

Realism, Fantasy, and the 'H' Certificate: Rethinking Horror Cinema in
Britain during the 1940s

by

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Abstract

Existing research on British cinema during the 1940s has often assumed an opposition between realism and fantasy or, as it is also known, 'realism and tinsel'. However, through an analysis of contemporary critical reception and censorship discourses, it becomes apparent how this division was nowhere near as clearly defined as is often argued. Discussions surrounding a supposed 'ban' on horror during 1942-45, and the subsequent debates regarding realism in the post-war climate, demonstrate how realism was often associated with fantasy and vice versa. While the 'quality' realist film of the 1940s demonstrates a concern with verisimilitude and the reproduction of the surface appearances of reality, when confronting the obscene or the taboo hidden below this surface realism was deemed to be far more closely associated with 'horrific' fantasy.

This thesis therefore looks beyond common perceptions of British cinema during this period through an analysis of contemporary discussions surrounding the relationship between 'realism and tinsel', with a particular emphasis upon the misapprehension that the horror 'ban' signified a falling interest in fantasy in favour of the 'quality' of realism. By also looking at a number of films not often included within such debates, this approach contributes to the discussion of a period largely unacknowledged in terms of horror in British cinema.

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Introduction

As Tom Johnson highlights in his analysis of the horror film in Britain during the 1930s, between 1932 and 1937 mounting pressure from local watchdogs and the clergy called for the British Board of Film Censors (later changed to Film Classification) to bring in a form of classification for the purpose of protecting children from the type of ‘horrific’ entertainment taking up an increasing amount of screen time in the UK.¹ The legal power granted to local authorities, entitling them to further censor any film approved by the Board, came to be the deciding factor in introducing the ‘H’ certificate as this new classification served two purposes. Not only would the ‘H’ keep children away from the exhibition of ‘horrific’ entertainment, thereby appeasing the key concern of local pressure groups, it also presented the possibility of greater uniformity across the country to the benefit of the producers, distributors, exhibitors, and the BBFC themselves who remained under the threat of calls for state censorship.

¹ Tom Johnson, *Censored Screams* (London: McFarland, 1997), p.6. An ‘advisory’ certificate was introduced in 1932, although it wasn’t until June 1937 that *The Thirteenth Chair* (George B. Seitz; 1937) received the first mandatory ‘H’ classification, restricting patrons to those over sixteen only. Up until this point only two other certificates had been in use, the ‘U’ for universal audiences and the ‘A’ for over-sixteens unless accompanied by an adult.

However, this victory for the moral guardians may have come too late as, by 1936, only two films of that year would receive the 'H' classification.

This is further complicated by the fact that while the majority of films represented by the 'H' were descendants of the original Universal horror cycle of the 1930s, the new certificate would also be handed to several productions outside of such supernatural realms, illustrating how the BBFC recognised the classification as a way of dealing with unpleasant subject matter as a whole.² Perceived as a ban on horror in the U.S.A., the inception of the 'H' certificate has also been accused of playing an instrumental role in the demise of the first horror cycle although, as Johnson has illustrated, by the mid-Thirties profits for horror were already in decline.³

The reappearance of the genre came in the form of a double bill featuring Universal's original *Dracula* (Tod Browning; 1931) and *Frankenstein* (James Whale; 1931), playing to packed auditoriums throughout 1938 in both London and New York. In spite of attempts made by the Production Code Administration (PCA) to dissuade Hollywood from cashing in on this success⁴, the rejuvenation of the genre would

² Including *Boy Slaves* (P. J. Wolfson; 1939) and *Hell's Kitchen* (Lewis Seiler & E. A. DuPont; 1939) both being attempts to highlight the conditions of correctional facilities for young offenders in the United States. Abel Gance's remake of his own anti-war film *J'Accuse* (1938) and *A Child is Born* (Lloyd Bacon; 1939), telling the story of a number of women waiting to give birth in a maternity ward, were both handed the 'H' classification also.

³ Johnson, *Censored Screams*, p.137. Compared with *Frankenstein's* profit of \$1 million on a \$262,000 investment, *Mark of the Vampire* made \$54,000 on a \$305,177 investment, while *Mad Love* lost \$39,000 and *The Devil Doll* made \$68,000.

⁴ Rick Worland, *The Horror Film: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007), p.126-7. Joseph Breen, head of the Production Code Administration in the U.S.A., made attempts to dissuade both Universal and Columbia from planning any future ventures into the genre by warning that the position on horror in the UK remained unchanged. In a letter to Joseph Brooke Wilkinson, then Secretary of the BBFC, Breen expressed his concern that horror may nonetheless return to the screens: Joseph Breen to Brooke Wilkinson, 7 November, 1938, Son of Frankenstein Film, MPPA/Production Code Administration Files, Margaret Herrick Library, Beverly Hills, CA. "It just so happens that by one of these curious freakish turns in the field of exhibition, the Universal company have been marketing certain re-issues of these "horror" pictures. Audiences, hereabouts, have turned to laughing at them – "spoofing" them – and refusing to take them seriously. These re-issues have been quite successful and two of our companies have in mind making some "horror" pictures, with the thought that this

provide Universal with enough incentive to bring back one of its most successful characters. *Son of Frankenstein* (Rowland V. Lee; 1939) received an ‘H’ certificate in the UK⁵ although, as the decade came to a close and war in Europe became a reality, the issues surrounding horror and censorship would be further complicated as definitions of the ‘horrific’ became more than merely those films represented by the new certificate.

The ‘H’ came under fire once again when any film deemed worthy of the certificate would not be approved for British cinema screens during the final years of WWII. In whatever guise, horror still played an instrumental role on British cinema screens throughout the 1940s, although this has not necessarily been a shared opinion within academic writing on the period.

1940s Horror

Discussions of horror cinema in the 1940s⁶ have often focussed upon the Universal franchise where “breaking new ground was not the goal”⁷, alongside a

same curious reaction on the part of audiences may turn them into good box-office successes. It was with this thought in mind that I wired you.”

⁵ BBFC, (2012). *Son of Frankenstein* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF197034/> [accessed 23 October 2012].

⁶ For summaries of horror in the 1940s see: Rick Atkins *Lets Scare ‘em: Grand Interviews and a Filmography of Horrific Proportions*; Rhona J. Bernstein *Attack of the Leading Ladies: Gender, Sexuality, and Spectatorship in Classic Horror Cinema*; Michael Brunas John Brunas and Tom Weaver *Universal Horrors: The Studio’s Classic Films 1931 – 1946*; Carlos Claren *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film*; Robert Cremer *Lugosi: The Man Behind the Cape*; Denis Gifford *A Pictorial History of Horror Movies*; Roy Huss and T. J. Ross *Focus on the Horror Film*; Tom Hutchinson *Horror & Fantasy in the Cinema*; Paul M. Jensen *Boris Karloff and His Films*; Walter M. Kendrick *The Thrill of Fear: 250 Years of Scary Entertainment*; Arthur Lenning *The Immortal Count: The Life and Films of Bela Lugosi*; Paul Meehan *Horror Noir: Where Cinema’s Dark Sisters Meet*; David Pirie *A Heritage of Horror: The English Gothic Cinema 1946-1972*; David J. Skal *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror*; Andrew Tudor *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie*; James B. Twitchell *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror*; Rick Worland *The Horror Film: An Introduction*.

⁷ Worland, *The Horror Film: An Introduction*, p.69.

reappraisal of the Val Lewton productions for RKO (Radio-Keith-Orpheum). The Lewton films came as a result of the outstanding box-office success of Universal's latest attempted to develop a new star in their monster cannon with *The Wolf Man* (George Waggner; 1941). Universal's success did not go unnoticed by the so-called 'Poverty-Row' studios,⁸ who drafted in the likes of Boris Karloff, George Zucco, Dwight Frye and Bela Lugosi to play similar roles to those they had made famous in the previous decade.

The 'psychological horrors' produced by Lewton in a series of less-than-extravagantly-budgeted horror-thrillers, such as *Cat People* (Jacques Tourneur; 1942), are now seen as the most significant contribution to the genre during the 1940s, creating a link between both the Film Noir and a move away from the supernatural seen much later in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). J. P. Telotte⁹, Robin Wood¹⁰,

⁸ Including Producers Releasing Corporation, Monogram, and Republic. For synopses and analysis of the pre-forties 'poverty-row' horror productions see George E. Turner and Michael H. Price *Forgotten Horrors: The Definitive Edition*.

⁹ J. P. Telotte, *Dreams of Darkness: Fantasy and the Films of Val Lewton*, (University of Illinois Press: Chicago, 1985), p.14. Telotte argues that the subtle approach taken to these productions relied upon the creative imagination of the viewer, thus leading audiences to discover that "the otherness we fear actually resides within, although it goes denied or unperceived in the welter of daily life."

¹⁰ Robin Wood, "The Shadow Worlds of Jacques Tourneur" in Robin Wood (Ed.), *Personal Views: Explorations in Film* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1976), pp, 65-6. In his work on director Jacques Tourneur's involvement with the Lewton productions discusses these films in terms of the realist approach in presenting an opposition between "a surface world of conventional and unimaginative "normality" – for want of a better word – and a far richer underworld of dangerous and fascinating dreams." What Tourneur creates is a distinction between two worlds; one dealt with on a day-to-day basis and also a world unseen by the majority that threatens to impinge on our "normal" lives. Although it could be argued that American society resembles this "normality", whereas foreign influence is the unseen threat, Tourneur is concerned more so with the comparisons between day and night imagery to create a sense of the unknown. This poetic nature creates a psychological meaning as a matter of suggestion which is never insisted upon or spelt out, causing an even greater sense of mystery.

Scott Preston¹¹, Paul Meehan¹² and Joseph Grixti¹³ have all acknowledged Lewton's contribution to the genre through a restrained approach to fantastical tales of cat people, voodoo or the occult, never imposing upon the audience the physical metamorphosis of the "other" as in the Universal films. In this sense, the everyday representations seen within a number of his productions provoke a greater psychological reaction through a familiarity with the 'real world'.¹⁴ James B. Twitchell recognises how the *Doppelgänger*, and the conflict between good and evil, played a particularly important role in this period as Freudian approaches to psychology, and the shift towards themes of psychiatry and psychological, became the new means of creating horrific thrills throughout the decade.¹⁵

Frank Capra's *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1944) epitomises another alternative take on the horror film prevalent throughout the period, blending comedy with the macabre in a manner noted by the press for managing to include equal measures of terror and humour. Respectable excursions into 19th century literature, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

¹¹ Scott Preston, "The Strange Pleasure of *The Leopard Man*: Gender, Genre and Authorship in a Val Lewton Thriller", *Cineaction*, n.71, 2007, pp.14-21. With the specific example of the *The Leopard Man* (Jacques Tourneur; 1943), Preston positions the film "first noir-horror hybrid", with the "doomed fortune" and "fatalism" more closely associated with the 'realism' of Film-Noir, resulting in the first "realistic representation of this modern monster in American movies."

¹² Paul Meehan, *Horror Noir: Where Cinema's Dark Sisters Meet* (London: McFarland & Company, 2011), p.57. Meehan takes a similar approach to Lewton's films, taking the insertion of the supernatural into the 'workaday' world of America as giving horror a "vital immediacy".

¹³ Joseph Grixti, *Terrors of Uncertainty: The Cultural Context of Horror Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.18. Grixti sees the distinguishing feature of the Lewton productions as a removal of the reassuringly unreal "exotic settings, stereotypical or larger-than-life characters, unusual or anachronistic situations".

¹⁴ For further reading on Lewton see: Atkins *Lets Scare 'em*; Manny Farber "Val Lewton and the School of Shudders" ; Jensen *Boris Karloff and His Films*; Arthur Lenning *The Immortal Count*; Paul Meehan *Horror Noir: Where Cinema's Dark Sisters Meet*; Alexander Nemerov *Icons of Grief: Val Lewton's Home Front Pictures*; Martha P. Nochimson "Val Lewton at RKO: The Social Dimensions of Horror"; Scott Preston "The Strange Pleasure of *The Leopard Man*: Gender, Genre and Authorship in a Val Lewton Thriller"; Joel E. Siegel *Val Lewton: The Reality of Terror*; J. P. Telotte "A Photogenic Horror: Lewton Does Robert Louis Stevenson"; J.P. Telotte "The Doubles of Fantasy and the Space of Desire"; J. P. Telotte *Dreams of Darkness: Fantasy and the Films of Val Lewton*; Robin Wood "The Shadow Worlds of Jacques Tourneur"; Rick Worland *The Horror Film: An Introduction*.

¹⁵ James B. Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

(Victor Fleming; 1941), *Phantom of the Opera* (Arthur Lubin; 1943) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Albert Lewin; 1945), represent efforts by the larger studios to shift the emphasis away from the horrific and towards the prestige nature of their production, illustrated in the praise bestowed upon the operatic scenes featured in *Phantom* by the British trades. Universal's *The Uninvited* (Lewis Allen; 1944) held its place alongside similar prestigious productions, received by critics as the first serious treatment of the supernatural in Hollywood, and yet made no bones about its nature as 'horrific' entertainment. The respectability of these 'prestige' productions was such that it drew the attention of the 'quality' press in the UK who were in the habit of dismissing horror of the supernatural variety indicated by the 'H' certificate.

As Mark Jancovich's work on 1940s horror demonstrates, in focusing upon the Universal productions of the period, definitions of the genre generated during the development of film studies in the 1960s and 1970s ignored a far wider range of films which were in fact sold and discussed as horror.¹⁶ The trade press on both sides of the Atlantic often applied terms now associated with the horror genre (such as 'macabre', 'supernatural', 'spooky', 'chilling', 'spine tingling', 'thrilling', 'shocking', and 'suspenseful') to a series of films that would later be disregarded by such generic definitions. This has been highlighted by Jancovich¹⁷, Diane Waldman¹⁸, Lucy

¹⁶ Mark Jancovich, "Thrills and Chills: Horror, the Woman's Film and the Origins of Film Noir" in *New Review of Film and Television*, v.7, n.2, June 2009, p.157-171, and "The Meaning of Mystery: Genre, Marketing and the Universal Sherlock Holmes Series of the 1940s", *Film International*, n.17, 2005, pp.34-45.

¹⁷ Jancovich, "Thrills and Chills" and "The Meaning of Mystery".

¹⁸ Diane Waldman, "'At Last I Can Tell it to Someone!': Feminine Point of View and Subjectivity in the Gothic Romance Films of the 1940s", *Cinema Journal*, v.23, n.2, Winter, 1983, pp.29-40.

Fisher¹⁹, Mary Ann Doane²⁰, Guy Barefoot²¹, and Paul Meehan²² who establish links between the horror film and a series of Gothic melodramas or ‘paranoid woman’ films. Furthermore, the link made by Siegfried Kracauer²³ between horror and the “terror and sadism” of “familiar, everyday surroundings”²⁴ in post-war cinema, later associated with the Noir, has also been established much earlier in the decade within the aforementioned Gothics.²⁵

While a great deal has already been written on horror during the 1940s, there is very little on the discussion of the British horror film during this period. The reason for this is largely due to the fact that the very notion of what constitutes as a ‘horror’ film, established within the work of genre studies some years later, has been retrospectively applied to an extremely diverse period in British cinema and found very little to speak of. Alison Peirse work on 1930s horror refutes claims made by Ian Conrich and James Chapman, that horror cinema rarely featured on British screens until after the war, by highlighting the problematic nature of applying genre conventions of one particular cycle of films in a wider context.²⁶

Writing in 1973, just as genre studies were being established, David Pirie’s work on British horror chooses to ignore the period prior to 1946, stating “how little

¹⁹ Lucy Fischer, “Two-Faced Women: The “Double” in Women’s Melodrama of the 1940s”, *Cinema Journal*, v.23, n.1, Autumn, 1983, pp.24-43.

²⁰ Mary Ann Doane, “The Clinical Eye: Medical Discourses in the “Woman’s Film” of the 1940s”, *Poetics Today*, v.6, n.1/2, 1985, pp.205-227.

²¹ Guy Barefoot, *Gaslight Melodrama: From Victorian London to 1940s Hollywood* (London: Continuum, 2001).

²² Paul Meehan, *Horror Noir*.

²³ Siegfried Kracauer, “Hollywood Terror Films: Do They Reflect an American State of Mind?”, *New German Critique*, n.89, Spring – Summer, 2003, pp.105-111; originally published in *Commentary* 2, 1946, pp.132-136.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.105.

²⁵ Andrew Sarris, “Two or Three Things I Know About Gaslight”, *Film Comment*, v.12, n.3, May/June, 1976, pp.23-25. See also: Paul Meehan *Horror Noir* and Guy Barefoot *Gaslight Melodrama*.

²⁶ Alison Peirse, *After Dracula: The 1930s Horror Film* (London: I B Tauris, 2013), p.122.

the cinematic horror was attempted in England prior to the late 1950s.”²⁷ While he acknowledges Ealing’s *Dead of Night* (Alberto Cavalcanti, Charles Crichton, Basil Dearden and Robert Hamer; 1945) as an important entry into the history of British horror cinema, Pirie then moves his discussion onto the Hammer films of the 1950s without further analysis of the earlier period. By linking elements of the supernatural reoccurring within the Ealing film to the Hammer series, Pirie’s work demonstrates how the established conventions of genre can be restrictive to any true analysis.²⁸

As Richard Maltby has argued, for film producers “generic distinction offers a layered system of classification, which they use in an opportunistic way that does not assume that one generic category excludes others.”²⁹ He goes on to add that these classifications “are being constantly revised, so that there is more than one system in operation at any one time”³⁰ making definitive interpretations of any particular genre more complicated than a few reappearing features and themes they may share. Drawing upon Maltby’s work on genre, Christine Gledhill recognises the importance in “exploring the wider contextual culture” in order to establish a link between “aesthetic mutations and textual complications” genre analysis is likely to present.³¹ By rethinking genre as a complex process of “industrial mechanism, aesthetic practice, and arena of cultural-critical discursivity”³² we can look beyond the established conventions in order to question the very nature of British horror cinema in the 1940s.

²⁷ David Pirie, *A Heritage of Horror: The English Gothic Cinema 1946-1972* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1973), p.22.

²⁸ Mark Jancovich, ““Psychological Thriller”: *Dead of Night* (1945), British Film Culture, and the 1940s Horror Cycle” in Caroline Joan S. Picart and John Edgar Browning (Eds.), *Speaking of Monsters: A Teratological Anthology* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp.39-49.

²⁹ Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema: Second Edition* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p.79.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Christine Gledhill, “Rethinking Genre’ in Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (Eds.), *Reinventing Film Studies* (London: Arnold, 2003), p.221.

³² Ibid., p.223.

British Cinema during WWII

Discussions of British cinema during the 1940s have more often than not been divided by the original distinctions made by the British press of the period, between the ‘quality’ film of realism and the much derided escapist ‘fantasy’.³³ Robert Murphy refers to this period as one of ‘realism’ and ‘tinsel’,³⁴ the latter typified by the ‘prestige’ costume melodramas made at Gainsborough and the former the ‘quality’ war film³⁵. This trend has tended to ignore the fact that a number of melodramas were actually praised for their realistic treatment of everyday life and also how realism was recognised for its power to shock and horrify just as the fantasy genre could.

Under Maurice Ostrer, Gainsborough studios thrived during the war, producing some of the country’s highest grossing films. Regularly featuring in the end of year audience polls, these productions were dedicated to the provision of exciting ‘escapist’ melodramas, principally located in 18th and 19th century England. Featuring a reoccurring cast of British talent³⁶, these included such box-office hits as *The Man in Grey* (Leslie Arliss; 1943), *Madonna of the Seven Moons* (Arthur Crabtree; 1945), and *The Wicked Lady* (Leslie Arliss; 1945). As John Ellis demonstrates, while the press in

³³ For example see: A. Haskell et al. *Since 1939: Ballet – Films – Music – Painting*; Geoff Hurd *National Fictions: World War Two in British Films and Television*; James Curran and Vincent Porter *British Cinema History*; J. P. Mayer *British Cinemas and their Audiences*; Robert Murphy *Realism and Tinsel: Cinema and Society in Britain 1939-49*; Geoffrey Nowell-Smith *The Oxford History of World Cinema*; Nicholas Pronany and D. W. Spring, *Propaganda, Politics, and Film, 1918-45*; K. R. M. Short *Feature Films as History*; John Whiteclay Chambers and David Culbert *World War II: Film and History*.

