancy's mother, thus combining an allusion to **Carrie** with a reference to **Christine** (1982). There are also comic manifestations of Freddy, most notoriously the tongue that appears in Nancy's telephone receiver. This combination of elements is unsatisfyingly contradictory at a number of points but, in that, it is also perhaps representative.

Hellraiser could not be more different in that, for the most part, it rigorously eschews comedy and overt allusion while engaging deeply with the conventions of various earlier traditions. Kim Newman remarks that "the most immediately striking aspect of the movie is its seriousness of tone in an era when horror films...tend to be broadly comic". (**MFB**, 1987, p276.) The earlier, and more interesting, part of the film consists of six scenes, two brief ones which form a kind of prologue to the action and four more extended ones in which the implications of this prologue are explored, and I shall analyse these in detail before dealing with the way in which the concluding sections of the film resolve the problems set up by them.

The opening scene is very brief and the action consists of the purchase of an intricately inlaid oriental box in a middle-eastern bazaar. The camera zooms out from a close-up of the box (a movement which is reversed in the final shot of the film) to take in two figures seated across a table from each other. "What's your pleasure, Mr Cotton?" asks the vendor in a strongly-accented, insinuating voice, to which the customer replies "The box." A thick wad of notes is handed over - enough to signify that this box is something

quite extraordinary: "Take it, it's yours..." the oriental voice continues, and then, after a pause, "It always was..."

The second scene shows the box being used in a solitary ritual by the Frank Cotton character. The emphasis is on sensual mysticism (Frank's sweating, uncovered torso as he kneels in an attitude of prayer-like devotion) and elaborate patterning (both in close-ups of the box and in overhead shots of Frank enclosed within a rectangle demarcated by lighted candles). Frank manipulates the box, which is a kind of Chinese puzzle of interlocking parts, but when he eventually unlocks its mystery he becomes "hooked", in a visual literalisation of various metaphors about getting something "under your skin" or allowing somebody to "get their hooks into you". After close-ups showing the hooks pulling Frank apart a narrative ellipse allows us to conjecture the extent of his torment by presenting its aftermath; slowly grinding "wheels of torture" drip blood onto a floor scattered with lumps of mangled flesh. A note of macabre humour intrudes as a hand is seen re-assembling Frank's face, jigsaw fashion, from scattered pieces.

The third scene constitutes the beginning of the narrative proper. In fact the arrival of a couple of prospective inhabitants to look at an old dark house would commonly feature as the opening scene in many similar films. The nature of the house is developed from the outset ("Smells damp." "Well, it's been empty for a while...") alongside the relationship of the couple (Frank's brother Larry and his second wife) and their relationship to Frank. Taking a first look around the place Larry complains "I wanted to sell it

after the old lady died. Couldn't get Frank to agree. Guess he needed a hideout or something." Various details of the mise-en-scene are immediately striking, particularly a mantlepiece surmounted by what appears, on first sight, to be a madonna figure, but, on closer inspection is seen to be holding out a severed head on a plate in a mocking parody of biblical kitsch. The statuette is framed by an arc of small light bulbs and there are some candles placed around it, giving the impression of some debased kind of shrine. "Don't you worry. This stuff means nothing to me...it all goes." comments Larry, making light of his wife's - Julia's - objection that "I thought half of it was your brother's".

There is an undercurrent of unease in Larry and Julia's manner with one another and when Larry is rather too emphatic in his insistence that "we **can** be happy here" this seems to refer to more than the fact that the old house is hardly the place to inspire such sentiments; one senses that they have been **unhappy** somewhere before and that this is probably connected with Frank. Larry's forced optimism is at odds with his lapses into a tone of irritable over-familiarity with Julia (Don't start, Julia!...") but as the scene develops the emphasis shifts onto the absent Frank. Larry investigates the kitchen (in which even the crockery is infested with maggots and cockroaches) while Julia ventures upstairs, passing another small religious statue, and discovers a bedroom in such a state as to prompt her to enquire about "squatters ?" Larry shakes his head: "Frank." The artefact which so immediately convinces Larry of Frank's recent occupancy is a small, "bad taste" ornament depicting a couple having sex.

Larry returns downstrairs to answer a telephone call from

his daughter Kirsty (family problems are hinted at again as Kirsty informs her father that she has found a flat, despite his evident assumption that she was to share the house with himself and Julia) while Julia discovers an envelope of photographs of Frank. They mainly show him with a variety of women, and some of them are mildly indecent. Julia flicks through them hurriedly and slips one into her pocket; from about this time she seems decidedly more reconciled to the prospect of moving into her future home.

The fourth scene is set on the morning that Larry and Julia move into the house and is a fairly complex construction mixing flashback with "present tense" and demanding a more detailed treatment. I shall take it from the moment after Kirsty's arrival, beginning with the shots in which Larry is helping two removals men to shift a bed in through the door and up the stairs. One of the removals men asks (with reference to Kirsty, who has just gone through to the kitchen) "That your daughter?" "Uh huh..." "Got her mother's looks..." (Cut to Larry.) "Her mother's dead." (Reverse shot showing the smile fade from the removals man's face) "Oh..." The second removals man chuckles at his friend's mistake, and then we cut to Julia, upstairs, seen in profile. The reverse shot gives us the object of her gaze - a photograph of Frank on a beach with a coloured woman. Another cut shows us Kirsty in the Kitchen trying to fill a kettle and getting impatient that the tap does not seem to work. The following shot shows us Julia's hands - we recognise her painted fingernails - as she tears the photograph of Frank, discarding the image of the woman so that only he remains. A

further cut returns us to Kirsty as the faulty tap sprays her with water. This shot is succeeded by a close-up of the picture of Frank and a deep male voice on the soundtrack is heard to enquire "Can I come in?" This extra-diegetic voice prepares us for the flashback shot that follows in which Julia is seen from behind, at an open doorway, against which Frank is leaning, with both arms raised against the doorframe in a posture both indolent and overbearing. It is raining heavily outside and he is dripping wet; "Can I come in" he repeats more forcefully.

We recognise the next shot of Julia, in profile, as essentially a repetition of the original shot of her looking down at the photograph of Frank, and therefore a fragment of "present tense" narration embedded in the flashback. Indeed, she is still looking down, tremblingly. But the next image is of Frank and the reverse shot of Julia shows her in full face as he asks "You're Julia, Right?" "That's right," she answers, "who are you?" "I'm Frank...I'm **brother** Frank." "Oh yes..." Julia's face brightens but Frank's casual comment - "I..uh..came for the wedding" - leaves her looking vaguely uneasy in the reverse shot. "Well, can I come in or not?"

"Of course" he can come in: "You're very welcome." "Well, that's nice to know" he replies, with deliberate sarcasm. He passes a hand over his dripping face - the rain streams down unabated - and asks for a towel. There follows a profile shot of Julia, signalling an end of the flashback sequence, and as we see her raising her eyes and turning her face towards the camera we hear Kirsty's voice on the soundtrack echiong Frank's question: "Have you got a towel?" Julia is shocked out of her reverie and her voice - directing Kirsty to the

bathroom - is combined with a close-up of her hand slipping the photograph of Frank back into her pocket. While Kirsty dries herself off in the bathroom she continues to make light conversation with Julia, who she assumes to still be outside at the foot of the stairs. However, when she emerges Julia is not there. "Julia?" she calls, and as she looks around her gaze begins to travel slowly upwards, at which point the camera tilts up in a long movement traversing a span of bare wall and eventually coming to rest on Julia on the floor above, looking down in a disdainful attitude with a set of painted, red fingernails resting on the handrail. This low-angle view of her is strongly suggestive of dark power, resembling as it does the type of composition favoured for the appearance of the "femme fatale" in film noir or of Christopher Lee in his first screen appearance as Dracula.

Julia backs away out of sight, and Kirsty is left looking perplexed that her call goes unanswered. When we cut back to Julia she is seen walking stealthily around the darkened upper regions of the house; she is first seen at full length and facing the camera but the camera glides around to view her from behind as she passes in front of a window streaming with light. Frank's voice on the soundtrack asking "What shall we drink to?" marks the return to flashback/memory as the camera zooms in on Julia's head and shoulders from behind just as she begins to turn around, making the troubled expression on her face visible to us. The reverse-shot gives us Frank lounging in an armchair, one leg up over the side and an open bottle of wine in his hand. The following shot of Julia completes the temporal regression and we notice the

change in the mise-en-scene - she is now standing in front of a lacy curtain. "I'm very happy" she assures Frank and his "I'm sure you are" is provocatively sarcastic. "You gonna let me kiss the bride?" he asks, roughly forcing her lips to his. There is a cut back to her face looking troubled accompanied by her voice on the soundtrack asking "What about Larry?" and then a further cut to a view of her over Frank's shoulder as Frank replies "Forget him."

The implied violence against Larry is underlined by the flashing of a knife before Julia's startled face but the knife is used to cut the shoulder strap of her dress. The flashback sex scene that follows is intercut with "present tense" shots of Julia's face looking more and more agitated, her breathing becoming heavier. As Julia and Frank begin to have sex shots of Larry, downstairs, helping to shift a bed into the house, are intercut. Larry's hand is seen attempting to force the bed round a corner of the bannister rail, on which there is a protruding nail, and a shot of his hand receiving a deep gash is juxtaposed with the climax of Frank and Julia's love-making. Similarly, the aftermath of Frank and Julia's adulterous sex (Frank's "It's never enough") is juxtaposed with Larry's pain.

The scene ends with copious amounts of Larry's blood being spilled over the floor, dripping onto the floorboards and seeping down, being absorbed. The following scene has Frank, unseen by the characters, being reconstituted from his brother's blood, his crushed and withered remains beginning to pulsate with new life, gaining in strength and vigour, until an oozing, half-formed, skeletal figure is seen to burst forth from beneath the floorboards.

The sixth scene begins with a housewarming party, throughout which Julia is seen to be ill at ease and distracted. She retires early from the festivities, sensing the renewed presence of Frank and eventually drawn - by some uncanny intuition - to the slimy, skeletal mess which is lurking in the attic. Subsequent scenes detail the complicity between Frank and Julia as she becomes instrumental in prolonging his unnatural existence, eventually helping him to regain his "flesh", luring victims to his lair in an attempt to divert his cannibalistic voracity from its logical object - his brother. The final restoration of Frank's physicality ultimately does, however, coincide with Julia's complicity in the breaking of this last taboo - Frank comes to literally inhabit Larry's skin - and this consummation of her complicity also coincides with her death at Frank's hand. I shall return to these later scenes after outlining three of the more significant features of this opening - in which all the major themes are nicely outlined.

1. Frank and Larry are presented through a "doubling" effect, the two as different aspects of a single personality, in fact. This is evident not only in their brotherhood and their joint ownership of the old house but in the set of oppositions around which their relationship is delineated: Larry represents stability/ respectability/ family (this last aspect conveyed largely through his relationship with his daughter) while Frank represents adventure (from the opening shots of him in an "eastern" location), mystery (the rituals which he enacts and the debased religious imagery which is associated with him) and sexual transgression (clearly

signalled in the photographs and the indecent ornament). These oppositions also clearly associate Frank with physicality although it is Larry who is associated with health and vigour (again, qualities partly invested in his daughter and partly in his "practical" attitudes) while Frank's decadent physicality is, above all, sexual and is associated with death, decay and perversity (most clearly brought out in his incestuous desire for Kirsty). Larry openly rejects everything that Frank stands for ("This stuff means nothing to me...it all goes.") but it is strongly implied that he merely exorcises his own aggressive urges vicariously, eg.in his rapt involvement in a televised boxing match. The two male figures are blatantly alternative mates for the central female character. In **Frankenstein** it is significant that the monster attempts to abduct Frankenstein's fiancee on their wedding night and in **Hellraiser** Julia's marriage to Larry appears to be consummated by Frank. Frank's reappearance coincides with what is more or less presented as an attempt by Larry and Julia to give their marriage "another chance" ("We can be happy here.") and more spefcifically with an incident in which Larry mutilates his own hand. However, it should be noted that Frank has already been revived (in Julia's mind) before he is given a new lease of physical life through his brother's blood.

2. It is worth pointing out that both Frank and Julia represent, to varying degrees, the characteristics of two of the major screen monsters of earlier films: the vampire and the zombie. Frank combines the sexual charisma and the blood-lust of the vampire with the gory and unappealing cannibalism

of the zombie in the early "reconstitution" sequences of the film. Julia, however, increasingly becomes a vampire figure by proxy as she procures victims to appease his appetite for flesh. This is signalled quite early on in the low-angle shot discussed above but, after her pact with Frank, she begins to wear dramatic facial make-up so as to go out and pick up men in bars, whom she then lures back to Frank's attic. The brightness of the make-up offsets her pallor and in the various "pick up" scenes she dresses in darker and darker clothing, eventually being seen all in black with dark glasses on. While Frank is, in some senses, a literal "vampire", the connotative associations of vampirism increasingly accrue around Julia and in the scenes in which she lures Frank's victims to their deaths it is almost as though the film is playing with the range of meanings intermediate between the words "vamp" and "vampire".

3. Thirdly, I would like to draw attention to the variable narrative functions of Frank's oriental puzzle-box. On the one hand the film hints that it should be taken to represent the "doorway" to the terrors of the unconscious while on the other hand it is associated with the conjouring up of a form of supernatural being - the cenobites - and there is a progressive ellision of the former meaning into the latter as the film develops. The enigmatic comment of the dealer when Frank purchases it ("It's yours...It always was.") leaves the question pleasingly open and the two sets of meanings are carefully balanced in Frank's explanation of the box to Julia:

Frank: No, don't touch it. It's dangerous...It opens doors...

Julia: What kind of doors?
Frank: The doors to the pleasures of heaven or hell. I didn't care which. I thought I'd gone to the limits...I hadn't. The cenobites gave me an experience beyond the limits; pleasure and pain indivisible...

When Kirsty steals the box from Frank and conjures up the cenobites they explain themselves to her as "...explorers in the nether regions of human experience, demons to some, angels to others..." but the function of the box in this scene seems to be to open up the doorway to hell and Kirsty is pursued by a flailing, pirhana-jawed monster from the depths, justifying Kim Newman's description of the cenobites as "a species of demon". From this point onwards the play between a metaphorical and a literal (supernatural) explanation of the cenobites is clearly resolved in favour of the latter. Kirsty has inadvertently summoned up the creatures and narrative closure is achieved by allowing her to strike up a kind of half-hearted version of the "Faustian bargain" with them, exchanging Frank's return for her own life/soul.

By the time Kirsty leads the cenobites back to their fatal rendezvous with Frank, Frank has "become" Larry; Julia has succumbed to his desire to be reconstituted from his brother's flesh. (That this was the logical drive of Frank's ambition was signalled in an earlier scene in which Frank had attempted to murder Larry by stabbing him in the back while he was having sex with Julia. He was prevented from doing so by Julia's continued resistance: "No, please...no, I can't bear it!" she screams, both to Larry - asking for the cessation of his sexual attentions, and to Frank - asking for the postponement of his designs upon his brother.) The parallels between Larry and Frank are further underlined by

the parody of marriage vows which Frank uses to persuade Julia to this act; he tells her that he must be fully restored before the cenobites pursue him if he is to have any chance of escape and that he and Julia "belong to each other", they "can be together like before" - "for better or worse...like love, only real..." Later Frank-as-Larry parodies Larry's earlier comments about the prospects for his marriage, announcing to Julia and Kirsty "We can all be happy here..."

Kirsty, initially believing Frank to be her father, gradually realises the true situation and Frank attempts to kill her, but in the struggle it is Julia who takes the knife. Frank's rhythmic plunging of the knife into her stomach visually echoes the earlier sex scene between them as well as being reminiscent of the staking of a vampire. However Frank is prevented from raping/killing Kirsty by the intervention of the cenobites and is once more torn to pieces in a scene which is this time played for its macabre humour; Frank clearly and deliberately enunciates the words "Jesus wept" as his face is slowly torn apart. The cenobites then turn upon Kirsty ("What, are you leaving us so soon?") but, inexplicably discovering that she is able to wield the box for her own ends, she proceeds to destroy them one by one with it.

These climactic scenes involve a series of shock appearances of the monsters and the kind of rhythmic play with their appearance/disappearance that typifies the end of the "slasher" movie. However these scenes are constructed to climax with the re-uniting of Kirsty and her boyfriend in a

deeply traditional kind of closure. As they discard the box into the old house's final conflagration a tramp figure - who had previously featured in two minor scenes - is seen to step into the flames and retrieve it, being metamorphosed through this baptism of fire into a satanic apparition similar to those which feature in **The Devil Rides Out** (1965). This creature is seen bearing away the box into the night sky and a brief coda shows the box back "on sale" in its original setting, suggesting that the film was simply one cycle in an endless circular movement.

The most striking feature of **Hellraiser** is the strength of the traditionally Gothic association of sexuality with death and decay. Here, sexuality lacks even the veneer of sophistication and sensuality allowed it in most vampire fiction. Frank is completely lacking in this kind of "charm": his sexuality is violent, brutal, although this lust for life does afford him a greater interest than Larry. Julia becomes progressively more sinister and predatory and there is an implication that her dissatisfaction with Larry's conventionality can only lead her to subordinate herself to to the contemptuously aggressive sexuality of Frank. **Hellraiser** thus follows, in an exaggerated way, the logic of many earlier vampire films. Disruptive female sexuality is no longer "awakened" by the attentions of the monster, though: domesticity is untenable because Julia actively yearns for this monster of lust and aggression. The logic of the situation seems to entail a pessimism akin to that of some 1960's and 1970's horror and to demand that these three characters end up tearing each other apart.

The impact of the more typical dynamic of the 1980's

horror film is evident in the belated shift of attention to the daughter, Kirsty, and the more typical confrontations of teenager and monsters. This aspect does not fit comfortably with the main trend of development; not only does the perfunctory characterisation of the young couple seem to belong in a rather different kind of film, but Kirsty seems not to be implicated in the set of twisted familial relations from which she sprang, allowing her to take up the box and turn it against its monstrous owners. The film again borrows from an older convention in its re-affirmation of the monstrous threat - perhaps recalling **Dead of Night** - but the effect here is more of formal symmetry and of endless renewal than of "paranoia". The final reunion of the young couple has a dated air of optimism quite at odds with much of the preceding narrative.

A nightmare on Elm Stret and **Hellraiser** are very accomplished movies by the prevailing standards: both seem to be attempts to transcend recent genric precedent and, though one is concerned with "nightmares" and the other with "desires", both blur the distinction between imagination and material reality in the attempt to develop new narrative patterns. However, both also entail a degree of instability that is indicative of the confusion and uncertainty of the horror film in the late 1980's.

11. HORROR AND COMEDY (2), RE-ANIMATOR AND THE EVIL DEAD FILMS

In discussing **The Howling** I considered some of the ideological implications of the preponderance of comic treatments across the horror genre in recent years. In discussing the **Evil dead** films and **Re-Animator** I intend to look mainly at the ways in which horrific situations become the object of humour; the narrative strategies of the horror-comedy. In order to do this a brief consideration of comedy itself will be indispensible.

Steve Neale distinguishes between two different types of comedy - the social (situation) comedy and the crazy comedy. The distinction is a theoretical one - most specific examples will involve a mixture of the two - but he argues that "...nevertheless, the two types...remain distinct as specific emphases and tendencies." (Neale, 1980, p24.) In both cases comedy arises from the disruption of discourse. In the social comedy it is the various discourses within the narrative that are disrupted or brought into conflict. Thus, in the films of Frank Capra it is a common strategy to place a character with a particular outlook - or set of discourses - into a milieu in which this discursive framework becomes eccentric or inappropriate; for example, to place a simple farmer into a world of urban corruption and sophistication. The comedy is largely a comedy of situations and arises from misunderstandings, amusing social faux pas, etc. In crazy comedy it is not so much particular discourses that break down but the rules of discourse itself; Neale's example uses a piece of dialogue from a Marx Brothers film to illustrate the point: "I know where the suspects are: they're in the

house next door" - "But there isn't any house next door" - "then we build a house next door". This collapse of discourse into an associative rather than a logical mode bears some similarity to the mechanisms Freud describes in unconscious thought processes and suggests one reason for the surrealists' enthusiasm for crazy comedy; their own assault on commonplace rationalism in the arts favoured a similarly associative principle to govern the combination of images.

This example clearly tends towards the absurd. The breakdown of discourse is the breakdown of the shared assumptions which provide us with our sense of coherence, order and predictability - a sense that our experiences involve more than a random succession of arbitrary chances, and that when we wake up each morning the world will still be found to conform to the same physical and social laws. Planning and forethought would otherwise be impossible. Freud writes that "Order is a kind of compulsion to repeat which, when a regulation has been laid down once and for all, decides when, where and how a thing will be done, so that in every similar circumstance one is spared hesitation and indecision. (**PFL**, Vol 12, p282.) Customary notions of order are consistently violated in Charlie Chaplin films and Andre Bazin describes how, after the initial comic shock of a Chaplin gag, a "spiritual abyss" opens up in the spectator, inducing "that delicious vertigo that quickly modifies the tone of the laughter it provokes". He continues: "The reason is that Charlie carries to absurd lengths his basic principle of never going beyond the actual moment..." (Bazin, 1967, p148.)

Most of Chaplin's actions amount to a frantic and absurd

improvisation. Conversely, when he is forced to conform to some kind of order he does so in an imitative and exaggerated way, contracting, as Bazin puts it, "...a sort of mechanical cramp, a surface condition in which the original reason for what he is doing is forgotten". (p150.) There is clearly an existential dimension to this comedy insofar as the basis for our most routine actions is called into question and this, presumably, is what is meant by Bazin's "spiritual abyss" and "delicious vertigo". It also tends to acquire a social dimension, and Bazin claims that every time Chaplin provokes laughter at his own expense

> "...it is when he has been imprudent enough...to presume that the future will resemble the past or to join naively in the game as played by society and to have faith in its elaborate machinery for building the future...its moral, religious, social and political machinery..." (p152.)

Something similar is true of the Marx brothers and prompts Andrew Bergman's description of their "anarcho-nihilist" humour. This kind of comedy is often related to an element of surreptitious but gleeful wish fulfilment, a comment which would apply generally to films in which figures of authority and representatives of order are presented in undignified and ridiculous postures or engaging in absurd and bungled actions (as in the Mack Sennett chases). Again, there is a slim but significant connection with surrealism, as is illustrated by the treatment of the priests in **Un Chien Andalou** and **The Seashell and the Clergyman**. Here, the laughter serves as cover for a sense of antipathy; Freud describes caricature, parody and travesty as being concerned with the "degradation" of figures that are "exalted", that "lay claim to authority and respect". (**PFL**, Vol 6, p262.)

In both forms comedy is often associated with tension - whether it undercuts that tension or serves as a particular mode of discharging it - and in crazy comedy this is particularly evident in the suspense generated through incidents which take place on ledges over precipitous drops, or which involve characters dangling from moving vehicles, etc. In the comedy of situations laughter often follows a build-up of pleasurable apprehension as one watches characters acting or talking at hopelessly crossed purposes and awaits the inevitable outcome. These tensions can be theorised in relation to the operation of suspense in mainstream narrative in general.

Neale argues that the process of narration involves maintaining a complex tension between the two pleasures it offers; the pleasures of process (movement) and of coherence (closure). These pleasures are inseparable; it is wrong to assert that because the pleasure of process involves the disruption of narrative equilibrium, the pleasure of coherence can be reduced to the fact of closure, of eventual resolution. The two are maintained in a shifting balance: one simultaneously enjoys the sense of development and momentum and longs for it to be over - that is, for the coherence produced by "the sense of an ending", the knowledge of "how things worked out". The balance is contained within the limits of "dramatic conflict" (potential resolution). In the social comedy the accumulation of social tensions (discursive contradictions) is periodically defused in humourous reconciliations, happy coincidences, etc, and periodically escalated into an engulfing clash of confused actions, misunderstood motives, etc. In the former instances the

release of laughter is associated with a gratification of the want for closure while the chaotic action associated with the latter heightens the sense of movement (uncontrol, incoherence) and multiplies the problems standing in the way of eventual resolution. Thus the release of laughter is tied up with the release or escalation of tension and in the latter case gives rise to the sensation that one is laughing "in spite of" one's self.