³⁴ Robert Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel: Cinema and Society in Britain 1939-49* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.39.

³⁵ Including: *In Which We Serve* (Noël Coward; 1942), *The Next of Kin* (Thorold Dickinson; 1942), *Went the Day Well?* (Alberto Cavalcanti; 1942), *San Demetrio London* (Charles Frend; 1943), *This Happy Breed* (David Lean; 1944), and *The Way Ahead* (Carol Reed; 1944).

³⁶ For further reading on 1940s British film production see: Charles Barr *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema*; John Whiteclay Chambers and David Culbert *World War II: Film and History*; James Chapman *The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda, 1939 – 1945*; Margaret Dickinson “The State and the Consolidation of Monopoly”; Geoff Hurd *National Fictions: World War Two in British Films and Television*.

the UK discussed the realist war film as a sign of ‘quality’, the ‘prestige’ melodramas intended to compete with the lavish Hollywood productions would be addressed in terms of their destructive impact upon the formation of a national cinema.³⁷ While truth, reality, logic and beauty formed the basis of the quality British film, the prestige productions were seen as merely gaudy and ‘unreal’ distractions for audiences in a manner more befitting of pre-war productions.³⁸

Influenced by John Grierson and the documentary film movement, realism in Britain during WWII had for a long while drawn attention away from the significance held by these successful melodramas, largely due to opinions held by the contemporary press.³⁹ While the melodrama has now earned its place within British film history, this has arrived through a particular interpretation of the genre during this period.⁴⁰ As the development of film studies came to associate melodrama with a specific type of film, discussed by Barbara Klinger in her interpretation of Douglas Sirk’s oeuvre,⁴¹ the identity of a number of British productions would often be tied to romance, domesticity, and the ‘Woman’s Film’.

In his historical analysis of the concepts of melodrama, Raymond Williams draws from 19th century theatre in order to illustrate its foundations in “sensational crimes and seductions” or the “‘costume epic’, peopled by pirates, bandits, soldiers, sailor and ‘historical figures’”, rather than being specifically ‘feminine’ or ‘female-

³⁷ John Ellis, “The Quality Film Adventure: British Critics and the Cinema 1942 – 1948” in Andrew Higson (Ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema* (London: Cassell, 1996), p.75.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.79.

³⁹ Philip Gillett, “Capturing the True Moment: Realism in Britain Cinema of the Late 1940s, its Antecedents and its Legacy”, *Film International*, v.4, n.24, November 2006, pp.50-58.

⁴⁰ For a more in depth analysis of the British melodramas see: Pam Cook *Fashioning the Nation: Costume and Identity in British Cinema*; Pam Cook *Gainsborough Pictures*; Pam Cook “Neither Here nor There: National Identity in Gainsborough Costume Drama”; Sue Harper *Picturing the Past: The Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film*.

⁴¹ Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History Culture and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).

centred'.⁴² By the 1940s, the British trade press still recognised these thematic elements as particular to melodrama, occasionally with added emphasis to define particular appeal for a female audience. Looking back at the Gothic melodramas of the 1940s, these films share similarities with those made at Gainsborough which have often been overlooked in terms of the true definition of melodrama – that being, their clear links to the horror film. Robert Murphy recognises Gainsborough as part of a “rich tradition of visceral, garish, flamboyant popular cinema” bridging the gap between the Tod Slaughter melodramas of the 1930s to the “sophisticated atmospherics of Hammer’s horror films”.⁴³

In attempting to identify the period as one in which a “symbiosis” of melodrama and realism came into prominence, contrasting the ‘quality’ critics’ disparate opinions on the two aesthetic styles, Christine Gledhill reflects upon the same 19th century period within which “melodrama and realism are neither opposed aesthetics nor gender defined.”⁴⁴ She adds:

Melodramas were taken as a valid way of representing life and judged for their truthfulness and realism of presentation. Moreover they appealed to male and female, working- and middle-class audiences alike.⁴⁵

⁴² Raymond Williams, “British Film History: New Perspectives” in James Curran and Vincent Porter (Eds.), *British Cinema History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), p.16. “As melodrama became popular, from the 1820s, its plots increasingly resembled events reported in the popular press: sensational crimes and seductions – though in melodrama these eventually concluded by providential rescues and escapes – at times presented in a radically perspective. From the 1860s there existed in effect two broad kinds of melodrama: this well-remembered type, but also the earlier and always numerically more common ‘costume epic’, peopled by pirates, bandits, soldiers, sailors and ‘historical’ figures of all kinds. Each type was to contribute massively to cinema: at first by direct adaptation (Pearl White, Jane Shore, Ben Hur); later by the cinematic adaptation of similar plots, themes and shows.”

⁴³ Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel*, p.56.

⁴⁴ Christine Gledhill, “‘An Abundance of Understatement’: Documentary, Melodrama and Romance” in Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson (Eds.), *Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p.215.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

This is also illustrated by Robert Murphy who recognises how the Gainsborough films utilised “the past to explore contemporary issues with the concerns of popular melodrama with sex, violence, and the possibility of happiness.”⁴⁶

The quality critics who championed the realist film were in fact receptive to a number of melodramas made during the start of the decade due to their realistic treatment of more sordid aspects to human nature, through which they would be seen as providing particularly ‘thrilling’ entertainment. Such films as *Gaslight* (Thorold Dickinson; 1940), *Hatter’s Castle* (Lance Comfort; 1941), and *The Night Has Eyes* (Leslie Arliss; 1942) came as precursors to the Gainsborough productions, sharing similar period dressings, themes of sexuality, criminality, and misdirection.

As Jancovich has suggested, the British critics shared much in common with New York Times critic Bosley Crowther who was a similar advocate of quality yet saw the worth in popular, unpretentious entertainment for the masses. With reference to Pierre Bourdieu, Jancovich recognises how Crowther sought to maintain the distinctions between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, as a number of horror films dealing in the psychological were dismissed as being low-brow attempts to deal with serious subject matter.⁴⁷ In the post-war period, the British critics faced a similar problem as the realism associated with the quality film was now utilised as a tool to confront the serious social issues deemed to be too sordid or horrific to be treated as cinematic entertainment. For these critics, such serious issues were deemed unsuitable in the hands of a profit-driven industry appearing to be supportive of society’s moral concerns represented by the work of the censors.

⁴⁶ Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel*, p.121.

⁴⁷ Mark Jancovich, “‘Two Ways of Looking’: The Critical Reception of 1940s Horror”, *Cinema Journal*, v.49, n.3, Spring, 2010, pp.45-66.

British Censorship

As Annette Kuhn has suggested, early studies of censorship tended to be dominated by a “prohibition/institutions” model “understood first and foremost as an act of prohibition, excision, or ‘cutting-out’”,⁴⁸ although such interpretations “may actually inhibit our understanding of how, and with what effects, the powers involved in film censorship work.”⁴⁹ Ira H. Carmen⁵⁰, Roger K. Newman & Edward De Grazia⁵¹, and Richard S. Randall⁵² approach the study of film censorship with an emphasis upon the legal framework within which it operates, while Robert Sklar⁵³, Garth S. Jowett⁵⁴, and Gerald Gardner⁵⁵ developed the discussion through a reflection upon society itself. Matthew Bernstein argues that the “cultural battleground” within which cinema finds itself has “encouraged researchers to consider the immediate historical context in which controversial films are viewed”⁵⁶ as a means of looking beyond the censors themselves.

The emphasis upon the work of the censor tends to obscure the fact that while films may indeed come under scrutiny for their content, the filmmakers and audiences themselves have a vital role to play when it comes to forms of self-censorship. The creative approaches taken by the studios to curb any restrictions tends to be ignored

⁴⁸ Annette Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality: 1909 – 1925* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁵⁰ Ira H. Carmen, *Movies, Censorship and the Law* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1966).

⁵¹ Edward De Grazia and Roger K. Newman, *Banned Films: Movies, Censors & The First Amendment* (New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1982).

⁵² Richard S. Randall, *Censorship of the Movies: The Social and Political Control of a Mass Medium* (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970).

⁵³ Robert Sklar, *Movies Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Random House, 1975).

⁵⁴ Garth Jowett, *Film: The Democratic Art* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976).

⁵⁵ Gerald Gardner, *The Censorship Papers: Movie Censorship Letters from The Hays Office, 1934 – 1960* (New York: Mead & Company, 1987).

⁵⁶ Matthew Bernstein, “Introduction” in Matthew Bernstein (Ed.), *Controlling Hollywood: Censorship and Regulation in the Studio Era* (London: The Athlone Press, 2000), p.4.

despite its importance when attempting to understand how censorship operates within any given period. The main concern of the industry has always been to maximise profits through ensuring access to as wide an audience as possible, achieved through negotiation between the studio and the censors. By keeping one eye on the censors and the other on the audience, filmmakers often managed to appease both through careful treatment of sensitive material.

Both the BBFC in Britain and the Hays Office in the U.S.A. operated as an independent body funded by the film industry itself, with a duty to protect the industry from state intervention. In Britain, the Home Office held no desire to take on the role as film censor, concerned their decisions would affect the role of the government, and instead made occasional recommendation to local authorities, based upon popular consensus amongst the interested parties, alongside the “token gesture” of appointing the President.⁵⁷

Neville March Hunnings⁵⁸ takes a mainly legal viewpoint of British censorship, while James C. Robertson⁵⁹, Nicholas Pronany⁶⁰, Jeffrey Richards⁶¹, and Tom Dewe Matthews⁶² demonstrate how the power-play between the BBFC, local authorities, moral guardians, and the filmmakers themselves, proved crucial to the development of film censorship and evasion of state interference. Robertson, Pronany

⁵⁷ Jeffrey Richards, “British Film Censorship” in Robert Murphy (Ed.) *The British Cinema Book: Second Edition* (London: BFI, 2001), p.156.

⁵⁸ Neville March Hunnings, *Film Censors and the Law* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1967).

⁵⁹ James C. Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema: British Film Censorship 1913 – 1972* (London: Routledge, 1974) and *The British Board of Censors: Film Censorship in Britain 1896 – 1950* (London: Croom Helm, 1985).

⁶⁰ Nicholas Pronany, “The First Reality: Film Censorship in Liberal England” in K. R. M. Short (Ed.), *Feature Films as History* (London: Croom Helm, 1981).

⁶¹ Richards, “British Film Censorship”.

⁶² Tom Dewe Matthews, *Censored – What They Didn’t Allow You to See and Why: The Story of Film Censorship in Britain* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994).

& Jeremy Croft⁶³, and Richards⁶⁴, view the period leading up to, and during, WWII as one in which the focus upon maintaining the “internal moral, political and social status quo”⁶⁵ became less constrictive during the war as “certain relaxation was allowed by the censors.”⁶⁶ It was within this climate that the Ministry of Information, who were by now working alongside the BBFC as a matter of international security, encouraged the production of the “realistic, relevant”⁶⁷ films which became the epitome of British filmmaking for the press.

This freedom led to an “upsurge of violence and sexuality”⁶⁸ developed from the critically successful quality film, which those same critics turned against during the post-war period when applying similar realist methods to the darker aspects of society. Realism, therefore, was to become associated with the wave of European ‘art’ films arriving in Britain following the war, dealing with taboo subject matter which provoked a series of debates surrounding cinema’s role as mere entertainment. The Board were to come under threat from a series of films thought to be immoral, vulgar, and horrific, just as they once had in the 1930s when dealing with the emergence of the horror film.

⁶³ Nicholas Pronay and Jeremy Croft, “British Film Censorship and Propaganda Policy During the Second World War” in Curran and Porter (Eds.), *British Cinema History*.

⁶⁴ Jeffrey Richards, “The British Board of Film Censors and Content Control in the 1930s: Foreign Affairs”, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, v.2, n.1, 1982, pp.39-48.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.9.

⁶⁶ Richards, “British Film Censorship”, p.158.

⁶⁷ Matthews, *Censored*, p.104.

⁶⁸ Richards, “British Film Censorship”, p.159.

The Horror Ban

Following the original disputes between the local authorities and the BBFC over the horror film during the 1930s, news of a ban on the 'H' certificate receives its first mention in U.S.A. trade paper *Variety* during November 1942, positioning the move by the BBFC as an outright ban on anything related to the horrific.⁶⁹

So-called 'horror' features are out in Great Britain. Formerly Britain issued an 'H' certificate for such pictures, which meant that youngsters were barred from seeing them, but these since have been withdrawn and the film getting the usual 'H' certificate (horrific film) now, is banned. Blackouts and air-raid shelters in Britain depress population there, and naturally such horror, or ghostly pictures are not wanted.⁷⁰

Variety further elaborate on their initial report three weeks later to suggest,

[c]hiller-dillers, based on ghoulish tales and off-screen screams as the clock tolls the 12th hour in the haunted mansion, are getting a chill from the British Board of Censors.⁷¹

Any film deemed worthy of this certificate was instantly rejected by the BBFC until June 1945, effectively banning these films for a three year period.

Details of the ban were reported by British trade paper *Kinematograph Weekly* in the months following the end of WWII:

"Horrific" films which have been held up by the B.B.F.C. during the war period are now to be released at the rate of one per month, if this rate meets with the approval of the Board. Twenty-three films coming within the "H" category have been withheld between June, 1942 and June 1945, and the Board had suggested to the [Kinematograph Renters' Society] that it would now release its ban upon them but would like to see the outflow regulated.⁷²

⁶⁹ Anon., "Multiple Censorial Restrictions, Here and Abroad, Harrass H'wood", *Variety*, v.148, n.9, November 4, 1942, p.7. The suggestion of preparing scripts for inspection prior to shooting, a standard practice at the Office of War Information during the war years, is mentioned in the article as well as a recommendation that the various authorities should be permitted to view final cuts of films in order to reduce the number of costly edits.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Anon., "H'wood Chillers Get Chill From British Censors; Too Jittery", *Variety*, v.148, n.12, November 25, 1942, p.3&39.

⁷² Anon., "Release of "H" Category Pictures", *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.345, n.2013, November 15, 1945, p.13.

The trade press in the U.S.A. interpreted the ‘ban’ as a reaction to the real horrors of war although, as Neville March Hunnings has discussed, the decision to remove the ‘H’ certificate came more as a response to the ongoing conflicts between the local authorities and exhibitors.⁷³ Considering the restrictions on film stock during the war, the easiest answer for both the industry and the BBFC would be to restrict the number of disruptions any decision by the Board could cause throughout the country, with the nationwide disparity on the ‘H’ film being the prime target.

The ban on the ‘H’ certificate has often been interpreted as an outright removal of horror from British screens during the period⁷⁴ and has no doubt played a significant role in the dismissal of British horror cinema during the 1940s although, as we have already seen, the nature of the ‘H’ certificate and horror is far more complex than originally thought. Not only did horror remain a permanent fixture on British screens during WWII, it thrived through the creativity displayed by filmmakers in their interpretation of how the genre may be refigured within a variety of stylistic forms other than those associated with the original horror cycle.

In the direct post-war period, during which the ‘H’ was once again unleashed, the films represented by the certificate were no longer perceived as the threat they once were. The BBFC now recognised a new kind of horror, that which resides within the same everyday realms once championed by the critics in favour of honest depictions of reality. It would be this new type of realist film, and not the horrors

⁷³ Hunnings, *Film Censors and the Law*, p.142.

⁷⁴ For examples of how the ‘H’ ban in Britain has previously been discussed see: Denis Gifford *A Pictorial History of Horror Movies*; Neville March Hunnings *Film Censors and the Law*; Tom Johnson *Censored Screams*; Mark Kermode “The British Censors and Horror Cinema”; Tom Dewe Matthews *Censored: What They Didn’t Allow You to See and Why – The Story of Film Censorship in Britain*; James C. Robertson *The British Board of Censors: Film Censorship in Britain 1896-1950*; James C. Robertson *The Hidden Cinema: British Film Censorship 1913-1972*; Sarah J. Smith *Children, Cinema & Censorship: From Dracula to the Dead End Kids*; Rick Worland *The Horror Film: An Introduction*.

associated with the 'H', which forced the BBFC into reconsidering its position on more 'sordid' themes, and subsequently how to tackle them on the public's behalf.

While the new realist films arriving from Europe contributed to the demands for greater censorship restrictions in the UK, the BBFC records and the contemporary British press showed just as much concern (if not more) for realist films from both the UK and the United States. The BBFC scenario reports, trade press articles and reviews, alongside the critical reception to a number of films recognised as horror during the period, illustrate how both realism and the horror film have often been misinterpreted during the 1940s. The former being recognised for its relationship to 'quality' British filmmaking and the latter for its association with fantasy and apparent withdrawal from British screens. This thesis therefore seeks to establish a greater understanding of the relationship between 'realism' and 'tinsel' (or 'fantasy') during the 1940s, often seen in opposition within discussions of British cinema, and how this relationship helps to reveal the once forgotten role of horror in Britain in this period.

Taking its starting point from the *Variety* article mentioned earlier in this introduction, Part One shows how the 'H' ban merely kept British screens free from a small number of films, linked to the fantasy realms of the original 1930s cycle, whereas a far greater number of productions, recognised for their association with horror, were in fact passed by the BBFC and exhibited in Britain. In doing so, this section attempts to provide an understanding of how horror was interpreted by the BBFC and the press in order to highlight the importance of re-evaluating the genre in Britain, during a period in which realism and horror became more closely entwined than previously thought.

Section Two pays particular attention to the critically derided melodrama of the 1940s, drawing the discussion away from gender studies and the role of women during wartime in order to re-establish the link between the Gothic and therefore the role these films play within the history of British horror. While the popular Gainsborough films were placed in direct opposition to the quality realist film, earlier British melodramas of the period were in fact acknowledged by the press for an ability to convey realistic interpretations of humanity within a melodramatic framework. This understanding of melodrama suggests a closer relationship between ‘realism’ and ‘tinsel’ than has previously been acknowledged, allowing for further reading of the period. Whilst clearly distinguished by many as the only British horror film of the decade, established through a limited interpretation of the genre, Ealing’s *Dead of Night* was in fact praised for its realistic treatment of the ghost story and a move away from the purely fantastical. The role of realism was clearly more significant during the 1940s than mere representations of a society coming to terms with the destructive forces of WWII.

Section Three follows this discussion by focussing on three key examples which, to varying degrees, all encountered issues with the BBFC for their attempts to replicate sordid aspects of the everyday. Val Lewton productions *The Body Snatcher* (Robert Wise; 1945)⁷⁵ and *Bedlam* (Mark Robson; 1946)⁷⁶ are both accounts of darker periods in British history than those realities told within the quality war film.

⁷⁵ Val Lewton’s production of *The Body Snatcher*, adapted from the Robert Louis Stevenson short story, presented a fictional account of real-life ‘resurrectionists’ Burke and Hare who undertook a series of gruesome crimes in the early 19th century in order to provide corpses for an Edinburgh medical school.

⁷⁶ Originally titled ‘Chamber of Horrors’, the film recreates conditions inside 18th century asylums opposed to by the Board due to the objectionable representations of the cruelty suffered in such institutions during this period, even though the BBFC scenario reports make it clear that these events represent a factual account of British history.

Twentieth Century-Fox's *The Snake Pit* (Anatole Litvak; 1948)⁷⁷ confronts the contemporary issue of conditions within mental health facilities⁷⁸ in the United States, inspired by a series of exposés within the press.⁷⁹ While *Bedlam* also deals with mental illness, albeit from an historical perspective, the horrifying imagery both films present goes against pre-war attempts by the BBFC to avoid conflict arising between the industry and particularly sensitive aspects of society. The liberalising effect of WWII on the film industry generated a new interest in everyday society and provided filmmakers with an awareness of how shocking such representations could be. It is this relationship between reality and its disturbing effects which brought the BBFC under fire from local authorities during the post-war years. This came as a result of the Board's failure to come to terms with a new era of filmmaking, one in which the 'H' film no longer drew attention from the moral reformers as the revelations made about their own society caused far greater concern.

⁷⁷ *The Snake Pit* was accused by the Board for attempting to sensationalise the anguish suffered by those inflicted by mental illness, even though the novel originally submitted for approval was in fact based on the real account of author Mary Jane Ward's time spent inside a U.S.A. institution. Following the release of more 'realist' versions of contemporary society, such as the rise in gang violence illustrated in *Brighton Rock* (John Boulting; 1947), there was clearly a shift away from 'realism' represented in the 'quality' film. While the BBFC were concerned by *Brighton Rock*'s reflection upon the rise in criminal activity throughout the WWII, a message tagged onto the opening credits emphasised the action as taking place between the two wars in order to diminish any such comparisons. A similar introduction to *The Snake Pit* was deemed necessary to avoid any possible connections being made between the state of U.S.A. mental health facilities and those in the UK following a series of protests. These objections came from, most notably, nurses working across five London hospitals who insisted that the ignorance of the typical cinema patron may feel that those conditions represented on the screen stand for all such institutions [Anon., "Snake Pit Film Must Be Banned – Say Nurses", *Daily Herald*, March 29, 1949.]

⁷⁸ For further discussions of cinematic representations of mental illness see: M. Anderson "'One Flew Over the Psychiatric Unit': Mental Illness and the Media"; Michael Fleming and Roger Manvell *Images of Madness: The Portrayal of Insanity in the Feature Film*; Jacqueline Noll Zimmerman *People Like Ourselves: Portrayals of Mental Illness in the Movies*.

⁷⁹ Albert Q. Maisel, "Bedlam 1946: Most U.S. Mental Hospitals are a Shame and a Disgrace", *LIFE*, May 6, 1946. Around the same time as *Bedlam*'s production, a pictorial expose written for *Life* magazine in the U.S.A. presented to the world the conditions prevalent in their institutions, being not too dissimilar to those portrayed in Lewton's recreation of 18th century England. The title of this article was "Bedlam 1946", an apt reflection upon the conditions and opinions towards mental health care as the patients remained 'unseen' and 'unsaid' throughout society, with the BBFC playing their own part in maintaining this position.

Part One

Chapter One: “Ghoulish Tales and Off-Screen Screams” – Understanding the ‘H’ Ban in Britain

Definitions of ‘horror’ during the 1930s and ‘40s have often favoured the Grand Guignol aesthetic associated with Universal’s original productions of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, establishing links back to Gothic literature of the 18th and 19th centuries.¹ Discussions of the period have often associated horror with the visually explicit, and therefore linked to “a sensation that might be literally stomach-churning” more recognisable in the genre during the 1960s and ‘70s.² In his detailed account of the ‘H’ certificate in Britain during the 1930s, Tom Johnson illustrates how between the release of *Dracula* and *Dracula’s Daughter* (Lambert Hillyer; 1936), Hollywood produced close to forty such films during the original cycle, although this commitment to repetition was driven by profits rather than any ambition to break new ground.³

¹ For example see: Michael Brunas John Brunas and Tom Weaver *Universal Horrors: The Studio’s Classic Films 1931 – 1946*; Carlos Claren *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film*; Denis Gifford *A Pictorial History of Horror Movies*; Tom Hutchinson *Horror & Fantasy in the Cinema*; Walter M. Kendrick *The Thrill of Fear: 250 Years of Scary Entertainment*; David J. Skal *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror*; Andrew Tudor *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie*; James B. Twitchell *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror*; Rick Worland *The Horror Film: An Introduction*.

² Worland, *The Horror Film*, p.11.

³ Johnson, *Censored Screams*, p.7.

The pressures felt in Britain to introduce a classification to deal with this new breed of film became a top priority for local watch groups, clergy, and various other moral guardians, who maintained their concerns for the effects of cinema on the younger audience. The 'H' certificate was introduced in 1932 as merely an advisory category, coming into full force in 1936 when the BBFC recognised its worth in appeasing local authorities through keeping children under sixteen out from all screening.⁴ The new category was seen by Hollywood as an attempt to 'ban' these films from the screen, with this apparent loss of the British market given as the reason for the removal of horror from their production schedules.⁵ However, by 1936 box office takings for the horror productions were already in decline, and the 'H' classification came more as a result of the BBFC's attempts to maintain a uniform system of film censorship across the UK, as local authorities often exercised their own powers entitling them to further cut or ban outright any film they deemed unsuitable.⁶

The end to this first cycle of horror is more likely to have arisen from a complex relationship between poor box office figures and the lack of bookings taken in the UK, due to the uncertainty of exhibition with the various local authorities. However, the subsequent success on both side of the Atlantic of a *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* double bill in 1938 proved enough for Universal to go into production on a new wave of horror features. With an awareness of the comical value audiences now derived from the original cycle, *Son of Frankenstein* came as an attempt to play upon this joviality although its links to the early films guaranteed an 'H' certificate in the UK.⁷

⁴ The original 'A' certificate was intended to keep out the under-16s unless accompanied by an adult, although this became an increasingly difficult as many children would ask strangers to escort them into the cinema. As the 'A' films became more horrific, the concern was that the real parents were not deemed responsible enough to make the appropriate decisions.

⁵ Johnson, *Censored Screams*, p.7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.138.

⁷ Worland, *The Horror Film*, p.127.

Universal followed this rejuvenation with the introduction of a new character to the canon in *The Wolf Man*, alongside a number of sequels to the earlier films, while the other studios also made attempts to capitalise on their success with Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer's (MGM) new interpretation of *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and Twentieth Century-Fox's *Dr Renault's Secret*, alongside a string of 'Poverty Row' productions.⁸

While the implementation of the 'H' certificate in the 1930s may have been a reaction to the number of children being granted permission to these films, discussions of the wartime ban became primarily focused upon the real horrors facing British audiences during WWII.⁹ The 1942-45 ban becomes a far more complex issue when we consider how the horror film was understood during this period, as the 'H' was merely concerned with a small number of productions associated with the original Universal cycle.

While the common assumptions regarding the 'H' ban have often favoured the idea that horror was removed from British screens during WWII, this chapter seeks to provide an alternative to this idea by firstly looking at how contemporary commentators perceived the ban and the type of film the certificate actually represented. The objections made by the BBFC scenario team to two 'poverty-row' productions later embroiled in the 'H' ban, Producers Releasing Corporation's (PRC)

⁸ Films such as Monogram's *The Corpse Vanishes* (Wallace Fox; 1942), with Bela Lugosi playing a variation on the Dracula character, and Producers Releasing Corporation's *The Mad Monster* (Sam Newfield; 1942), attempting to cash in on the success of *The Wolf Man*, stood alongside the Universal sequels and spin-offs during an onslaught of horror not seen since the original cycle.

⁹ The 'H' certificate was an ambiguous term, as the BBFC's idea of the 'horrific' was not always 'horror'. For example, Abel Gance's remake of his own 1919 anti-war drama *J'Accuse* was handed an 'H' certificate principally because of a key scene in which dead soldiers are seen returning to life. *Kinematograph Weekly* remarked on the "horrors" and "the use of the macabre" for the creation of "realistic war effects" in a film intended to highlight the futility of war rather than to disturb. The supernatural aspect was enough for the BBFC to regard the film as 'horrific' but not 'horror'. The differences were vague but were very much directed at these 'macabre' visual effects. (Anon., "J'Accuse", *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.254, n.1818, April 28, 1938, p.25).

The Mad Monster and *Dead Men Walk* (Sam Newfield; 1943), are the only films eventually embroiled in the ban to have been submitted to the BBFC at the script stage, with the Board's responses providing an insight into their own interpretation of the classification.

The response to the ban by U.S.A. trade journal *Variety* demonstrates a misinterpretation of the 'H' certificate, as a list of future releases deemed to be at risk of the ban published in November 1942 includes several films passed by the BBFC with the lesser 'A' certificate. Rather than being a blanket ban on all forms of 'chilling' entertainment, as *Variety* suggest, the suppression of the 'H' film during WWII merely kept a small number of 'low-budget' and 'low-brow' films out of British cinemas. The BBFC records hold little information detailing the nature of the 'H' ban although reports published in the British trade press during the post-war period assist in developing a clearer understanding of the classification. The following chapters in this section look more closely at those films clearly recognised as horror yet still released in Britain during the ban, while here I wish to draw attention to the 'H' films themselves in order to demonstrate their significant and yet minor role in our understanding of horror cinema in Britain during the 1940s.

The BBFC and the 'H' Certificate

While filmmakers were not required to submit scripts to the BBFC prior to production, the process both protected the reputation of the Board and helped producers avoid any costly edits or reshoots. Although this practice was not subscribed to by all, BBFC records show that two such scenarios were indeed submitted to the Board, with the subsequent reports written by the scenario team providing an invaluable insight as to their interpretation of the 'H' classification.

Reports on the PRC production of *The Mad Monster*, by veteran scenario supervisor Colonel John C. Hanna and President of the Board Lord Tyrrell, were initially written between June and July 1942 at the time the ‘H’ ban was introduced, although these documents are no longer available for analysis. The film stars George Zucco as Dr Lorenzo Cameron, a discredited scientist who uses blood extracted from a caged wolf in order to turn his gardener into a ‘wolf-man’, inevitably leading to a rampage of destruction.¹⁰ The final filmed version the PRC film was rejected by the BBFC that same July¹¹ although attempts to appease the BBFC with a new treatment of *The Mad Monster* came in the form of a reworked script submitted that September, accompanied by the less conspicuous title “Professor Cameron’s Experiment”.

The new script submitted by American Pathe Pictures LTD (who now owned PRC), alongside documents intended to persuade the BBFC to reverse their position, made attempts to compare the film to an earlier decision made by the Board. Colonel Hanna’s response states that “[t]he covering letter submitted with the scenario compares it with the story “The Man with Two Lives” submitted by Pathe and passed ‘A’ on 4th May 1942”¹², thereby illustrating that Pathe deemed the film worthy of similar treatment. While both films display an emphasis on the supernatural, *Man with Two Lives* (Phil Rosen; 1942) ends with the realisation that the preceding events were all a dream, a common trick often used to manipulate the BBFC’s verdict.¹³

¹⁰ The film is very careful not to draw similarities to Universal’s *The Wolf Man* and there is no mention of werewolves or the mythology surrounding the Lon Chaney Jnr. version of the previous year. *The Mad Monster* received its U.S.A. trade reviews in June 1942.

¹¹ BBFC, (2012). *The Mad Monster* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfcc.co.uk/releases/mad-monster-1970> [accessed 1 December 2012]. The film was passed with an ‘X’ certificate January 10, 1952.

¹² Colonel John C. Hanna, “Professor Cameron’s Experiment”, *BBFC Scenario Notes 1941-1942-1943*, October 2, 1942.

¹³ *The Man with Two Lives* deals with the spirit of a serial killer transferred into the body of a young man who returns to his old gang to continue his life of crime.

Hanna's report for the reedited version of the script for *The Mad Monster* suggests a similar approach was taken:

The story now submitted makes it appear that the various scenes which form the main subject of the story are really a form of a dream which Cameron has whilst suffering from a breakdown due to overwork. The film also appears to be less horrific than the original version, but it is not easy to make a definite assertion to that effect.¹⁴

Hanna also recommends the reduction of the number of scenes showing the 'Wolf Man' and furthermore, "showing either wolves or the sound of wolf howls, could be deleted altogether, and this could leave the actual nature of professor Cameron's experiment much more vague and less gruesome."¹⁵ Hanna concludes that,

[i]f these suggestions can be carried out I am of opinion that it might be possible to avoid the "H" and pass the film with "A" certificate. Adding a few lines making it appear as a dream and not a reality will not be sufficient in itself to obtain this result.¹⁶

The implication that the monstrous events of the film stem from Cameron's overworked mind goes some way in alleviating the BBFC's objections to the story, although it is clear that the exceptions taken to *The Mad Monster* remained the visualisation of what such a lurid title brings to mind.

As with *The Mad Monster*, PRC's *Dead Men Walk*¹⁷ was not released in the UK for several years after the 'H' ban had been lifted.¹⁸ Starring horror regular Dwight Frye, in a role reminiscent of characters he portrayed in both *Dracula* and

¹⁴ Colonel John C. Hanna, "Professor Cameron's Experiment", *BBFC Scenario Notes 1941-1942-1943*, October 2, 1942.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ BBFC, (2012). *Dead Men Walk* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/releases/dead-men-walk-1970-0> [accessed 30 November 2012]. The BBFC records only show a pass date for 1953 with an 'X' certificate.

¹⁸ Anon., "Dead Men Walk", *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.16, n.182, February, 1949, p.23. At this point the film was being exhibited with an 'H' certificate and a running time of 64 minutes, whereas the BBFC record for 1953 has a submission time just over 66 minutes suggesting that the version released with the 'H' had a few cuts.

*Frankenstein*¹⁹, playing the assistant to occult fanatic Elwyn Clayton (George Zucco) who returns from the dead as a ‘vampire’ in order to enact revenge upon the brother, Dr Lloyd Clayton (Zucco again), whom he believes to be his murderer. The film opens with a book entitled ‘History of Vampires’ being thrown onto a fire, over which a disembodied head appears and challenges the audience in a similar manner to Edward Van Sloan’s Van Helsing at the end of Tod Browning’s *Dracula*, when the actor teases the viewer with “there really are such things as vampires!”²⁰ In PRC’s version of the vampire myth, Elwyn Clayton’s return from the dead and subsequent thirst for blood is explained as a result of an encounter with the supernatural in India²¹ and, although Clayton’s twin is obviously intended as a Van Helsing substitute, there is no mention of the themes established within *Dracula*.

These direct links between the PRC films and their Universal predecessors made the BBFC’s decision to effectively ban *The Mad Monster* and *Dead Men Walk* with the ‘H’ classification unavoidable, as the themes they shared came to represent the majority of those films presented with the certificate. Submitted to the BBFC in August 1942, with the original title “When Dead Men Walk”,²² a report for *Dead Men Walk* was completed on August 26th 1942, approximately two months after the ban came into effect. Colonel Hanna’s review of the script illustrates how the style established by the original Universal cycle came to be symbolic of the ‘H’ classification:

¹⁹ Frye also appears as Renfield in Universal’s *Dracula*.

²⁰ The opening to *Dead Men Walk* begins in a similar manner to *Dracula*’s close: “You creatures of the light, how can you say with absolute certainty what does or does not dwell in the limitless ocean of the night? Are the dark enshrouded regions of evil not but figments of the imagination because you and your puny conceit say they cannot exist?”

²¹ “The power has been given me to draw everlasting life from the veins of the living. They will give me the blood from their hearts [...] The power is with me only during the hours of darkness. From dawn to dusk am I helpless in the grave.”

²² Colonel John C. Hanna, “When Dead Men Walk Scenario Report”, *BBFC Scenario Notes 1941-1942-1943*, August 26, 1942.

The subject of this film is one which is almost always placed in the 'H' class, and it would seem as if this one would follow the general rule. It would therefore not be passed by this board during the war at any rate.²³

Colonel Hanna's colleague, Mrs N. Crouzet, shared a similar opinion on the overall theme of the film in that "this is a very similar story to Dracula and as a horrific class of film I do not think exception can be taken to the synopsis"²⁴ further cementing the relationship between the 'H' certificate and the type of horror film associated with the original Universal productions.²⁵

The trade reviews for *Dead Men Walk* came in the first month of 1949 and although the 'H' certificate was soon to be replaced by the 'X', their definitions of the 'H' classification explain a great deal with regards to the perception of the 'horrific'. This "Horrific drama" is dismissed by *Monthly Film Bulletin* as a "crude and amateurish [production] that only the most unsophisticated will enjoy"²⁶ whereas *Today's Cinema* regard the film as an "[a]cceptable offering for lovers of wholehearted melodrama."²⁷

While *Today's Cinema* often regarded these horrific films as an offshoot of melodrama (in this case a "Vampire melodrama") their understanding of the 'H' certificate focused upon the Grand Guignol and the supernatural:

The only sequences in this melodrama meriting its "H" certificate are those which provide us once again with the familiar secrets of vampire lore: the sinister resurrections from a coffin and the blood-sucking escapades of the night. Otherwise, the film is a conventional and rather slow-moving essay in mystery and suspense, touched off with the inevitable element of romance and the barest touch of comedy.²⁸

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Mrs N. Crouzet, "When Dead Men Walk Scenario Report", *BBFC Scenario Notes 1941-1942-1943*, August 28, 1942.

²⁵ While the remainder of the report simply lists the details of the plot, there are no recommendations offered for future submissions and no record of any further attempts to resubmit the script.

²⁶ Reviews, "Dead Men Walk", *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.16, n.182, February, 1949, p.23.

²⁷ J.G.W., "Dead Men Walk", *Todays Cinema*, v.72, n.5748, January 5, 1949, p.9.

²⁸ Ibid.

What distinguishes this film as something more than melodrama, of which ‘mystery’, ‘suspense’, ‘romance’ and ‘comedy’ were all a common elements, is the connection to ‘fantasy’ and the ‘supernatural’ perceived by this reviewer to be the most likely reason for the higher classification. While the ‘H’ certificate was indeed made a compulsory classification for horrific films, the very nature of the term was often taken to distinguish between mere melodrama and the more ‘gruesome’ forms of melodrama. In order to place this ‘H’ ban into its original context, and to further understand this specific type of ‘horrific’ film, it is necessary to understand the initial reaction to the news in both the U.S.A. and the UK.

Understanding the ‘Ban’

Reporting in November 1942, *Variety* ascribed the British ‘ban’ to the very real terror faced by the public on a day-to-day basis, suggesting that “naturally such horror, or ghostly pictures are not wanted”.²⁹ While this statement may have been true for the handful of films rejected by the BBFC, the assumption is taken (and has been in subsequent accounts of the ban) that by enforcing a restriction on the ‘H’ certificate the BBFC effectively refused all horror productions for the remainder of the war. This misapprehension is highlighted in *Variety*’s selection of films believed to be targets of the ban, beginning with the example of Monogram’s *Bowery at Midnight* (Wallace

²⁹ Anon., “Multiple Censorial Restrictions, Here and Abroad, Harrass H’wood”, *Variety*, v.148, n.9, November 4, 1942, p.7.

Fox; 1942)³⁰ a film passed without cuts by the BBFC and seen merely as “a bit grisly in its detail” by British trade paper *Today’s Cinema*.³¹

While *Bowery at Midnight* was not categorised alongside those films deemed worthy of an ‘H’ (Chapter Two further examine the reasons for this) there remained a number of productions due for export to the UK that the journal felt were of a similar horrific nature to those presented with the certificate in the past:

Other studios threatened with un-chilling censorship are RKO with ‘The Cat People,’ ‘I Walked With a Zombie,’ ‘The Seventh Victim’ and ‘The Leopard Man’. Universal with ‘Night Monster,’ ‘Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man’ and ‘The Mummy’s Tomb’, and 20th-Fox, with ‘Dr. Renault’s Secret’ and ‘The Undying Monster.’³²

For reasons I shall discuss later in Part One all of the RKO productions, *Cat People*,³³ *I Walked with a Zombie* (Jacques Tourneur; 1943),³⁴ *The Seventh Victim* (Mark Robson; 1943),³⁵ *The Leopard Man* (Jacques Tourneur; 1943),³⁶ alongside Universal’s *Night Monster* (UK title *House of Mystery*, Ford Beebe; 1942),³⁷ passed through the

³⁰ While the article reports that Monogram were “hesitating to release other horror films in that terrain” in reaction to the film’s heavy censorship in the UK, *Bowery at Midnight* was still yet to be viewed by the BBFC at the time of the *Variety* article. In fact the BBFC have the film listed as ‘A’ certified *uncut* at 61 minutes and 32 seconds, passed January 12, 1943 (BBFC, (2011). *Bowery at Midnight* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF004000> [accessed 7 February 2011]). The *Variety* review from November 1942 has the runtime at a mere *60 minutes!* (Fran., “Bowery at Midnight”, *Variety*, v.148, n.10, November 11, 1942, p.8&24). As the eventual UK trade review of the film in April 1943 still gives the longer running time, the *Variety* article would appear to be somewhat of a kneejerk reaction to the suggestion that these films were out of favour at the BBFC as there remains no indication that the Board took exception to the Monogram production. The report of the film being severely cut by the Board may have been a reaction to decisions made by certain local authorities in the UK.