Clearly the viewer may stand in a variety of relations to such actions as they develop. It is possible that, at particular moments, the viewer will be "taken unawares" in much the same way as the characters or that s/he will stand in a situation of superior knowledge to some or all of them. In terms of narrative development as a whole some degree of superiority - of distance - is generally indispensible to the appreciation of situations as comic. Freud's outline of a theory of "the comic" is more concerned with comic situations as they arise in life (rather than in fictions) but some of his comments are relevant here:

> "...a person appears comic to us if, in comparison to ourselves, he makes too great an expenditure on his bodily functions and too little on his mental ones; and it cannot be denied that in both these cases our laughter expresses a pleasurable sense of the superiority which we feel in relation to him." (**PFL**, Vol 6, p256.)

This passage may stand in need of some elucidation. When Freud speaks of an excessive expenditure on "bodily functions" he is referring to situations in which a person (or character) applies a greater degree of energy, physical movement, etc, than is required by the actions to be performed (as children do). It is this which provokes our laughter at Charlie Chaplin's walk and which renders the

lumbering gait of many of the monsters of the horror genre unintentionally funny or susceptible to parody. Examples of the inadequate expenditure on "mental functions" which Freud refers to would include those "false economies" in thinking which involve sacrificing the wider considerations of logic to the momentary demands of a situation. Thus, we laugh at Stan Laurel's inability to keep two thoughts in his head at the same time: mid way through moving a piano up a staircase he is reminded of something else he should have done and sets off without a thought for the laws of gravity. Again, there is something childlike in such acts.

So far, then, it has been asserted that comic pleasure arises from comparing the actions of a person (or character) to those that we ourselves would take in the same situation (and it has been implied that the origin and basis of this pleasure lies in the relation between childhood and adult perceptions). The relationship described was one of pleasurable superiority in this instance but it is worth stressing that, for Freud, "...the feeling of superiority bears no essential relation to comic pleasure". The origins of the capacity for comic pleasure lie in this area, to be sure, but it is the act of comparison itself that comes to provide the basis for adult comic pleasure. Even then, this act (direct comparison of another person with ourself) need no longer take place as it gives rise to an ability to derive pleasure **independently** from **either side** of the relationship implied by comparison, ie. from empathy with another person **or** from processes within ourself. In the latter instances the "comparison" becomes internal to ourself (a comparison of

expectation and eventuality, anticipation and reward, with laughter arising friom the disproportions between them - this being particularly relavent to the horror-comedy). In the former instances (empathy with another person) we are talking about a comedy of "situations"; we understand that the disproportionate expenditure of physical/mental energy has been brought about by an external influence which would have compelled us to respond similarly in such circumstances. (The common situations in which a character's behaviour is altered by alcohol, a knock to the head, an unavoidable physical encumbrance, etc would serve as examples.) The comparison now arises between the actions of a person (character) before and after such a misfortune:

> "The person who offers us this difference becomes comic to us once again for his inferiority; he is inferior only in comparison to his former self and not in comparison with us, for we know that in the same circumstances we could not have behaved otherwise. But it is noteworthy that we only find someone's being put in a position of inferiority comic where there is empathy - that is, where someone else is concerned: if we ourselves were in similar straits we would be conscious only of distressing feelings." (**PFL**, Vol 6, p257.)

Freud's use of the word "empathy" here (from which I take my cue) clearly inverts the sense of the word "identification" as it is applied in film studies; again, we are talking about the ability to assess the demands of another's situatiuon, rather than vicarious participation in (or emotional duplication) of it. In fictional comedy it is often a condition for our appreciation of a character's situation as comic that we should not be invited to sympathise too closely with that character or that the potentially adverse consequences of the situation are fairly minor. If we are denied this necessary distance the balance will begin to shift from laughter to anxious suspense, as

happens to some extent in Chaplin's **Monsieur Verdoux**. This can be illustrated with reference to Scorsese's **King of Comedy** which uses similar narrative devices to those found in many comedies, particularly in the placement of the protagonist in situations of excruciating social embarrassment. However, the codes of verisimilitude that operate in that film lead us to envisage variously unpleasant outcomes to his situation and the preoccupation with the central character induces a squeamish sense of enforced complicity with his pathological actions that usually precludes their being seen as comic.

It is, in fact, possible to wring pleasure from such potentially un-pleasurable situations, but, for Freud, such pleasure is differentiated as a sub-species of the comic sufficiently distinct as to require a different name; humour. Freud describes humour as "the most easily satisfied among the species of the comic" because it arises, quite simply, from an economy in **feeling**, in **emotional** expenditure. Freud gives a simple example of "gallows humour" in which a condemned man, being led to his execution early on a Monday morning, remarks on how well the week is beginning. Such humour has an obvious bearing on the relationship between horror and comedy. In this case it arises from a bravado inattention to the difference between this particular Monday and all the others; a refusal to consider that subjectively - for the man in question - the week is **not** beginning. His economy in feelings of terror and distress permits our economy upon the emotions of pity and sympathy.

Something similar is true in the case of **Elm Street III**'s

severed head "gag" (discussed further below). In this, the mother is irritated by the way in which her daughter's nocturnal traumas interfere with her own love life. She ignores the altered scope of the inconvenience when her head is sliced clean off her shoulders; the head merely continues its desultory nagging in the same vein. We are permitted a considerable economy in our emotional expenditure on her account. It is not surprising that what Freud classifies as humour should be one of the major forms of "the comic" in much contemporary horror. Such devices make possible an escalation of the horrific content of such fictions without a corresponding intensification of our emotional responses to them. However, I would argue that Freud's account implies a connection between humour and "the unexpected"; an over-reliance on humour will therefore dull its effectiveness. For Freud, the act of "displacement" is essential to humour; the tension generated through our psychological preparedness for emotionally distressing material is given an unexpected outlet, this being experienced as pleasurable. Clearly, once we begin to anticipate such turnabouts our emotional investment in the fiction is diminished, and it is this which accounts for the emotionally flat, uninvolving nature of many recent horror comedies.

There is little space here to go into the infantile basis of comic pleasure although it should be readily apparent that comedy involving mimicry, repetition and exaggeration can be traced back to that source, and Freud's remark that "the comic of situations is mostly based on embarrassments in which we rediscover the child's helplessness" (p291) gives a further pointer. A crude summary - which cannot do justice to

the detail of Freud's argument - would have to stress the element that all forms of "the comic" share, ie. that their pleasures all arise from economies in our mental functioning. Freud connects this with "the mood of a period of life in which we were accustomed to deal with our psychical work in general with a small expenditure of energy - the mood of our childhood." (**PFL**, Vol 6, p302.)

Before going on to deal with the horror-comedy itself I should point out that there is no precise congruence between the two theoretical positions that I have derived from Neale and Freud respectively: one seeks to explain the workings of comedy as a film genre while the other seeks psychological explanations for our perception of certain forms of behaviour as "comic". In looking at the horror-comedy I shall mainly be interested in the way in which its narrative strategies involve Neale's clash of discursive regimes, with the emphasis on the discourses of the genre itself (supernaturalism, pseudo-science, etc). There will however be many instances of physical, knockabout humour or verbal wit that can more properly be understood as examples of the disproportionate expenditure of physical/mental energy that Freud discusses.

To return to Neale's account of comedy: the most adequate way in which we can define a horror-comedy is to say that it is a comedy in which the discourses that are subject to disruption are the discourses of the horror film itself. (I shall leave aside the films in which the comic and dramatic modes are more equally balanced until the next chapter.) Two questions arise from this definition of the horror-comedy.

1). Why does this genre (among others) periodically pass through parodic phases in which a large number of examples re-work the conventions in a comically disrupted way? 2). In what relation does the horror-comedy stand to the conventions that are thereby re-stated/transformed?

The most popular explanations for why the horror film undergoes periods of comic development rest upon the assumption that the conventions sometimes become outmoded, over-exploited, or threadbare - that is, of a failure to innovate. This may be ascribed to the workings of the industry itself (the imperative to repeat a successful "formula") or to the creative inertia that it engenders. In some respects this popular explanation has a good deal to recommend it (see below) and only becomes seriously misleading when elevated into a theoretical principle like Brophy's "saturation", which I have already objected to in discussing **The Howling**. The problem here is with the metaphor itself; "saturation" is what happens to a sponge or a chemical solution is "full" and can "absorb" no more. To take this metaphor seriously we would have to make the logically impermissible assumption that the range of conventions has some pre-determined limit beyond which development is only possible through technical improvement, self-parody, etc. The popular view is infinitely superior to this in that it recognises that the horror-comedy is not the culminating point of a trend of development but a periodic recurrence. After all, the Gothic novel went through a parodic phase in the early nineteenth century.

The popular view has its limitations though. The periodic "over-working" of conventions is not fully accounted for by

considering the industry in its industrial aspect; as with any other industry the pressures towards standardisation are always counterbalanced by the competitive advantages accruing to innovation. What is true is that changes in the organisation of the industry - as, for example, in the 1960's - may alter the balance of the two pressures. However, while industrial conditions may favour generic vigour or stagnation the latter instances are merely described, not explained, by any notion of conventions wearing thin through over use. After all, conventions which appear incapable of extension at one point often reappear in a new burst of development much later, demonstrating that there is a good deal of life left in them. This, indeed, may require a fresh stimulus, but there are times when the inability to test the potential of conventions might be better described as a compulsion to repeat rather than a failure to innovate.

Numerous examples could be cited in objection to this proposition and admittedly there have been many cycles in which a popular model is imitated until diminishing returns force a greater degree of change. This is not an adequate account of the development of the horror movie in the 1980's though. Here, the act of repetition often provides part of the pleasure the movie offers and in those examples where there is a significant degree of innovation a sense of repetition is sometimes maintained through the elaborate referencing of earlier models. There are a number of examples in which the element of repetition that guarantees familiarity does not stem from fidelity to a contemporary tradition but from the deliberate revival of an archaic

model. (**The Howling** is an example of this trend, which I shall refer to as the revisionist horror-comedy.) This tendency can be seen across the whole of the mainstream cinema but the horror movie is one of the genres in which it is most pronounced.

In the the processes of genre, as Neale theorises them, the conventions figure not simply as a convenient regulation of the potential diversity of narrative forms, but as the circulation of expectations, orientations and ideological positionings. (A similar sense of conventions as the expression of a world view, a set of ideological assumptions, emerges from Franco Moretti's work on literature.) The development of genres involves a systematic variation which is inherent in the act of repetition although the precise relationship between the two is variable; for Robin Wood the difference between the staple products of a genre and the works that come to be seen as "great" genre pictures "...lies very largely in the relationship between the familiar and the surprising - in the length of the leap the spectator is asked to make from generic expectations to specific transformations, the transformations being as much ideological as conventional." (Wood, 1986, p163.) The emphasis of this formulation could perhaps be reversed: no doubt a film does make demands upon its audience but the converse is also true; it both registers and contains the current anxieties of its audience, which is surely what we mean in any discussion of ideologically problematic tensions.

In horror fictions, customary distinctions between form and content are more inappropriate than ever and these tensions are intimately bound up with the dynamic of the

narrative process itself. Following Punter, I have described this dynamic as "a continual oscillation between reassurance and threat" in which order and stability are never more than precarious, always subject to sudden ruptures and dramatic reversals. The particular shapes of both reassurance and threat are variable and topical but much of the genres thematic is couched in the dynamic itself, as a particular mode of ordering experience. The intensities of, say, vulnerability and violence may be ameliorated within a particular text but this can only go so far before the effectiveness of the fiction is impaired. A restricted degree of variation between texts, on the other hand, allows the dynamic its full play while softening its impact through repetition: threat becomes reassurance, instability yields coherence.

Excessive coherence - predictability - robs a narrative of its interest, but a part of the function of innovation may be taken up by the comic disruption of the conventions themselves. The horror-comedy of the 1980's - and many earlier examples - follows two main strategies in this respect and I shall distinguish between a). the revisionist horror-comedy and b). the slapstick horror-comedy. Again, most examples will use a combination of both strategies and the distinction is mainly a matter of emphasis. In both types the humour is largely at the expense of the genre's conventions themselves, entailing a degree of disengagement - of distance - from them. This is not the same thing as a distance from the characters (an undercutting of our interest in, and sympathy with, them) although, given the extent to

which the conventions are concerned with our expectations about characters (their behaviour, its likely consequences, etc) this is also common, particularly in the slapstick horror-comedy.

A. The Revisionist Horror-Comedy.

From the late 1960's onwards a number of films - those that appear to mount a self-conscious critique of earlier sets of conventions - have been referred to as "revisionist" genre movies. This applies particularly to the western, in which it commonly took the form of altering a number of key conventional elements and then working through the consequences of this (**The Wild Bunch**) or, in the "Vietnam western", systematically inverting the values the conventions have traditionally expressed (**Soldier Blue**, **Little Big Man**). There are several examples of this kind of interrogation of narrative conventions in the horror film, of which the most accomplished is probably George Romero's **Martin** (1978), in which the vampire figure becomes a sexually disturbed adolescent and the final staking a tragic misunderstanding. Clearly, this revision of genre conventions does not necessarily involve a comic treatment.

In the horror film, though, it has often been associated with parody. In **Dance of the Vampires** (1967), for example, the Van Helsing figure, traditional scourge of vampirism, is replaced by a bumbling incompetent whose efforts unwittingly ensure the triumph of the vampires at the film's conclusion. This film retains the stylised, indeterminate, period settings of its sources (though, unusually for a vampire film, it conceives of high mountainous areas as snowy) and

this lends it an air of nostalgia. Elsewhere, one of the most familiar procedures for a revisionist film is to detach a set of narrative conventions from its traditional "period" setting and transpose them to a more modern one; this involves a corresponding modernisation of the conventions themselves (as in **Martin**,) and a refusal to completely harmonise the narrative conventions with their context sometimes serves as a comic strategy (**An American Werewolf in London**). This is complicated by the way in which, in the horror film, many conventions have both a literal and a metaphorical dimension and the modernisation can be used as a means of creating a disjunction between the two. This can also occur in non-comic films, such as **Martin**, in which vampirism is predominantly seen as a form of sexual aberration although one of the characters acts out the uncompromising logic appropriate to the traditional supernaturalism of the genre. It is more commom in comedies, though, and the most striking thing about **The Howling**'s opening scene is that it comes close to a "straight" modernisation involving a Freudian understanding of the werewolf, while subsequent, more comic, scenes, hesitate between this and a more literal, folkloric conception.

The effectiveness of **The Howling**'s opening scene is bought "on the cheap", so to speak. The conventions of the werewolf movie have not been adapted sufficiently to become adequate to the world of the opening scene and the emergence of the traditionally literal visualisation of the monster is therefore facilitated by a change of scene, a reliance upon comedy, and a de-emphasis of the issue of sexual violence against women. The problems that would be involved in

maintaining the modern, urban emphasis are evident in a scene from **An American Werewolf in London**, in which the hero/monster must somehow make his way home naked across the busy metropolis after his nocturnal lupine activities. This film solves its problems through a more consistent alternation between comic and dramatic modes, the hero's metamorphoses being depicted with little trace of the comedy which is reserved for their social consequences. **Wolfen** (1981), which attempts a "straight" modernisation of the sub-genre, dispenses with the metamorphosis altogether, with the unfortunate consequence that its monsters appear no more fearful than, say, a large alsatian.

I have already mentioned the element of nostalgia in **Dance of the Vampires** and it is horror-comedies of this type that are often described as exercises in "affectionate pastiche" or "gentle parody". This should not obscure the films' sense of superiority to the conventions they re-work. **Dance of the Vampires** appeared while the Hammer films are still being produced, but in a decade of rapid transition in the genre, and betrays an incipient awareness that the role of the "expert" in defeating the monster is becoming anachronistic, giving way to a direct confrontation between monster and potential victim - a conflict whose outcome that film anticipates. The "expert" functions in relation to a hierarchical social order which he defends and Polanski's parody extends to the whole of a fictional world whose credibility is being undermined. While revisionist films in general dispense with generic elements which no longer conform to the changing demands of verisimilitude, the comic

variety retains those elements only to demonstrate that they are no longer viable.

B. The Slapstick Horror-Comedy.

It is difficult to arrive at a clear-cut definition of horror-comedies, not least because, although I have concentrated on the way in which the conventions of the horror film are involved, there are many scenes which come close to comedy proper. Thus, the affinity between a chase sequence in a crazy comedy, and the presentation of flight and pursuit in the horror movie, is exploited by **Dance of the Vampires**. These are sequences which would be best discussed in relation to Freud's "comic if physical movements". However, retaining the focus on horror conventions, there are a number of films whose strategy seems to be precisely the opposite of what I have called the revisionist horror-comedy. Many of these are also - in a sense - revisionist, but, rather than the loving and elaborate re-creation of (particularly visual) conventions, these films rely upon a degree of familiarity with contemporary conventional structures, which they strip down to their bare essentials. The degree of narrative economy achieved may, in itself, serve as a pretext for comedy, but also allows more screen time to be devoted to a messy slapstick involving amputations, spilled viscera, etc.

Much of this narrative economy is achieved at the expense of characterisation (the attributution of motives, character differentiation, etc). Characters, as Bordwell and Thompson say, will have the number and kind of traits required for them to function adequately in a narrative. This criterion of

"adequacy" clearly varies from one genre to another and, as Andrew Tudor comments, "Compared to many fictional forms...the horror movie is restricted in the narrative space that it routinely allocates to characterisation" (Tudor, 1989, p110):

> "In a thriller or a western, say, sequences conveying specifically characterising information are quite common, though strictly speaking unneccessary for narrative progress. Most horror movies, by contrast, dramatically limit such "digressions", primarily focusing audience attention through their tension-based involvement with a restricted array of character types...And while it is true that all popular genres employ some form of...conventional shorthand to define character, in the horror movie that process has been pushed close to its limits..." (Tudor, 1989, p112.)

So close, in fact, that very little further compression is needed to pass over the limits into comedy. A minor adjustment in this direction will easily convey a sense that the characters are perfunctorily acting out their pre-ordained generic roles. They are revealed to be, like the "subject" in Althusser's version of "Marxism", the passive bearers of pre-existing structures. The extent of the disengagement this encourages enables the "blood and gore" aspect of the films to be experienced as being at least as comic as it is horrific, but it is mainly the inadequate and deadpan responses of the characters to horrific situations that provide the occasion for laughter.

The situations themselves are set up with as much economy as possible, again a slight extension of a general tendency of the horror films of the late 1970's and 1980's. Taken together, these two aspects of the slapstick horror-comedy amount to a deliberate accentuation of those aspects of the "exploitation" horror movie that have sometimes been the occasion for unintentional humour. The films I shall discuss

apply this treatment to recent or contemporary horror conventions. In the **Evil Dead** films this involves an eclectic mixture of conventions drawn from different sub-genres (the "demonic possession" film, the teenage massacre movie, etc) while in **Re-Animator** it involves the Frankenstein-type "mad scientist", which, while not as prevalent a convention as it once was, is still significant today, as can be seen from the use made of it in most of David Cronenberg's films, including **The Fly** (1986), and in George Romero's **Monkey Shines** (1988).

Re-Animator achieves its remarkable narrative economy through a succession of short scenes which calculatingly compress as much narrative information as possible into the briefest dialogue exchanges, this dialogue also serving to set up several abrupt transitions between locations. The film's fluency demonstrates an easy familiarity with the Gothic idiom - Dennis Paoli, the co-writer, was brought into the project because of his postgraduate research into eighteenth and nineteenth century Gothic fiction - and this facilitates the element of absurd precis involved. As producer Brian Yuzna explains, discussing the source material from Lovecraft: "What we did was we kind of condensed the elements, updated it, and made it take place over a couple of weeks..." (**Fangoria**, best of, No 5, p38).

In the pre-credits sequence the protagonist, Dr Herbert West, is seen struggling with the erratically flailing form of his mentor, Dr Greuber, who appears to be having some kind of fit. Greuber's demise (blood oozing from every pore) provokes West's irritated remark that "Of course he's dead;

the dosage was too large". Accused of murder - "You killed him!" - he responds with a passionate: "No - I gave him life!" The situation thus set up, the credits then appear over a disco remix of Bernard Herrman's soundtrack to **Psycho**. The two main comic strategies are already set in motion. Firstly, there is the play upon expectation, with **Re-Animator** rushing to confirm its audience's anticipations almost before they can be formulated, and secondly, there is the habitually inadequate "emotional expenditure" of Herbert West, for whom the death of a senior colleague is simply a source of information about dosage levels.

The next scene introduces a student doctor by the name of Dan Cain and accomplishes a shift of location to the Miskatonic Medical School in Massachussetts. Cain's over-enthusiastic attempts to revive a patient whose heart has stopped ("A good doctor knows when to stop...you can take her to the morgue") provide the characterisation necessary for us to accept him as West's "assistant" at a later point. West's re-appearance at the Miskatonic Medical School, which already has a resident mad scientist - Dr Carl Hill - makes confrontation inevitable. We first encounter Dr Hill performing an autopsy; he appears to be drilling a hole and inserting a straw-like tube into a human head, his lips pursed in a look of wistful contemplation, his head cocked to one side as he admires the delicacy of his own handiwork. Moments later he is introduced to Dr West, who greets him as follows:

"I Know your work, Dr Hill...quite well! Your theory of the location of the will in the brain is...interesting...though derivitive of Dr Greuber's research in the early 'seventies, so derivitive, in fact, that in Europe it's considered plagiarised, and your support for the twelve minute time

limit on the life of the brain stem after death..."
"six to twelve minutes, Mr...er..."
"West. Herbert West. Frankly, Dr...uh...Hill, your work on brain death is outdated..."

This deliberately schematic setting up of the clash between the two scientists is the main concern of the scene, but it is also made to serve other narrative functions, in particular, the introduction to the head of the medical school - Dean Halsey - who invites Hill to dinner, thus preparing the ground for a later scene.

A cut takes us back to Dan Cain as he pins up an "apartment to let" notice on the school's notice board. He is joined by a young woman, their kiss informing us that she is his girlfriend. The kiss whets Cain's appetite but she resists his inappropriately public embraces, this reluctance being used to motivate a cut; her "No, no, no!" becoming the "Yes, yes, yes!" of the sexual act through the instantaneous transition to his bedroom. Their subsequent dialogue - she has to leave because her father will know where she is - informs us that she is Dean Halsey's daughter, thereby motivating future conflicts. The shift of scene to Cain's apartment is given a further significance: as Megan Halsey is leaving Dr West turns up to view the apartment, or rather its basement. Once he has assured himself that the basement is suitably dark and extensive ("Oh, yes, I think this will be just fine!") he persuades Cain, over Megan's protests, to allow him to move in right away.

A surgery class in which Dr Hill demonstrates his technique for exposing the human brain - "It's rather like peeling a large orange" - further develops the conflict between Hill and West before the dinner party scene at Dean

Halsey's. Here, Dr Hill proposes a toast that demonstrates he is obsessive in more ways than one: "To my colleague's beautiful, capable, loving daughter, the obsession of all who fall under her spell..." By this point most of the antagonisms that power the narrative have already been sketched in and the trend is towards escalating chaos. The account I have given cannot fully convey the strict narrative economy with which the various lines of narrative development are furthered here, several strands often being carried by a single scene. The overall effect is of contrivance rather than efficiency though, an exposure of the movie's own mechanics. This brings about the disengagement I referred to earlier and also a sense of momentum, of the inevitability of the mayhem that is to follow. As Kim Newman points out, the film's mise-en-scene is specifically geared towards the fullest exploitation of this ensuing chaos: "The film is designed mainly in black and white, with huge splashes of red for the set-piece zombie mutilation scenes". (**MFB**, 1986, p12.) It would, however, be a mistake to see the comedy as arising mainly from this grossly physical aspect; Noel Carroll's observation that, in the horror film, the characters' responses generally cue those of the audience still applies.