³¹ E.A.P., “Bowery at Midnight”, *Today’s Cinema*, v.60, n.4867, April 20, 1943, p.15.

³² Anon., “H’wood Chillers Get Chill From British Censors; Too Jittery”, *Variety*, v.148, n.12, November 25, 1942, p.3&39.

³³ BBFC, (2011). *Cat People* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF005113> [accessed 8 February 2011]. Passed as an ‘A’ 12th December 1942 with no cuts.

³⁴ BBFC, (2011). *I Walked with a Zombie* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF017391> [accessed 8 February 2011]. Passed as an ‘A’ 14th May 1943 with no cuts.

³⁵ BBFC, (2011). *Seventh Victim* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF008944> [accessed 8 February 2011]. Passed as an ‘A’ 12th November 1943 *with* cuts of which no details are available.

³⁶ BBFC, (2011). *The Leopard Man* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF020360> [accessed 8 February 2011]. Passed as an ‘A’ 21st September 1943 with no cuts.

³⁷ BBFC, (2011). *House of Mystery* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF016424> [accessed 8 February 2011]. Passed as an ‘A’ 19th November 1942 *with* cuts although no details are available.

BBFC during WWII with ‘A’ certificates. The remaining films, *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* (Roy William Neil; 1943),³⁸ *The Mummy’s Tomb* (Harold Young; 1942),³⁹ *Dr Renault’s Secret*,⁴⁰ and *The Undying Monster*⁴¹ (UK title *The Hammond Mystery*, John Brahm; 1942),⁴² were indeed held up by the BBFC until after the war, though few details of their classification remain. Nonetheless, the reception to these films upon their eventual release in the post-war period aids in establishing their relationship to the ‘H’ classification.

Nearly three years after the U.S.A. release of *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, *Monthly Film Bulletin* criticise Universal’s “[h]orrific thriller” as a “farrago of nonsense” whilst also acknowledging that “many people enjoy an occasional real bloodcurdler”⁴³. The first in a series of Universal productions bringing together characters from earlier films, these efforts serve as reproductions of earlier storylines with more elaborate conclusions, described by *Kinematograph Weekly* as the “grisly main event.”⁴⁴ The “dizzy and gory pyrotechnics provide its money’s worth” although this is also seen as the key reason behind the ‘H’ certificate awarded to this “highly coloured hokum”, and potentially for a reduction of box-office takings.⁴⁵

Today’s Cinema similarly praises the gruesome characterisations of the monsters as a “triumph of make-up” with other highlights in this “reliable offering for

³⁸ BBFC, (2011). *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF011588> [accessed 8 February 2011]. Not passed by the BBFC until 1954.

³⁹ BBFC, (2011). *The Mummy’s Tomb* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF046029> [accessed 8 February 2011]. Not passed by the BBFC until 1952.

⁴⁰ BBFC, (2012). *Dr Renault’s Secret* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/releases/dr-renaults-secret-1946-0> [accessed 28 November 2012]. Not passed until 8th February 1946 with cuts as an ‘A’.

⁴¹ BBFC, (2011). *The Undying Monster* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF016742/> [accessed 8 February 2011]. The film was passed as an ‘A’ with cuts 7th March 1946.

⁴² BBFC, (2011). *The Hammond Mystery* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF015474/> [accessed 8 February 2011]. Renamed as *The Hammond Mystery* the film was once again classified 18th April 1946.

⁴³ Anon., “Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.13, n.149, 1946, p.63.

⁴⁴ Anon., “Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.350, n.2036, April 25, 1946, p.23.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

“horror” enthusiasts” including “the opening spoliation of a grave and the return to life of a corpse [...] paraphernalia of the laboratory” and the “struggle between the Wolf-man and the Monster”.⁴⁶ While the ‘horrific’ is clearly reinforced by *Today’s Cinema*, the emphasis upon visual effects and categorisation of the film as “Grand Guignol melodrama” confirms how the ‘H’ stood for a particular type of film within a much wider, and far more complex, descriptive process.

Although no British trade reviews appeared around the time of the BBFC’s classification of *The Mummy’s Tomb* in 1952, the film itself shares a similar reliance upon the presentation of the horrific in terms of the visually explicit. *The Mummy’s Tomb* follows from the previous films in the series with the obligatory resurrection of the monster and inevitable destruction upon the surrounding environment. What the film does indicate is a connection between the ‘H’ classification and a recognisable roster of stars who feature within a vast majority of these productions. Lon Chaney Jr. became the most prominent star of the Universal features during this period, alongside a series of supporting actors who became affiliated with horror in a similar way to Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi in the 1930s.

One such star, George Zucco, appears in *The Mummy’s Tomb* as well as a number of other Universal and ‘Poverty Row’ productions associated with the ‘H’ certificate, including *The Mad Monster* and *Dead Men Walk*. Playing the eponymous doctor in 20th Century Fox’s *Dr Renault’s Secret*, Zucco’s character is derived from a number of ‘mad scientist’ films, particularly *Island of Lost Souls* (Erle C. Kenton; 1932), although Dr Renault’s creation comes as a result of turning a man into an animal rather than the reverse.⁴⁷ *Monthly Film Bulletin* summarises this “Horror Film”

⁴⁶ C.A.W., “Frankenstein Meets the Wolf-man”, *Today’s Cinema*, v.66, n.5332, April 18, 1946, p.9.

⁴⁷ *Island of Lost Souls* remained banned in Britain until 1958, largely due to the suggestion of bestiality.

as “gloomy and irrational” with the rampage of the ape and eventual murders being the basis for the overall “theme of this macabre picture”.⁴⁸ *Today’s Cinema* recognises the main source of “[h]orrific detail” within the “grotesquely simian appearance” of Renault’s ape, thus relying upon the “highly coloured” rather than making any attempt to appear “remotely credible”.⁴⁹ The review categorises the film as a “[h]orror melodrama”, an “above-average [...] full-blooded melodrama”, and also a “[b]izarre melodrama”, thereby further acknowledging the understanding of the ‘H’ film as a breed of melodrama dealing with the ‘fantastic’ and the supernatural.⁵⁰

Dr Renault’s Secret and *The Hammond Mystery*, another Twentieth Century-Fox film caught up in the ban, were eventually passed with the lesser ‘A’ certificate in 1946, following a series of cuts made by the BBFC. *The Hammond Mystery* (U.S.A. title *The Undying Monster*) combines the mystery of a family curse seen in another Fox production *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Sidney Lanfield; 1939), with the appearance of another ‘wolf-man’ style monster. The *Kinematograph Weekly* review highlights this link to the Holmes series, as the main plot of the story is concerned with the investigation into an apparent animal attack by Robert Curtis (James Ellison) and Christy (Heather Thatcher), playing the roles of Holmes and Watson respectively.

As with *Baskervilles* the presence of the ‘monster’ is felt throughout the film but not revealed until the very end, giving *The Hammond Mystery* appeal as an “exuberant “gas-light” thriller”⁵¹ or, for *Monthly Film Bulletin*, a “[m]urder mystery” with a “horrific atmosphere”,⁵² although “in spite of the fact that death stalks the screen for the full duration of its modest running time, it carries more unintentional laughs than

⁴⁸ Anon., “Dr Renault’s Secret”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.13, n.145, 1946, p.33.

⁴⁹ J.G.W., “Dr Renault’s Secret”, *Today’s Cinema*, v.66, n.5314, March 8, 1946, p.9.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Anon., “The Hammond Mystery”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.353, n.2046, July 4, 1946, p.18b.

⁵² V.M.C.D., “The Hammond Mystery”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.13, n.145, 1946, p.97.

thrills.”⁵³ The original decision to uphold the film until after WWII no doubt had a great deal to do with the final reveal of the creature at the end of the film as there is little else to differentiate *The Hammond Mystery* from similar Sherlock Holmes productions made during the same period.

The Post-war Resurgence of Horror in the UK

As we have seen, the selection of films listed within the *Variety* article of 1942 only represent a small number of those actually denied exhibition in the UK during the ban. Although *Kinematograph Weekly* published no definitive list of the banned films⁵⁴, in November 1945 an article stated that the BBFC would now recertify the films denied exhibition during 1942-45:

It was suggested at Thursday’s K.R.S. [Kinematograph Renters Society] meeting that such films as could not by judicious cutting be brought within the “A” requirements should be distributed at the rate of one per month, and new films which come within the “H” description should “queue up” behind them. It was agreed that renters of such films meet together and agree upon the order of release.⁵⁵

As in the cases of *Dr Renault’s Secret* and *The Hammond Mystery* a number of films were cut in order for them to be passed with the lesser ‘A’ certificate, although the majority retained their original ‘H’ classification following resubmission, with the

⁵³ Anon., “The Hammond Mystery”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.353, n.2046, July 4, 1946, p.18b.

⁵⁴ Anon., “Board of Film Censors Report Shows 10 per cent. Decline in Output and Footage”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.340, n.1992, June 21, 1945, p.3. In 1941 only one “H” certificate film passed by the Board, of the 1,426 total, along with one of the 1,497 total in 1942. The following two years records no “H” films being passed by the Board although there is a list of ‘outstanding’ films. During this period 7 (1941), 11 (1942), 2 (1943) and 16 (1944) films were classified as ‘outstanding’ along with three outright rejections in ‘42 and just one in ‘44.

⁵⁵ Anon., “Release of “H” Category Pictures”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.345, n.2013, November 15, 1945, p.13. The total number of films listed by the BBFC as ‘outstanding’ for ‘43 and ‘44 is eighteen, only five shy of the twenty-three “H” films reported for the period June ‘42 to June ‘45 with the remaining films potentially made up from those ‘outstanding’ from the later part of ‘42 and beginning of ‘45.

agreement made between the BBFC and the KRS ensuring that they would receive a staggered release.⁵⁶

Universal's *The Invisible Man's Revenge* (Ford Beebe; 1944)⁵⁷ became the first 'H' film to be reviewed in two years and received its initial trade reviews in December 1945.⁵⁸ Including one of the Universal's original horror characters of the 1930s, *The Invisible Man's Revenge* differed somewhat from the other monster films and yet, once again, the 'H' classification came as a result of some of the more grisly details. The "[b]izarre and exciting comedy thriller" deemed to be a "good novelty thriller for the crowd" by *Kinematograph Weekly*, shares similar traits with *The Hammond Mystery* in its "skilfully timed" moments of both the "amusing and creepy" interpreted as "good fun" rather than merely 'horrific'.⁵⁹

The reviewer believes the "eerie, unorthodox vendetta of the "hero"" to merely be part of the reason behind the film's 'H' certificate, with the villains appearing to get away with "embezzlement and attempted murder that invites stricture."⁶⁰ While the suggestion of the 'Dracula' theme by the reviewer is apt for a film centred on the antagonist's draining of victim's blood in order to prevent his own invisibility, the *Today's Cinema* review points towards the "rather gruesome detail of the blood transfusion scenes" as being the main source of "thrill and sensation".⁶¹ The journal

⁵⁶ Around the same time the British horror *Dark Eyes of London* (Walter Summers; 1939) was reissued in an apparent anticipation of a post-war appetite for horror. *Kinematograph Weekly* reviewed the film with fondness for the "exciting, suspenseful and tremendously thrilling plot" and the "effectively sinister" work from Lugosi, informing the audience that they should not be deterred by the 'H' certificate. (Anon., Reissue "Dark Eyes of London", *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.346, n.2017, December 13, 1945, p.27).

⁵⁷ BBFC, (2011). *The Invisible Man's Revenge* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF017120> [accessed 8 February 2011]. The film was passed after cuts with an 'H' on December 4, 1945.

⁵⁸ Anon., "The Invisible Man's Revenge", *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.346, n.2017, December 13, 1945, p.26. The film was released in America the previous summer which would suggest that *The Invisible Man's Revenge* was the first of the 23 banned 'H' films to be released during this period.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ C.A.W., "The Invisible Man's Revenge", *Today's Cinema*, v.65, n.5276, December 7, 1945, p.15.

makes reference to the film in a similar style to the review of *Dr Renault's Secret*, presenting *The Invisible Man's Revenge* as a “[g]rand Guignol melodrama” providing “[h]earty melodramatic entertainment for the lovers of ‘strong meat’”⁶².

While *The Invisible Man's Revenge* was recognised for its vague similarity to the Dracula story, Monogram Pictures’ production of *The Return of the Vampire* (Lew Landers; 1943)⁶³ brought back the original Universal star Bela Lugosi for a contemporary interpretation⁶⁴ of the Bram Stoker original.⁶⁵ For *Kinematograph Weekly*, Lugosi’s role as a “particularly sinister and ruthless vampire” is let down by “crude macabre and clumsy parable” in this poor attempt at the Dracula story which is “far more likely to cause audiences to die of laughing than be scared to death.”⁶⁶ Upon recognising the film’s lack of horrifying moments, the opinion that “the Censor’s judgement is sound”⁶⁷ in awarding an ‘H’ certificate infers a distaste for this type of film over a judgement of its horrific content.

The film’s poor reproduction of “bomb-menaced London”⁶⁸ is confirmed by the *Monthly Film Bulletin* who impart that, aside for those who seek “ghoulish and macabre in entertainment”, audiences “who find it hard to believe in the supernatural will probably consider the film a jumble of nonsense.”⁶⁹ What these reviews both

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ BBFC, (2011). *The Return of the Vampire* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF007266> [accessed 10 February 2011]. While the film was reviewed by the trade press with an ‘H’ film during the first week of 1946, there are no records available for its classification at the BBFC until 1954 when it received an ‘X’ certificate with cuts.

⁶⁴ *The Return of the Vampire* not only reworks the Dracula story into a contemporary setting, it also includes a version of the Wolf Man for added measure.

⁶⁵ See: Rick Worland, “OWI Meets the Monsters: Hollywood Horror Films and War Propaganda, 1942 to 1945”, *Cinema Journal*, v.37, n.1, Fall, 1997, pp.47-65. Worland’s article demonstrates how a series of 1940s ‘horror’ films became embroiled in the propaganda efforts of the Office of War Information in the U.S.A., with *The Return of the Vampire* being a prime example.

⁶⁶ Anon., “The Return of the Vampire”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.347, n.2020, January 3, 1946, p.26.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ G.M.D., “The Return of the Vampire”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.13, n.145, January, 1946, p.6.

highlight is not necessarily a distaste for horror itself, but rather for a certain breed of horror film associated with the supernatural and therefore the implausible.

In familiar territory to *Dr Renault's Secret*, Universal's *The Mad Ghoul* (James Hogan; 1943)⁷⁰ drew similar criticism to *The Return of the Vampire*, as the *Kinematograph Weekly* review ends simply by stating “[i]t’s not even funny”⁷¹. George Zucco’s involvement as another scientist, driven to murder in order to obtain fluid from the heart of his victims for the survival of his ‘ghoul’ previously exposed to an ancient nerve gas, once again ties the film to the pseudo-scientific themes deemed to be beyond plausibility for these critics. The production is recognised as “a poor risk”⁷² for exhibitors even without an ‘H’⁷³ certificate, principally because of the “complete absence of story point”.⁷⁴ By inferring that *The Mad Ghoul* is “solely for the sticks”⁷⁵, the review also insinuates a lack of quality inherent within the ‘H’ films, typically disregarded by the ‘quality’ press and thought to appeal to non-intellectual audiences.

Although not overtly praised by *Today's Cinema*, the trade paper acknowledges *The Mad Ghoul*'s creation of “thrill, sensation and shock”⁷⁶ and goes on to list the key reasons behind the ‘H’ certificate, which the film “certainly merits”:

[B]eginning as it does with a repugnant experiment on a monkey, and continuing with the dire effects of the gas on a human being, the incessant tour of cemeteries for the dreadful mutilations of the dead, the sacrifice of a too-eager journalist in substituting his own body for a corpse in a mortuary, and the zombie’s final relentless stalking [...].⁷⁷

⁷⁰ Anon., “The Mad Ghoul”, *Motion Picture Herald*, v.153, n.4, February 23, 1943.

⁷¹ Anon., “The Mad Ghoul”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.348, n.2027, February 21, 1946, p.24.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ BBFC, (2011). *The Mad Ghoul* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF023355> [accessed 10 February 2011]. There is no record of classification until 1969 when it received the ‘X’ certificate.

⁷⁴ Anon., “The Mad Ghoul”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.348, n.2027, February 21, 1946, p.24.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ C.A.W., “The Mad Ghoul”, *Today's Cinema*, v.66, n.5306, February 19, 1946, p.14.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

The fact that not all films dealing in the horrific were out-rightly dismissed in the trade press is evident within the reviews for the Republic Films effort *The Lady and the Monster* (George Sherman; 1944)⁷⁸.

Mistakenly reviewed in *Kinematograph Weekly* with its original 'H' certificate in April 1946⁷⁹, the film had just recently been passed by the BBFC as *The Lady and the Doctor* with an 'A' certificate.⁸⁰ The reviewer interestingly makes a strong argument against the 'H' classification, stating that the censors were “a trifle harsh in giving it an “H” certificate” as many other films had “got away with an “A”.”⁸¹ The story revolves around a scientist who creates a device enabling the brain of a multi-millionaire to survive after death, leading to its telekinetic control of his assistant, a plot described by *Kinematograph Weekly* as “a good shocker” based upon “pseudo-scientific detail [...] unlikely to be endorsed in *The Lancet* or *The Electrical Trader*.”⁸² For *Today's Cinema*, the “highly coloured”⁸³ theme of the film “offers tremendous opportunities for horrific detail and grisly excitement” although these opportunities are not decisively exploited in the second half of the film.⁸⁴

The lack of exploitation of the theme later in the film, when the possessed assistant seeks to acquit a young man of a murder charge, moved the story away from the type of 'horrific detail' represented by the 'H' certificate. As such, the film was reviewed by *Monthly Film Bulletin* as a “[d]rama” dealing in “standard thriller material”⁸⁵, suggesting the subtle approach to the story distances the film from the

⁷⁸ Anon., “The Lady and the Monster”, *Motion Picture Herald*, v.154, n.12, March 18, 1944.

⁷⁹ Anon., “The Lady and the Monster”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.350, n.2033, April 4, 1946 p.51.

⁸⁰ BBFC, (2011). *The Lady and the Monster* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF020209> [accessed 10 February 2011]. The new title submitted, also been seen with the case of *The Hammond Mystery* A.K.A. *The Undying Monster*, was supposedly to detract from the horror it implied.

⁸¹ Anon., “The Lady and the Monster”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.350, n.2033, April 4, 1946 p.51.

⁸² Ibid. *The Lancet* and *The Electrical Trader* were medical and scientific journals of the period

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ J.G.W., “The Lady and the Monster”, *Today's Cinema*, v.66, n.5323, March 29, 1946, pp.26&28.

⁸⁵ K.F.B., “The Lady and the Monster”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.13, n.148, April, 1946, p.48.

realms of the supernatural and the Grand Guignol without diminishing its intentions as thrilling entertainment.

Conclusion

While discussions of the 'H' ban in Britain have often implied that the horror film was out of favour during the 1940s, the ban itself merely prevented the exhibition of a small number of 'fantastical' or 'supernatural' films. The BBFC's reaction to the scripts for *The Mad Monster* and *Dead Men Walk* are significant in that they demonstrate how the Board, on the whole, perceived the 'H' certificate as a category suited to a particular style of 'horror'. The focus of the BBFC's restrictions may have tended towards these fantasy productions, although the main emphasis would always be on the depiction of grisly details suggested by themes dealt with in the plot. Attempts to remove elements of the supernatural or 'monstrous' were encouraged by the BBFC in order for the film to receive the lesser 'A' certificate, while they also recognised the limitations in re-submitting scripts largely designed for the creation of 'highly coloured' macabre.

The reaction to the ban by *Variety* illustrates the complexity of the 'H' certificate as discussions of horror go far beyond those few films tied up in the ban. Furthermore, it would be more correct to suggest that horror was not in fact 'banned' by the Board during WWII as the restrictions were merely focused upon a limited selection of the films, quite often rejected by the trade press as poor attempts to thrill audiences. As the post-war British trade reviews show, horror was in fact perceived as a form of melodrama rather than a distinct style in and of itself. As melodrama was recognised as a blend of generic themes (action, adventure, romance, etc.), the 'horror

melodrama' followed a similar generic pattern albeit with a strong emphasis on the traditions established by the Universal franchise, or the 'strong meat' it predicated.

When we look beyond those few productions tied-in with the 'H' certificate it becomes clear that a far greater number of films actually released in Britain during the ban, often also associated with melodrama, were clearly discussed as horror outside of the supernatural.

Chapter Two: “Dark Patches and Vague Presences” – Val Lewton and the Acceptable Face of ‘Horror’ During the ‘H’ Ban

While the previous chapter illustrates how several of the films initially perceived to be candidates for the ‘H’ ban by *Variety* were indeed upheld by the BBFC, the remainder passed through the Board with the lesser ‘A’ certificate. Monogram’s *Bowery at Midnight* and Universal’s *Night Monster*, alongside the Val Lewton productions *Cat People*, *I Walked With a Zombie*, *The Seventh Victim* and *The Leopard Man*, were certainly recognised as horror productions within the British trade press, albeit of a somewhat different variety from those embroiled in the ban.

In January 1943, *Kinematograph Weekly* reported on a programme of upcoming releases, listing the four Lewton productions under the title “PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILL” with no accompanying statements echoing any of the concerns voiced by *Variety*. While *Cat People* is promised as “one of the seasons most exciting features”, *Seventh Victim* as a “hair-raising thriller”, and *The Leopard Man* “an unusual and thrilling story”,¹ the Lewton films were later dismissed by the British trade press for not living up to the Grand Guignol suggested in the colourful titles and

¹ Anon., “Renters’ Programme”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.311, n.1865, January 14, 1943, p.75. *The Leopard Man* is listed under the working title of “Black Alibi” from the source novel by Cornell Woolrich.

basic premise of the story. With the exception of *The Seventh Victim*, the four Lewton productions were passed uncut with an ‘A’ certificate by the BBFC during the ‘H’ ban, suggesting the lurid titles alone provoked *Variety* into pressing the panic button.

Alexander Nemerov and others have recognised that the most common perceptions of Lewton are that he “made the most of small budgets; he emphasized the unconscious motivations of human beings; he favored [sic] darkness and the unseen generally so his audiences could imagine horror instead of see it.”² As with *Bowery at Midnight* and *House of Mystery*, Lewton’s productions held back on ‘colourful’ visuals thus avoiding the main concern for the BBFC regarding the horrific. Considering Lewton’s *Cat People* was an obvious attempt to cash in on Universal’s success with *The Wolf Man*, the fact that the Universal monsters were out of favour during the ban makes the acceptance of the Lewton productions all the more interesting.

There had clearly been no concerns regarding *Cat People* at the BBFC as the film was classified by the Board just a month after its initial *Variety* review, in which themes are established that subsequent Lewton productions also adhered to:

This is a weird drama of thrill-chill calibre, with developments of surprises confined to psychology and mental reactions, rather than transformation to grotesque and maudling [sic] characters for visual impact on the audience.³

Just as Nemerov has stated, the “grotesque” nature of horror was underplayed in the Lewton productions in favour of the power of suggestion. Jacques Tourneur, director of *Cat People*, *Zombie* and *Leopard Man*, worked with Lewton in creating films which “exhibit not only stylistic but thematic features that at once connect them with each

² Alexander Nemerov, *Icons of Grief: Lewton’s Home Front Pictures* (London: University of California Press, 2005), p.9.

³ Walt., “Cat People”, *Variety*, v.148, n.11, November 18, 1942, p.8.

other and distinguish them from other films in the series”⁴, a style drawing horror from the realms of the everyday over the supernatural.

Scott Preston⁵ and Paul Meehan⁶ have both recognised in the Lewton films an immediacy to horror provided in the workaday environments and themes common to the ‘realism’ of Film Noir. For Robert Grixti, this move away from the exotic realms of ‘fantasy’ also produces a greater sense of dread in the viewer as they no longer have a safe distances with which to dismiss the horrific as being located outside of everyday existence.⁷ J. P. Tellotte discusses this confrontation with the ‘normality’ of everyday existence as being an attempt to expose a more unsettling fear hidden within the cracks of the ‘real world’ and, in creating a sense of verisimilitude within an environment familiar to the viewer, historical or not, the security of what we perceive to be safe and distanced from the terrors of fantasy is thrown into confusion.⁸

The Lewton films released during the ‘H’ ban were recognisable for the uncertainties raised through mere suggestion of something ‘unnatural’ without resorting to that which was distinct from the everyday and, therefore, of a reassuringly fantastical nature. These Lewton films were clearly defined as horror by the British trade press and also routinely dismissed as such for attempting to appeal to both those seeking low-brow thrills, in a similar vein to the Universal films, and also a more intellectual audience.

This chapter will therefore consider the manner in which the Lewton productions circumvented the restrictions imposed by the ‘H’ certificate and how the response to these films in the British trade press demonstrated a recognition of the

⁴ Wood, “The Shadow Worlds of Jacques Tourneur”, p.64.

⁵ Preston, “The Strange Pleasure of *The Leopard Man*”, pp.14-21.

⁶ Meehan, *Horror Noir*.

⁷ Grixti, *Terrors of Uncertainty*.

⁸ Tellotte, *Dreams of Darkness*, p.13.

shift away from supernatural towards a horror stemming from the everyday. The uncertainties delivered in questioning the very presence of the ‘abnormal’ or ‘supernatural’ in our own everyday realm brought the horrors much closer to home. This assisted in a move towards ‘realism’ being acknowledged as a site for the creation of something far more horrifying than the ‘highly coloured’ pursuits of the Universal films. While trade reviews for the Lewton films indicate a psychological approach to horror, providing the necessary thrills in doing so, the move away from the Grand Guignol was seen as somewhat of a let-down considering the expectations aroused by such lurid titles. For these reviewers, the Lewton productions came up short in attempting to promote stimulating psychological horror within a framework established by the supernatural realms of the Universal productions.

The ‘Unseen’ Horrors at Universal and ‘Poverty Row’

Aside from the Lewton productions, Monogram’s *Bowery at Midnight* and Universal’s *Night Monster* also managed to avoid the ‘H’ ban following their inclusion in the *Variety* article of November 1942. While these two films both featured Bela Lugosi, a name evoking the horrors of ‘H’ certificate, the trade press in the UK acknowledged a reduced investment in the supernatural. For *Bowery at Midnight* Lugosi relinquishes the supernatural allure of his turn as *Dracula* in a dual role playing Brennar, a psychology professor whose alter ego, Karl Wagner, acts as the head of a local mission where he abuses his respected position to influence the poor to pilfer and slay at his command.

While *Variety* recognised the film as being “good enough by ‘B’ standards”, recommending its place within the “lower dual spots”, the under-development of “sheer, unadulterated horror” suggested in the basement cemetery is deemed a waste,

with Lugosi's failure to capture his final victims seen as "an example of how to ruin what might be a fair thriller."⁹ The British trades were far more accepting of the film as a product of the 19th century Gothic, with *Kinematograph Weekly* distinguishing *Bowery at Midnight* as an "[e]xtravagant, highly coloured Jekyll and Hyde melodrama turning on the gory machinations of an evil eccentric"¹⁰. *Today's Cinema* also defined Lugosi's character as a "composite Jekyll and Hyde and Sweeny Todd"¹¹ while *Monthly Film Bulletin* recognised that the Jekyll and Hyde theme brought the film closer to "[m]urder melodrama" rather than 'horror', implying a move away from fantasy and the Grand Guignol.¹² *Today's Cinema* concur in acknowledging Lugosi as "[o]nce more [...] suavely sinister in the main role" albeit one which is decidedly less fantastical than his previous efforts.¹³

The "[p]opular creepy angle"¹⁴ of the story, as defined by *Kinematograph Weekly*, is established as the key ingredient for the "ingenuous" audience member for whom "[n]othing else matters" while *Today's Cinema* suggests that this "sensationalist melodrama [...] relies little on conviction" but manages to be "a bit grisly in its detail"¹⁵. These reviews function as a reminder that 'creepy' films such as *Bowery at Midnight* were intended "to serve one master, the down-town box-office"¹⁶ and, regardless of its low-brow nature, there remained continued appeal of the horrific as a draw for exhibitors.

⁹ Fran., "Bowery at Midnight", *Variety*, v.148, n.10, November 11, 1942, p.8&24.

¹⁰ Anon., "Bowery at Midnight", *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.314, n.1879, April 22, 1943, p.28.

¹¹ E.A.P., "Bowery at Midnight", *Today's Cinema*, v.60, n.4867, April 20, 1943, p.15.

¹² M.G., "Bowery at Midnight", *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.10, n.113, 1943, p.50.

¹³ E.A.P., "Bowery at Midnight", *Today's Cinema*, v.60, n.4867, April 20, 1943, p.15.

¹⁴ Anon., "Bowery at Midnight", *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.314, n.1879, April 22, 1943, p.28.

¹⁵ E.A.P., "Bowery at Midnight", *Today's Cinema*, v.60, n.4867, April 20, 1943, p.15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

House of Mystery (U.S.A. title *Night Monster*)¹⁷ features Lugosi alongside horror cohort Lionel Atwill, both playing minor roles in a film exploiting their familiar personae by giving them top billing over their co-stars.¹⁸ The “adequate” casting of Lugosi and Atwill may have been positioned as the main draw for a film “[f]abricated along the usual lines”, yet *Variety* argue that *House of Mystery* “carries more horror-thrill in the title than in its footage” with merely a reference to the “weird atmosphere” created in the age-old mansion setting.¹⁹

Kinematograph Weekly reviewed the film as a “[m]urder mystery melodrama, set in a lonely fog-bound mansion” with emphasis upon the “grisly “who dunnit” story”²⁰. Like *Bowery at Midnight* this film is directed at “ingenuous industrial audiences” who may fall for the supposedly supernatural murders of the wheelchair bound psychic, although these details are only confronted in the final act of a story largely outside the realm of fantasy:

The picture opens with promise, in the eerie fog-bound mansion, but clarity, let alone plausibility, goes by the board with the introduction of Hindu mysticism or whatever ism it is that enables the killer to grow legs at will and carry out his campaign of revenge.²¹

¹⁷ BBFC, (2011). *House of Mystery* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF016424> [accessed 26 May 2011]. The records held by the BBFC and the running time for the film listed by *Variety* show five minutes had been removed by the Board in order to approve exhibition under an ‘A’ classification although, as with the majority of films of the period, there are no records of what was cut. The BBFC certificate was awarded only four weeks after the initial *Variety* review indicating that in some cases these films were not always taken exception to by the Board and were indeed suitable for exhibition in the UK. *Variety*’s unassuming review of the film, following their initial concerns over its exhibition in the UK, indicates once again that the ‘H’ ban was merely concerned with a certain type of horror rather than of the entire genre itself. By cutting five minutes from the finished film, the BBFC were clearly in favour of exhibition if suited to the lesser forms of classification.

¹⁸ The lead roles were played by Ralph Morgan (who would go on to star in Sam Newfield’s *The Monster Maker*), Irene Hervey and Don Porter.

¹⁹ Walt., “Night Monster”, *Variety*, v.148, n.7, October 21, 1942, p.8.

²⁰ Anon., “House of Mystery”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.313, n.1875, March 25, 1943, p.27.

²¹ *Ibid.*

The reviewer's disappointment in siding with the fantastical did not deter them in summarising *House of Mystery* as "pretty good" and "occasionally exciting" yet still "somewhat bloodthirsty" and "creepy"²².

Today's Cinema also recognises this "[m]urder-mystery melodrama on Grand Guignol lines"²³ as somewhat diluted in its presentation of the visually explicit, demonstrated in the "[c]ontrolled direction [which] keeps colourful narrative and eerie atmosphere within reasonable bounds despite lurid material out for sensation, mystery, suspense and thrill" with the appearance of Lugosi and Atwill merely aiding to "strengthen the atmosphere of things unholy afoot".²⁴ The "[v]ery good entertainment of macabre type", attributed to the "[e]xcellent portrayals; distinctive production qualities; well-above-average dialogue"²⁵ and an "array of prowling, dark looks, killings, screams"²⁶, satisfies an appetite for the horrific whilst also appeasing the censors distain for the explicitly supernatural. The "workmanlike" direction and impressive cast of actors providing "misleading clues [...] suggested without overemphasis"²⁷, illustrated by *Monthly Film Bulletin*, further demonstrates how this restrained approach to horror was taking over from the more explicit whilst remaining a draw for the box-office.

The Exception to Val Lewton's Cat People

While Monogram's *Bowery at Midnight* and Universal's *House of Mystery* both successfully avoided the restrictions imposed by the 'H' ban, RKO achieved greater

²² Ibid.

²³ E.A.P., "House of Mystery", *Today's Cinema*, v.60, n.4854, March 19, 1943, p.29.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ K.F.B., "House of Mystery", *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.10, n.112, April, 1942, p.41.

success with Val Lewton's B unit productions operating throughout the early part of the 1940s. The Lewton films have often been praised as the only significant contribution to the horror genre in the period, with this recognition largely derived from a shift away from the Grand Guignol aesthetic of the Universal pictures towards a creative use of 'psychological' horror and suggestion. For *Cat People*, a sense of mystery is created through various references to Irena's (Simone Simon) beastly alter ego, released through her sexual arousal brought about by admirer and eventual husband Oliver (Kent Smith).

The film shies away from the type of grisly details associated with the 'H' as the presence of anything truly 'horrific' is created through suggestion in carefully constructed scenes emphasising the threat of Irena's alter-ego. Lewton and director Jacques Tourneur were fully aware that the viewer's own imagination would fill the gaps left open through suggestion, allowing audiences to picture the worst possible scenario. By setting the film within a selection of everyday environments (offices, apartments, cafés) there is also an immediacy brought to the moments of terror, taking them away from the realms of fantasy and into our own reality:

It was in Lewton's RKO horror output that he brilliantly evaded the studio scalpel through his indirect portrayals of the ways that gendered hierarchies, aggressively dehumanised technologies, and corrupted class, racial, and economic relations result in the tendency of the mind to irrationally create its own devils.²⁸

This indirect approach taken by Lewton came in no small part as result of the lurid titles evocative of the Universal franchise, supplied to the producer by the studio who were understandably out to cash in on the resurgence of horror at the turn of the decade.

²⁸ Martha P. Nochimson, "Val Lewton at RKO: The Social Dimensions of Horror" in *Cineaste*, v.31, n.4, Fall 2006, p.9.

For the British trades, likewise some of New York Critics, the restrained approach and use of psychoanalysis drew criticism for attempting to inject a typically ‘low-brow’ genre with a respectability unbefitting the established ‘industrial’ audiences. As Scott Preston argues,

someone else may have turned up their nose at the position and either rejected it, or produced the films with the kind of hatred for the material that results in forgettable work, Lewton instead elevated what in 1942 was an embarrassing “low” genre into art.²⁹

While it now may be perceived as a somewhat ‘artistic’ approach to the genre, at the time RKO’s attempts to break into the horror market had little to do with the creation of a new aesthetic style and more with the ambition to duplicate Universal’s success.

As a result, Lewton and Tourneur’s style came to be distinguished from the elaborate sets and special effects associated with the ‘H’ films with an emphasis upon the “doubling” of the fantasy world, as discussed by J. P. Telotte, in which we remodel the world of the film by directing our own imaginations onto it. Thus helping to explain why “the most effective threats in the genre are seldom the clearly visible monsters or noontday devils, but dark patches and vague presences which invite projection”³⁰. In *Cat People*, the doubling effect of Irena and her hidden alter ego creates a threat to the everyday realm she attempts to hide until the inevitable rejection by her husband. Not given the opportunity to witness Irena’s transformed-self permits the creation of the monstrous within the psyche, aided through Irena’s feline-like behaviour, her drawings of a caged panther, cat-shaped shadows thrown on street walls, and the paw-like feet of a bathtub.

²⁹ Preston, “The Strange Pleasure of *The Leopard Man*”, p.16

³⁰ J. P. Telotte, “The Doubles of Fantasy and the Space of Desire” in *Film Criticism*, v.7, n.1, Fall 1982, p.57.

Following the uncut version of the film being passed with an ‘A’ by the BBFC, the British trade reviewers were presented with the difficulty of appraising a ‘horror’ film beyond the tried and tested method of its traditionally ‘high-coloured’ predecessors, now relying upon the active participation of the average audience member. *Variety*’s review of *Cat People* demonstrates this uncertainty in its blend of “weird drama of thrill-chill calibre, with developments of surprises confined to psychology and mental reactions, rather than transformation to grotesque and marauding characters for visual impact on the audiences.”³¹ *Cat People* was presented by the U.S.A. trades as no less chilling than the more explicit ventures into horror, although the reviewer’s analysis of the script as too “hazy for the average audience”³² signifies an understanding that the typically ‘unsophisticated’ viewer of such fare may have difficulty in interpreting the psychological background to the story.

Following a successful run in New York at the tail end of 1942 and into 1943, *Cat People* received its first British trade reviews in the February of ‘43 and was met with a mixed response as a result of this complex blend of psychological horror. *Kinematograph Weekly* recognises the film’s status as a breed of “[p]sychological thriller”³³ but uses this appraisal to criticise the film for not making the most of its potential as “effective Grand Guignol melodrama.”³⁴ The reviewer displays disappointment in *Cat People*’s inability to “exploit its unique macabre qualities convincingly” as the “sinister shadows seldom succeed in exciting the imagination” although the music and cinematography is recognised as contributing to the “creepy

³¹ Walt, “Cat People”, *Variety*, v.148, n.11, November 18, 1942, p.8.

³² Ibid.

³³ Anon., “Cat People”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.312, n.1870, February 18, 1943, p.20.

³⁴ Ibid.

colour.”³⁵ A comparison is made to similar conventional ‘thick-eared’ thrillers failing to provide “many violent shocks” but enough to “thrill the unsophisticated.”³⁶

Similarly, *Today’s Cinema* acquiesces the story is “ably enough put over as to bizarre detail [although] it can by no means be regarded as universal appeal” with the recognition that “such a yarn is out for the thrill, entirely regardless of conviction.”³⁷ The reviewer, therefore, establishes *Cat People* as an attempt to instil a level of believability in what is fundamentally a reinterpretation of the ‘supernatural’ realms of the Universal series, with the desired result remaining the intention to ‘thrill’. For this reviewer, the film is recommended as “sufficiently horrific for the most jaded tastes, and for those who care for this sort of thing, here is a decidedly juicy dish.”³⁸

While it may be seen that the reviewers stood against *Cat People* for shying away from its promise of Grand Guignol, suggested in its lurid title and recognition as ‘thrilling’ entertainment for audiences, the film’s effectiveness is illustrated by a *Kinematograph Weekly* report in June of that year stating that Oldham Watch Committee would not permit exhibition of *Cat People* to anyone under the age of sixteen. Effectively this move imposed a similar restriction upon the film as the ‘H’ certificate, suggesting how it was certainly recognised by a number of local authorities as being unsuitable for younger audiences even though, as we have seen, the film bore no marks of what typically constituted an ‘H’ classification.³⁹

Now regarded as one of the more respectable entries into the oeuvre, through creating a horrific atmosphere by restraining the lurid potentials of its premise, British

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ C.A.W., “Cat People”, *Today’s Cinema*, v.60, n.4839, February 12, 1943, pp.5-6.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Anon., “‘Cat People’ for Over Sixteens”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.316, n.1888, June 24, 1943, p.7.

trade reviewers of 1943 saw *Cat People* as more of a diluted attempt to create shocks and thrills. As such, the film was treated as a poor attempt to move away from the Grand Guignol aesthetic implied in its basic premise, towards a more ‘convincing’ attempt at the psychological thriller. Typically, productions dealing with similar themes of human transformation, such as the ape-turned-human in *Dr Renault’s Secret*, suffered the heaviest under the ‘H’ ban although *Cat People’s* tendency towards the psychological rather than the graphic proved to be the winning combination with the censors.