There is even some similarity with the social comedy. Naturally, West's experiments are concerned with bringing the dead back to life. His first success is with Cain's cat. Dean Halsey is far from enthusiastic when Cain tells him that "Herbert West has effected re-animation in dead animal tissue". "I know he's unstable but I've seen the results...and so has your daughter", Cain persists, to which

Halsey replies "**What** have you been doing with my daughter?". Megan later assures her father that "He loves me; we're getting married!" but Halsey's opinions are firmly set: "He's mad. I've seen this happen to medical students before - good ones!" The comedy in both cases arises from the blunt incommensurability of statement and response. By this time West and Cain have graduated to reviving human corpses, the first of which has run amok in the morgue. Halsey, angered at these unauthorised experiments, makes his way down to the morgue where he is messily battered to death by the crazed zombie. West, concluding that his corpses have not been fresh enough, makes a hurried adjustment of dosage levels and takes advantage of this sudden windfall. When the spattered Halsey is brought around he is out of control and by the time that Megan and the attendant arrive he is halfway through strangling Cain. One of the highlights of the scene is West's elaborately implausible explanation of what has happened.

This absurd comedy of situations extends into the next scene. Halsey has become what Yuzna describes as a "frothing, blood-blithering creature". Dr Hill wants to perform exploratory surgery and tells Megan that he wants "...to take a look at the right frontal lobe. I'll open the skull here..." Hill is clearly "stuck" in his role as a mad scientist and has problems switching to a more appropriate discourse for the "dead" man's daughter. When he does attempt this he lurches into an equally inappropriate lecherous solicitation. Megan is equally "stuck" in her role as a minor horror movie heroine, convinced that all will be alright if

she can only "talk" to her father. As if to illustrate the absurdity of it all, their discussion is cut short by Halsey's corpse banging its damaged head against the glass behind them. While this is undoubtedly funny, most of the comedy does stem from the way in which the characters mechanically act out the logic appropriate to their stereotypical roles, the dialogue often constructed as a series of near misses in which they fail to connect with each other, or as an exchange of generic cliches.

At most times the characters' responses are completely inadequate to the sheer gruesome carnage, with Herbert West as the most striking example. When Dr Hill tries to "steal" his discovery West decapitates him with a shovel and casually proceed's to reanimate both parts of his former colleague. His detachment is underlined by the way in which he idly taps a pencil against Hill's severed head while waiting for the reagent to take effect. He calmly asks the head how it is feeling when it comes around - it slowly enunciates the words "You bastard!" - and there is a touch of pantomime humour in the slow advance of the re-animated body in the background until it knocks the inattentive West unconscious. Most of the remainder of the narrative is concerned with the megalomaniac machinations of Hill's severed head, acting in collaboration with his body, and there is a rather unpleasant scene in which the helpless Megan is subjected to the leering advances of the head.

Re-Animator's strategy of ruthless compression and hyperbolic excess is tilted heavily in the latter direction by the **Evil Dead** films. Very little compression is needed as the basic scenario - teenage group isolated in remote cabin

and subjected to monstrous attack - is effortlessly set up. In this situation the attack is commonly the work of a "psycho" but in the **Evil Dead** films it is important that it be given a supernatural form. Conventionally, the appearance of a "supernatural" monster is accompanied by the unpredictable malevolence of various aspects of nature, and of ininimate objects, and **The Evil Dead** extends this in the direction of crazy comedy by taking it as a licence to suspend most of the laws of both physics and logic so that more or less anything goes. The only restraint takes the form of an awareness that comedy is largely dependent upon a play on generic expectations which involves presenting the monstrous attacks in a form which regularly refers back to generic precedents. In **Evil Dead II** even this constraint is relaxed by the fact that the expectations have largely been set up by the first film, of which it is more a re-make than a sequel. (This is increasingly common.)

It is for this reason that **Evil Dead II** provides the best material for an account of slapstick in the horror film - the excessiveness of its comic effects arises from the fact that the material that it subjects to comic disruption was already comic in its own right. Some devices familiar from **Re-Animator** are made use of; so, when the hero's girlfriend becomes possessed by a demon he is forced to decapitate her and, predictably, doubles his troubles in this way. At one point the severed head drops into his lap with a cry of "Hello lover!" and viciously bites him. The absurdity of the situation is undoubtedly enhanced by the fact that it is a human head that locks its teeth around his hand and cannot be

dislodged but the "gag" effectively operates as a variation upon a staple of crazy comedy and could equally well involve a character getting a hand stuck in a vase, a foot stuck in a bucket, etc. The hero's reactions are of precisely this order and involve an inattention to the fact that this is his girlfriend's head in favour of the simple problem of freeing his hand. This is accomplished by the exaggeratedly practical expedient of having him make his way to a workshed and avail himself of a vice. Freed of the amputated monstrosity he muses upon the best method for its destruction. "Chainsaw!" he decides, whereupon the headless body walks in wielding this very weapon.

Severed head gags have, in fact, become something of a staple in slapstick-horror although the motif does not originate here, the severed - but still vocal - head of Ash in **Alien** is used to considerably disturbing effect. On the other hand **A Nightmare on Elm Street III**, which appeared in the same year as **Evil Dead II**, uses the decapitation gag simply to make a joke at the expense of one of the characters. The heroine's mother is depicted as a selfish, uncaring woman, and this is reinforced by the way that she cannot stop moaning at her daughter even when her head has been removed: "God dammit. Kristen, you ruin everything. Every time I bring a man home you spoil it!"

Evil Dead II extends the scope of this amputation humour by constructing a running gag in which the hero - Ash - is involved in a lengthy confrontation with his own hand. In a parody of the first transformation scene from **An American Werewolf in London**, Ash looks on in horror as his hand takes on a life of its own, but, where the offending organ

metamorphosed into a wolf's paw in **American werewolf**, here it simply takes on a mischevous independence, breaking all the crockery in the house over his head. Having thus reduced him to unconsciousness, the hand begins to walk, on its fingers, across the floor, dragging Ash behind it. He comes around as it is edging towards a meat cleaver but manages to skewer it to the floor with a knife (using his "free" hand), crying out in triumph "Who's laughing now? Who's laughing now?". With that he takes up the chainsaw again and amputates the hand, thereby opening the way for a parody of **The Beast With Five Fingers** (1946).

As the hand writhes on the floor Ash covers it with a large cooking pan ("Here's your new home") which he weights down with a pile of books, including a copy of **A Farewell to Arms**, before bandaging his stump. But the hand escapes. He hunts it with a rifle as it scuttles across the floor; it lazily taps its fingers while he clumsily reloads, taunting him, and responds with an obscene gesture when he fails to kill it. Although the visual realisation of these gags stands in the tradition of the "splatter movie" the gags themselves come close to those found in childrens' cartoon serials such as **Road Runner** and **Tom and Jerry**. In these, characters are regularly falling vast distances, having all their teeth knocked out, or being squashed to a paper-thin two dimensionality, without suffering any great ill effects afterwards. Although not miraculously restored to health in subsequent scenes, the emotional responses of the characters in **Evil Dead II** are not far removed from that of various cartoon characters. The gags in these cartoons are often

constructed in a similar manner to those in the 1930's crazy comedy but without the constraints imposed by a physical dependence on a particular pro-filmic event; the development of special effects allows the slapstick horror-comedy a similar freedom.

At times the mise-en-scene of **Evil Dead II** also edges towards the plasticity and simplification found in cartoons. There is a scene, for instance, in which Ash attempts to escape from the cabin in his car but finds the way back to the outside world cut off by the destruction of the only bridge over a yawning chasm. The scene is captured in long-shot with the cliffs to either side in virtual silhouette, along with the bridge, which is virtually torn up like so many straws; the distant landscape beyond has a degree of flattened symmetry comparable with anything to be found in a cartoon. It is tempting to compare this scene to a number of analogous situations in which the Road Runner finds its way blocked after following yet another of the "diversions" laid down for it by Wile. E. Coyote. A similar observation would apply to a scene in **A Nightmare on Elm Street II** in which a school coach, taken over by the ubiquitous Freddy Kreuger, ends up perched on an impossible pinnacle of rock over a fiery abyss.

The plasticity of the mise-en-scene is commonly matched by a similar expansion of the repertoire of the horror film's conventional cinematography and in the **Evil Dead** films this is most evident in the accelerated, headlong tracking shots which signify the presence of the demon. It is also evident in the freedom and rapidity with which camera movement and editing exploit a range of positions from long-shot to

extreme close-up, while also making use of extreme ("expressionistic") angles, in a manner which recalls - but far exceeds - the cinematography of some spaghetti westerns. The overall effect is of a violent anti-realism which complements the heightened anti-naturalism of the performances. Despite the level of emotional disengagement which this promotes these films sometimes retain their effectiveness as exercises in the formal dynamics of what Tudor refers to as the "terrorising narrative" but the comic excesses of **Evil Dead II** render it less successful than its predecessor in this respect.

The element of "revisionism" which these films retain involves reducing the premisses of the horror genre to a level of efficient tautology similar to those underlying many children's cartoons. One does not ask why the Road Runner runs; running is its defining characteristic. Similarly, one does not ask why Tom and Jerry fight; the relationship between cats and mice is a given. In **Re-Animator** one accepts that scientists are "mad" on the grounds of generic precedent rather than through being offered an account of altruism turned to pathological obsession or any of the similar rationales favoured in earlier films. The sixty-year history of the horror movie would tend to indicate that the majority of scientists are that way inclined and Dean Halsey seems to be fully cognizant of this when he remarks that "I've seen this happen to medical students before - good ones!" Of course, the comment does equally allude to the popular perception of medical students and the humour is partly due to ambiguity of reference. In the **Evil Dead** films, demonic

possession is similarly reduced to a narrative function; the accidental playback of a cassette-tape automatically triggers the malevolence of a "Kandarian demon". **The Exorcist**'s portentious build-up of an apocalyptic demonic "invasion" is left far behind when the "invasion" of our world can be casually activated in much the same manner as one would switch a light on or off.

It is this solipsism which has rendered these films so impervious to ideological analysis. The disruptions of discourse which are characteristic of both situation and crazy comedy tend to take on a social aspect. The discourses that are disrupted in the horror-comedy - particularly its slapstick variations - are second order constructs, the conventions of a particular type of fiction already at one remove from the social world. It is for this reason that it is necessary to seek the ideological function of these films in their relation to the genre itself, in the way in which they tend to neutralise the tensions for which, historically, the conventions have been the expression. However, no fictional mode can float entirely free of any referent and solipsism is not a quality that can be indefinitely sustained. One does find that the concerns of the slapstick horror-comedy are inflected in one direction or another by a number of factors, among which social pressures are significant. I will now turn to the development of the **Elm Street** sequels as a series in order to examine this process. In these films the element of revisionism recedes as the series acquires its own internal dynamic and conventional structure.

12. HORROR AND COMEDY (3):A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET, PARTS 2, 3 AND 4.

1. **Freddy Kreuger and slapstick-horror.** I have already discussed **The Howling**, the **Evil Dead** films and **Re-Animator** as examples of comic horror. The original **A Nightmare on Elm Street**, on the other hand, I have treated as a development out of, and a partial departure from, the "slasher" movie. Clearly it involved some comic elements but this is an observation which, given the dominance of comic horror across the genre as a whole, could have been made of most of the horror films of the period. In the sequels, though, and particularly from part III (**Dream Warriors**) onwards, these comic elements came to the fore as a major aspect of the films' appeal to their teenage audience and as one of the most commented upon features in the (abundant) coverage in the popular press. In discussing the **Elm Street** sequels we remain essentially within the territory of slapstick horror but with the following refinements over, say, the **Evil Dead** films; firstly, the monster becomes essentially a comic character, a clown or master of ceremonies (literally so in the American T.V. spinoff, **Freddy's Nightmares**), and secondly, its manifestations assume the dual aspect of horrific assaults against the characters within the fiction which are also surrealist pranks, for the audience at least.

Such surreal touches have become a feature of much modern horror-comedy, one motivated as tongue-in-cheek references to other films without any serious narrarive justification. The **Elm Street** series, however, gradually moves towards defining a separate "dream" realm (another dimension, as science-fiction films would usually have it) where the laws governing

our world do not apply and bizarre transformations and distortions of material reality are the expression of the power of Freddy Kreuger, part 4 actually being called **The Dream Master**. In part III it is made clear that the dream-state is, indeed, another dimension into which characters may enter by surrendering to sleep and into which they can mentally "pull" each other, or enter collectively through hypnosis. This clears up some of the contradictions that plagued the original film and prompted Kim Newman to complain that "since a dream reality can only be subjective, all film dream sequences should be shot with a first-person camera". (**MFB**, Sept 85.) The necessity for establishing certain "groundrules" in part III may well be due - at least in part - to the way in which part II had compounded the confusions of the original film into a hopeless incoherence.

Part II is unable to decide whether Freddy is a monster who stalks through the central character's dreams or an unquiet spirit by which he is possessed. Worse still, the film presents incidents which defy either explanation, as in the scene in which the family's pet budgerigar darts frantically around the living room and finally "explodes" in a flurry of green feathers. As nobody appears to be either asleep or "possessed" at the time one can only sympathise with the father's comment that there has to be a rational explanation - "I mean, animals don't just explode into flames for no reason" - and his accusation that the son set the whole thing up with firecrackers. In this case the humour seems entirely unintentional.

2. **The unevenness of the sequels**. This example points up the

unevenness of the **Elm Street** films as a series. This is typical of many of the "series" that have dominated Hollywood in the late 1970s and 1980s and stems mainly from the fact that there is often no continuity of personnel in key areas of the production process (scripting, direction, cast, etc). In some cases, of course, a continuity must be maintained; the **Star Trek** movies, for example, would be unthinkable without the retention of most of the main characters and the actors that played them in the television series. However, various people have taken a turn as director and a number of critics, having viewed William Shatner's directorial efforts on **Star Trek V**, have lamented that the series was allowed to run on past four episodes. In the earlier example of the **Godfather** films both Coppola's direction and Pacino's powerful performance were major factors in the success of the original film and were carried over into the sequel; the two films have a strong stylistic unity despite very different narrative strategies and thematics. In the horror genre, despite exceptions (eg, the particularly strong continuity of Romero's Pittsburgh based team - actors apart - on the "dead" trilogy) there has been a particularly strong tendency to treat a popular title as a "property" which can be used to sell subsequent films regardless of their relationship to the original. **Halloween III: Season of the Witch** is among the best known examples, having virtually no connection with the original film except in that the action centres on halloween night.

At the opposite extreme, a number of sequels have stuck so close to the original blueprint as to be virtual re-makes. In

such cases the reason is usually the same; as Kim Newman says, in reviewing **Phantasm II**:

"Like **The Hills Have Eyes Part 2**, **Evil Dead II** and **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2**, **Phantasm II** follows its sire after quite a gap, and like those films has been made by the same creative team who worked on the original, mainly because their directors have had a succession of commercial setbacks and now need to get their careers back on course." (**MFB**, Jan 1989.)

In such cases of excessive "continuity" the original films were usually low-budget independents with the original production company retaining its rights with regard to any subsequent exploitation of the title. But, in those cases where "continuity" is weak, the right to produce sequels was often conceded in return for production capital and guaranteed distribution. In some instances script changes are also agreed in order to facilitate the production of sequels. The inadequacy of **Elm Street** 1's ending stems from such a re-write. Wes Craven explains his compromise as follows: "I felt I owed Bob Shaye that because he had seen the value of the film, he had raised the money. I was flat broke. I had to borrow money to pay my taxes. Bob said to me "Look, this is a partnership, give me this one thing. Give me a hook to hang at the end for a sequel". Craven goes on to say that although such alterations are sometimes a cause for regret later "...there might not have been any **Nightmare on Elm Street** at all if I hadn't done that. So **my** end of the compromise was that I would **not** have Freddy driving that car." (In "Nightmare on the High Street" by Kim Newman, **Empire**, No1, June/July 1989, p63.)

In many cases a studio may simply commission a new script that uses a successful title and hand the process of production over to a new producer/director/team for each

additional film. Sometimes the direction of a prestigious sequel may figure as a promotion for someone who has previously worked in a more lowly capacity; James Cameron, who had previously worked in special effects, ended up (via a number of other films) directing **Aliens** (1986) - considered by some to be more successful than the original. Sometimes a director may use the opportunity to direct the sequel to a successful model as a chance to demonstrate a capacity to handle more ambitious projects. Chuck Russell moved from directing **A Nightmare on Elm Street III: Dream Warriors** (1987) to the big budget remake of **The Blob** (1988). Renny Harlin, who had directed the competent (though unspectacular) **Prison** (1987) has now moved towards the Hollywood mainstream by taking on the direction of **A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master** (1988) and **Alien III** (forthcoming). Alternatively, a director who finds his/her career languishing may well mark time working on the sequel to a well known property. Thus Richard Franklin, best known for the playfully Hitchcockian thriller **Road Games** (1981) turns up as the director of the first, belated sequel to **Psycho** two years later. In a more extreme example, Gary Sherman, responsible for the seminal British cannibal movie **Death Line** in 1972 was reduced, by 1988, to direction of the disastrous **Poltergeist III**. At the most undemanding end of the low-budget horror field the direction may be taken up by anyone involved in the original production who is competent to repeat what they have seen done by others; the first two sequels to **Friday the 13th** were directed by the original film's executive producer before part 4 was handed to Joseph

Zito (**Rosemary's Killer**, 1981).

In the case of the **Nightmare on Elm Street** films the unevenness of the sequels must arise partly from the change of director for each additional film. The second film, **Freddy's Revenge** (1985), - directed by Jack Sholder(**Alone in the Dark**, 1982) - has the least connection with the original, with only Robert Englund carried over from the cast and no involvement on the part of Wes Craven. Craven reappears with a co-scripting credit in part III (**Dream Warriors**) and Heather Langencamp returns as Nancy Thompson, the heroine of the original movie. The main continuity of the series, though, consists in Robert Englund's development of the character of Freddy Kreuger through all the films. The (commercial) success of **Freddy's Revenge** demonstrated that the popularity of the original film had been no aberration. With "Freddy" himself as the only constant factor to which this could be attributed the obvious move was to place a still greater emphasis on Englund's monster in **Dream Warriors**.

Already, for **Freddy's Revenge**, Kreuger had been the focus of the advertising campaign and New Line had marketed him "as if he was a rock and roll band". For **Dream Warriors** the same applied while the character of Freddy was somewhat softened and the humourous element played up. The rationale behind this was spelled out by Bob Shaye: "**Nightmare** 2 caught on in a big way with the non-gross-out teen and young adult audience. We're not out to alienate the horror audience, but we do want to broaden the **potential** audience for these films". (Quotations from Newman, **Empire**, June/Jul 1989.) **Elm Street** III succeeded in doing this and Renny Harlin,

directing **Elm Streeet 4**, was aware that Freddy was perceived not only as a monster but also - because of his viciously humourous one-liners - as something of a hero to the youth audience. Accordingly, this element was further exploited. Both the development of Freddy's character, and the increased budgets from **Elm Street III** onwards, allowed for the extension of the "surrealistic" element and this may also have been a factor in broadening the films' potential appeal. As Englund puts it: "Everybody identifies with the bad dream and, depending on the age of the viewer, they can pick up on the symbolic level or the Freudian implications or just the simple cheap thrills of the scares and special effects". (Quoted by John Minson, **Guardian**, 27-4-1989.) This strategy sounds similar to that involved in the generation of a broad audience for the post-**Star Wars** fantasy/adventure film; in these the parodic referencing of earlier generic models allows for an "ironic" reading on the part of an adult viewer while preserving the innocent pleasures of the youth audience.

Given that the development of the series consists in the responses of a number of different scriptwriters and directors to the precedents laid down by previous examples/ commercial pressures/ changing perceptions of potential audiences, etc, I shall consider the films separately and consecutively.

3. A Nightmare on Elm Street II: Freddy's Revenge. Robin Wood, discussing some of the most problematic films of the 1970's, distinguishes between films that are incoherent because of their inability to achieve a consistent attitude

to the issues and conflicts they dramatise, and films which are incoherent through sheer ineptitude. **Elm Street II** falls within the second category and while this can, in part, be attributed to incompetence at the level of scripting/direction, it is clearly aggravated by the pressures of generic expectations. In particular, the impulse to couch every dramatic incident in the form of a reference to an earlier generic model means that the "monster" begins to acquire the mutually contradictory attributes of a number of its genre predecessors. This is most damaging in the cases where the legacies of the "possession" film and of **Alien** intersect.

The possession angle dominates the film as Jesse - the hero - periodically transforms into Freddy and commits outrages that he would not countenance in "real life". It is also evident in much of the dialogue, particularly in the perception of Jesse's girlfriend (Lisa) that she is engaged in a duel with an evil being who has taken him from her: "I'm not afraid of you. He's in there and I want him back. I'm gonna take him away from you and you can go straight back to hell you son of a bitch..! "Go to hell" is, of course, a figure of speech, but in this instance it almost cries out to be taken literally: Freddy, like Michael Myers, is "Evil itself"; one of his manifestations involves extreme heat and the spontaneous combustion of objects; he inhabits a subterranean boiler-room and is persistently associated with an imagery of flames and furnaces. The association is with the Devil himself although this does not preclude other connotations of evil; John Minson notes the further

association of "Freddy, keeper of the gas furnaces, as a symbol of evil incarnate, represented by the Nazis". (**Guardian**, 27-4-1989.)

At the same time the film attempts to maintain a continuity with the original by insisting that Freddy is a figment of Jesse's nightmares. Again, this is explicitly raised in the dialogue:

Lisa: "Fight him Jesse...You created him; you can destroy him...He is living off your fear. Jesse, fight him!"
Jesse: "I can't."
Lisa: "You can...Fight him! You are not afraid of him - he doesn't even exist!...

This exchange is accompanied by a rising spate of telekinetic happenings (as in **Carrie** and **Scanners**): doors and windows close and bolt themselves, a T.V. explodes and a fishtank shatters and empties. These visual manifestations of the monster do not expose the contradictions in its conception too acutely, but elsewhere - and in conformity with the contemporary horror film's commitment to unmotivated visual excess - Freddy is presented as physically erupting from Jesse's body. The image is a peculiar one, poised mid-way between the werewolf transformation of **The Beast Within** (1982) and the "chestbuster" scene from **Alien**. It is as though the codes of verisimilitude which operate in recent horror films will accept thr maximisation of inter-textual referencing as an alternative to narrative motivation.

The most extreme example of this comes right at the end of the film. Freddy is ostensibly defeated and Jesse is seen riding on the schol bus but, in the closing moments of the film Freddy makes a sudden reappearance, as his razor fingers erupt out of the chest of another character. This conclusion echoes the opening scene of the film, in which the school bus

had careered out of control and Freddy had been revealed as the driver. This incident turned out to have taken place in a dream. The recurrence of the situation encourages the expectation that it will now be re-enacted as "reality", a convention going back at least as far as **Dead of Night** (1946). This expectation is undercut by the staging of Freddy's last minute re-appearance so as to invoke the precedent of **Carrie**. (In **Carrie**, though, narrative coherence was maintained by the revelation of this final scene as a dream.) The eruption of a thrusting limb refers back to **Carrie** but the way it appears from within one of the characters is an instantly recognisable reference to **Alien**. Clearly, nothing in the narrative itself motivates this final scene. However, the convention of the monster's indestructibility has assumed such force that even when it has been emphatically destroyed the regular horror audience is not necessarily perturbed by its reappearance. According to the convention the monster's destruction can never be more than provisional and the coda is read, not as a flagrant contradiction, but as a clearly separable plot function, an intimation that there is more to come.

This final scene, then, adds to the film's incoherence not so much because it contradicts Freddy's earlier demise but because it exposes the contradictions in his conception, presenting him as a grossly physical being. **Elm Street II**'s problems run still deeper though; not only is the monster inherently contradictory, it also performs wildly contradictory functions. Freddy, the unquiet spirit of a lynched child killer, directs his murderous attacks against

the representatives of affluent suburban youth and Englund speaks more generally about his "loathing of youth, beauty, innocence and the future" ("...because Freddy's got no f___in' future!": **NME**, 6-5-1989). A number of scenes in **Elm Street II** are in keeping with this basic idea, particularly the one in which Jesse-as-Freddy menaces his own young sister in her bed. Jesse is involved in a schizophrenic self-confrontation, rasping "Wake up, little girl" in Freddy's voice but, when she murmurs "What time is it?", answering, in his own voice "It's late, go back to sleep" and actually tucking the bedclothes in with his lethal glove. However, such scenes are outnumbered by those in which Freddy seems to be acting out Jesse's unconscious urges and the targets of his violence are correspondingly different. This is most evident in the murder of two characters who appear to be the object of Jesse's repressed homosexual desire, Grady (the school bully) and the sadistic games teacher. The murder of the teacher follows a scene in which Jesse has allowed himself to be picked up by him in a gay bar. This scene then shifted to the school's gymnasium and the sado-masochistic potential of the pupil-teacher relationship, and of the various articles of sporting equipment, are fully exploited in the murder.

It is impossible to offer a reading of the film except in terms of its basic incoherence. There are, though, two specific continuities - traces which the film picks up from its predecessor and passes on to the succeeding films - which are worth briefly commenting on. The most important of these is the theme of parental dereliction, which, in **Elm Street III** hardens into a contempt for the adult world. In **Elm**

Street II this is only touched on in passing in the scene in which Jesse's father's materialistic attitudes are blamed for the various supernatural events which overtake the family. It transpires that he had known all along about the family home's history and its evil reputation but had seen this simply as an opportunity to acquire the property at a knock-down price. This is a variation upon the possession theme - in which the demonic presence is often associated with a particular place - and the direct precedent here may well be **Poltergeist**, in which a similar acquisitive cynicism played a major part. Secondly, **Elm Street II** picks up on the original film's use of a high school setting for a number of scenes. In the conflict between Jesse and the schoolteacher the film - perhaps inadvertently - comes close to inscribing the theme of generation conflict within a specific institutional context.

This is the step which is taken by **Dream Warriors**, providing that film with a clear structuring principle, although this time the institution is a hospital rather than a school. In **Dream Warriors** the adult/teenage conflict is polarised into an opposition between the institution and its inmates and the degree of sympathy extended to the adult characters is dependent upon their ability to break with the rigid, dogmatic perceptions of the adult world and embrace the teenagers' "dream" reality. This primary opposition is superimposed upon the older, and more conventional, dichotomy of science (adult, dogmatic, blinkered) and mysticism (child-like, imaginative, open to experience). A figure emerges who mediates between the adult and teenage worlds and this figure

- like Van Helsing, a scientific-mystical composite - provides the key to the narrative's resolution.

4. A Nightmare on Elm Street III: Dream Warriors. The above sketch of **Dream Warriors** displays its affinity with the Gothic tradition, suggesting that the drive to structure the eclectic assemblage of the previous film has found expression in this form. A link between the **Elm Street** films and the Gothic tradition has been argued before by Mike Bygrave in **The Guardian**, but in terms so general as to be misleading. He claims that

> "...there is a straight line from the 18th century Gothic novel to the 19th century "golden age" of horror (Bram Stoker, Edgar Allan Poe) to stage horror (like the French theatre of Grand Guignol) to Universal's famous Frankensteins and Draculas of the Thirties and Forties to today's monsters - Jason in **Friday the 13th**, Michael Myers in **Halloween**, Freddy Kreuger et al..." (**The Guardian**, 27-4 1989.)

This is very questionable and seems to stem from a desire to validate such films by reference to a (semi-) respectable tradition, a desire provoked by the massive success of **Elm Street 4**. The only evidence put forward has to do with the potency of dream images: "Think of dreams. Both Mary Shelley's **Frankenstein** and Wes Craven's original Freddy Kreuger were direct transcriptions of their creators' nightmares." While it is true that many Gothic works were inspired by dream experiences (including Walpole's **The Castle of Otranto** in 1764) Mary Shelley never claimed that **Frankenstein** was a direct transcription of anything and Wes Craven is quite calculating about the publicity value of such claims; the release of his **The Serpent and the Rainbow** was accompanied by claims that he had shaken hands with a zombie dug up from the grave. ("My Night With a Real-Life Zombie",

The People, 19-3-1989.) **Dream Warriors** is, in fact, the only one of the **Elm Street** sequels to elaborate on Gothic traditions sufficiently to be profitably analysed in relation to them. In this account I shall be concerned with the specific transformations that Gothic conventions undergo in this context.

A). Dual Worlds. Charlene Bunnel describes the dual worlds of the Gothic in the following way. One world is "external" ("cultural and institutional") and is "light" because of its commonplace familiarity. The other world is "internal" ("primitive and intuitive") and is "dark" (though not necessarily evil) because of its mysterious "otherness". In **Dream Warriors** the external world is institutional with a vengeance (the hospital) and is dominated by the uncomprehending regime which the figures of adult authority impose upon the teenage protagonists. In terms of mise-en-scene this world is represented by the functional cleanliness of the hospital environment and by the suburban affluence of Kristen's middle class home. In both environments the reality of the teenagers' dream experience is denied. In the hospital Dr Summers insists that none of the inmates will make any progress until they recognise their dreams for what they are: "...the by-products of guilt. Psychological scars stemming from moral conflicts and overt sexuality". In her home environment Kristen's mother sees her nightmares as an irritating wilfulness, remarking that her daughter "specialises in strangeness" and, asked whether Kristen has always had nightmares, complaining "No, they've gotten worse since I've taken away her credit cards".

The dark, internal world is a separate but overlapping realm. It is represented by the mysterious dolls' house which we see Kristen constructing in the credits sequence and which becomes the Gothic "bad place" in her nightmares, outwardly eerie and inwardly labyrinthine. Thus the suburban home contains, in microcosm, the nightmare world which it supresses. Similarly, the hospital has a deserted wing which was shut down in the 'forties after a scandal. This wing is described as "...purgatory, fashioned by the hands of men..." by the spectral nun who appears to Dr Gordon. This apparition is clearly a descendant of "the bleeding nun" from Lewis' **The Monk** (1796) and the deserted wing is the counterpart of the Gothic castle's locked chamber or secret passage. The nightmare world is the domain of Freddy - the boogeyman - an exaggerated representative of the persecuting power of the adult world in the form of a child killer. But it is also the space - a psychological "space" which assumes ambiguously physical form - in which his power is revealed as illusory (that is, entirely dependent upon the teenagers' willingness to believe in it). It is thus also, potentially, a world of childish wish fulfilment. It is no accident, therefore, that in the pivotal scene of the film, when the teenagers discover that Freddy can be defeated through their own powers of fantasy, the precedent of **Peter Pan** is explicitly invoked in the dialogue.

According to Bunnell, the Gothic's dual worlds structure is associated with four conventions. The first of these, the setting, has been sufficiently elaborated above and I shall now go on to discuss the uses made of the other three in

B). The Journey. The journey, as Bunnell remarks, may be physical or psychological or both. In **Dream Warriors** this convention is most evident in the Teenagers' sudden and involountary transitions between the two worlds. However, the major counterpart of its usage in the eighteenth century Gothic is reflected in Dr Gordon's journey of discovery, involving the progressive abandonment of his outworn "scientific" prejudices in favour of an open faculty of belief. There are two main factors in this "journey". Firstly; the classical use of a romance sub-plot in which Dr Gordon's involvement with Nancy Thompson entails a growing predisposition to adopt her viewpoint, her understanding of the teenager's predicament. Secondly; his exposure to the visitations of the ghostly nun. When he encounters her at the graveyard she questions him about his faith and he hesitates: "Science, I suppose." "Sad choice", she admonishes, and he agrees that "There, are times when it doesn't offer much comfort."

C). The Double. The double is a crucial device for the Gothic and is conventionally used to express the relationship between the two worlds. Its most prominent usage in **Dream Warriors** is in the explicit paralleling of the behaviour of one of the hospital orderlies with Freddy's persecution of the teenagers. One of the teenagers, Taryn, is emerging from her room when she is approached by a member of hospital staff who insinuatingly calls her "sweet stuff" and "baby". He tells her he has "pulled" night duty and "got the keys to heaven" (the dispensary). She rejects his offer/advances and

he turns scathing about her claims to have overcome her addiction, pointing out the needle marks on her arm: "What are those - beauty marks?" Freddy later exploits the same weakness in order to kill her in their final dream confrontation. As Taryn duels with Freddy he confronts her with his deadly glove, the fingers tipped with syringes rather than razors in this instance. In a "surreal" moment the needle scars on her arms are metamorphosed into suppurating "mouths" crying out for a fix and Freddy is able to kill her.

D). The Supernatural. Obviously there are many incidents in **Dream Warriors** which can be seen as supernatural. The apparition of the nun, though, most clearly conforms to the functions which are performed by supernatural agencies in the literary Gothic. As Bunnell says, the supernatural is often used "to foretell future events or to reveal past ones". The deserted wing of the hospital conceals its darkest secret - Freddy's origins. The nun, who is finally revealed as the ghost of Freddy's mother, is associated with the deserted wing and is able to unlock this mystery. She reveals Freddy's origins, recounting the days she spent accidentally locked in this wing, which was, at the time, a place where the worst of the "criminally insane" were locked up "like animals". She was raped hundreds of times until near death and describes Freddy - in the film's most famous line - as "the bastard son of a thousand maniacs". She also provides the knowledge necessary to Freddy's defeat, revealing that he cannot be laid to rest until his remains are discovered and buried on hallowed ground.

One strand of narrative development is concerned with Dr Gordon's movement towards understanding, climaxing in this revelation from the spirit of the nun. This allows him to play his part in finally "burying" Freddy. The other main line of development concerns the teenagers' growing mastery of their dream powers, allowing them to defeat Freddy on his own terrain in the world of dreams. The crucial figure in both lines of development is Nancy Thompson and I shall now describe the role of this character and the way in which she mediates between the film's two worlds, which can now be represented in the following set of oppositions:

External "daylight" world / Internal "dark" world
Suburbia, the hospital / The "dream" house, the deserted wing
Adulthood / Childhood
Science / The Supernatural

Nancy Thompson was the heroine of the first **Nightmare on Elm Street** film, the final survivor of its teenage cast. She reappears in **Dream Warriors** (set several years on) as a brilliant young doctor with a reputation for "ground breaking research on pattern nightmares". The entry of such a precocious talent into a hidebound scientific institution is conventionally the occasion for resentment on the part of the established staff. **Dream Warriors** briefly re-states this convention before her arrival at the hospital. Dr Gordon, having read the report on the new staff member, complains that he doesn't need outside help: "I know these kids. I don't want some hot-shot taking chances with them so's she can get published..." In her first appearance in the film the process of undermining this resistance is initiated. Kristen, the latest admission to the hospital, bears the physical

scars of her nightmare confrontation with Freddy, which are diagnosed as resulting fron a suicide attempt. She is rapidly in conflict with the staff, fending them off with a scalpel and - half-in, half-out of the dream state - murmuring the children's rhyme:

"...seven, eight, better stay up late,"

Towards the end of the rhyme she falters,

"...nine, ten,..never...never..."

Nancy Thompson makes her entrance at precisely this point, completing the verse with "...never sleep again." Within moments she has disarmed the child and won her confidence. This clear demonstration of ability is the first step towards winning Dr Gordon's confidence. Skeptical, after his discovery that Nancy herself is using the experimental dream-suppressant "hypnocyl" to avoid a recurrence of her own nightmares, he is gradually won over. He comes to realise that, in scientific terms, "nothing makes sense" and eventually Nancy suggests that he may be ready for "the truth". She can offer this, but "Only if you're willing to put aside everything you've learned and trust me..."

This idea of "trust" is the key to the film's presentation of its teenage milieu. The teenagers are united by an almost telepathic bond of solidarity against the adult world. The hospital attempts to overcome their psychological "problems" through group therapy sessions which are introduced with the ritualised statement "Group in session. Straight talk only in here." The irony is that any attempt at "straight talk"/truth is greeted with ridicule; for the adult world truth equals conformism. Nancy's breakthrough consists in convincing Dr Gordon to convene an unauthorised group session at which the

"truth" can finally be expressed, the bond of teenage solidarity affirmed, and a collective entry into the dreamworld accomplished (through hypnosis) for a final confrontation with Freddy.

Her first attempt at this ends in a fiasco and both she and Dr Gordon are "suspended from duty". She therefore re-enters the hospital under a pretext, and in defiance of its authority (i.e. in much the same situation as the teenagers themselves). In this situation she is able to assume the leadership of the surviving teenagers. With one of their number (Joey) already in the dreamworld, and another (kristen) under sedation in the "quiet room", and thus powerless to avoid entry to the dream state, time is of the essence. Nancy gives the teenagers a pep-talk in which the dialogue is reminiscent of an officer's briefing of his men before an escape attempt in a Prisoner Of War movie. "It's now or never. I'm not going to kid you - this is as dangerous as it gets. If you die in this dream it's for real. Nobody has to go in that doesn't want to." The pact is sealed. This enthusiastic affirmation of the "team spirit" carries the echoes of a number of children's fictions - **Peter Pan**, as I have said, but also a vague hint of Enid Blyton - while the narrative situation itself, the moment of entry to another "world", has a number of precedents as diverse as **Time Bandits** and **The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe**. The entry to the dream-world accomplished, the "team" finds itself separated in the labyrinth of the "bad house" and those that fail to link together again fall victim to Freddy while the remainder go on to the final showdown.

Suspense is generated through parallel editing as Dr Gordon's attempts to locate and inter Freddy's earthly remains are intercut. Again, the self-conscious referencing of earlier childrens' fiction is prominent as the doctor is forced to do battle with Freddy's skeleton - an idea borrowed from **Jason and the Argonauts** - before finally commiting it to the grave. The two narrative lines are forcefully linked as Dr Gordon consigns Freddy's remains to the earth and sprinkles them with holy water. Each splash of water figures, in the dream-world, as a searing beam of light lacerating Freddy's form while he is engaged in mortal conflict with Nancy. Freddy is consumed but Nancy is also fatally wounded.

It is worth observing some of the consequences of conceptualising the film's teenage milieu as a team/gang:

i). It allows for a considerable break with the conventions of the post **Halloween/Friday the 13th** "slasher" movie. In these films the monster usually figures as a punitive force which systematically eliminates the teenage characters with the exception of a single survivor (this survivor being associated with sexual restraint in a climate of permissive experimentation). In **Dream Warriors** it is not the individual characters who are finally tested against the depredations of the monster so much as the solidity of the group itself; the film's distance from **Friday the 13th** is evident in the survival of three of the teenagers in contrast to the conventional lone individual.

ii). The function of sexuality within the fiction is correspondingly different. In **Elm Street 1** the conventional

treatment of sex in terms of an alternation between voyeuristic fascination and punitive violence is abandoned: the fact that the two teenage couples are sleeping together is not lingered over, nor is there any note of censure. However, the situation itself - the couples, their sexual involvement - is undoubtedly inherited from the "slasher" movie and remains the context of the monsters appearance. **Elm Street** II's reversion to the "possession" theme places it rather outside the main trend of development and the monster's contradictory (sexual) functions are quite different to those presented in the other films. In **Elm Street III** the teenage milieu is retained but there are no sexual relationships between the various characters. The breakdown of the "team" into couples would be contrary to the overall development of the narrative.

The dialogue makes some use of sexual humour: wearied by the insistence that the teenagers' dreams are the expression of psycho-sexual problems Kincaid retorts "Oh great, my dick is killing me!" However, the teenagers' relationships with each other seem to be essentially pre-sexual. Sex does figure in the film though, as one of the temptations of the adult world - as in the scene between Taryn and the drug dealing hospital porter. This is one of the temptations through which Freddy may lure the characters to their death. Joey - one of the teenagers, develops a crush on an attractive nurse and Freddy appears to him in this form, reverting to the figure of the monster part way through a sexual encounter. **Elm Street 4** fails to sustsain most of the developments of part III but this particular idea is retained when Freddy appears to one of the characters in the form of a pin-up girl

featured in a poster on his bedroom wall, thus luring him to his death.

The main tendency, though, is to move away from the "slasher" film's emphasis on casual sex towards a re-instatement of the classical romantic sub-plot which provides narrative closure in the unity of the couple. In **Elm Street III** we can see this clearly in the growing intimations of romance between Nancy Thompson and Dr Gordon (rather than within the teenage milieu) but the resolution is blocked by Nancy's death. The convention is fully re-instated in **Elm Street 4**, this time involving two of the teenage characters. Significantly, the two characters are never shown engaging in sexual activity; the narrative has in fact, provided a series of obstacles to their union, which is postponed until after the death of the monster.

iii). The idea of the youthful "team" in opposition to the adult establishment eclipses all other social divisions. One of the claims that has been advanced about the **Elm Street** films is that they involve a strong element of class sentiment. Robert Englund himself understands the film's appeal partly in these terms:

> "In America...Elm Street is a symbol of everything White Anglo-Saxon Protestant Upper Middle Class...Elm Street stands for this bourgeois thing and Freddy's out there kicking ass on Elm Street. The punks love the fact that that's where he's wreaking havoc. We're polluting suburban America!" (Quoted by Newman, **Empire**, No 1, June July 1989, p63.)

In **Elm Street III** the "team" figures as a unit in which all social divisions are dissolved in a solidarity against a common enemy. In some ways this is similar to the situation in a World War II movie. Some effort is made to differentiate

the teenagers: Kincaid is black, Kristen comes from a clearly middle-class home, Taryn appears to come from a less affluent background, Will is disabled (from an earlier attack by Freddy?), etc. The strategy of the "youth" movie typically involves the condensation of all (potential or actual) tensions into the indeterminate and transitory anxieties associated with adolescence, and any diversity which is allowed to register is later recuperated into this sense of community. The dominant milieu - here and in **Elm Street 4** - remains suburban and middle class, but this seems largely a consequence of the way in which the American entertainment industry often conceives of the middle class as representative of America itself.

Finally: some brief remarks on **Elm Street III**'s ending. In **Dream Warriors** the burden of humourous allusion to generic precedent is largely dispensed with in favour of a). the motivation of "surreal" gags as a function of Freddy's character itself, and or the nature of the dream world, and b). the use of a wider range of precedents drawn from childrens' fiction. The multiple allusions which characterise the endings of the first two films are correspondingly absent although the conventional re-emergence of the monster is maintained through the more subtle device of a light which comes on in the window of the dolls' house at Dr Gordon's bedside, as he sleeps in the final image. The obstinate recurrence of this convention testifies to the contradiction between the Hollywood film's drive for closure, on the one hand, and the tendency towards the 1930's/1940's style serial form on the other. **Elm Street III** and **4** are fully fledged

"event movies" (in John Izod's terminology), presented as one-off, unique experiences, but are also mere links in a chain which will be extended as long as popularity/profitability persists. In **Elm Street 4** this typical ending is again present and is similarly understated. Freddy's reflection is glimpsed on the surface of a pool but is rapidly obliterated by the ripples from a coin which is thrown into the water as the heroine makes a wish. This reappearance of the monster is not read as threatening and does not detract from the closure achieved in the unity of the young couple. By its placement in the closing moments of the film's (roughly) ninety minute span, **after** the climactic scene, the image is read as a mere re-statement of the monster's inevitable reappearance rather than as an immediate threat to the characters. The threat (it is understood) is held over till the next episode. Inevitably, this threat, when it emerges in the opening of the sequel, does so in a narrative situation quite unrelated to that in which it was signified at the close of the preceeding narrative. The conventional ending is, indeed, a "pure" plot function.

5. **A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master. Dream Warriors** is the pivotal film of the series, the moment at which it achieves some kind of aesthetic equilibrium - a stable unity of theme and structure. A thematic concerned with generation conflict crystallises into a set of oppositions which are primarily expressed through Gothic devices. At the same time, the Gothic provides a coherent pattern of narrative development through which the characters negotiate these oppositions (intuition/logic, dream/reality,

etc) in a process of self realisation. The genre's customary bias towards supernaturalism (negated in Radcliffe's "explained supernatural" and the various developments out of it) is here intensified in the defensive solidarity of childhood perception. This emphasis on the "team" rather than the individual is unusual in Gothic fictions although Stoker's **Dracula** provides another significant example of it. In **Dracula** Van Helsing commands a team which is united in its commitment to destroying the Count before Mina Harker - who has been bitten - is irretrievably lost to the ranks of the un-dead: "This must not be! We have sworn together that it must not. Thus we are ministers of God's own wish...He have allowed us to redeem one soul already, and we go out as the knights of old of the Cross to redeem more..." (Dracula, p324.)

It is not this aspect of **Dream Warriors** that **The Dream Master** pursues but the partial re-instatement of the classical sub-plot of romance. This is marginal in **Dream Warriors** (i.e. it takes place outside the teenage milieu) but in **The Dream Master** it becomes central - indeed, the entire narrative hinges upon it. The heroine's ability to attract the partner she desires becomes dependent upon her ability to vanquish the monster. The monster's destruction of the secondary characters at regular intervals was ameliorated - less obviously arbitrary, mechanical - in **Dream Warriors**, but still present as an intractable dynamic inherited from the "slasher" movie. In **The Dream Master** it comes to the fore again as the heroine's growing stature and attractiveness is made dependent upon the acquisition of the positive traits of each of those characters who preceed her in combat with

Freddy - and die. So, **Elm Street 4** follows a strategy fundamentally different to that of its predecessor while retaining a striking continuity, particularly in its visual aspects and in a wealth of superficial detail.

A. Continuities. **Dream Warriors**' display of its own status as a major film is encapsulated in the device of a literary quotation as preface: "Sleep: those little slices of Death. How I loathe them." (Edgar Allan Poe) The appropriateness of the line itself defuses the obvious danger of pretentiousness which is realised in **The Dream Master**'s use of a biblical reference complete with assorted semantic archaisms. The gulf between this affected seriousness ("When sleep falleth upon men, fear came upon me...") and a diagetic world whose ambience is permeated with ephemeral high school incident and pop music is some measure of the gap between the nouveau-riche ostentation of the "event movie" and its humble generic lineage. In a similar way the film's opening scene re-uses several devices which have their precise counterpart in the opening scene of its predecessor. Again, this is not merely a matter of re-statement; **The Dream Master** avails itself of the opportunities for condensation which are inherent in the act of repetition, reducing its opening scene to a set of notations of key elements from the opening of **Dream Warriors**. At the same time, these notations apotheosise several aspects of their counterparts in **Dream Warriors** (lighting, camera movement,) as signifiers of virtuosity/production values.

Dream Warriors opens with a scene in which Kristen is constructing the dolls' house which is a miniature simulacrum of the "bad place" of her nightmares. However, there is no

establishing shot - precisely the reverse: we see the heroine's hands in extreme close-up in the course of a montage consisting mainly of fine details; the globules of milky-white flour and water paste, the slow, precise movements of a pair of scissors cutting paper, Kristen's fingertips as the paste down strips of paper in the house's construction. The sinister aspect of this activity is strongly suggested in a shot of a sluggish stream of sticky paste descending into a glass bowl around whose rim a fly slowly crawls. Various longer shots are introduced as Kristen tries to keep awake (with spoonfuls of dry coffee and loud music) before her mother rushes her to bed, indifferent to her fears. Kristen's entry to the nightmare world is signalled in the crosscutting of two slow zooms, one back onto the dolls' house, the other onto her face. As we come to rest on her face her hair is ruffled by a gust of wind and when the camera pulls back a matte shot is used to show the eerie old house as it now looms beyond her headboard. The lighting emphasises the whiteness of her nightdress as she is led towards the old house by the etherial figure of a young girl on a tricycle wearing an old fashioned, white party dress.

The opening of **The Dream Master** dispenses with the entry to the nightmare world by locating the action as already taking place within it. The use of extreme close-ups without an establishing shot is repeated but the old house is being drawn in chalk upon a pavement here, rather than modelled in three dimensions. Longer shots are introduced to show the young girl who is doing the drawing and the range of camera

positions is massively expanded when the camera pulls back from a close-up of the girl into a dizzying overhead long shot. The cinematography continues to draw attention to itself as the camera tilts, from this position, to show the approach of another female figure in a flowing, white dress. The two meet. The child is recognisable as the young girl from **Dream Warriors** and the other figure is Kristen, although as she is played by a different actress, this has to be brought up on the soundtrack ("Be calm, Kristen", she tells herself). Their conversation functions, essentially, as an incantation; all the visible signs of Freddy's presence are conjured up at the mention of his name. "Where's Freddy?" Kristen asks, and the child giggles, answering "He's not home" as she removes her hand from the drawing to reveal a smudgy sketch of Freddy looking out of one of the house's windows. No sooner has this image registered than the drawing is washed away by sudden, driving rain, accompanied by frantic music. Until this point the scene has taken place in daylight but the rest of it is set in darkness. Kristen's reconstruction of the "bad house" in **Dream Warriors** had something in common with the protagonist's compulsion to sculpt a mountain in his living room in **Close Encouters**. In this corresponding scene from **The Dream Master** the intensity of the lighting effects associated with the "bad house" is almost a Gothic equivalent of the display of the potential of lighting at the end of that film. Not only is all the paraphernalia of storm and lighting present but the house itself radiates brilliant shafts of light from its windows and half open door, drawing Kristen like a beacon.