However, the trade press were clearly less favourable to this approach, perceiving the overall failings of the film for this very reason. For *Kinematograph Weekly*, *Cat People* ultimately fails as a horror film for not living up to its lurid title, suggesting that the unsophisticated horror spawned by the Universal productions was favoured for not protesting to be anything more than an attempt to generate explicitly horrific imagery.

“Hollow Rather Than Horrific Visions”

In the case of *Bowery at Midnight* and *House of Mystery*, the reviewers reflected upon the appeal these films held for the ‘low-brow’ viewer and how they successfully communicated these thrills during the ‘H’ ban without attempting to convey pretence of being anything other than good entertainment for fans of the genre. As with his previous film, Lewton’s *I Walked with a Zombie* maintained a doubling motif in order to summon the dark-desires and fears of the viewer’s unconscious rather than playing upon a sensational title provided by the studio. In doing so, the film was received by the British trade press in much a similar way to the RKO’s previous attempt to draw horror from the dreamlike world created in its visual style.

These dreamlike settings created by Lewton and Tourneur takes the idea of the conscious mind a step further from the dream-sequence in *Cat People* by placing us into an almost consistently half-conscious realm in the ‘other’ world of Caribbean island Saint Sebastian. Here we are introduced to plantation manager Paul Holland (Tom Conway), hiring Canadian nurse Betsy (Frances Dee) to look after his wife Jessica (Christine Gordon) who suffers from an unknown illness. Towards the end of the film, when it is revealed that Paul’s half-brother Wesley (James Ellison) intended to run away with Jessica following an affair they believed to have been undiscovered, it is implied that Holland’s mother Mrs Rand (Edith Barrett) placed a voodoo spell on Jessica in order to stop her from splitting up the family. Alongside the mysteries surrounding the Holland family, the nearby islanders, decedents of slaves brought to the plantation who believe in such voodoo rituals, are misinterpreted by Betsy as a threat to the family until she comes to understand the important role they have on Saint Sebastian and the true nature of their beliefs.⁴⁰

Described in *Today’s Cinema* as “strong melodramatic fare for non-squeamish tastes”, *I Walked with a Zombie* was not dismissed out-rightly by the British trade press as the reviewer recognises how the “restrained directorial treatment [created] effectively eerie backgrounds”.⁴¹ However, in “making no appeal whatsoever to conviction”, for the more intelligent audiences there is “little narrative interest in so a fantastic a line-up of confected thrill and sensation.”⁴² Regardless of the successful creation of such ‘eerie backgrounds’, the restraint placed upon the approach to creating

⁴⁰ The uncertainties suggested by the voodoo practices are highlighted in a scene in which Betsy hears cries emanating from somewhere inside the house and assumes they are coming from Jessica. In fact they are cries of mourning coming from the maid Alma (Theresa Harris) as she mourns not death, but the birth of her sister’s child because of the traditions slavery brought upon their society. Death is celebrated as it signifies and end to their existence as a slave while new birth brings with it another oppressed existence.

⁴¹ C.A.W., “I Walked with a Zombie”, *Today’s Cinema*, v.60, n.4894, June 23, 1943, pp.9-10.

⁴² Ibid.

fantastical thrills presents “very little achievement”⁴³ in providing truly shocking moments for less discerning audiences, for whom the title alone would indicate something significantly more explicit.

While it is not suggested by *Today’s Cinema* that *I Walked with a Zombie* holds little or no appeal for the horror audience, there remains a concerted effort by the reviewer to demonstrate that a film implying the ‘highly-coloured’ should deliver on such a promise. Instead, the film falls between attempts to appeal to fans of the genre and the more intellectual audience, for whom such entertainment would be often be disregarded as ‘low-brow’.

This problem is also raised by *Kinematograph Weekly*, who deem the film as a failed attempt to appeal to audiences beyond those defined by the horrors of the ‘H’ classification. The reviewer categorises *I Walked with a Zombie* as “too far-fetched to thrill intelligent audiences and not exciting enough to chill the spines of the masses”, resulting in a “hollow rather than horrific vision” with only the stars and lurid title stopping it from “falling too heavily between two stools.”⁴⁴ Therefore the film is treated with suspect as an attempt to inject the horror genre with a respectability unnecessary for the established audiences for whom, as the trade press seeks to illustrate, the Grand Guignol is the most appealing aspect.

With little to appeal for either audience, *I Walked with a Zombie* is perceived as merely having “catch-penny potentialities for industrial halls” as the most “salient theme is overdressed and under developed.”⁴⁵ With reference to Tourneur and Lewton’s previous collaboration, *Monthly Film Bulletin* recognises *Zombie* as another “telling mixture of sound normality and the occult” as “[a]lmost all the weird sounds

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Anon., “I Walked with a Zombie”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.316, n.1886, June 10, 1943, p.29.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

and strange happenings are traced to reasonable causes” thus presenting a film which fails to live up to expectations in terms of its ‘horrific visions’.

As with *Cat People*, *Monthly Film Bulletin*’s opening categorisation of the film as simply “[d]rama” distinguishes the Lewton production beyond the realm of the purely ‘supernatural’ or Grand Guignol. Interestingly, rather than dismiss the moments which tend towards the ‘fantastic’, the reviewer for *Monthly Film Bulletin* goes as far as to question “whether it is right to perpetuate and strengthen superstition by proving the efficiency of magic”⁴⁶ making discussions of the supernatural within a less elaborate locale appear somewhat more realistic. In taking the film out of the context of the established Universal horror conventions, primarily through avoiding direct confrontation with the undisputed acceptance of the supernatural, the unassuming approach to *I Walked with a Zombie* creates a disturbing atmosphere caught between ‘reality’ and ‘fantasy’.

Representing a shift away from shades of the supernatural, *The Leopard Man*⁴⁷ became the first of the RKO films to be solely invested in the human psyche, albeit disguised under a misleading title derived from the eponymous owner of an escaped leopard thought to be the culprit for a series of grisly murders in New Mexico. In an unashamedly exploitative attempt to generate an audience through a similar set-up to *Cat People*, with the expectation being the presentation of a ‘leopard-man’, the deaths of several young female victims is kept from the audience until the end of the film. It is finally revealed how curator of the local museum Dr Galbraith (James Bell) was in

⁴⁶ K.F.B., “I Walked with a Zombie”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.10, n.115, July, 1943, p.78.

⁴⁷ Preston, “The Strange Pleasure of *The Leopard Man*”. As Preston has highlighted, *The Leopard Man* came at a time when America was in the midst of a “sexual psychopath” scare, with the government encouraging its citizens to be on the lookout for the “outsiders” of society who may pose a very real threat. This reading of the film demonstrates how Lewton’s films drew from the very real threats prevalent within society as a means of addressing the ‘horrors’ of the everyday.

fact using a claw-like tool to dispatch his victims with only the first attack being perpetrated by the escaped feline.

This misdirection is once again criticised by the trade press with *Kinematograph Weekly* responding to *The Leopard Man* as an attempt to present a macabre tale under the guise of a more intelligent thriller. Introduced as a “[h]igh falutin’ thriller”, or being in pretence of something above the average horror, the attempt to introduce a series of clever touches to the story is deemed “too great a burden on the imagination of the average viewer” who are unlikely to follow the misdirection central to the story.⁴⁸ Praising Jacques Tourneur for the imagination brought to the film, the review also critiques *The Leopard Man* in a similar way to *Zombie* by suggesting the production “falls between two stools”.⁴⁹

This is recognised in the attempts to “convert a conventional creepy to something a little more intelligent” as the “heights demanded by the connoisseur” of the ‘thriller’ are never reached.⁵⁰ In referring to the viewer of the more intelligent type of film as the “connoisseur”, a cultural hierarchy is established between Lewton’s production and the more discerning viewer for whom the association with the ‘creepy’ would commonly be perceived as something more suited to ingenuous audiences. In this case, the film is seen as failing in both respects.

There is no questions as to whether or not these reviewers perceived the film as anything other than an attempt to operate within the established conventions of the ‘horror’ genre although, because of the expectation this created, the criticisms are directed towards a failure to live up to this promise. *Monthly Film Bulletin* makes no qualms in recognising that, after categorising the film as a “thriller”, *The Leopard Man*

⁴⁸ Anon., “The Leopard Man”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.320, n.1904, October 14, 1943, p.14.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

“merits its “A” certificate as it is very gloomy and people who “scare” easily should avoid it [as] [d]arkness, horrors and suspense abound.”⁵¹ While *Kinematograph Weekly* perceive *The Leopard Man* as a disappointing blend of intelligent thriller and underwhelming Grand Guignol, *Monthly Film Bulletin* avoids establishing this link as one of the film’s flaws. Instead, the reviewer recognises how the ‘horrific’ is successfully applied, to the point where the “A” certificate merits a further warning for those who may find these dark themes too much to handle.

Even so, *The Leopard Man* avoided further censorship at the behest of the BBFC by supressing explicit visuals in favour of a more suggestive approach to the implied horrors perpetrated by the ‘leopard’ killer, with the title challenging audiences to once again establish their own gruesome ideas of the fate awaiting the hapless victims before revealing the true nature of the murders.

Conclusion

The only production of the RKO series to have suffered cuts in order to avoid the ‘H’ classification, *The Seventh Victim*, was the fourth Lewton film to be passed by the BBFC during the ban and maintained a balance of normalcy and the occult seen in *I Walked with a Zombie*. The story follows Mary Gibson (Kim Hunter) as she travels to Greenwich Village in search of older sister Jacqueline (Jean Brooks) after the latter falls victim to a group of devil worshippers, manipulating her into suicide for breaking a vow not to speak of their activities.

Monthly Film Bulletin’s appraisal of this “[t]hriller” once again demonstrates a negative reaction to attempts made to appeal beyond the ‘low-brow’, as the “plot is slow and confused and the horrors are so obviously contrived to impress that they fail

⁵¹ D.E.B., “The Leopard Man”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.10, n.119, November, 1943, p.125.

in their attempt.”⁵² The contrived horrors of this “[m]isfire thriller which may get by uncritical patrons” are illustrated by *Today’s Cinema*, pointing towards the “artificial atmosphere of brooding horror created by such devices as [the] mysterious noose dangling in victim’s bedroom [and] overdone use of sombre lightings”⁵³ as failed attempts to produce the desired sinister effects through the implication of something more horrific.

As with the other Lewton productions, the British trade press position *The Seventh Victim* as “a completely abortive effort”⁵⁴ to generate horrific effect without explicitly confronting the viewer with any of the graphic detail implied by the morbid atmosphere. The move away from the supernatural, and therefore towards the darker side to the ‘everyday’, leads the reviewer to infer that in order to “achieve its object, bizarre incident must surely have some semblance of plausibility if not of conviction” as the resultant irrationality leaves the film with a number of “misfire shocks”⁵⁵. What these reviews for *The Seventh Victim* illustrate is confirmation of the Lewton productions as misdirected efforts to appease the masses by drawing from the conventions set by the Universal productions, whilst simultaneously promoting a stronger emphasis upon the rationality of the everyday as a site for less elaborate construction of the ‘horrific’.

The four Lewton films mentioned in the original *Variety* article provide an interesting example of how a traditionally ‘low-brow’ genre was being criticised by the trade press for not living up to the expectation established in prior horror efforts. These criticisms imply that the Val Lewton productions somewhat sell the viewer short by not conforming to the genre conventions established in films dealing with

⁵² D.E.B., “The Seventh Victim”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.11, n.122, February, 1944, p.18.

⁵³ C.A.W., “The Seventh Victim”, *Today’s Cinema*, v.61, n.4970, December 17, 1943, pp.12.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

similar themes. This is confirmed by the reaction to the other two films on the *Variety* list, *The House of Mystery* and *Bowery at Midnight*, recognised for their value as good thrilling entertainment for mass audiences and with no pretence of being anything more.

What is also of significance is how these reviewers show a great deal of frustrations towards the RKO productions for not paying off in the delivery of the shocking moments and macabre themes thought to be of great appeal to the uncritical masses. The attempts made by the Lewton films to appeal to a more sophisticated audience, through psychological themes and reasonable explanations for the seemingly supernatural activities, is dismissed as incompatible with the traces of Grand Guignol implied throughout each film.

These reviews, therefore, provide us with evidence of the trade press's understanding of a continued appeal for horrific entertainment in Britain during a time when this particular type of film was thought to be of little appeal to the audience. The lurid titles of the Lewton productions offer a promise reminiscent of those films embroiled in the 'H' ban and are repetitively questioned by the British trades for not living up to expectations.

While Lewton sought to provide the shocking entertainment demanded by the studio, without a reliance upon the supernatural as a means of doing so, the films grew a greater semblance of 'normality'. This is illustrated in the confusions surrounding the real murderer of the young girls in *The Leopard Man*, the refusal to allow sight of Irena's true identity in *Cat People*, the unexplained state of Jessica in *I Walked with a Zombie*, and the sinister rather than supernatural events of *The Seventh Victim*. For the duration of the 'H' ban in Britain, the shift away from the fantastical realms of the supernatural suited the BBFC fine as it was those very films which had been under

fire from local authorities and watch groups throughout the previous decade. However, as horror became even more closely associated with 'realism' it would come to be understood as far more shocking than the earlier films derived from the realms of fantasy.

Chapter Three: Prestige, Comedy, and Nations at War – Redefining Horror for the War-Time Audience

Discussions of horror in Britain during the 1940s have often been dismissed in light of the common perceptions held on the ‘H’ ban although, as we have already seen, the trade press of the period certainly recognised the box-office potential for horror. Banning the ‘H’ certificate may have succeeded in keeping a number of ‘low-brow’ horror productions off British screens although a number of alternative approaches to horror passed through the BBFC unnoticed to oppose the suggestion that both quality and quantity was on the downturn during WWII.

As Rick Worland has argued:

The general disdain for the genre’s aesthetic depletion in the war years [...] has tended to forestall consideration of how such common movies might still yield other historically interesting subtexts, particularly in those horror films that engaged the contemporary wartime background overtly and directly.¹

The circumstances surrounding WWII brought about a number of attempts to refigure the horror film, including its amalgamation with the war film, via the prerogatives of propaganda and the Office of War Information (OWI)² in the United States.

¹ Rick Worland, “OWI Meets the Monsters”, p.47.

² Established in April 1942.

Following the ban on Hollywood imports to Germany and Italy, and subsequently the bombing of Pearl Harbour, a spate of films were released in retort from Hollywood and the first job for the OWI would be to deal with the exploitation of war as a backdrop for an array of established Hollywood formulae. *Secret Agent of Japan* (Irving Pichel; 1942) and *Remember Pearl Harbour* (Joseph Santley; 1942) are presented as more of a call for revenge than propaganda, and the OWI certainly had no intention of allowing such films to alienate the international audience or generate hatred for their own citizens of foreign ancestry.³

The OWI's influence upon Hollywood during U.S.A. involvement in WWII is recognisable in the impact upon a number of established cinematic styles. After the slapstick approach to *The Invisible Woman* (A. Edward Sutherland; 1940), an inconsequential second sequel in the "Invisible Man" series, the follow-up film *Invisible Agent* (Edward L. Marin; 1942) became one of the first 'horror' products to be passed by the BBFC following the inception of the 'H' ban in June 1942.⁴ The film represents a clear attempt by the studios to place a popular genre character onto a wartime backdrop at a time when themes of war began to fill the Hollywood production schedules, leading to the most prominent involvement of the American government in mass media ever seen.⁵

³ This became a period when the government would maintain control of popular culture in America, with 1652 scripts reviewed by the OWI's Bureau of Motion Pictures until President Truman abolished the office by August 31st 1945. The bureaucracy surrounding this period in Hollywood led to the creation of products diluted for international markets, sacrificing certain standards and leading studios to become closer to factory-line production than ever before.

⁴ BBFC, (2013). *Invisible Agent* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/releases/invisible-agent-1970> [accessed 6 February 2013]. The film was passed as an 'A' uncut by the BBFC on August 28 1942, two months after the arrival of the 'H' ban in Britain.

⁵ Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: Patriotism, Movies and the Second World War from 'Ninotchka' to 'Mrs Miniver'* (London: Tauris Parke Pakerbacks, 2000), p.18.

While the war did indeed play a direct role in shaping the aesthetics of a number of horror productions during this period, attempts were also made to produce a series of ‘prestige’ horror films, removed from the contemporary environment, and notable for their basis on classic literary work. In his work on the critical reception of horror in the U.S.A. during the 1940s, Mark Jancovich has suggested that a number of these ‘prestige’ films were intended to appeal to more ‘feminine’ tastes as opposed to the masculine sensibilities of the ‘low-budget’ horror film.⁶ Criticised as “features that signified quality without actually providing quality” these films were perceived as pretentious attempts to dress up their low-brow status in order to generate wider appeal.

Alongside a number of often low-budget ‘horror-comedies’, of which there were numerous during the war, these respectable prestige pictures were arguably an attempt to present horror as something other than cheap, low-brow and visually unpleasant. While Universal’s *Phantom of the Opera* and MGM’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* drew respectability from their origins as classic literature of the late 19th and early 20th century, with an eye on period dressings and glamour, they were also intended to draw in audiences seeking the pleasures of the horror picture.⁷

Alongside the Universal ventures, Paramount invested in their own interpretation of the *Dorian Gray* story with *Man in Half Moon Street* (Ralph Murphy; 1945), a more gruesome retelling of the Oscar Wilde’s version inasmuch as the protagonist retains his youthful appearance by feeding from the glands of the younger

⁶ Jancovich, “Two Ways of Looking”, p.59.

⁷ Indeed *Phantom of the Opera* was preceded by the 1925 silent version (Rupert Julian) starring Lon Chaney, also made at Universal, and became one of the precursors to the original horror cycle as Hollywood moved into the sound era. The popularity of the new version of *Phantom of the Opera* also spawned a ‘sequel’ in *The Climax* (George Waggner; 1944), loosely based on the 1909 play by Edward Locke, re-using the Opéra Garnier interiors used in the previous film.

men he periodically murders. After translating Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre" into a contemporary horror story of voodooism in the Caribbean, Val Lewton's *I Walked with a Zombie* for RKO⁸ was followed that same year by a closer adaptation to Brontë's original novel by Twentieth Century-Fox (Robert Stevenson; 1943), making the most of the Gothic aesthetic already established as a key ingredient for the original Universal horror cycle.

While these films were recognised as sharing visual and thematic styles with the horror film, *Jane Eyre*⁹ has also been discussed by Diane Waldman as part of a cycle of Gothic romance films during the 1940s.¹⁰ Such films as *Murder in Thornton Square* (U.S.A. title *Gaslight*, George Cukor; 1944) and *Experiment Perilous* (Jacques Tourneur; 1944) have been recognised as a reaction to studios wishing to satisfy the largely female wartime audience, however, their draw for horror audiences also cannot be refuted.

It may be seen that the period during the 'H' ban in Britain was one in which discussions of horror in the trades and the press remained in abundance, albeit often in reference to the disappointment with efforts such as *Phantom of the Opera* and *The*

⁸ For a discussion of Lewton's film in relation to *Jane Eyre* see: Martha P. Nochimson, "Val Lewton at RKO: The Social Dimensions of Horror", *Cineaste*, v.31, n.4, Fall, 2006, pp.9 – 17.

⁹ The story of orphan Jane (Joan Fontaine) and her love for the strange and embittered Lord Rochester (Orson Welles), complicated by the mystery of his former wife locked away within the confines of the isolated Thornfield Hall, was met with criticism in Britain for its betrayal of Brontë's original novel. The "bizarre exteriors" provided the film with a suitable setting for this Gothic tale (Anon., "Jane Eyre", *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.322, n.1911, December 2, 1943, p.35.) and the earlier orphanage scenes, presenting a "place of dungeon-like gloom and terror" was of particular appeal (L.C.H., "Jane Eyre", *Today's Cinema*, v.61, n.4963, December 1, 1943, p.12.). *The Times* criticises the "sham Gothic lines of an outmoded melodramatic tradition" in a production deemed to have the potential as "a more interesting and important event than actually it turns out to be" (Anon., "The Christmas Film", *The Times*, December 24, 1943, p.6).