This formal exaggeration is repeated throughout the film.

The most extreme example is the scene where Kincaid is attacked by the newly resurrected Freddy in the scrap car lot. The labyrinthine nature of this automobile graveyard is emphasised by rapid and erratic camera movement around its pathways and when Kincaid is finally "boxed in" the camera pulls back to a tremendous height which, combined with the use of wide-angle, reduces him to the dimensions of a mere speck while expanding the dimensions of the car-lot almost into infinity. The main function of the opening scene is a similar, though more controlled, display of mise-en-scene and cinematography; in narrative terms it merely re-activates expectations from the previous film in as economical a manner as possible. These expectations do not, in fact serve as the basis for an extension of the previous narrative; rather, they are construed as a set of obligations to be discharged before an entirely new narrative can be set in motion. It is for this reason that continuity is heavily reinforced - at the formal level - in this opening scene. The following scenes take up this continuity at the level of the situation itself by re-uniting the three surviving members of **Elm Street III**'s "team". However, these scenes simultaneously introduce a new set of characters and the three that are held over from the previous narrative are eliminated fairly early on in favour of these newcomers - and a new trend of development.

Dream Warriors had sought - through the character of Nancy Thompson - to maintain a degree of continuity with the original film, bypassing **Freddy's Revenge** as an anomaly. **The Dream Master**, similarly, opts for a selective continuity; it

is significant that it is the three teenage characters who are the vehicle for this, rather than Dr Gordon (with whom the previous film had closed). This reflects **Elm Street 4**'s exclusive concentration upon a teenage milieu, its acknowledgement of the other side of the coin being almost entirely restricted to a single character - an alcoholic father. It would be little exaggeration to say that the entire weight of representing the adult world falls upon a single prop - a bottle of whisky. **The Dream Master** locates its teenage world mainly within a high school setting - already an element in parts 1 and II - but it is the use of this setting in order to incorporate a plot of teenage romance into the narrative and a good deal of pop music onto the soundtrack that marks this film off from its predrecessors.

B). Discontinuities: Fairy Tales and Romance. The main points of divergence between **The Dream Master** and its predecessor will be readily apparent from a description of the difference between the primary sources/precedents for the two narratives. **Elm Street III**'s Gothic roots have already been elaborated; while there is some continuity (see above) **The Dream Master** stands much closer to a number of fairy tales, and in particular **Cinderella**, which is concerned with the overcoming of a sense of personal worthlessness/uglyness and equates the achievement of a blissful state of adult self-confidence with marriage.

The character of Alice in **The Dream Master** emerges as the protagonist after the demise of the characters left over from **Dream Warriors**. It is rapidly established that her existence

is sufficiently miserable as to motivate a regular escape into a world of day dreams. She also dreams vividly in her sleep and, when asked how she comes to know so much about dreams, she comments that "When you've got nothing else you come to be pretty much an expert". The parallel with the original fairy tale is sufficiently close that a part of Alice's unhappiness is attributed to her role as unappreciated household drudge. Taking the place of her absent mother she cooks for her brother and her (alcoholic) father; in an early scene the father's complaints about her cooking are followed by a fantasy sequence in which she dashes it over the table. The parallel can be taken still further if we include Alice's unrequited yearning for the high school's sex symbol, Dan Jordan, who is described, in the juvenile idiom of the dance movie, as "one major-league hunk". However, the inspiration here appears to be the dance movie itself and the evocation of milieu has a certain amount in common with **Grease**. The story is basically concerned with the way in which Alice's stature changes and she begins to be able to command Dan Jordan's attention.

The device through which this is achieved involves giving Alice's dreaminess a narrative function; she becomes Freddy's unwitting accomplice in his search for victims. This has a rather thin rationalisation as follows: Kristen was the last remaining child of the the people who originally killed Freddy and after her death Freddy "...can't get to the new kids unless there's someone to bring them to him". It begins to dawn on Alice that by bringing the other characters into her dreams she is inadvertently delivering them up to Freddy. After the killing of Sheila, the high school's "swot", she

realises that "I brought Sheila in. Oh God! I brought Sheila in like Kristen did with me...I gave Sheila to him and now she's dead..." Freddy gloats over her usefulness to him. In one of the film's bizarre images he orders a pizza which has, instead of olives, the tiny but animated heads of his victims, and, after eating one, he leers "Bring me more!" But Alice's function is double edged; she acquires all of the positive qualities of the characters who are thus sacrificed. This aspect is given no rationalisation at all but serves eventually to render her an appropriate match for Dan Jordan.

The teenage characters are differentiated insofar as this is necessary for a clear transfer of their characteristics over to Alice at the appropriate moment. These traits are therefore usually centered on a particular verbal mannerism, habitual physical gesture, prop, etc. Kristen, for instance, had smoked, and shortly after her death Alice catches herself in the middle of a cigaratte with the bemused remark "I don't smoke!" This cumulative transformation of Alice's personality climaxes in the scene in which she kits herself out for final combat with Freddy. This scene underlines her readiness for a fight to the finish and is strongly reminiscent of the "tooling up" scene in **The Evil Dead II**, in which the hero equips himself for combat with his demonic foes, commenting on his eventual readiness in a single word: "Groovy!". The corresponding scene here is very different, though, in terms of visual style and use of soundtrack.

Alice is presented donning various articlee of clothing associated with the other characters and this signals her acceptance of their special powers - intellect, in the case

of Sheila, Kick-boxing skills in the case of her brother, physical strength in the case of the body builder, Debbie, etc. She admires her preparedness in front of a mirror; her stance suggesting aggressive self confidence, reinforced by the self congratulatory comment :"Fuckin' A!". The implication of physical omnipotence is balanced against one of pop-star glamour. This aspect stems mainly from the formal organisation of the scene, its combination of rapid cutting and strident rock music in the manner of a pop video. This is a kind of summation of the extensive use of pop music throughout the film: in the **MFB**'s listing of the film's credits musicians account for a surprising proportion and include such well known names as Billy Idol, Blondie, The Fat Boys and Sinead O'Connor. A newly glamorous Alice emerges from this scene and all her skills are tested in the ensuing combat with Freddy. This however, is largely beside the point; perhaps aware of the incongruity of having a supernatural figure defeated through a display of martial arts, the film makers opt for having Freddy destroyed by Alice's chance recollection of a hitherto unmentioned rhyme. "Evil will see itself - and die!" she intones, eventually contriving his downfall by confronting him with his own reflection in a mirror.

C). Attitudes to death. In the post **Friday the 13th** "slasher" movie the deaths of the subsidiary characters are necessary to the selection of the heroine. It follows, from the above account of **The Dream Master**, that, in that film, the series of slayings becomes actively necessary to the **definition** of the heroine - the formation of her character. Where **Dream**

Warriors shows a tentative divergence from the dynamic of the "slasher" movie **The Dream Master** betrays an implicit recognition of its underlying logic. One thing that all these films have in common, though, is an obvious disengagement of the instances of violent death from their emotional repercussions. Though not horror-comedies (in the sense that the films discussed in the previous section were) the **Elm Street** films' comic moments often coincide with their presentation of death.

Psychologically plausible reactions to death are a rarity in the horror film; the characters must not become so incapacitated by grief and loss as to become incapable of performing those actions necessary to the satisfactory conclusion of the narrative. This aspect of the genre's conventions was challenged by the more uncompromising horror films of the late 1960's and 1970's. The clearest examples are from **Night of the living Dead**, in which Barbara becomes virtually catatonic after the death of her brother in an early scene, and from **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre**, in which the ending suggests that Sally's survival may have been bought at the expense of her sanity. The "slasher" movie has a tendency to circumvent this problem emtirely by having the characters picked off one by one, often remaining oblivious to each other's fate. In the **Elm Street** films - and the horror-comedy in general - the characters **are** aware of the horrific deaths of most of their friends but are only allowed the most perfunctory and conventional expression of regret. They are also given to mildly humorous statements of their predicament ("We're dropping off like flies here.").

Alongside this reduction in the emotional significance of

death **The Dream Master** - picking up on a tendency in **Dream Warriors** - tends to divest it of its tactile unpleasantness by making each killing the occasion for a gag. I have already remarked on the single trait a character bears and later contributes to the heroine's armoury; these doomed characters often possess a second trait which provides the occasion for the gag that marks their demise. Thus Sheila is supplied with the traits of intelligence (her oft-repeated motto is "mind over matter") and of being athsmatic (so that Freddy kills her by literally taking her breath away). Similarly, Debbie is given the trait of being a body builder, and of having an inordinate fear of insects (Freddy kills her by turning her into a giant cockroach and crushing her). The deaths of the subsidiary characters become comic "moves" made by Freddy in his match with the heroine; wickedness, however, is ultimately self defeating and it is Alice who is, in the end, the beneficiary of these moves. In this respect the two of them operate a division of labour; as Freddy says at one point: "You've got their powers, I've got their souls".

This presentation of death is wilfully childish.

> "...a child's idea of being "dead" has nothing in common with ours apart from the word. Children know nothing of the horrors of corruption, of freezing in the ice-cold grave, of the terrors of eternal nothingness - ideas which grown-up people find it so hard to tolerate, as is proved by all the myths of a future life. The fear of death has no meaning to a child; hence it is that he will play with the dreadful word and use it as a threat against a playmate: "If you do that again you'll die, like Franz!"..." (Freud, **PFL**, Vol 4, p354.)

The horror film, of course, has ample knowledge of the "horrors of corruption" and the "ice-cold grave"; these are its stock in trade, but are progressively repressed or deflated through humour in much modern horror. Even for the

youth audiences of the **Elm Street** films the pleasures offered could only be of a regressive nature. This is in keeping with the overall tendency of the series, in its attitude to adult life, sexuality, etc. With these concerns effectively neutralised **Elm Street 4** is free to allow its heroine's fantasies to come true, and to present her progress through the imagery of dynamism and glamour derived from popular music video.

13. BODY HORROR AND THE PERSISTENCE OF THE GOTHIC TRADITION: THE FLY

A. "Body Horror" as Critical Construct.

Since the mid-1980's a number of commentators on the horror film have tentatively identified a new trend which is usually referred to as "Body Horror", a designation that was absorbed into the standard critical vocabulary at about the time that the "Body Horror" edition of **Screen** was published in early 1986. In the same year - the occasion being the release of Cronenberg's **The Fly** - the television documentary **Long Live The New Flesh** popularised the concerns and imagery of such films to a wider audience through interviews with Cronenberg, as a leading practitioner in the field, clips from a number of his films, and critical commentary from (among others) Robin Wood, Stephen King and Martin Scorsese. The auterist slant of the programme meant that the vocabulary in which Cronenberg describes his own films - a "viral strain of horror film-making" or even "venereal horror" - was accepted as a description of them: what was to become known as the wider phenomenon of "Body Horror" was viewed, in this instance, as a manifestation of Cronenberg's personal "obsessions", giving rise to the kind of thematic and iconographic consistency familiar from earlier auteurist studies of popular cinema.

By the time that **The Media Show** offered its account of these films in February 1989 the "Body Horror" designation was used as the title of the item and the scope was expanded to include such films as **Alien** (1979), **The Thing** (1982), **Hellraiser** (1987), **Hellbound** (1988) and **The Blob** (1989).

However, it is noteworthy that even with the addition of such films more than half the accepted examples of "Body Horror" do fall within Cronenberg's auteurist canon: **Shivers** (1976), **Rabid** (1977), **The Brood** (1979), **Scanners** (1981), **Videodrome** (1982) - from which the phrase "Long Live the New Flesh" was culled - and **The Fly** (1986). The fact is that Cronenberg, operating well outside the mainstream of the American film industry until **The Dead Zone** in 1983, clearly dominates the field and that when one comes to examine the proposed definitions of "Body Horror" films like **Hellraiser**, and particularly **The Blob**, only relate very tangentially to the trend. In fact, **The Blob** relates to it far less convincingly than some other examples of this loose connection that have been cited, **An American Werewolf in London** and **The Beast Within** for example.

What seems to have happened is that the notion of "Body Horror" has conferred a certain intellectual respectability upon those examples of the horror film to which it is applied - a respectability desperately needed after the lengthy dominance of the "slasher" movie and the horror comedy - and that the concept of "Body Horror" has been adopted by some figures within the industry itself as a kind of legitimating discourse. By discussing a film in terms of "Body Horror" one implicitly claims that it is dealing with complex cultural issues in a highly mediated fashion and the appeal of doing this is clearly evident in Chuck Russell's discussion of his own remake of **The Blob**:

"The idea of something so organic that it can slip under a door,...that it can dissolve a human being in seconds: in a strange way it makes sense...It's not Darth Vader with a ray gun, it's not something complex and far fetched - in a way it's a living disease. I think we're living in an age of new

diseases. It's something that's happening in this decade; there is, apparently around every turn,...some terrifying new disease...that is changing the way we think about ourselves and the ability of our kindly "Marcus Welby" doctors to cure us. It's something that has disturbed this generation of people..."

The film itself, which retains several key scenes from the original, has more in common with the "nostalgia" cycle of re-makes than with the relentless modernisation of 1950's classics which propels **The Thing** and **The Fly** into the area of "Body Horror". What "modernisation" is attempted seems to involve some rather opportunistic borrowings from Romero's **The Crazies** (1973); not only does the "blob" become the result of a biological weapons experiment rather than an invasion from outer space, but the scene of its depredations is quarantined by a military-scientific task force dressed in the eerily institutional white protective clothing used so effectively in the Romero movie. While for Julian Petley **The Blob** becomes "rather an effective symbolic stand-in for at least two contemporary nightmares; nuclear weaponry and AIDS". I think it would be more accurate to say that the pertinence of these issues may be deduced from this narrative which, however, consistently fails to engage with them, concentrating instead on a series of expensive (comic) horror effects which, in Petley's own account, largely eclipse both story and characterisation. (**MFB**, June 1989.)

And yet it is only too obvious from the remark about "an age of new diseases" that Russell would like to annex his work to the increasingly highly regarded Cronenberg oeuvre. However, he misses the central point about Cronenberg's films which has entered into most of the available definitions of "Body Horror": they repeatedly dramatise a sense of physical

vulnerability which involves the breakdown of the human body **from within**. The American release title of Cronenberg's first major film, **They Came From Within**, and its pre-production working title, **Orgy of the Blood Parasites**, map out, in advance, the territory that the "Body Horror" film would later occupy. Admittedly, some accounts of "Body Horror" do seem to view these "biological horror" movies as only the most extreme manifestation of a sensibility which is evident across the entire genre and which involves a concern with "the lifelike creation of tissue in torment, the body in profuse disarray", along with a reduction of interest in character to the level of vicarious physical discomfort rather than emotional sympathy. Pete Boss describes this in relation to **Rabid**:

> "Freed from interest in character we watch Marilyn Chambers' skin graft...with the detached eye of a surgeon as strips of flesh are peeled away with some kind of electric slicer. It is her flesh that fascinates and appalls us rather than the character's plight - she is reduced to mere tissue..." (**Screen**, Jan/Feb 1986, p16.)

By this criterion **Hellraiser** is only distantly related to the trend while **The Blob** remains deeply traditional: one's involvement with the characters is almost exclusively bound up, in true monster movie fashion, with their vulnerability to a formlessly omnipresent **external** agent of pursuit. The same will be true of many horror films, including those that are linked in with "Body Horror" - the "monster-chases-girl" ending of **Alien** is an obvious example. However, that film's inclusion in the "Body Horror" category rests upon the infamous eruption of the monster out of John Hurt's stomach, rather than such traditional elements. A heightened sensitivity to physical vulnerability is not really specific

enough, in itself, to serve as a defining characteristic of "Body Horror" although it often crops up in discussions of the topic, especially from people working within the industry itself (as opposed to the critics who first constructed the category). Some of John Carpenter's remarks in **The Media Show** item on "Body Horror" are representative:

> "...essentially a horror movie will reflect back at you that which is most horrifying in the culture. Now, often you have to look beneath the surface to find it, but...I think it's pretty obvious: we're all so worried about being good looking and hip...and here comes somebody to rip us up..."

The assimilation of a "reflection" model of social determination is mildly surprising (if not particularly interesting) while the final "here comes somebody" tends to imply that the horror movie, including "Body Horror", involves only superficial variations on a single timeworn idea. The worry about being "good looking and hip" does tie in with one of the more important propositions made about "Body Horror" though; Pete Boss has argued that these representations of human frailty should be understood as a dark, inverted reflection of the cult of youth/ beauty/ physical fitness: "In cinematic terms one might postulate **Fame** (1980) and **Flashdance** (1983) against the films directed by David Cronenberg, the physical energy of the former against the drained performance of Christopher Walken in **The Dead Zone** - the hero as terminal case..." (**Screen**, Jan/Feb 1986, p17.)

This is a very important observation because it aims to pinpoint precisely what is modern and different about "Body Horror"; we are talking not simply about physical vulnerability but about - in Philip Brophy's phrase - "the fear of one's own body, of how one controls and relates to

it". The most obvious (and most widely discussed) instances of this relate to the breakdown of the body through disease or through parasitic infestations that may themselves be metaphorical of disease. Carpenter's explanation of **The Thing**, for instance, runs as follows: "The creature is basically a cancer if you want to get down to it...It's a disease of the human body in terms of replicating cells and something out of control, but the theme was...it's in your body and it **is** your body and it can do anything that it wants to..." In Cronenberg's early films the spreading of disease may be partly metaphorical of the release of sexual energy (**Rabid**, 1977) or at least linked to a sense of "uncleanness" associated with sex (**Shivers**, 1976), suggesting distaste for a physicality perceived as a loss of control, a surrender of the mind to the blind dictates of the body. In some of the later films the failure to control ones own physical being is manifested in the unreliability of the senses: in **Scanners** (1981) telepathic "invasions" of the mind have disturbingly physical results, with heads being literally blown apart, and in **Videodrome** (1982) the vulnerability of the senses to electronic manipulation has equally unpleasant physical repercussions.

The important common link remains the loss of control over ones own body. The significance of Pete Boss' observation is that the fear of this "loss of control" may equally well be present as a motivating factor in those films which hysterically assert the possibility of such control through what Andrew Britton calls "the stringent regime of the born again body" as in those that actually dramatise the process

of breakdown. The idealised physical perfection to which the one set of films invites us to aspire has its echo in the others' fantasies of physical decay: if the invitation to perfect ones own body is a supremely individualistic solution to the "general experience of powerlessness which is one of the most characteristic features of this phase of late capitalism" (Britton) then the rehearsal of total uncontrol involves a scaling down of the 1970's horror film's apocalyptic vision to a similarly "individual" level. The characteristic form of such an "intimate apocalypse" includes the representation of disease but it is entirely comprehensible that such uncontrol can also take the form of a dissolution of the "self"/the individual in the face of media manipulation or of a surrender to unrestrained sexual expression. In the two films which most clearly involve such a sexual dimension (**Shivers**, **Rabid**) the surrender to sexual instinct is linked to a representation of female desire as rapacious and predatory.

It is important to stress the centrality of this distrust of ones own body in relation to the films under discussion because a number of accounts talk more loosely about visually explicit depictions of physical annihilation. This is a phenomenon common to a number of trends quite distinct from the "Body Horror" films without necessarily being definitive of any of them.

B. Defining "Body Horror".

"...Body Horror is not **immoral**...it's as though it's amoral...it really is just about "showing". Now that isn't necessarily something that I would call a bad thing in that there is a material dimension...you know...to ones body and to the world...which is just "stuff" - like it is **just**

"stuff" - and these films seem to be setting out to deal with it as **just "stuff"**. It's almost a political point that, I think, peoples' sense of control has become so limited that it almost ends with the boundaries of the body. The obsession with health, health foods, jogging, looking after yourself, keeping fit, aerobics, all those kind of things...I'm not saying they're bad but they are **as if** the only thing you could really change in life is your own body..." (Judith Williamson, **The Media Show**, 19th February 1989.)

There is a problem with what Judith Williamson has to say about "Body Horror". While the second half of this passage ties in with the observations of Boss and Britton about the ideological significance of representations of the body, the remarks preceeding them - about the amoral, dispassionate nature of demystifications of the material "stuff" of life - sit uneasily alongside them. The body, in these films, figures as the focus of profound anxieties and can never be perceived by the viewer as just "stuff". The "dispassionate tendency" in its presentation is the result - as Pete Boss demonstrates - of the "technical redundancy" of special effects whose cold "realism" is designed to maximise the physicality of the viewers' discomfort. Cronenberg asks "Why don't we have an aesthetic for the inside of our bodies ?" and complains that "Most of our bodies are internal but we don't have one way of describing it's beauty..." (**NME**, 7th January 1989) but this is simply specious wordplay: his films do not include representations of the "inside" of the human body to the (limited) extent that **Hellbound** (1988) or even the "gore" films of Herschell Gordon Lewis do. What they do feature is numerous instances of painful physical degeneration.

Further: most of these films solicit our interest in characters who are - by the standards of the horror film - carefully delineated, and are nowhere near as detached or

dispassionate as some accounts would have us believe. Even the scene from **Rabid** described above is simply an instance in which a graphically horrific close-up is used very early in the narrative so as to induce a degree of nervous anticipation in the viewer for the rest of the film. One does not remain "freed from interest in character" for long and in fact an ambivalent - if not terribly complex - response to the Marilyn Chambers character is demanded. Her behaviour is certainly repulsive but one is convinced of her inability to understand or resist what is happening to her so that her insistence that "I'm still me" becomes genuinely affecting. The routine disposal of her body in a garbage truck - clearly modelled upon the ending of **Night of the Living Dead** - is efficient, anonymous, and really does treat her body as just "stuff" to be cleared away, but is obviously designed to evoke pity. **The Fly** demands a still stronger emotional engagement with the characters, albeit one lightened by the use of humour. Cronenberg's summary of what **The Fly** would look like if made as a straight drama brings out its powerfully simple emotional mechanics: "...two attractive people meet, fall in love, and one of them contracts a hideous disease. His lover watches helplessly until she helps him commit suicide". (**NME**, 7th January 1989, p17.) It is the fact that one is asked to empathise with Seth throughout the meticulously simulated process of physical disintegration, as well as Veronica's simultaneous love of/revulsion towards him that makes this film the best known example of "Body Horror".

The use of the hero-as-terminal-case can clearly serve as an effective structuring principle for the "Body Horror"

film, with its disease-conscious world view, but would have been unthinkable in many earlier films whose gruesomeness had entirely different motivations. Explicit scenes of violence and dismemberment can be traced back at least as far as **Blood Feast** (1963) - some would say as far back as the nineteenth century **Theatre du Grand Guignol** (McCarty, 1984) - and cannot be claimed as a specifically contemporary phenomenon. Originally an eccentrically marginal activity, as in Lewis' work, or "a sign of a director's inability to produce a decent horror-thriller", the "gore movie" only became a sub-genre in its own right in the wake of Vietnam. (Hardy (ed), 1985, pp291-292.)

Phil Hardy's horror "encyclopaedia" offers an explanation of this which is couched in terms of a tantalising but over-convenient psychological symbolism. Identifying the "gore movie" with a profound shift in the fantasies underpinning the genre, it is argued that the oedipal problems informing many of the films of the 1950's and 1960's ("with their images of surgery and lethal sexuality") are eclipsed by the more regressive Body-in-pieces fantasy which harks back to earliest infancy. Unfortunately, the identification of such a body-in-pieces fantasy with the Vietnam debacle which "had torn the country apart" reveals the verbal sleight of hand upon which the reading leans so heavily. The insistence that such fantasies had a social grounding in America but that their European counterparts were merely imitative removes from consideration a number of the really visceral movies and many of the American "gore" movies that we are left with are often mis-named: the two best known examples (**The Texas Chainsaw Massacre** and **The Hills Have Eyes**) actually have very

little gore. While **Chainsaw** certainly images the body-in-pieces in its mise-en-scene, the primary strategy of the film is the generation of a violent suspense within which the power of split-second editing itself assumes the force of a series of blows in an assault upon the viewer. Any body-in-pieces fantasy is strictly on the level of Carpenter's "and here comes somebody to rip us up" rather than that of actual depiction, but then it is hard to know how literally the proposition was meant to be taken... George Romero offers, more prosaically but more convincingly, the observation that "...the age of "splatter cinema" coincides with the age in the U.S.A. where people were refusing to go off to war. It is criticism from overstatement and obviously so. It carries things to an absurd degree that we know is absurd..." (Interview in **Starburst**, August 1982, pp37-38.)

"Gore movies", "splatter cinema"...The terms tend to become misleading and it is often unclear what they refer to; John McCarty's book **Splatter Movies** takes vagueness to the limits of absurdity by including movies as diverse and inappropriate as **The Entity** and **Monty Python and the Holy Grail** . On the one hand there is a commonsense assumption about the type of "exploitation movie" that is referred to by the "gore" or "splatter" label while on the other hand the whole tendency can be linked to the extension of cinematic realism which eventually makes such scenes a commonplace of the horror film as a whole, and indeed of much of the mainstream cinema. **Taxi Driver** and **Apocalypse Now** would serve as examples and are both (incidentally ?) connected in one way or another with the Vietnam experience. "Body Horror"

obviously builds upon this development with the essential difference that its presentation of insidious breakdown from within is a long way from the apocalyptic vision of what Romero calls "the age of splatter cinema". Robin Wood describes the films of this earlier period as commonly sharing a despairing - or nihilistically exhilarated - sense of human powerlessness and the inevitability of annihilation. The global enormity of this "annihilation" is as obvious in the satanic inversions of the second coming as it is in the disproportionate savagery attendant upon the characters' minor deviations "off the main highway" in the "rural Gothic".

I have already described "Body Horror" as being concerned with an "intimate apocalypse". Clive Barker chooses the same word to describe a tendency that he notices in recent horror films.

> "**Alien** is actually an intimate narrative, particularly in its weirdest manifestations. It's a locked system and...you know...John Hurt's "explosion" is a very intimate little scene...I mean it's a dinner scene, it's a **dinner party** scene. **The Thing** is a locked system. My own **Hellraiser** again, is a small-scale, intimate story; it's a move away from the large, almost apocalyptic stories of the 'fifties where horror movies tended to happen...you know...whole towns got trashed..."

Cronenberg's career demonstrates an uneven progression in this direction. **Shivers** (1976) and **Rabid** (1977), his earliest commercial films, are also his most apocalyptic, both of them moving "outwards" from "intimate" scenes of surgically induced sexual mutation/parasitism to chronicle the rising tide of a venereal plague. The films are closely related to the science-fiction "invasion movie" and the Romero-influenced endings suggest the probability of complete social collapse. **Scanners** (1981), **Videodrome** (1982) and **The Dead**

Zone (1983) strike a balance between close confinement and wider backdrop but that balance is tilted towards the former and there is greater emphasis on characterisation. **The Brood** (1979) is an anticipation of the "intimacy" of the later movies and while nothing could be more "intimate" than **The Fly** (1986), **Dead Ringers** (1988) - a step away from the horror genre - also restricts itself to three major characters and uses the lifeless modernity of its blue-grey interiors to positively claustrophobic effect. This movement to drastically curtail the scope of the films has, as its major effect, the separation of the characters from society, presenting them as individuals detached (to varying degrees) from any diagetic network of relationships - in this sense Barker's phrase about "locked systems" is very apposite.

If "Body Horror" is defined as a **tendency** to locate the "monstrous" as something which emanates from within the bodies of the character(s) and to dramatise its "eruption" on an "intimate" scale (a small group of characters confined to very limited locations) then it becomes apparent that there are very few "pure" examples of it. The word "tendency" is used for exactly this reason. Only in **The Thing**, **Alien** and **The Fly** does the entire narrative conform to this schema although there are many striking scenes and images - when blood and saliva become the object of horror in **The Hitcher**, for example - which confirm that the most fully realised examples are only the tip of some kind of iceberg. This suggests that the "body Horror" label may have something in common with the designation "German expressionism": in terms of absolute numbers the films involved are negligible, and

furthermore are largely the work of a single director, but their significance and influence are quite disproportionate to this. It is this aspect of "Body Horror" which explains the tendency towards eclectic list-making in the critical literature around it, as though its existence could be more firmly established by maximising the number of films concerned.

Naturally, there are many precedents and affinities to be found in other horror films of the late 1970's and 1980's. In particular, there are instances in which traditional themes such as "possession" or werewolf "transformation" are re-thought in uncomfortably physical terms, the affected characters left helpless before the monstrous unreliability of the flesh. Philip Brophy's example of **The Beast Within** (1982) is a good illustration: "The boy not only goes through a transformation, but his body is discarded, shed to make way for the "beast" within. The horror is conveyed through torture and agony of havoc wreaked on a body devoid of control - the fictional body is as helpless as its viewing subject". (**Screen**, Jan/Feb 1986, p10.) **An American Werewolf in London** is also a good example; again what is important here is not the technical mastery which allows the traditional dissolves to be dispensed with in favour of a convincing transformation in real time, but David Naughton's horrified disbelief as he watches his own hand "change" and his agonised writhing and moaning as his body is distorted into werewolf form, complete with sound effects of cracking bones, etc. The transformation is no longer the physical externalisation of inner drives (as it remains in **The Howling**) but a complete helplessness in the face of a

contagion that has affected the body, a contagion that is extremely painful.

C. Explaining "Body Horror".

"Body Horror" can be - and often is - viewed as "spectacle", the application of improved special-effects techniques in the service of a traditionally Gothic fascination with death and decay. However, many critics have been at pains to understand its emergence as either a displaced reaction to various much publicised topical anxieties or as evidence for the emergence of a new sensibility, a changing perception of the "self"/subject or of the relationship between the subject and the objective world. These latter ways of understanding "Body Horror" give rise to four main "explanations" of it which I shall describe, "explanations" that should probably be understood as complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

i). **"Body Horror" and Cancerphobia.** Carpenter's contention that **The Thing** is essentially concerned with the fear of cancer has already been quoted. In particular, it is clear that the film dramatises the paranoia which is evident in the metaphorical uses of the word ("cancerous growth", "spreading like"...) and the offended sense of an existential - almost metaphysical - injustice which attends a disease that indiscriminately strikes down the outwardly young and healthy, "eating away" from within a body which might appear the embodiment of physical beauty. Inevitably, such a disease develops an aura of uncleanness and becomes a "taboo", these attitudes extending, to some extent, to the perception of its

victims. **The Thing** develops paranoia to the point where none of the characters can be sure of each other because any one of them may be, beneath a deceptive surface, the agent of contagion. However, **The Thing** is not "dealing with" cancer so much as deploying it as an agent of terror; one critic describes Carpenter's movies as "blatant exercises in visceral film-making" while another summarises the problems of **The Thing** as being contained in the irony that the more visually explicit it gets the more thematically diffuse it becomes.

Cronenberg's films have a far more sustained concern with a variety of diseases, but cancer is clearly a major preoccupation and the films have been described as embodying a "tumour conscious world" haunted by "the spectre of cancer". In the astutely self-publicising auteurism of his interviews Cronenberg often claims to be attempting to find an aesthetic that will encompass disease, and even invites us to "see the movies from the point of view of the disease", but, as Robin Wood and Julian Petley have pointed out, the authorial statements are often radically at variance with what the films themselves actually do. One point on which he does convince, though, is in his insistence that his films have a deeply traditional concern with ageing and death rather than with any of the transient forms which our fear or them may take. However, given the myriad reflections of this particular terror in the history of the Gothic tradition, this would tend to confirm, rather than deny, that such a theme will only connect with an audience through the specific and localised form within which it is most acutely felt at

the time. So **The Fly** can be seen as an inescapably modern variation on a traditional theme and the critics who have identified it with the AIDS panic are probably correct:

> "AIDS is a progressively debilitating virus which affects the immune system in such a way - and I don't think this is very often talked about, but - if you look at people in the advanced stages of AIDS they look old, even young people, thirty year olds: their hair gets thin, they get a pallor, they **age**...and if you look at **The Fly**, and you look at the transformations Goldblum goes through, it's roughly equivalent to those stages of the deterioration of the body..." (Vito Russo, **The Media Show**, 19th February 1989.)

It would be a mistake to see **The Fly** as being "about" AIDS but quite reasonable to see it as informed by the fear of the disease. The distinction is an important one and it is partly on these grounds that I would reject many of Russo's criticisms of the film. However, one could also mount a defence of it on the grounds that, while its monstrous visualisations of disease are as much "an exercise in visceral film-making" as **The Thing** the film is also concerned with our responses to disease in a way that Carpenter's film is not. Russo argues that **The Fly**

> "...does not come to terms with the illness itself or the psychology of the illness but it leaves the lasting impression on a mass audience that there is something unclean going on here, and I think they incorporate that into their consciousness and they act upon it in ways they don't even understand...so that they will go to a film like Cronenberg's **The Fly** and they'll enjoy it, and in fact they will sympathise with this monster...because the poor man is suffering terribly by being...affected...as a creature. And yet they'll leave it in the theatre when they go home because this is not something they want to be part of their life..."

Of course, nobody really wants incurable disease to play a great part in their life and a film like **The Fly** does not "come to terms with" such diseases; the most that could be argued is that its deployment of a particular set of conventions has been affected by an awareness of them.

Nevertheless, the mass audience is unlikely to be able to "incorporate" chosen aspects of a film into its consciousness and "leave" others in the theatre. Typically, the "Other" in the horror film must be exaggeratedly monstrous before it can be "humanised" and this is where the complex tension of response arises; if the audience is going to be deeply affected by Brundle's growing hideousness then it will also have to come to terms with the bitterly flippant wit with which he both mocks his situation and demonstrates his continued humanity. But the film also deals with reactions to disease through presenting the attitudes of its other two main characters, Seth's girlfriend Veronica, and her ex-lover, Stathis.

Although it is Veronica who first insists that there is something terribly wrong with Seth while he is still convinced of the "inherently purging" effect of "teleportation" she is not prepared for the truth about his condition when he finally recognises it and even tries to make light of it. "I think it's showing itself as a bizarre form of cancer...a general cellular cancer", he tells her, "I'm...uh...just going to disintegrate. In a novel way, no doubt! Yeah!...and then I'll die...and then we'll be alright." Veronica cannot face up to this: "No, no, no...I don't accept that. There must be something we can do, you know, somebody we can go to...tests that can be done..." But Seth - who now refers to himself as "Brundlefly" - feels thet even the attempt to get help would merely invite patronising sympathy: "No! I won't be just another cancerous bore talking endlessly about his hair falling out and his lost lymph nodes..."

Stathis' first reaction, when Veronica tells him, is "Don't go back to him", expressed in such a way as to convey a horror of contagion but also clearly motivated by sexual jealousy. Perhaps sensing this, Veronica recoils from what Stathis offers as a comforting hand on the shoulder, evidently more appalled at Stathis' callousness than Brundlefly's physical repulsiveness. When she tries to convince Stathis that Seth needs help he asks her to show him the situation - to videotape "Brundlefly". Whatever the motivation, the audience is likely to share Seth's suspicion that it is simple journalistic curiosity. "I think we should chronicle the life and times of Brundlefly, don't you ?", he sardonically agrees, adding "At the very least it should make a fabulous children's book..." There follows what Kim Newman describes as "an amusingly disgusting T.V.-chef style demonstration of the fly-like manner in which the new creature eats a doughnut", with Goldblum brilliantly conveying the sense that Brundlefly's cruel parody of his own grossness is a necessary defence against a voyeuristic audience.

The film makes no bones about Veronica's natural revulsion to Brundlefly - in particular, she experiences an overpowering horror of contagion at the discovery that she is carrying Seth's child and is unwilling to even wait until the next day for an abortion - but one of its most powerful and affecting scenes, as Pam Cook says, is the one in which she overcomes this sufficiently to embrace him. The film's assertion of Veronica's humanity is ultimately invested in her ability to do this and in her tearful reluctance to

destroy Brundlefly even after he has become a hideous fusion of telepod and cancerous insect. Similarly, Seth's humanity is asserted through his awareness of the "monster" he has become, both in the scene in which he sends Veronica away for fear that he will hurt her, and in his final, desperate plea that she should kill him. Clearly, the audience is offered more here than a general sense of uncleanness. Despite his sheer physical distastefulness, Seth remains, throughout the film, a more appealing character than Stathis and his "monstrousness" is treated with more sympathy than in any horror film since **The Elephant Man** - which was not really "of" the horror genre in the sense that **The Fly** is although Kim Newman is right about its indebtedness to the incidentals of Hammer horror. Admittedly, **The Fly** does not make the "humanisation" of its disintegrating hero its major project and I offer this reading slightly "against the grain" of the film, so to speak. The imagery of disease in the film, in fact, needs to be set against its earlier scenes of tireless physical athleticism, with the entire narrative as a disturbingly physical recasting of the Faustian over-reacher theme.

ii. "Body Horror" and the Admission of Mortality.

Understanding "Body Horror" in terms of cancerphobia runs the risk of making it merely symptomatic; a direct "reflection" of contemporary fears. Pete Boss' suggestion that Cronenberg's tendency to dramatise the slow death of his heroes should be set against the contemporary dance movie's celebrations of dynamism - with **Dirty Dancing** as a recent success - is an invitation to reconsider them as

interventions in a particular discursive formation. On this level it is obviously not the "dance" movie that has produced the most definitive icons of muscular physicality: the (sometimes cloying) liberalism of the dance movie - its "issues" consciousness - has prevented it from celebrating the physical to the extent that some other genres do in their elevation of the hero to an implausible immunity from physical harm. Such invulnerability is a characteristic of various types of heroes in children's fiction and - as Robin Wood points out - a number of unprecedentedly popular cycles of Hollywood films in the 1980's have consisted of updated versions of children's films **conceived and marketed largely for adults.**

Andrew Britton goes so far as to detect a tacit agreement that "if you are American you cannot die", with **Raiders of the Lost Ark** as his primary example, backed up - more interestingly - with some observations on the significance of Spock's "resurrection" in **Star Trek III** and, in the **Star Wars** trilogy, the finality of death for the "bad father" when "the good father, having died, proceeds to come back again". Outside the genres of fantasy, he argues, the "recuperation of mortality" remains a powerful impulse, with **Terms of Endearment** serving as an example of the way in which death must be thoroughly "redeemed" in one way or another, usually when it "brings the family together again" or provides an occasion for dramatic emotional display. **Poltergeist** serves as an example of this banishment of mortality from its traditional domain in the horror film but it needs to be stressed that it is quite exceptional in this respect.

The "video nasties" controversy, which peaked in 1983,

left the lasting impression - upon outsiders, at least - that the portrayal of death had become the raison d'etre of the genre; that it was now an object of tasteless, desensitised voyeurism. Most of what was said on the subject was, quite simply, inaccurate and misinformed but it **is** worth considering the way in which death is presented in the films of the 1980's. At least from **Friday the 13th** onwards death, in the horror film, becomes very often (for the characters) a staggeringly meaningless and bloody interruption of some mundane activity, and is often associated with sex; the most memorable image in that film being of a young man attacked by "something under the bed" , a blade erupting out of his body amidst a welter of blood before his startled gaze. Where it does not follow this (shock) pattern death is usually the culminating move in a one-sided game of hide and seek ("I think I heard something...Is that you?"). In both cases it is too sudden and unlikely for the characters to fully grasp what has happened to them before it is all over and the predominant image of death must surely be the open-mouthed scream of terror, pain and, above all, bafflement. The freeze-frame that ends **Friday the 13th**'s prologue is typical. The overwhelmingly random nature of death (for the characters) contrasts with the way in which it becomes the subject of a conventionalised pattern of repetition-in-difference (for the audience).

The way in which this rapid codification of the formal strategies involved facilitated the development of the horror film in the direction of comedy has already been described. With scenes of violence and scenes of (often crude, sexist)

humour providing alternating climaxes within this play of repetition-with-variation, many films became incapable of sustaining any unity of tone or purpose - any real coherence. From another direction the **Evil Dead** films and the **Elm Street** films developed a similar dynamic although here horror and humour are fused rather than alternated. This is clearest in the **Elm Street** sequels where the death of a character became the occasion for a humourous one liner ("Welcome to prime time, bitch!") in a development paralleling that of the science-fiction/horror/combat movie amalgams starring Arnold Schwarzenegger (which have something in common with the James Bond movies). **Predator** (1987), **The Running Man** (1987) and **Total Recall** (1990) are the main examples; in **The Running Man** Schwarzenegger disembowels an opponent with a chainsaw, later commenting "He had to split", while in **Total Recall** he dispatches an assailant with a drill, muttering "Screw You". The overall tendency of these films involves the wholesale slaughter of a cast of minor characters with whom the audience are minimally involved while the protagonist acquires, to varying degrees, an immunity from physical harm. Schwarzenegger's career is interesting here as he plays the implaccable android assassin in **The Terminator** but becomes a positive figure from the mid-1980s onwards. The first half of **Predator** is clearly indebted to **Rambo** (1985) and the way in which Schwarzenegger's popularity eclipses that of Stallone may well have to do with the changing political climate: **The Running Man** and **Total Recall** adopt the "vague anti-corporatism" of **Alien** and **Aliens** in contrast to the "cold war" stance with which Stallone was associated.

The ethos of the **Elm Street** sequels is similar, with the

trashing of suburbia as the conventional subtext. **The Fly** can be seen as a direct inversion of this pattern, a kind of opposing extreme. Most films of the 1980's occupy an intermediate position although there are some interesting examples in which long standing genre conventions are altered or violated in an evident softening of their logic. The comic abandon with which **Return of the Living Dead** (1985) parodies the apocalypse of the Romero zombie movies, having its zombies finally "nuked", is noteworthy here and even **Near Dark** (1986), which is essentially serious in tone, opts for an ending in which the hero's love for a vampire redeems her rather than leading to the tragic necessity that she should die by his own hand. The diversity of the genre is such that it would be ill-advised to generalise too much but the "body horror" films do seem quite exceptional in being haunted by the spectre of painful death. This statement, of course, needs to be qualified by reiterating that "body horror" is a tendency within certain films which share qualities with some of the other movies I have mentioned. **The Thing**, for example, has been much criticised for its subordination of character to special effects while the logic of **Alien** does clearly drive towards the climactic duel evident elsewhere.

The Thing, though, does pursue its premiss to the bitter end: a plague (of one sort or another) ravaging a small, closed community - a "locked system", in Barker's phrase - will eventually claim all its members. Any meaningfully human existence is also inescapably social, and therefore entails a mutual susceptibility to contagion. With **The Thing**'s Antarctic setting the only alternative to a horrific bodily

invasion is the acceptance of a lingering death in the snow. At the film's conclusion there is no prospect that the two survivors will last long; their doubts about each others humanity are probably well founded but even should neither prove to be "the thing" it is only a matter of time before the elements extinguish life anyway. In this respect the "intimacy" of **Alien** and **The Thing** has an entirely different function to the restricted casts and isolated settings of the post **Friday the 13th** movie. In both **Alien** and **The Thing** suspense derives partly from a paranoid claustrophobia - there really is nowhere to run to - and all the characters are only too aware of their impending doom. (**Alien** reserves the "shuttle" as a final loophole.) In the post **Friday the 13th** movie the characters remain absurdly unaware of the threat to them - despite regular disappearances! So, the former films coerce us into an involvement in the characters' mounting sense of physical helplessness while the latter films allow us to perceive an omnipresent danger which they can never fully grasp, often generating interest around the sequence in which they will die and undercutting our sympathy to the point where death becomes primarily "spectacle".

In this sense the "Body Horror" films are prepared to countenance the reality of physical suffering and death in a way that most other horror films do not. But, with **Alien** sharing only a partial engagement with this logic it once again becomes difficult to say whether we are talking about a wider trend or primarily an auteurist canon. The fact that Cronenberg pursues the same morbidly romantic love affair with death in **Dead Ringers**, this time well outside the area of "Body Horror" (the slide towards the grave is the result

of obsessive psychological dependency), can only encourage the suspicion. There is a real possibility of reading the "Body Horror" films - in this respect - as the straggling survivors of the tougher horror of an altogether different era rather than a significant "new" trend.

iii. "Body Horror", Feminism and Postmodernism: Alien. Most of the available literature on "Body Horror" does, however, treat it as a significantly "new" trend, one index of a decisive change in the social and cultural climate. I have suggested that what is new - or rather, contemporary - about it is its retreat from the broad and crowded canvasses of the 1970's to the level of the "small group" portrait and its presentation of the corruption of the human body from within. It is upon this latter aspect that any serious readings of "Body Horror" as some kind of seismic indicator of a deep shift in our cultural perceptions would have to rest. In Judith Williamson's view it is a "political" point that the prevalence of a feeling of powerlessness in our society may be so extreme that the limits of control end with the boundaries of the body itself. This would tie in with the "intimacy" of the narratives and it avoids the grandiose implications of a qualitative socio-cultural change. Such readings have been proposed though, the starting point being a suggestive passage by Pete Boss in which he speculates upon the development of "Body Horror", invoking the writings of Michael Foucault in which "the basis of a new economy of power in society" is outlined. This "economy" is heavily dependent upon a "political technology of the body"

"...in which the reproduction of the social formation,

crucially relying upon the body as an instrument of production, is in part effected by the constitution of the body as an object as well as a subject, a knowable quantity for both physical and political regulation..." (**Screen**, Vol 17, No 1, p19.)

What does this mean? Propositions like this have become such a commonplace since the advent of "postmodernist" criticism that they no longer give one pause for reflection in the way that they perhaps should. The sense of epochal change is, in itself, trivialised through over use, a new "economy" of power-knowledge/of the image/of cultural capital, etc, being invoked to account for so many discrete phenomena that the concept comes to be validated through the extensiveness of the network of references to it, rather than being actively demonstrated. Even the word "economy" has lost its status as **metaphor** through its habitual and increasingly literal usage, and we are thus discouraged from questioning its appropriateness. Privileged access to knowledge-power/the means of representation becomes the structuring principle of the social formation and the economic - in its classicasl sense - becomes obscured behind a social vision which derives its legitimacy from figures like Foucault and Baudrillard, though Orwell and Kafka might be equally appropriate. Knowledge of what? Power over what? These questions are ultimately unanswerable within the terms of the discourse but a close inspection of the passage by Boss gives some indications.

Yes, one can agree that the body is indeed "an instrument of production" and the political implications of this are evident as early as Taylorism and Fordism. But this is conditioned less by its "constitution as an object" than by the rising costs of its reproduction. One recalls that during

the early years of industrial capitalism the labour force, as an "instrument of production", tended to be prematurely "worn out" in the very literal sense of premature ageing and low life-expectancies, but that the "reserve army" of labour was sufficiently cheap and plentiful that this did not amount to economic short sightedness. The workforce required under late capitalism, by contrast, is "reproduced" through a heavy investment in at least a decade's full time education and is "maintained" by a continuing expenditure on health care, social services, etc. The body itself - inseparably both object and subject - is the repository of a considerable capital expenditure and its capacity to function efficiently is ensured through a) a lengthy process of socialisation/training, and b) the formidable battery of modern medical technology and techniques. Presumably this is what Boss has in mind when when he quotes Foucault about the coercion of the body "at the level of the mechanism itself - movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity..." and the extension of the process of regulation into "modern medicine and medical rationalism". There seem to be two essential points to be made about this latter aspect: firstly, that the maintainance of the body becomes largely the preserve of "experts" and institutions, a control not exercised by the subject him/herself; and secondly, that modern medicine not only conquers many diseases but also brings about a greater awareness of disease in general, including those to which it has no answer. If the world of disease is a dark continent then the conquest of each small area makes visible the shadowy outline of an ever-more-vast hinterland beyond.