¹⁰ Waldman, "'At Last I Can Tell it to Someone!'. Waldman suggests these films were part of shift in the role of the female in the Gothic films during the period when gender roles were being put into question. The typically unreliable point of view of the female protagonist at the turn of the decade would progress throughout WWII to become the reverse, as the patriarchal order of the Gothic male was threatened in a similar fashion to masculine authority during the war.

Picture of Dorian Gray due to a lack of ‘thrills’ in favour of a look of quality. One such ‘quality’ production from Paramount Pictures, praised by critics and deemed the first ‘serious’ treatment of the supernatural, *The Uninvited* managed to portray a spiritual story convincingly without causing concern for the BBFC. While the Val Lewton productions were often recognised as attempts to bring some conviction to the horror film, in the eyes of the critics they also failed to deliver the shocking moments judged to be a measure of success for these particular films. *The Uninvited* avoided any such criticism through its delivery of genuinely terrifying moments whilst simultaneously establishing ‘quality’ and, as with the Lewton productions, closer links to ‘reality’ than the earlier fantasy horrors.

Therefore, a series of approaches to the horror film taken by Hollywood during the 1940s came with varying degrees of success, all recognised for their attempts to appeal to horror audiences through significant variations on themes previously established in the pre-war period. These films demonstrate significant attempts to establish alternatives to ‘low-brow’ fantasy upheld by the censors in Britain, and this chapter will therefore discuss how these new approaches contributed to the development of what was understood as horrific during the period in order to further the understand a genre thought to have been ousted during WWII.

Hollywood Moves to War

The purpose of the OWI¹¹ during WWII was not necessarily to ban films but to insert themes¹² into productions as a means of aiding the war effort and to remove those deemed to be damaging to both relationships at home and on the world stage.¹³ During the early stages of the war, a number of Hollywood writers and directors made their own attempts to integrate the anti-fascist messages into their films and, on September 9th 1941, studio heads were even charged for attempting to drag America into war by projecting ‘anti-isolationist’ ideologies onto their audiences.¹⁴ The first of the sequels to Universal’s *The Invisible Man* (James Whale; 1933), *The Invisible Man Returns* (Joe May; 1940) confronts the fascist regime spreading across Europe with Curt Siodmak’s screenplay echoing the climate in Germany from which he fled following Hitler’s rise to power in 1933.¹⁵

¹¹Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, p.vii. The OWI’s influence upon the industry came through their close involvement in studio meetings, script rewrites, and the final production process.

¹² Ibid., p.63. Action such as “teenagers participating in war activity as part of their daily routines, and businesses displaying war posters, rationing notices, and other signs of a nation at war”.

¹³ Worland, “OWI Meets the Monsters”, p.48. Although the Production Code Administration (PCA) had substantial power in Hollywood from the mid-1930s onwards, the OWI dealt more directly with complex issues raised during wartime. In effect, the aim of the OWI was to insert material into the pictures whereas the PCA would remove it.

¹⁴ Koppes and Black, pp. 15-28. After films such as *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (Anatole Litvak; 1939) and *Foreign Correspondent* (Alfred Hitchcock; 1940) began challenging the threat of war, Joe Breen at the Hays Office was uncertain of such films playing to an international audience and initially showed concern towards unfair portrayals of Hitler as a screaming madman. *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* was initially banned throughout Europe and had to be drastically cut before it was exhibited in England although it played very well in its original uncut form throughout Great Britain when it was reissued in 1940. A series of exploitative films appeared in the first half of 1942, around the time of Universal’s *Invisible Agent*, capitalising on the attacks at Pearl Harbour before the OWI and Franklin D. Roosevelt’s administration sought to control Hollywood’s treatment of issues perceived as crucial to the war effort. Roosevelt recognised the film industry’s power as a device for propaganda, although films such as *Secret Agent of Japan* served less as an attempt to bring about victory and more as encouragement of racial stereotype and hatred.

¹⁵ As the megalomaniacal ‘invisible man’, Sir Geoffrey Radcliffe (Vincent Price) proclaims: “Just think what I can do for my country, or let’s say with my country – control it! Other nations would tremble before us, as this nation will tremble before me...I could sit in on the councils of kings and dictators. It makes me King!”

Jon Hall's eponymous character in *Invisible Agent* stands in stark contrast to both the performances by Claude Rains in the original *The Invisible Man* and Vincent Price's in the sequel *The Invisible Man Returns*, as the emphasis shifts to portray the protagonist as a patriotic hero utilising his invisibility formulae as a means of spying on the Axis rather than continuing the evil deeds perpetrated in the previous films. Released in the U.S.A. at the beginning of August 1942, *Invisible Agent* arrived several months after the OWI opened its offices and demonstrates the markedly different approach to the post-Pearl Harbour horror film. Peter Lorre and Cedric Hardwicke, playing Japanese Baron Ikito and Gestapo Officer Conrad Stauffer respectively, were familiar antagonists to horror audiences¹⁶ although in this film their actions are chosen to represent those enacted by the Axis powers, while the hero is reminded that it is every American's duty to defend their country against such evil.

The introduction of the German resistance to the film also became crucial to U.S.A. propaganda efforts, as Koppes and Black suggest:

Hollywood and OWI had a commendable objective in offering a salute to the resistance movements. Members of the resistance were heroic, and it was important for American's to know that, even when governments surrendered or collaborated, part of the population continued to fight.¹⁷

The OWI had clearly begun to bring their own way of thinking to Hollywood, who in turn used the war to their own advantage, making the most of an invisible man running amuck in Berlin on behalf of the Allied audience. *Invisible Agent* represents an early Hollywood effort to capture the mood of a demoralised American public who were in the need of some light relief, although the OWI found these farcical attempts to be

¹⁶ Peter Lorre also played Mr. Moto in eight films between 1937-9. As a secret agent, Mr Moto is a friend of the world helping to uncover smuggling operations, foil murderous plots and subvert war between England and France.

¹⁷ Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, p.295.

“deeply disturbing”¹⁸ as no real effort was made to represent the enemy in any true light.

In a similar manner to the reception of the Val Lewton films in the UK, the trade press criticised *Invisible Agent* for not fully realising the potential promised in such a fantastic storyline, with an audience likely to be drawn from the topical plot and lure of the Universal ‘monster’. *Kinematograph Weekly* remarked upon this issue by criticising the poor efforts made the protagonist who fails to “make the most of his opportunities” and instead “toys with the small fry when he might more usefully have occupied his time by making a bee-line for Hitler” resulting in more laughs than thrills.¹⁹ *Monthly Film Bulletin* expresses a similar concern towards the confusion created between the various thematic methods employed, summarising the style as “a spy melodrama [which] turns into a farce with heavy slapstick, and alternates between farce and slapstick during the development of the story.”²⁰

Today’s Cinema credits the film’s capacity to provide “exciting action” and “jokes of cigarettes, champagne glasses and furniture floating in mid-air”²¹ yet the review goes no further than to suggest the film is anything other than a ‘spy melodrama’, with the implication that the story is in no way related to the horrors previously associated with the character. While the traditional Grand Guignol of Universal remained part of the programming schedule in the U.S.A., the last of the studio’s classic creations to be seen on British screens until the end of the war came in the form of a comical interpretation of a horror character, disguised as a patriotic

¹⁸ Ibid., p.63.

¹⁹ Anon., “Invisible Agent”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v. 307, n. 1849, September 24, 1942, p.44.

²⁰ O.V., “Invisible Agent”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.9, n.105, September, 1942, p.144.

²¹ C.A.W., “Invisible Agent”, *Today’s Cinema*, v.59, n.4778, September 22, 1942, p.9.

American serving the purposes of both the OWI and a box-office cashing in on a popular character in a topical setting.

“Murder, Sadism and Mania”: The Lighter Side to Horror

Following the release of *Invisible Agent* in the autumn of 1942, the BBFC passed a number of similar films playing the macabre for laughs, with British reviewers displaying an awareness of their ‘creepy’ nature, accumulating with the critical success of the screen adaptation of *Arsenic and Old Lace*. Bringing together veterans of the original horror cycle Boris Karloff and Peter Lorre for a “screwy comedy melodrama”²², Columbia Picture’s *The Boogie Man Will Get You* (Lew Landers; 1942)²³ came off the back of Karloff’s recent self-parodying role in the original stage run of “Arsenic and Old Lace”²⁴, taking a light-hearted approach to his persona as a horror star developed throughout the 1930s.

Playing the role of mad-scientist Professor Billings, forced from his home for not meeting mortgage payments by Peter Lorre’s Dr Lorentz, Karloff parodies the type of character complicit to the horror genre throughout the 1930s, increasingly becoming the source of light-hearted mockery. Although the casting of Karloff and Lorre, alongside the suggestive title, would no doubt have drawn in the horror crowd, *Today’s Cinema* recognises its value as a novelty in a “[n]egligible narration [which] pokes fun at traditions of mystery thriller” and sees Karloff “debunk the very brand of laboratory

²² Anon., “The Boogie Man Will Get You”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v. 312, n. 1869, February 11, 1943, p.34.

²³ BBFC, (2012). *Boogie Man Will Get You* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF003997/> [accessed 8 June 2012]. Passed with an ‘A’ January 1943.

²⁴ Bela Lugosi would later take on the role played by Boris Karloff on stage.

chiller on which he made his name.”²⁵ While these comedy-based horror productions were recognised as such by the British trade press, the reviewers consistently demonstrated that there remained an intent to retain a certain amount of thrills, albeit with the result often being “[a]lot of nonsense with a certain amount of humour”²⁶. As *Kinematograph Weekly* argued, the presence of “the sinister cellar activity [...] in line with the conventional Karloff thriller” as the site of the star’s fiendish deeds, fails to connect with the comedic motivations of the film as the two “gain little by contrast”²⁷, making his appearance overall a disappointment.

The Karloff ‘horror-comedy’ was followed later that year by the Jekyll and Hyde-esque *Henry Haunts a House* (Hugh Bennett; 1943)²⁸ in which protagonist Henry Aldrich (Jimmy Lydon), star of a series of comedy films throughout WWII, fears he may have committed murder following consumption of a strength enhancing drug resulting in “ludicrous detection exploits in skeleton-decorated and cobwebbed mansion.”²⁹ As part of a series of humorous adventures involving high-school student Henry, the reaction to *Haunts a House* demonstrates how the macabre still shone through the comedic approach. Praised as “a neat hair-raiser”³⁰ by *Kinematograph Weekly*, *Monthly Film Bulletin* recommends the well sustained “haunted atmosphere of the old mansion [for] those who enjoy macabre in their entertainment”³¹ while *Today’s Cinema* point towards the “house of skeletons, cobwebs, suits of armour and

²⁵ C.A.W., “The Boogie Man Will Get You”, *Today’s Cinema*, v.60, n.4680, February 3, 1943, pp.9-10.

²⁶ E.R., “The Boogie Man Will Get You”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.10, n.111, March, 1943, p.27.

²⁷ Anon., “The Boogie Man Will Get You”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v. 312, n. 1869, February 11, 1943, p.34.

²⁸ BBFC, (2012). *Henry Haunts a House* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF015823/> [accessed 12 June 2012].

²⁹ E.A.P., “Henry Haunts a House”, *Today’s Cinema*, v.61, n.4949, October 29, 1943, p.10-11.

³⁰ Anon., “Henry Haunts a House”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v. 321, n. 1907, November 4, 1943, p.42.

³¹ D.B., “Henry Haunts a House”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.10, n.119, November, 1943, p.123.

secret passages, the well-trying material and treatment” as causing “many a titter tinged with an ‘Oo!’”³²

Along a similar vein to the recent *Ghosts in the Night* (William Beaudine; 1943)³³ starring Bela Lugosi, *The Ghost and the Guest* (William Nigh; 1943) takes on a similar comedic theme of misdirected terror with a newlywed couple having the misfortune of mistakenly spending their honeymoon in a sinister looking mansion currently occupied by gangsters, which they believe to be haunted. Indicative of the ‘old dark house’ style comedy-horror³⁴, *Today’s Cinema* regards “those old stand-bys of sliding panels, screams in the night and underground passages [as] confirming to the traditions of the standard comedy”³⁵ rather than being utilised in the creation of genuine moments of terror, confirmed in *Kinematograph Weekly* as “a poor joke and even worse macabre” due to a lack on both fronts.³⁶

By November 1944 the “old dark house” style had proven to be a mainstay of the war period with reviews for *One Body Too Many* (Frank MacDonald; 1944) suggesting that the “[p]opularity of comedy thrillers” dealing with “old theatrical tricks”³⁷ continued to register with audience despite their poor reception. Playing the red herring, Bela Lugosi stars in a story concerning the death of a millionaire and the ensuing debacle over the inheritance, in which “humour is at times a trifle grim, but only the super-sensitive are likely to take exception to its robust lack of reverence for

³² E.A.P., “Henry Haunts a House”, *Today’s Cinema*, v.61, n.4949, October 29, 1943, pp.10-11.

³³ AKA *Ghosts on the Loose*, the film reunited Lugosi with The East Side Kids following *Spooks Run Wild* (Phil Rosen; 1941).

³⁴ See: *The Old Dark House* (James Whale; 1932) and *The Cat and the Canary* (Filmed twice in 1927, directed by Paul Leni, and 1939, by Elliott Nugent).

³⁵ C.A.W., “The Ghost and the Guest”, *Today’s Cinema*, v.61, n.4967, December 10, 1943, p.23.

³⁶ Anon., “The Ghost and the Guest”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v. 322, n. 1913, December 16, 1943, p.19.

³⁷ Anon., “One Body Too Many”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v. 333, n. 1959, November 2, 1944, p.29.

the dead”³⁸. It was this lack of reverence for death, amid a blend of comedy and horror, which reached a pinnacle in November 1944 with the aforementioned *Arsenic and Old Lace*, adapted from the “sensational and persistent stage success”³⁹, giving audiences the opportunity to share a joke at the expense of Karloff whilst providing the requisite macabre entertainment.

As the Grand Guignol of the 1930s began to lose momentum, shown in a move towards ‘quality’ productions and the less explicit Lewton pictures, the tendency towards parody proved to be a constant throughout WWII. The success of Frank Capra’s film as a ‘horror-comedy’ was assigned by the critics to a stronger focus on the production of humour over thrills, rather than an attempt to provide an inconsistent mix of both. As with the previous efforts to combine macabre thrills with humour, the trade press sought to define *Arsenic and Old Lace*’s position amongst a series of films appropriating the horror aesthetic.

For *Kinematograph Weekly* the “high mortality rate puts it in the macabre category, but neat plot construction, resourceful direction and clever characterisation prevents it from being taken too seriously”⁴⁰ with the murdered bodies “wisely kept from view”, merely becoming “stepping-stones to laughs.”⁴¹ In light of the film receiving an ‘A’ certificate *Monthly Film Bulletin* also express some concern in the audience’s need to overcome “an initial distaste at seeing murder, sadism and mania made the themes of uproarious farce” in order for them to recognise the “brilliantly amusing” result.⁴²

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Anon., “Arsenic and Old Lace”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v. 333, n. 1962, November 23, 1944, p.24.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² D.E.B., “Arsenic and Old Lace”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.11, n.132, December, 1944, p.141.

Today's Cinema confirm that exception may be taken to the dark humour of *Arsenic and Old Lace*, although praise is awarded to the successful blending of the horrific with the 'honeymoon farce' without alienating the audience:

One would hardly have thought that the subjects of murder and insanity could have provided hilarious fun, but here is clear evidence to the contrary. Capra's direction does not permit a single murder to be seen committed, nor do we ever glimpse any one of the many corpses, the entertainment being entirely a matter of gay innuendo, jovially burlesqued characterisation and ludicrous by-play.⁴³

Even though "heavy drama" is included within the scenes involving the attempts of the two crooks to dispose of a corpse, the general consensus treats this as nothing more than harmless fun. The film is discussed amongst the trade press in relation to its origins in 'horror' yet succeeded above and beyond other such 'comedies' through the removal of any determined effort to provide shocks over humour.

Regarded by *Kinematograph Weekly* as a "certainty to beat the doodle-bugs, black-out and other war impediments"⁴⁴, *Arsenic and Old Lace* counters the opposition to the suitability of horror for wartime audience with themes of the earlier 1930s cycle being utilised for the purpose of humour. The earlier 'horror-comedies' mentioned above may not have been as well received as Capra's film, through a failure to commit the macabre moments to out-and-out humour, yet they play an important role in discussions of a period in which the genre was being interpreted in new and various ways.

⁴³ C.A.W., "Arsenic and Old Lace", *Today's Cinema*, v.63, n.5112, November 17, 1944, p.25.

⁴⁴ Anon., "Arsenic and Old Lace", *Kinematograph Weekly*, v. 333, n. 1962, November 23, 1944, p.24.

“romance, music, big stellar names and lavish spectacle”

At a time when the ‘low-brow’ productions upheld by the BBFC remained on the agenda in the U.S.A., Universal (alongside Fox, Warner, and MGM) made further attempts at horror more closely associated to the Gothic traditions of the 1930s productions, away from comedy and wartime settings. These ‘quality’ films were largely based in historical periods, taking inspiration from a range of literary sources including *Jane Eyre*, *Phantom of the Opera*, its ‘sequel’ *The Climax*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, as well as a reworking of the 1940 version of the British film *Gaslight* (the new version was retitled *Murder in Thornton Square* for the UK release) and *The Uninvited*.

Recognised for their appeal as horror productions, the quality traditions of these films created debate amongst the British critical press who frequently refused to acknowledge the fantasy realms associated with the ‘H’ certificate. This recognition, albeit not entirely outwardly in praise of the prestigious productions, establishes these films as somewhat above the low-brow traditions of horror.

For five consecutive weeks prior to the film’s review, *Phantom of the Opera* was preceded by a succession of full second page adverts within *Kinematograph Weekly*, promoting the films as “Universal’s Greatest Triumph! *Phantom of the Opera* in Technicolor”, an exceptional number of advertisements engaged for an individual release throughout this period and clearly indicative of Universal’s attempts to appeal to a wider audience.⁴⁵ Reports from *Kinematograph Weekly* building to the release

⁴⁵ Advertisement, “Phantom of the Opera”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v. 320-1, n. 1906-10, October 28-November 25, 1943, p.2. The images accompanying these advertisements imply a level of respectability to Universal’s big prestige picture of the year, rather than a clear evocation of the horrific nature of the story established in the studio’s previous version of the story starring Lon Chaney. Beginning with the image of an elegant theatre box, subsequent advertisements consist: a

date predict the film will “break box-office records everywhere” due to a universal appeal, aided by opera scenes “staged with faultless precision” alongside “magnificent Technicolor [which] enhances the beauty of the settings in the famous Paris Opera House, where parts of several well-known operas are staged with the house crowded with a fashionable and glittering audience.”⁴⁶

Mentions too of Nelson Eddy’s “superb voice” and Susanna Foster’s “enchanted singing” directs the focus of the film away from the horrific connotations associated with the deformed Phantom and, as if to emphasise this point, the article makes it clear that the character is “often only seen by the shadow he makes on the wall”⁴⁷. In response to the upcoming trade screening, a subsequent report on the reaction to *Phantom of the Opera* across the Atlantic recommends the film as “magnificent money-making entertainment for all types of audiences” in its “appealing romance, eerie, intriguing mystery, music and a strong gripping element of dramatic suspense.”⁴⁸

The trade journal’s review for the film makes clear distinctions between its success as a mixture of “the melodramatic and operatic” yet identifies a clear failure to exploit the macabre.⁴⁹ In light of the extravagance of the film taking away from the potentially horrific nature of Erique’s homicidal tendencies, the reviewer infers that “the eerie vaults of the Paris Opera House provide an effective if not fully exploited field for the macabre, while spacious interiors furnish an equally fitting setting for

conductor and orchestra performing in front of veiled stage; the mask of the Phantom; a white bust of star Susanna Foster; culminating with a violin resting on an open book of sheet music.

⁴⁶ Anon., “Phantom of the Opera Here”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v321, n.1908, November 11, 1943, p.19.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Anon., ““Phantom of the Opera” Trade Show Fixed: Many Front Rank Stars, Music and Spectacle in Technicolor Triumph”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v. 321, n. 1910, November 25, 1943, p.43.