This is what seems to be meant by Boss' description of "the recasting of the unknown within the parameters of the human body". Indeed, such a notion is implicit in any discussion of "Body Horror" as cancerphobia. In this light the trappings of "a new economy of power" are at best superfluous, at worst mystificatory. However, it is these hints which have been taken up and enlarged upon so enthusiastically in Barbara Creed's feminist/postmodernist elaboration upon Boss' idea. She endorses the understanding of a dark, fearful **interior** and, crucially, couples this with a description of the "feminine" as a signifier for "...the unknown, the monstrous - everything that is not held in place by such concepts as Man, Truth, Meaning". "Man", "Truth", "Meaning": the unknown here is clearly conceptual rather than literal, although Creed does describe the modern science-fiction/horror film as having "a concentration on imagery associated with the female reproductive cycle" and "a fascination with the maternal body": for example, she interprets the shock sequence in **Alien** in which the monster emerges from John Hurt's chest as a symbolic representation of the male body as womb.

> "Why this preoccupation with the maternal body, processes of birth, monstrous offspring, the alien nature of woman, her maternal powers - and most recently the representation of the male body as "womb"? I would argue it is because the body, through the process of gynesis, has come to signify the spaces of the unknown, the terrifying, the monstrous. This would register Lyotard's concern about the body losing its capacity to function as "an essential site of resistance" - clearly a postmodern anxiety." (**Screen**, Vol 28, No 2, p58.)

There is a convergence of several currents of thought in Creed's work as a whole - exemplified in the passage quoted here - which is worth examining.

1. Postmodernism" is specifically invoked and much of the earlier part of the article is concerned with the latest theoretical writings of its practitioners. It is defined in terms of new modes of perception arising from the "de-centering" and "disintegration" of "the foundations of western society" (p50), such foundations conceptualised as essentially discursive/ philosophical. So: what is being specified as being in a state of crisis or collapse is the "Master Narrative", ie., any system of thought that strives towards a systematic or over-arching account of history or society, or which employs such categories as History/Progress/Man/Knowledge/Truth. It is argued that the subject itself is "decentred" and that all such categories are in a state of collapse or are becoming discredited.

2. Creed's connection between feminism and "postmodernism" centres on the idea of "gynesis". This idea is borrowed from the theorist Alice Jardine and can be understood as follows: the collapse of the "Master Narrative" creates a conceptual/cultural void ("filled with both promise and fear"), a "space" which has hitherto remained "unknown", "terrifying" and "monstrous". A new way of seeing and a new language are demanded if we are to be able to conceptualise this "Other" - that which is "without history", the "feminine". Gynesis - the insertion into discourse of "woman"/the "feminine" as problematic - signifies not woman as such, but those "blind areas" of the "Master Narrative"'s non-knowledge/loss of control. The process of gynesis is not necessarily about women or feminism and, according to Creed, the exploration of new "spaces" within discourse often

involves, for the male, a preoccupation with "becoming woman". This, for instance, is what is behind the assertion that **Alien** involves a representation of the male body as womb. I shall return to this idea and discuss it in more detail later.

3. Psychoanalysis: the basic method which Creed uses in the analysis of specific films is a decoding of both imagery and narrative development in Freudian/symbolic terms. Thus, for her, **Alien** presents various re-workings of the "primal scene", behind each of which lurks the image of the mother in her generative function as the originator of life. The first such scene involves the "re-birth" of the astronauts from their sleep-pods, safe within the "womb like" interior of the ship whose computer/mind is known as "Mother". Another representation of the primal scene is detected in the episode on board the unknown space ship filled with monstrous eggs; this is described as an exploration of the "gigantic, cavernous, malevolent womb of the mother" in which Kane's peeping into the egg figures as a transgression strong enough to trigger his own violation "in an act of phallic penetration" (by the alien). Further versions of the primal scene are perceived in the "birth" of the alien from Kane's chest and in expulsions (of Kane's coffin, of Ripley's escaping shuttle) from the maternal body, now turned malevolent, hostile...

I have already offered an alternative explanation for those features of the contemporary American cinema which have been identified with "postmodernism". In this I drew heavily

on the work of a number of critics: Steve Neale, Richard Dyer, Robin Wood, and above all, Andrew Britton. I shall not recapitulate the argument here except to note the discrepancy between an analysis of ideological function in a "cinema of conservative reassurance" and the naively idealist claims which Creed advances about a crisis of legitimacy and a crumbling of the "founding structures" of western thought at a time when the balance of social power favours a retrenchment of the status quo. It is nowhere demonstrated that the "Master Narratives" are discredited in popular thinking or that such concepts as "history" and "truth" are anything other than common currency in the mass media, the popular press, etc, and the discourses through which most people make sense of their lives. The concept of "progress" is another matter and can hardly be expected to have survived unscathed through the end of the post-war boom and the return of the system to crisis. This calls into question the status of Creed's readings: just whose perceptions are being mapped in readings which employ this kind of rhetoric?

If the status of the readings is questionable then their reliance upon a feminist "appropriation" of psychoanalytic methods becomes doubly so. From Laura Mulvey to Robin Wood, there are now a wide variety of psychoanalytic approaches to film, and the proceedure employed here seems to me to be dangerously limiting. Primarily, it is concerned with correspondences between specific images/narrative occurrences within the film and similar images/events which are of symbolic or symptomatic importance within a Freudian schema of infantile development. Once such a correspondence is identified a metaphorical identity is assumed between a

representation and the traumatic unconscious material that is said to motivate it. (1) So, it is argued that the horror film abounds in negative representations of the "archaic mother", of the "monstrous vagina" - "the origin of all life threatening to re-absorb what it once birthed". The following examples are given:

> "We see her as the gaping, cannibalistic bird's mouth in **The Giant Claw**; the terrifying spider of **The Incredible Shrinking Man**; the toothed vagina/womb of **Jaws** and the fleshy, pulsating womb of **The Thing** and **the Poltergeist**."

There is a difference between an explanation of the psychological basis of our capacity to fear certain objects/entities and an assumption that all representations of these are merely displaced signifiers for the original object of fear. So it is worth insisting that there is not actually a "toothed vagina/womb" in **Jaws** any more than there are "wombs" in **The Thing** or **Poltergeist** (Creed's failure to even specify the title of the latter film correctly is indicative of her disregard for the text). The point can be illustrated by the fact that, even working within a broadly Freudian framework, these monsters can **equally well** signify other things entirely. Andrew Britton's work provides an obvious point of comparison. His psychoanalytic "method" is more concerned with mechanisms of repression and displacement in the operation of the text itself than with "correspondences" at the level of imagery. It is in this sense that we should understand his argument that the shark, in **Jaws**, is established as a lawless irruption of "masculine energy" in an early scene, the sexual connotations being suppressed thereafter as the theme of "male territoriality" is pursued through the interactions of the three leading male

characters. This reading - in which the shark is a vehicle for/projection of a wide range of social fears - clearly identifies the monster with phallic power and is supported by a description of the film's emphasis "which is that the shark attacks a woman and children - that is, the home, the family, the basic unit of American democracy." (**Movie** 23, p27.)

Again, the "black hole" in **Poltergeist** which is described as a "womb" by Creed features as an "anus" in Britton's account. Horror, in that film, he argues, derives from an "excremental vision of the body's materiality": "...the suburban home is built over a graveyard and the mouth of hell is an anus..." (**Movie** 31/32, p39.) My point is not so much to argue for the superiority of this reading as to note that, once again, it can be supported by reference to the text itself, and in particular to the climactic scenes. In these the ground upon which the suburban home is built becomes a pit, a cauldron of bubbling filth from which the dead rise and into which the heroine is in danger of sinking. The problem is that Creed's readings are not usually supported by the text in this way and that even in the one case where they are - **Alien** - the film is subject to a massive "over-reading".

Much is made of the fact that, in **Alien**, the ship's computer is known as "Mother", and this is used as a licence to decode the ship's mise-en-scene as a representation of the interior of the maternal body. There **are** some grounds for this although some of Creed's description of this mise-en-scene ("womb-like interiors, fallopian tube corridors, small claustrophobic spaces") would apply to a wide variety of

science-fiction films. The problem with this understanding of the ship as "Mother", though, is that it misses one of the film's most obvious relationships to a tradition in popular culture: to name the computer "Mother" is to use a generic shorthand which is only "legible" in the light of Orwell's "Big Brother" and the inappropriately genial sounding "HAL" in 2001, among others. The cultural developments which make sense of this are connected to the post-war bureaucratisation of the language of repression and mass homicide although its origins lie further back: the bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were known as "Little Boy" and "Fat Man". In this light it is the irony of the name which is likely to inform audience perceptions. However, even if we were to attach a much greater significance to the name than this, we would not necessarily have to understand the ship in terms of the "maternal body". "Mother" - essentially a disembodied voice and some flashing lights - could be viewed as one "character" among many. This understanding is implicit in Robin Wood's account of Ripley as the film's myth of the "emancipated woman", rebelling against both "Mother"(the computer) and "Father" (Ash, the Robot).

That there are alternatives does not, of course, invalidate Creed's reading. All films are inevitably polysemic. However, it is this polysemy that would seem to be denied in readings where the connotative dimension of a film's imagery is presented as something precise, univocal and transparent. This, it seems to me, is what happens somewhere between Creed's observation of an anthropomorphic dimension to the ship's interiors and her consequent reading of the astronauts' awakening from space sleep as a scene of

"birth" or "re-birth":

"The seven astronauts emerge slowly from their sleep pods in what amounts to a re-birthing scene which is marked by a fresh, antiseptic atmosphere. In outer space, birth is a well controlled, clean, painless affair. There is no blood, trauma or terror. The scene could be interpreted as a primal fantasy in which the human subject is born fully developed - even copulation is redundant." (**Screen**, Vol 27, No 1., p55.)

and

"The first birth scene, where the astronauts emerge from their sleep pods, could be viewed as a representation of incestuous desire **par excellence:** the father is completely absent; here the mother is sole parent and sole life support." (p57.)

The detailed ramifications of this "birth" reading - extending to speculations about incestuous desire - sit uneasily alongside the paucity of the evidence which is provided of any imagery of "birth" in the scene itself. Creed herself describes the setting as "fresh, antiseptic..." and the main thing that does support her thesis is, curiously, not mentioned; the astronauts emerge looking helpless and near-naked, wrapped only in the white "nappies" that protect their modesty. This initial impression of helplessness seems to me to be important in view of the functioning of this soft voiced "Mother" within a completely controlled environment which is eventually revealed to be the scene of an experiment conducted upon the astronauts themselves - upon their very bodies. With the unmasking of Ash comes the revelation that "the company" is primarily interested in the alien, to which it is happy to sacrifice the crew while Ash studies its "effect" on them.

That the scene invites us to perceive the characters' childlike dependence upon Mother's apparently benign life support system does not necessarily impel us towards so

detailed a reading of the scene in terms of "birth". In fact, Creed seems uncertain whether it involves "birth" (whose connotations are overwhelmingly literal) or "re-birth" (whose connotations are metaphorical, not having to do with birth itself but with rejuvenation, purification, etc). I think that the case for the latter could be plausibly argued, with this early scene presenting the technological miracle of "re-awakening". (This idea in science-fiction seems to be at least partially derived from an older mythical tradition: sleeping beauty is awakened with a kiss, Arthurian Knights sleep in hollow hills, waiting to be re-called, etc.) It is this hint of a technological utopia which is undermined throughout the rest of the film as the life support system is revealed to be the instrument of a cynically murderous conspiracy at the astronauts' own expense.

It is not actually unprecedented that this conspiracy should focus upon the very bodies of the characters: as Kim Newman says of **Rosemary's Baby**, what it does basically is to offer a dramatisation of the "Big Scary Idea" that "the monster wants your body". (Newman, 1988, p39.) In this case the film is not concerned with the crude, physical horror of such a situation although there are some devices that hint at this. Phil Hardy's horror "encyclopaedia" for instance, describes the remarkable power of an unlikely piece of editing as follows: "In the scene in which Rosemary is overcome by the pain she has described as burning like wire...Polanski cuts to a shot of raindrops streaming down the windowpane: the effect is like a physical jolt as one feels the wires of pain torturing her." (Hardy(ed), 1985, p199.) **Alien**, for the first time, offers us such a physical

jolt achieved through the use of literal and bloody detail. This, of course, is what is significantly different about the film and not its use of the human body as the site of "invasion". However, even if Creed's reading of **Alien** - in which the film is specifically concerned with a horror of birth, of the female reproductive system, of the maternal body, etc - were correct, she is at pains to point out that these themes are not new to the science-fiction and horror genres:

> "Over the decades the sci-fi horror film has dealt with scientific alternatives to human conception (the **Frankenstein** films); other modes of sexual reproduction (**Invasion of the Body Snatchers**); parthenogenetic modes of conception (**The Thing**); cloning (**The Boys From Brazil**); the transformation of robots into human beings (D.A.R.Y.L.) and the impregnation of women by aliens (**I Married a Monster From Outer Space, Village of the Damned, Xtro, Inseminoid**)..." (**Screen**, Vol 28, No 2, p57.)

The first thing to note here is that the "listing" process itself presents a rapid-fire succession of examples rather than encouraging a serious consideration of the appropriateness of any one of them. To what extent, for instance, can **Invasion of the Body Snatchers** seriously be considered to be about "other modes of sexual reproduction"?

The second striking feature of this passage is the inclusion of the **Frankenstein** films as examples: if we accept this then surely we must, by extension, also accept their literary source - in fact, Ellen Moers' reading of Shelley's novel as "birth trauma" links the book far more convincingly to this theme than any reading proposed for the films themselves. The tradition begins to look as though it has roots stretching back to the early nineteenth century. Creed's claims for the (post-)modernity of the trend fall back upon a perception

that, in recent years, the sci-fi horror film has become "increasingly preoccupied with alternative forms of the conception-gestation-birth process" producing "a concentration on imagery connected with the female reproductive cycle". However, there is no serious attempt to demonstrate this except in the case of **Alien** and its sequel, the remainder of the account resting on the tacit assumption that we will accept the other examples mentioned as being somehow "like" those films.

The reading of **Aliens** is similar to that offered for its predecessor, except in that the multiplication of the number of monsters - and associated imagery of egg-laying, etc - gives fresh scope for speculation about a horror/fascination with the female body and female reproductive capacities. Without decisively rejecting this reading, two other factors should be noted: 1. that this multiplication of the monstrous threat is partly a matter of narrative strategy, following a similar logic to that found in most "paranoid horror", and 2. that the monstrous fertility of insect-like creatures is more a feature of the 'fifties than of the 'eighties and Peter Biskind has already proposed much the same reading of **Them!** (1954). What is so different about **Aliens** is largely a matter of the effectiveness of its special effects.

The most unconvincing reading of this type is the one proposed for **The Fly**. Creed is correct to see the initial narrative "disruption" which **The Fly** works through in terms of an awakening of sexual desire. However, the schema in which the meeting of male intellectualism and female carnality gives rise to Brundle's metamorphosis - a process of "becoming woman" - is completely unsupported. All that we

are offered is the statement that "the film draws parallels between the woman and the fly" (does it? where?) and a comparison of the film's finale with that of **The Incredible Shrinking Man**. (This demonstrates nothing; it was the hero himself who was attacked by the giant insect in that movie.) Given the strikingly Gothic problematic of **The Fly** it would seem to me that, in the tradition of **The Monk**, woman is connected with sexual desire as a dangerously uncpredictable force, threatening uncontrol, a jealous egotism, or - in the terms of **Jekyll and Hyde** - a relapse to the primitive/animal level. Brundle's impulsive first teleportation takes place under the influence of alcohol and in an outburst of sexual jealousy after his deduction that Stathis is Veronica's ex-lover. In the initial stages of his transformation he experiences a feeling of intense physicality and a tireless sexual athleticism. Trying to persuade Veronica to undergo teleportation herself he tells her that "It's like a drug - the power...I feel surging inside me! And I won't be able to wear you out...and we'll be the perfect couple, the dynamic duo. Come on - right now!" Again, as in **The Monk**, there comes a point at which this animal passion goes out of control, giving rise to a phase of irrepressible megalomania before the "fall", the process of decay, sets in.

By studying the way in which **The Fly** infuses its deeply traditional Gothic structures with insistently topical concerns a fourth explanation of the phenomenon of "Body Horror" begins to emerge; an explanation which sees, behind the films' apparent modernity, a much older concern with the Cartesian dualism of mind and body.

iv. "Body Horror", the Gothic and Cartesian Dualism: The Fly.

"I suppose it's a medieval preoccupation,...maybe this is my version of original sin. Basically, the idea that you are born having to face your own death, and death is very physical, not abstract - you know, the spectre of having a mind that feels as through it ought to be able to live for another 2,000 years having to watch the body that supports it, or is somehow inextricably linked with it, age and die. That's **true** horror for me." (Cronenberg, interviewed in **Starburst**, August 1981.)

There has been a problem in discussing the major concerns of Cronenberg's work because the director's self-publicity is often couched in an articulate and persuasive auteurist discourse which is too often taken at face value by critics. The identification of a small cluster of recurring themes is something which Cronenberg himself actively promotes, understanding that this confers a level of authorial seriousness, although a small number of dissenting critics have accepted this "thematic consistency" only to construe it as a damaging limitation. Julian Petley seems - if his italics are anything to go by - genuinely surprised that Cronenberg's oeuvre should revolve almost **entirely** around so traditional a science-fiction theme as the disastrous consequences of misplaced scientific ingenuity. Cronenberg himself draws attention to the recurrence of such themes, and to the repetition of a certain type of protagonist, but is most keen to argue that his work is concerned with such vast, intractable subjects as death, the relationship between mind and body, and the nature of disease/mutation.

Cronenberg's interest in the mind/body opposition is exemplified in the quotation above. It is presented as a personal concern although, as Colin McArthur has shown, such themes are anything but personal, and can be traced through a

wide range of filmic and literary works at least as far back as the mid-eighteenth century. ("In other words, these themes write the director, rather thasn the director inventing the themes": McArthur, in Drew (ed), 1984, p2.) Further, Cronenberg's films are rarely concerned with the mind/body dualism in any abstract or philosophical sense (with **Videodrome** as a partial exception). While there are moments when **The Fly** does exhibit a concern with ageing and death in the sense outlined by Cronenberg above, the mind/body dualism is usually overlaid with the subtly different opposition between those passions and urges that can conveniently be located in "the flesh" and the cooler rationality which is seen to be at odds with, and constrained by, its physical housing. The Gothic's movements between its dual worlds can sometimes be construed as an externalisation of this opposition and the double life of the werewolf is similarly motivated. It is thus unsurprising that **The Fly** should show a remarkable fidelity to the conventions of the Gothic novel, albeit in the knowing and semi-parodic manner so common in American films of the 1980's. In the rest of this section I shall examine the way in which the film re-works Gothic conventions in order to modernise or "renovate" a typically Gothic ambivalence about physicality.

The first two scenes of the film definitively establish Seth Brundle as a somewhat domesticated variant of the isolated and obsessive protagonist best represented in Mary Shelley's **Frankenstein**. After a single establishing shot Cronenberg cuts directly to a close-up of Brundle, already engaged in conversation with Veronica. The narrative function of the scene is to introduce the hero and the heroine (to the

audience and to each other) and they are henceforth considered in almost complete isolation from any social framework. The opening shot begins under the credits as a shifting pattern of unidentifiably blurred shapes and colours, gradually resolving itself into a high-angled long shot of a large gathering of people in a spacious, civic-looking building. No individuals are clearly distinguishable until the cut to Brundle but the dialogue soon establishes that this is a scientific convention. Brundle's reluctance to discuss his work "with half the scientific community of North America eavesdropping" motivates the obvious shift of scene to his laboratory.

Right from the opening lines of dialogue in the scientific convention the over-reacher theme is comically developed. Brundle's straightforward statement that he is working on "something that will change the world as we know it" is met by Veronica's sceptical "Change it a lot or just a bit?" Her initial sense of his nature ("Somehow I get the feeling that you don't get out much") is confirmed by their arrival at his laboratory. The entry to the Gothic "castle" is both invoked and parodied, the parody being given a cunning narrative motivation in the form of Brundle's nervously self deprecating humour. The laboratory looks like a run down tenement block from the outside but inside there are heavy, solid sliding doors and the characters' footsteps echo eerily. Veronica advances into the lab while Brundle secures the door; he then switches on the lighting so that the interior appears in a burst of dusty light against which she is silhouetted. When he walks to a piano to jokingly provide

an accompaniment for her entrance she becomes a little nervous and embarassed and he quips that she has seen too much to be allowed to leave the place alive, adding an ominous piano flourish.

The opposition between the physical and the intellectual is first introduced in the contrast of the functional and efficient looking "telepods" and Veronica's sensual removal of a stocking for an object upon which to test their powers. It is soon developed as a major theme, especially through the dialogue. Brundle's work is being blocked because, having developed it to the point where he can teleport inanimate objects, he finds that the repression of his physical side means that he doesn't understand "the flesh" and cannot teach his computer systems to deal with living things. The consequences of this degree of repression are shown to be disastrous; when he first attempts to teleport a living baboon the creature is literally turned inside out, emerging as a mass of pulsating tubes and organs.

Once awakened, Brundle's physical passions rapidly escalate out of all control, although at first they seem to hold the key to the development of his research. When he first sleeps with Veronica she tells him "I just want to eat you up...You know, that's why old ladies pinch baby's cheeks; it's the flesh...it just makes you crazy". Turned on to "the flesh" Brundle has a sudden insight into what he has failed to communicate to his computer ("Computers are dumb, they only know what you tell them...") and it is not long before he is able to successfully teleport a baboon. This successful teleportation carries echoes of Frankenstein's life-infusing spark: in its molecular decimation the monkey appears to be

consumed in a flash of lightning - only to reappear in the second telepod. When Brundle first teleports himself this imagery is repeated and he emerges as a "new" man; naked, physical, primitive; as he strides from the second telepod the baboon leaps to his arms and they strike a pose reminiscent of Tarzan and Cheetah.

Brundle is flawed, not because he possesses such a physical side, but because he allows it to overpower his scientific rationality and caution. He teleports impulsively in a fit of sexual jealousy, failing to notice the presence of the fly that has entered the machine. In **Jekyll and Hyde** Stevenson is quite explicit that Hyde's bestial amoralism came about through no fault in the transformative drug itself, but because Jekyll used it while under the sway of his darker passions. Had he used it in a more generous and benevolent state of mind it would have been these qualities which would have been enhanced in his alter ego. Behind the absurd element of chance represented by the insect itself **The Fly** would seem to follow a similar premiss. Again, although Brundle does not actually separate into two entities his mood oscillates alarmingly between insect brutality and human warmth and vulnerability. Outraged by Veronica's unwillingness to follow his example and undergo teleportation - her refusal to become subservient to his will - he tells her that she is "a fucking drag", that she is "too chicken shit", that she is "afraid" and that she "only knows society's straight line about the flesh" and cannot "penetrate beyond society's sick, grey fear of the flesh". Later he insists that she is jealous of him but, alone again,

laments "What's happening to me. Am I dying? Is this how it starts - am I dying...?"

This inner war between the two halves of Brundle's personality is developed as much through changes in his physical appearance - sometimes through wider aspects of the mise-en-scene - as it is through the dialogue. There is no smooth progression from man to fly or from health to debility; scenes in which he seems to be literally falling apart and walking with difficulty on crutches are later succeeded by a renewed burst of insect vigour during which he finds that he can walk on the ceiling. Similarly, scenes strongly suggestive of Brundle's forlorn humanity alternate with outbursts of blind insect ruthlessness.

The low point of Brundle's human vulnerability comes with the realisation of his exclusion from the human race, conveyed through a turnaround in the use of the Gothic's "castle" imagery so that it becomes suggestive of entrapment. Veronica and Stathis are leaving the laboratory, having seen the appalling state of his physical decay. There is an almost overhead long shot as they walk to their car, suggesting Brundle's lonely view from some distant perch, and this is followed by a correspondingly low-angled shot in which his wizened, decayed face peers from between what appears to be a row of battlements, a swirl of dry ice smoke rising into the black night. (This shot is similar to one used in **The Hunchback of Notre Dame**.) There is a quiet soundtrack accompanying these images giving us the conversation that Seth overhears; Veronica is pregnant with Brundle's child and discusses abortion with Stathis, though pointedly not with Seth.

This demonstration of Brundle's wounded humanity is later answered by scenes in which his insect callousness leads him to abduct Veronica and attempt to physically force her - and his unborn child - into a fusion with him at the molecular-genetic level, the amalgamation of all three into a single composite being. The narrative pursues the development of his insect side up to this point - the point at which his megalomania impels him to play God with the fate of those close to him - before having him literally transform into the insect state, his diseased human flesh sloughed off to make way for the monstrous fly that erupts from within. Denied his last human vestige - the power of language - the final assertion of his humanity can only take the form of suicide but, unlike Dr Jekyll, he lacks the power to accomplish this unaided. It is perhaps fanciful to detect an invocation of the holy trinity in Brundle's final bid for life but his statement, as he forces Veronica towards the telepod, is certainly the culmination of the imagery of re-birth, purification, etc, which has studded the dialogue: "We'll be the ultimate family, a family of three joined together in one body!..More human than I am alone..."

The Fly does not simply replicate the structure of any single text one could cite from the eighteenth or nineteenth century Gothic, it shifts between various modes; at some points Brundle is both Frankenstein and monster, at others he is both Jekyll and Hyde and, in his oscillations between desire/action and remorse/self pity he follows the same trajectory as Lewis' Ambrosio. What distinguishes him from the hero of Lewis' novel is not only that his aspiration and

fall are not directly motivated by uncontrollable sexual lust, but also that one is able to sympathise with him to the bitter end. In **The Monk** one's initial sympathy with Ambrosio is later disavowed and turned to horror. In **The Fly** Brundle's "fall" - the gradual and uneven process of decay - occupies a greater proportion of the narrative and is presented in such a way as to encourage sympathy with his plight. If indeed the visual imagery of **The Fly** represents a displaced reaction to the AIDS panic then the corresponding impact of such fears upon the narrative structure would consist in this. However, this (slight) shift of narrative emphasis from "aspiration" to "fall" does not alter the underlying thematic of the film which concerns itself with what is properly "human" and, in line with tradition, excludes "excessive" physicality from this designation. There is nothing modern - or post-modern - in this: it would be more accurate to say that a timeworn theme and narrative structure have been subtly altered through becoming encrusted with transient, topical imagery.

Notes.

1. This approach to the horror film is not unique to Barbara Creed. Barbara Klinger attempts a similar psychoanalytic deconstruction of **Psycho**, producing an esoteric account that suffers from all the same defects. ("**Psycho** and the institutionalisation of female sexuality" in **Wide Angle**, Vol 15, No 1.)

14. CONCLUSIONS.

I have suggested that many horror films, even contemporary ones, can most usefully analysed in relation to the Gothic tradition in literature. In some ways this proposition may seem theoretically dubious; after all, one of the primary impulses behind a lot of film theory has been to establish the specificity of film as a medium, against an earlier tendency to treat it as an adjunct to literary or theatrical traditions. If discussing film in relation to literature involves treating it as a "poor relation" then it is undoubtedly pernicious and - whatever its various failings - French "auteurism" of the 1950's was enormously positive in its scandalous blindness towards conventional qualitative distinctions between, say, Balzac and Dostoyevsky, on the one hand, and Hitchcock and Hawks on the other. A similar "blindness" ought to be evident in the foregoing discussion of the horror film, though - as evinced through textual analysis - this does not extend to the differing formal systems involved. The importance of literary tradition to the horror film is clear in the formative impact of two of the most enduring Gothic texts upon the genre as a whole but is also manifest - in a different way - in the fact that the three films discussed in chapter 7 all take popular novels as their starting point, reflecting the prominence of horror fiction, in general, in that period.

As well as detailing the distinctiveness of film as a medium, film theory has, particularly since the late 1960's, been much preoccupied with the question of ideology, that is, with the place of film within bourgeois culture and society more generally. One of the interesting features of the Gothic

tradition, in this respect, is its continuity within that culture; the rise of the Gothic novel coincides not only with the rise of a new reading public (as discussed earlier) but with the rise of industrial society itself. David Punter discusses it largely in these terms, arguing that the persistence of the Gothic attests to the persistence of certain features of social experience, even though, as Marx puts it "...uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones". In fact, for Punter, it is primarily **this** which underpins the persistence of the Gothic. At its most general level, the question that he poses is whether a society in which "regulation" is experienced as the external action of abstract and impersonal forces "...would have specific reasons for producing a literature dealing extensively in vulnerability and violence?" (Punter, 1980, p416.)

One of the ways in which he proposes to understand the "historical specificity" of the Gothic, then, is as "a literature of alienation". He does not actually offer us the original formulations of this concept, which Marx derived from his German philosophical background but so strikingly transformed. These, however, serve as a useful way into the issues involved:

> "The worker is related to the **product of his labour** as to an alien object...The worker places his life in the object; but now it no longer belongs to him but to the object...What the product of his labour is, he is not...The externalisation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an **external** existence, but that it exists **outside him**, independently of him and alien to him, and begins to confront him as an autonomous power; that the life that he has bestowed on the object confronts him as hostile and alien..." (**Early Writings**, p324.)

The key adjectives are "alien", "external", "autonomous" and "hostile". Here they figure in a description of individual experience but, for Marx, these features are simply multiplied when considered in terms of the ensemble of social relations, and this is enshrined in our own linguistic usage which speaks of the "economic climate" as though it were something as unfathomable and capricious as the weather. Marx intuitively couches a number of social relationships in the imagery of the Gothic, from the description of capital itself ("which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour") to the corresponding image of the proletariat as the "gravedigger" of capitalism, to the famous "spectre" haunting Europe. (Chris Baldick discusses the correspondences between Marx and Mary Shelley in detail.) Clearly, the science-fiction derivitives of the Gothic, which transform the products of human ingenuity and labour into a hostile power, will only make sense in such a culture. But what of the more traditional body of Gothic work?

Punter attempts to contextualise these by discussing the more specific forms of alienation that come to pervade capitalist societies. Industrialisation brings about an alienation from the natural world, but also, in an urban, industrial context, fosters a sense of alienation from one's own "human-ness" consequent upon the reduction of the individual to "a series of discontinuous roles". The breakdown of stable, "natural" power structures into unregulated competition brings about an alienation from other people; at the same time this rising notion of the free, self-motivated "individual" does not do away with the

elaboration of strict moral codes and taboos although it does facilitate the experience of these as external restraint and frustration. It is in this context that much of the Gothic's concern with sexuality must be understood; Punter's category of sexual alienation could be elaborated upon considerably.

The treatment of sexuality is usually bound up with the conventional instability discussed earlier; in the "female" Gothic it commonly figures as an external threat, contributing to the dialectic of violence and vulnerability; in the "male" versions it figures as a force or compulsion that overwhelms from within, but follows an essentially similar pattern. It should be noted that both forms share a predeliction for female victims and, while there undoubtedly are misogynistic variants, the "vulnerable woman" is also the central figure in the "female" Gothic, surely indicating a perception of womens' social position on the part of many women writers. This perception, historically, has defined the parameters of the Gothic's treatment of sexuality and is still prevalent today. The post-**Halloween** films are distinctive only in the ferocity of their violence and in their adaptation to a juvenile audience, their treatment of teenage sexuality.

Traditionally, Gothic fictions have treated sexuality with all the ambivalence accorded to a taboo, hedging it around with enough negative connotations that sexual behaviour often figures as a morbid compulsion fraught with the fear of contagion or as an exilirating, but ultimately destructive, force. This conception survives; it has been most remarked upon in David Cronenberg's films but is equally clear in **Hellraiser**. In that film, in fact, it is offset, rather

awkwardly, against a romantic sub-plot which is a legacy of Hollywood classicism. This optimistic traditionalism masks the underlying logic of a conception of sexuality as destructive and disordering. **Carrie** is unusual in both re-working and contesting this problematic, and despite the general drift of the genre, the possibility that that film exploits is a distinctively modern one. Elsewhere, I have dealt with a number of films that are far more positive about sexuality in general, and specifically about female sexuality (the Romero movies, **Alien**), and it is perhaps not coincidental that these films should tend towards the science-fiction genre.

Punter finds that "...it is impossible to make much sense out of Gothic fiction without continual recourse to the concept of paranoia" (p404) and, as I have used the concept myself, and in ways that seem quite compatible with his definition, I shall not elaborate the point further here. "Paranoia" would possibly be too loose a term to be of much analytic value if it were not that he links it to two further concepts; "the barbaric" and "the taboo". I shall take "barbaric" to refer to things (attitudes, etc) that are both distasteful and anachronistic, and in this context it is to be understood as referring to such things as defined - in our culture - as belonging to its past or existing beyond its margins. Punter specifically speaks of being brought up against "the boundaries of the civilised" and, particularly since Darwin, and later Freud, this has had a dimension which is "internal" to the individual. The "taboo", in its common usage, refers to that which lies "beyond the pale" and the

conceptual oppositions entailed in its definition attest to the ambivalence that it arouses; it is that which is both unspeakable and common knowledge, sacred and unclean, etc (the sexual connotations being obvious). It is in the conjunction of the three that Punter locates the "heart" of the Gothic, its "vital effort".

None of this is in contradiction with the more formalistic definition offered by Bunnell; a text like **Dracula** can easily be analysed within her terms but also answers to Punter's description well. What is involved is a double notion of barbarity (both a relic of the social past and a relapse into the bestial) and a central concern with sexual taboos, the two being conjoined in a reversible metaphor. Something similar could be demonstrated with regard to any of the Gothic fictions discussed earlier but would not necessarily have a bearing upon more recent works; after all, the kind of metaphysical transgression associated with **Frankenstein** is no longer a "taboo" in the same sense, and if this type of figure has survived it is because it has proved remarkably flexible and open to new layers of meaning. Nevertheless, modern Gothic fictions often reproduce, with remarkable fidelity, the conceptual basis which Punter outlines; in the case of **Psycho** this would hardly need to be spelled out as the central taboo is so jarringly exposed at the point where the hidden barbarities of past and present collide.

To argue this is not to claim that perceptions of what is "barbaric" and "taboo" are in any way uniform or uncontested within contemporary culture. Indeed, though I have taken issue with the way in which Britton conceptualises **Carrie** and **The Exorcist** the counterposition of the two retains its

value; the forces which stand against the barbaric floodtide in the one figure precisely as "barbaric" in the other. In earlier phases of development the barbaric was often more clearly conventionalised. In the eighteenth century it was almost invariably associated with the feudal past or with South European catholicism while in the "decadent Gothic" of the late nineteenth century it often figured as degeneration (most clearly in **The Time Machine** and **Jekyll and Hyde**). In all cases the importance of the recurring "dual worlds" is that the barbarities of the past inevitably hint at the hidden barbarities of the present, and even the future. Punter notes the tendency in dystopian science-fiction to recreate the barbarity of the past in a tyrannous future. There are nevertheless contemporary instances in which the barbaric is reproduced as a fear of degeneration and it is largely in these terms that I have objected to the **MOVIE** critics' understanding of the cannibal movies discussed in chapter 6.

Even within Tony Williams' account of **Chainsaw Massacre** there is a tension between the idea of the cannibal family as "the degenerate remnants of the hunters who have succumbed to the wilderness" and as the "despised remnants" of a proletariat that has contributed to the affluence of its victims. (**MOVIE**, No 25, p12-16.) This is not to say that such a film would necessarily be coherent and that both implications might not be present, but the backwardness is heavily stressed (as in the hitch-hiker's preference for the old "sledgehammer" method of killing). The word "degenerate" appears time and again in accounts of the film and, while

Williams connects the hitch-hiker with hippie youth culture on grounds of dress Kim Newman's observation that "he grins, twitches and has a deforming facial birthmark" is equally important. (Newman, 1984, p42.) Leatherface appears to be a mute, capable of only a wierd, animal squealing, and the mask of human skin gives an impression of deformity whether or not that is what it serves to conceal. (In Hooper's later **The Funhouse** another masked character is revealed to be more hideously deformed underneath.) Hooper himself sees the film as being about "crazy, retarded people going beyond the line between the animal and the human". (Hardy (ed) 1985, p298.) Similarly, in **The Hills Have Eyes** connotations of "degeneration" abound, in the film itself and in the Sawney Bean legend that was its inspiration. It is most evident in the tribal/clannish imagery but also at the level of performances and in the physical appearance of some of the characters. The inspiration is clear in one of Wes craven's comments on the casting: "Michael Berryman just came to me and told me, "I have twenty-six birth defects. I think you can use me."" (**MFB**, 1982, p179.) Degeneration figures in a different way in the Romero zombie-movies but is particularly well exploited through the paranoia associated with "infection".

These films are interesting but could not be claimed as typical. In fact, the way in which they reproduce the themes - and some of the structures - of the decadent Gothic is almost negated by the prevailing move to the suburbs in so many horror films of this era. by the 1980's, with the rise of the suburban vampire, even the most influential monster of the decadent Gothic is almost unrecognisably transformed by

this drift. Many of the films are much more difficult to place in relation to an identifiable Gothic tradition and some of them were discussed in relation to other types of fiction. This is not surprising - I am not proposing another master-key to the genre - and Punter's comments on his own work would apply equally here: "Some of the texts discussed locate themselves self-consciously within a recognisable Gothic tradition, others are linked in more shadowy and tenuous ways - through common imagery, common themes, common approaches to narrative problems". (p402.) There are films that show relatively little departure from traditional structures (and sometimes themes): **Elm Street 4** and **The Fly** served, in their very different ways, as examples. More common, though, is the elevation of one aspect of the Gothic to the virtual exclusion of the others. The intensity of the paranoia that envelops the suburbs in **Halloween** seems to be in proportion to its divorcement from the kind of conventional structures and social referents that were remarked on in earlier movies.

Several ways of understanding this development have been proposed. in Andrew Tudor's account **Halloween**'s "terrorising narrative" figures as a kind of logical extension of the horror film's move from "secure" to "paranoid" horror over the last three decades and it seems only reasonable to connect it with a generalised sense of instability encompassing social structures and a personal sense of meaning. The kind of social changes involved are also at work, in a different way, in the breakup of the studio system and the loosening of classical conventions more generally.

Seen in this light the escalation of paranoia can be seen to be, in part, the cinema's realisation of a paranoia that was sometimes evident in the literary Gothic much earlier. Richard Dyer observes that the cinema sometimes seems to belatedly repeat literary history and refers to "the gradual emphasis on the attractiveness of the vampire, explicit in literary sources but initially repressed in the cinematic versions until Christopher Lee." (Dyer, 1979, p112.) Similarly, it should be recalled that Mary Shelley's novel chronicles the deaths of most of Frankenstein's friends and family and concludes with the mutual destruction of both monster and creator. The conventions of the classical cinema entailed a dramatic change. However, this is merely a qualification and there is no doubt about the changing attitudes involved in the shift towards paranoid horror.

Andrew Britton has proposed a further way of considering this:

"The Gothic has always depended opon the fear that the repressed cannot be contained because it is in fact produced by the culture that seeks to contain it. The modern horror film (from **Halloween** and **Friday the 13th** onwards) abandons the identification of the monster with the return of the repressed while institutionalising the monster's indestructibility, thus innoculating the Gothic at a stroke. ...in those cases in which the monster cannot be killed, or has to be killed repeatedly, its resilience no longer means anything - except that we are continually in danger of persecution by a nameless, inelimitible and motivelessly malignant principle of evil. It has become customary to conceive of the monster in punitive terms, as the scourge of sexual licence, sexual transgression and female self-assertion. when this is the case...the genre's new solipsism serves to mystify the monster's function by focussing our attention on narrative proceedure in the abstract and by systemativally trivialising character, so as to pre-empt any complex emotional involvement in the action - indeed,to promote indifference to it." (**MOVIE** 31/32, p11.)

This is a more difficult proposition. I do **not** think that the Gothic is always intelligible in terms of the "return of

the repressed" argument although there are texts which will respond to this kind of analysis. However, even within the terms that I have proposed there is a sense of a culture overwhelmed by forces that it denies or contains and much of what Britton says is plausible. Even if **Halloween** does not promote audience "indifference" to its action the comments about the trivialisation of character and the diminution of emotional involvement tie in with the strategies of later horror-comedies. I think that this should be seen as an attempt to defuse the prevailing paranoia. Perhaps this is part of what is meant by the "innoculation" of the Gothic. Again, I would agree with the comments about the monster becoming "inexplicable" and ceasing to "mean anything"; this seems to be the point: the fears that these films dramatise are seen as irrational and beyond human control.

One way of looking at this would be in terms of the sense of social malaise that is evident in some of the major films of the late 1960's and 1970's giving way before the rhetoric of the Reagan years. This is the main emphasis in Britton's account, particularly in his discussions of nostalgia, "reassurance", the significance of the concepts of "good" and "evil" in the **Star Wars** films, etc. One of the main areas of contestation was the attempt to redefine social failings in terms of the defects of the individual and the language of psychopathy spilled over into the field of international relations in a manner that recalled the 1950's, without rising to the same pitch of intensity. Before the liberalisation of the late 'eighties Russia became the "Evil Empire" again, Iran fell under the spell of "mad mullahs" and "fanatics", Libya was ruled by "mad dog" Gadaffi and the

ongoing situation in the Middle East was presented as the work of small groups of individuals embodying an inexplicable principle of evil. The currency of these kinds of discourses must be part of the informing context although the shrillness and fragility of the rhetoric suggest that the paranoia relates, as in the 'fifties, largely to domestic insecurity. Here, the stridency with which the values of civic responsibility, family life, etc are promoted indicates some of the areas of underlying unease.

Though this by no means exhausts the informing context of films like these it is important to stress that the culturally specific nature of this kind of shift in a popular genre. The understanding of the Gothic that has been proposed is directly opposed to accounts that treat that genre as the expression of timeless and unchanging fears. Even otherwise useful writing on the genre often includes remarks about "its universal appeal to all kinds of audiences" (Bunnell, in Grant (ed), 1984, p98) or an "ever-present yearning for the fantastic, for the darkly mysterious, for the awed terror of the dark". (Clarens, 1967, p9.) No doubt all societies have had their fears but, as Punter says, this argument is intellectually undemanding and fails to explain why these types of fictions are more strongly represented in some periods than others or why the iconography of terror changes. While Punter gives an excellent account of some of these changes, there are occasions when his comments on the specific "taboos" of capitalism sound a little thin:

> "Capitalism has specific taboos, or specific forms of taboo, just as primitive societies vary in their taboo structure: what has been most important during the last two centuries emerges quite clearly from the Gothic - the family, the

concepts of creation and work, the claims of the individual, the power of the repressive apparatus of the church and state. These are the areas where to probe too deeply would be to risk tearing the social fabric, and these are the areas in which Gothic fiction locates itself ..." (Punter, 1980, p219.)

I do not want to disagree with any of this reasoning but it is odd that the traditional terrors in which many creators of Gothic fiction will tell you they deal - particularly the fear of death and dying - are absent. I do not know whether this is absence is because this fear is so obvious it does not require comment, or because there is a worry over reducing the Gothic, once again, to something immutable and ever present. If this is so then I would argue that the fear of death is, in itself, deeply historical. Guy Debord has described the fear of death as being inherently connected with the fears of living: the specific forms it takes under capitalism commonly centre on the fear of potential unfulfilled, possible lives unlived - and, ultimately, the fear of death is often a form of alienation, a fear of a life stripped of meaning. This kind of fear may well be present throughout the Gothic but it has commonly been associated with older conceptions of sin and damnation, or, in the horror-film, partially redeemed through a context of heroism, meaningful social relations, etc. What seems significant about some of the post **Psycho** developments is that death emerges as random, unexpected and messy.

In the **Friday the 13th** films this may be connected with the trivialisation of life. Robin Wood picks out a piece of dialogue from one of these films in which one of the characters ventures to comment that the only things worth living for are getting stoned and having sex, and this seems

to reflect the overall presentation of life in the series. The life presented is, of course, restricted to a teenage milieu. **Halloween** had presented something similar, albeit with Loomis as a residual - and ineffective - expert, but another of the ways in which the **Friday the 13th** films draw out the full logic of their model is to move the action to a teenage summer camp and almost completely exclude the adult world. The **Elm Street** sequels have a similar tendency - all of them depict the adult world in negative terms - but present death in a very different way by making each death the occasion for a comic "gag".

Parts III and 4 also develop ways of defusing the paranoia inherent in their basic scenario. In part III the development of the youthful team itself provides a meaningful force, even a sense of community, to counterpose against the monster, in place of the traditional expertise and authority which is presented as negligent or repressive. Here, this is merely an adjustment within a largely paranoid framework. Part 4 also reproduces a world whose very fabric is pervaded with menace but superimposes a fairy-tale line of development in which the heroines' passage through this "world" becomes a process of personal growth. The use of the fairy-tale here forms an interesting contrast with **Carrie**, both in terms of the uses made of the high school setting and in terms of sexual politics.

A Nightmare on Elm Street itself would tend to suggest that there are formal as well as ideological reasons for these developments. That film pushes paranoia to its limits by developing a monster that can appear almost anywhere, do almost anything, and generally renders resistance pretty

futile. However, the narrative strategies of the horror film depend upon producing suspense around questions of if and how the monster can be defeated/escaped. **Nightmare** fulfils these formal demands but the reverses the monster suffers tend to become arbitrary and this provides part of the basis for comedy. The various horror comedies re-work and parody the current conventions as though in recognition of this impasse, attesting quite forcibly to the impossibility of any return to more "secure" conventions. The impulse to recreate a sense of security is unmistakably present in the **Elm Street** sequels though.

Another strategy which is sometimes adopted in this respect is the "rehabilitation" of traditional figures of expertise. **Fright Night** (1985) will serve as an example. The film is a suburban vampire movie with a strong element of teenage comedy. Its hero, Charlie, is a monster-movie obsessed youth whose avid viewing of the "Fright Night" T.V show gives him the kind of conventional wisdom necessary to realise that a new neighbour is, in fact, a vampire. Faced with universal scorn he attempts to cast Peter Vincent, the T.V.show's "great vampire-killer" in the Van Helsing role only to find that Vincent himself doesn't believe in vampires and has just been made redundant because his ratings have slipped so low. Vincent is eventually paid to play his role, only becoming convinced that it is for real when he is already involved. He is prone to lapses of faith during which the traditional paraphernalia will not work and even the vampire reminds him "You have to have faith for that to work - remember!" Eventually he resorts to a kind of method-acting

technique to summon up the conviction necessary to defeat the monster.

This film is a revisionist horror-comedy in the sense I have outlined, but with a crucial difference. Where I have described the strategy of these films as involving a working through of conventions in order to demonstrate their shortcomings, **Fright Night** proceeds from an acknowledgement that the conventions are no longer credible and moves in the opposite direction. This is the tendency of many films directed towards the teenage market and effectively proposes a juvenile faculty of "belief" against the genre's prevailing paranoia. It is interesting to note that the films discussed in chapter 13 - the ones that have been singled out by critics as being haunted by the fear of death and disease - tend in the opposite direction, and that in the three clearest examples (**Alien**, **The Thing** and **The Fly**) we are restricted to an adult milieu, most of the characters figuring in a professional capacity. The type of characters represented does tend to give some indication of the intended audience but, if anything, this would lend weight to the suspicion that these films were "survivors" of an earlier tradition: it is the teenage-oriented films that come closer to the main trend of the mainstream cinema (described, by Britton, as a "cinema of reassurance"). Significantly, though retaining something of the paranoia of the earlier film, **Aliens** reduced the sense of conspiracy to a more stereotypical figure of evil and edged towards the "combat" orientation of the current Schwarzenegger movies, while **The Fly II** reverted to a tale of teenage romance. It is the contestation of the world of "paranoid" horror through comedy

and pastiche, and the influence of the narrative strategies of "teenage horror" upon the genre as a whole, that is increasingly characteristic of the horror movie through the 1980's.

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NB. i). When quoting from a book that has appeared in more than one edition, or an essay that has appeared in more than one anthology, I have not restricted myself to a particular version but have indicated, in the text, the edition to which my page reference applies. ii). All uncredited quotations in chapter 13 are transcribed from the edition of **The Media Show** broadcast on 19 - 2 - 1989.

Abbreviations:
BFI: British Flim Institute.
MFB: Monthly Film Bulletin.
NEL: New English Library.
NME: New Musical Express.
PFL: Pelican Freud Library.

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