⁴⁹ Anon., “Phantom of the Opera”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v. 322, n. 1911, December 2, 1943, p.35.

impressive music and song”, before emphasising that “strangely enough very few gripping thrills spring from its eerie humid atmosphere.”⁵⁰ Offering “terrific money’s worth, inasmuch as it represents a visit to Covent Garden and The Lyceum in one go” the film is set apart from other attempts into the macabre through a focus upon the lavishly decorated sets and highbrow nature of the operatic setting, confirmed in the suggestion that the film is a “better opera, or rather operetta, than a thriller.”⁵¹

Today’s Cinema similarly praises *Phantom* as “[o]utstanding entertainment for all classes of patrons” in its ability to combine “magnificent singing, delightful ballet” with “action, spectacle, pity and horror”⁵², while *Monthly Film Bulletin* underscore the “technical excellence” achieved in musical sequences and set design, hindered only by the weaker moments surrounding “the cheap emphasis of the hooded masked figure of the mad musician.”⁵³

Passed by the BBFC with an ‘A’ certificate,⁵⁴ the film’s appeal lay more so in the respectable endeavours into high-brow over the Phantom’s murderous exploits. Writing for *The Observer*, C. A. Lejeune regards “the best darn silly movie that has been seen for years” as “a horror film that is admitted to be a horror film” moving audiences to “shrill yelps of ecstasy.”⁵⁵ This “tommy-rot with taste”⁵⁶ is seen by Lejeune as a derivative of the ‘low-brow’ with the added impetus of ‘high-brow’ musical moments, giving the film a level of respectability not typically associated with

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² C.A.W., “Phantom of the Opera”, *Today’s Cinema*, v.61, n.4963, December 1, 1943, pp.11-12.

⁵³ K.F.B., “Phantom of the Opera”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.11, n.121, January, 1944, p.5.

⁵⁴ BBFC, (2012). *Phantom of the Opera* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF005630/> [accessed 22 June 2012]. A number of cuts were made to the film of which not records remain.

⁵⁵ C. A. Lejeune, “The Films”, *The Observer*, February 6, 1944, p.2.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

the genre, with the operatic moments generating appealing outside of the established horror audience.

In comparison to *Phantom of the Opera*, Universal's attempt to produce a sequel of sorts with *The Climax*, featuring the "over-theatrical villainy" of Boris Karloff in a similar role to Raines' Phantom, was received less favourably by the trade press, relegating the film to the "hardy industrial and provincial audiences".⁵⁷ In attempting to go "one better than" Phantom, the alternation between "opera and shocker" is undone through the "macabre melodrama [...] presented on a much lower plane than its music", with those more enamoured towards the musical sequences "unlikely to have much time for its flashy Grand Guignol."⁵⁸ In the case of the earlier film, the success of its wider appeal lay in underplaying the horrific and focus upon respectability, whereas *The Climax* is criticised in a similar manner to the 'horror-comedies' for attempting to over-emphasise the macabre.

Following MGM's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* the studio made two further attempts at 'prestige' horror in the mid-1940s with *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde's Gothic tale of the Victorian period, and Female Gothic *Murder in Thornton Square*. Rooted in the traditions of the Gothic, and presented with similar trappings of prestige as *Phantom*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* made an appeal to sophisticated audiences familiar with Wilde's "brilliant epigrams and aphorisms" designed for "speculation and serious thought", whilst remaining "[g]ripping and fascinating macabre".⁵⁹ This adaptation of Wilde's classic tale of a hedonistic double life takes place within a

⁵⁷ Anon., "The Climax", *Kinematograph Weekly*, v. 331, n. 1953, September 21, 1944, p.20.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Anon., "The Picture of Dorian Gray", *Kinematograph Weekly*, v. 338, n. 1984, April 26, 1945, p.24.

stylishly decadent Victorian London, creating respectability through distancing the film from the low-brow.

Kinematograph Weekly establishes *Dorian Gray* as “artistic macabre”⁶⁰ through a high quality script and production values, with the only exception coming in the final scene of Gray’s death in which the character takes a knife to the now ghastly vision of his own portrait. Thought to be “a trifle lurid”⁶¹, the final scene led *Monthly Film Bulletin* to question whether or not “it be more dramatic for us to never see the portrait” in light of the image “ruthlessly but justifiably setting out to shock the audience”⁶². *Today’s Cinema* follows on a similar vein taking exception to the “bizarre by-play which is at times vivid and repulsive”, dismissing the decaying portrait of Dorian as “an artistic blunder [...] which plays havoc with realism”⁶³. An approval of the ‘quality’ productions suggests that the macabre elements are deemed more acceptable when move further away from depictions of the more lurid details previously associated with fantasy and horror, or in fact removed in their entirety.

In a “period piece deliberately played for horror”⁶⁴ MGM’s *Murder in Thornton Square* stars Ingrid Bergman as the wife of a con-artist, psychologically manipulated by her husband as a means of securing the expensive jewels bequeathed to the young woman by her aunt. The film received criticism for its ‘unrealistic’ treatment of period settings, with *Kinematograph Weekly* describing the “garish period trimmings” as “over elaborate [...] superfluous [and] very studio”, whilst also establishing “intelligent and holding macabre” once settled into the main focus on “brilliant

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² A.R.M., “The Picture of Dorian Gray”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.12, n.137, May, 1945, p.61.

⁶³ C.A.W., “The Picture of Dorian Gray”, *Today’s Cinema*, v.64, n.5176, April 20, 1945, pp.13-14.

⁶⁴ C. A. Lejeune, “The Films”, *The Observer*, July 16, 1944.

psychological cat-and-mouse”.⁶⁵ *Monthly Film Bulletin* remark upon the “fussy and untidy” treatment of the period backgrounds and peripheral characters as detracting away from the films intensity as a psychological melodrama, destined to have been a “high achievement” indicated by all other areas of the production.⁶⁶

In establishing macabre within the realms of ‘reality’ these prestige productions were seen to relying upon convincing period settings in order to convey a level of realism and, therefore, plausibility in the construction of ‘chilling’ effect. Interestingly signposted as “a great woman’s picture, as well as gripping Grand Guignol”⁶⁷, the *Monthly Film Bulletin* review indicates how these Female Gothics may have held certain appeal for the feminine audience whilst also generating interest from horror audiences in general.

A Respectable Foray into the Supernatural

The propensity towards feminine appeal for the spiritual and psychological is also established within Paramount’s *The Uninvited*,⁶⁸ distinguished as “a very good creepy for the better-class halls.”⁶⁹ The film concerns two spirits, Carmel and Mary, who haunt Winward House and its new owner Roderick (Ray Milland), purchasing his new home from Mary’s father who now lives with his Granddaughter Stella (Gail Russell). It is later learned that Carmel had an affair with Stella’s father and is in fact

⁶⁵ Anon., “The Murder in Thornton Square”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v. 329, n. 1944, July 20, 1944, p.24.

⁶⁶ K.F.B., “The Murder in Thornton Square”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.11, n.128, August, 1944, p.91.

⁶⁷ Anon., “The Murder in Thornton Square”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v. 329, n. 1944, July 20, 1944, p.24.

⁶⁸ BBFC, (2012). *The Uninvited* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF016616/> [accessed 10 July 2012]. Although the details are not available for scrutiny, the BBFC passed the film with an ‘A’ after a number of cuts had been made⁶⁸, potentially a result of the subject matter and the level to which representations of the supernatural had created such a strong reaction amongst the critics.

⁶⁹ Anon, “The Uninvited”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v. 325, n. 1924, March 2, 1944, p.27.

the girl's real mother, bringing Roderick and Stella to realise that it is actually Mary who is the threatening spirit while Carmel merely seeks to protect her biological daughter.

Labelled as a "very unusual film" by *Today's Cinema* prior to the trade showing, producer Charles Brackett's first independent feature from "long-time writing-directing partner Billy Wilder" is sold through the quality established in its adaptation of Dorothy Macardle's "best-selling and imaginative novel"⁷⁰. Praise is also directed towards the sympathetic role portrayed by Gail Russell "calling for more than usual acting ability", as well as the recognition of debut director Lewis Allen's responsibility for a number of successes on the London and New York stage.⁷¹ This, with the added grandeur of a "fine specimen of Georgian architecture", illustrates how *The Uninvited* was being established as Hollywood's "first serious ghost story"⁷², moving away from the typically humorous approach to the 'spooky-house' tale.

Impressed by the "beautiful interiors", the "extremely efficient" photography of "ghostly emanations", and overall "good job technically", *Monthly Film Bulletin* approached this ghost story with a genuine concern for its convincing interpretation of the supernatural.⁷³ Following commendations for the film's technical prowess, the reviewer queries "whether such a film should ever be made, producing visual evidence of unexplained phenomena which, to say the least, have never yet been photographed."⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Anon., "Paramount to Show Very Unusual Film "The Uninvited" February 29", *Today's Cinema*, v.62, n.4995, February 16, 1944, p.19.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ K.F.B., "The Uninvited", *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.11, n.123, March, 1944, p.33.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Following on from typically comedic treatments of the ‘supernatural’ with titles such as *Spooks Run Wild*, *The Ghost and the Guest*, *Ghosts in the Night* etc., this ‘serious’ treatment of the subject is presented in such a way as to add credibility to the realm of ‘fantasy’. Not only was it becoming possible to lure respectable audiences into traditionally ‘lowbrow’ trappings of the macabre, seen in the operatic-driven *Phantom of the Opera*, the high-production values of supernatural films such as *The Uninvited* impacted upon the perceptions of horror bourn of the tired traditions of the 1930s and early ‘40s.

Conclusion

As the examples given above demonstrate, the numerous attempts to draw upon the horror aesthetic during the ‘H’ ban led to a disparate group of films distinguishable through their varied approaches to ‘horror’. These films were, on the whole, recognised by the trade press as attempts to tackle the genre with varying degrees of success, based primarily upon their commitment to the creation of the ‘horrific’. As the Office of War Information in the United States began to clamp down on depictions of the war for use as backdrops to established themes and genres, illustrated in Universal’s slapstick treatment of the Axis with *Invisible Agent*, the British trade press grew accustomed to horror being appropriated for more light-hearted purposes.

While the intent may have been for these films to function as ‘spoofs’ of the genre, the reviewers often recognised their potential to cater for an audience seeking thrills traditionally supplied by the ‘H’ productions held back by the BBFC until after the war. Until *Arsenic and Old Lace* fell down harder on the side of comedy over the

macabre, there remained a precedence held by the trade reviewers for these ‘comedy-horrors’ to side with one style or the other rather than attempting to bridge the gap between two realms thought to be at odds with one another.

As horror became more closely associated with humour during the period of the ‘H’ ban, there also remained a concerted effort by the major studios to produce films derived from the realm of the horrific with an emphasis upon prestige and elaborate period dressings. For the wartime adaptations of *Phantom of the Opera* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the presentation of the horrific became almost a footnote to the film’s success with reviewers often ascribing the potential for box-office triumph to the respectability derived from an association with the high-brow.

Even so, as war was drawing to a close, the type of horror film upheld by the BBFC would be substituted for, what the trade reviewers deemed to be, more serious treatments of the horrific established through closer links to realism over the fantasy realms of the past. As the Val Lewton productions were quite often dismissed by the British trade press for attempting to bring a level of conviction to the supernatural, films along similar lines to *The Murder in Thornton Square*, wherein the possibility of the supernatural is explained away by quite reasonable means, were recognised for their intelligent treatment of the ‘macabre’. *The Uninvited*, therefore, represents a defining moment in the reception of horror in the UK, as a film openly dealing with the supernatural came to be praised for its conviction whilst also maintaining an impetus upon providing thrilling moments for audiences.

The 1942-45 period of the ‘horror ban’ in Britain demonstrates how the genre’s appeal remained an integral part of film exhibition, recognisable in the number of films discussed as such by the trade press, regardless of the assumption that horror was ‘out

of favour'. Any films ably conveying 'shocking thrills' whilst not falling too heavily on the side of comedy or 'prestige', became the sign of 'good' horror production and, therefore, a potentially successful one.

Part Two

Chapter Four: Homemade Horrors – The Darker Side to British Cinema during World War Two

Writing in April 1945, *Kinematograph Weekly*'s senior reviewer R. H. Billings discusses the complicated matter of attempting to second-guess cinematic audiences, in terms of future production strategies, by reflecting upon the most popular films of the preceding year. Billings addresses the problem through an analysis of the box-office hits in 1944, with the inevitable result being that “[i]n looking over the list of comparatively recent winners we find that almost every conceivable form of entertainment represented”¹. For Billings ‘horror’ came as an exception to this diverse range of box-office hits², ruling out a number of successful British films sharing similar traits to the Gothic which would later pave the way for the Hammer horror productions.

This contradiction is seen in the same article when Billings, after dismissing the popularity of horror (or ‘shockers’ as he also labels them), highlights the success of several British productions including *The Man in Grey*, *Fanny by Gaslight*

¹ R. H. Billings, “Politics, “Shockers” and These Crazy Radio Comedies Always Fail!”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.338, n.1984, April 26, 1945, p.5.

² Ibid. He also singles out ‘political’ films, and “films which are mere adaptations of crazy comedy radio features.”

(Anthony Asquith; 1944), *Madonna of the Seven Moons*, alongside the Hollywood adaptation of *Jane Eyre*. These films were all recognised for being of particular appeal to female audiences, and have often been discussed in academic writing along such lines. The rise in popularity of the female-focused Gothic melodramas in the 1940s³ has often been seen as a result of the largely feminine cinema audiences in Britain following the outbreak of WWII⁴. However, this approach tends to ignore the fact that these films were also recognised as providing similar entertainment associated with horror.

While ‘melodrama’ would later come to be recognised for domestic drama and romance, during the 1940s it retained connotations associated with its origins in 18th and 19th century theatre. As John L. Fell⁵ illustrates:

Melodrama was the product of an industrial society, the urban working class, and the topical excitements of its period-crime, military adventure, wilderness exploration. It developed out of morality plays and sentimental plays as well as from the Gothic novels of Walpole, Mrs Radcliffe [...] and Monk Lewis.⁶

Definitions of melodrama were therefore far more complex, often tied to the Gothic as well as a number of the films discussed in Section One. The fact that so many melodramas remained a constant on British screens throughout WWII points towards a continued appeal for the ‘morbid’, ‘macabre’, and the ‘horrific’.

Coming as a result of certain freedoms afforded to filmmakers during the war, the move towards more sordid subject matter would later be seen as holding far more potential for horrific entertainment than the fantasy film. The British trade press were unanimous in their acknowledgment of the ‘thrilling’ entertainment these melodramas

³ Waldman, ““At Last I Can Tell it to Someone!”, pp.29-40.

⁴ Sue Harper, *Picturing the Past: The Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film* (London: BFI, 1994).

⁵ John L. Fell, “Dissolves by Gaslight: Antecedents to the Motion Picture in Nineteenth-Century Melodrama”, *Film Quarterly*, v.23, n.3, Spring, 1970, pp.22-34.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.23.

brought to the wider audience, suggesting Billings's argument that horror was failing at the box-office ignores how the melodramas were in fact attempting to appeal to audiences with an appetite for darker themes.

Just as the Val Lewton horror productions "paved the way for future developments"⁷ of the genre, through an emphasis upon the psychological over fantasy, the British melodrama also dealt with similar themes of the sexual and psychological. While a number of these films were highly evocative of the supernatural, through the suggestion of something more unnatural to the story, the climax would often reveal a far less fantastic explanation. Furthermore, the repeated use of period settings as a locale within which to challenge these themes established a distancing from contemporary society, thereby affording the filmmakers room to tackle more taboo themes of sexual repression and violence.

Retrospectively acknowledged by Robert Murphy as "the British 'morbid' film"⁸, stemming from "a strong tradition of the macabre in British cinema", the 1940s produced a series of films influenced by the popularity of murder contained within the pages of turn-of-the century Sunday press which "share an interest in psychological disturbance, in sex, violence, the exotic, and the unusual"⁹. While this rise of the 'morbid' made a significant impact on British filmmaking during WWII, the BBFC would more often than not take exception to representations of infamous criminals and the potentially hazardous effect upon the cinema-going public. As Murphy adds:

The hostility of the censors to anything which came close to real-life crime encouraged film-makers to introduce exotic or comic elements into their crime stories which led them away from censorial disapproval into the realm of the fantastic.¹⁰

⁷ Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p.86.

⁸ Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel*, p.169.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.169.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.171

By utilising various historical periods as a locale for confronting morbid subject matter, filmmakers took on sex and violence with very few objection from the censors, as this method would become mainstay of British production throughout WWII when dealing with such material. As Murphy notes, while Britain had no distinct ‘horror’ genre until the 1950s, an evident style of filmmaking utilised a number of archetypes with which the genre would frequently be associated.

These “morbid burrowings”¹¹ may not be definable under one particular generic definition, yet it is the Gothic which drew attention from both the trade and critical press throughout the 1940s in its appeal as ‘escapist’ entertainment at a time when melodrama faced criticism from the ‘quality’ press in favour of the realism associated with the British war film. While the later Gainsborough melodramas were derided by the press in favour of the realistic tendencies of the war film, the early-1940s produced a number of Gothic melodramas praised by the same critics for incorporating realism as a means of dealing with the ‘morbid’ nature of real-life.

This chapter will therefore focus upon the British Gothic melodrama of the early 1940s and how the quality press recognised the worth of such films as escapist entertainment, producing both thrills and ‘quality’ through an association with realism. The later films at Gainsborough may have been derided for taking liberties with historical accuracy, however, Paramount British’s *Hatter’s Castle* and British National’s *Gaslight* were praised for verisimilitude, levels of realism, and value as escapism. While the period has retrospectively been viewed as one in which British press scathed melodrama in favour of realism, the two approaches often passed freely between one another with the former providing social meaning and the latter employing techniques to heighten emotion. These films are key to an understanding

¹¹ Ibid. pp.168-9.

of horror and realism in Britain during the 1940s as a demonstration of, not only the connection to melodrama but also, the power held in realism to produce far more shocking moments than the realms of fantasy.

The Move to the Dark Side

Sue Harper has discussed the success, or lack thereof, for the numerous historical films inspired by Gothic literature released throughout the war, attributing the appeal of the *Hatter's Castle* to its “recognisably Gothic type, in which the visual style displays explicit debts to expressionist practice.”¹² While Gothic visuals played a key role in addressing the film’s more macabre nature, for Harper the depiction of strong masculine authority over typically weaker female victims (later developed in the Gainsborough productions) suggests that the largely feminine war time audience were being directly addressed by the female Oedipus complex. With the lack of the mother figure, the female character develops beyond the control of the male and along the way splits the male character into two opposing halves.¹³

As with the Gothic novel, women are thought to identify with the female heroine whilst distancing themselves from the control of an oppressive male. Harper adds:

The Gainsborough film-makers and their publicists clearly intended that their films would usher women into a realm of pleasure where the female stars would function as the source of the female gaze, and where the males, gorgeously arrayed, would be the unabashed objects of female desires.¹⁴

These Female Gothics could, therefore, be seen as a direct reaction to the fall in male cinema attendance alongside the apparent lack of interest in the horror film. As

¹² Harper, *Picturing the Past*, p.101.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.122.

wartime audience were becoming predominantly female, the production of themes common to the 'horrific' became heavily influenced by the new demographic.

Harper recognises, as did the producers at Gainsborough, how these melodramas became the female equivalent of horseracing or boxing, as "low-status anodynes which pleurably and harmlessly defused aggression."¹⁵ Gainsborough's winning combination of glamour and Gothic romanticism created a kind of "stylish villainy"¹⁶ allowing women to play out some of their darker, or more exotic, fantasies whilst escaping the harsh realities of war.¹⁷

Often perceived as 'melodramas' with a 'feminine angle' these films came to question, as Christine Gledhill has noted, the very nature of a term applied to productions of appeal to an audience of both genders.¹⁸ In a period when the Woman's film was often recognised as either concerned with 'romance' or 'domestic comedy', melodrama was in fact invested with a series of elements derived from tribulations of 'real life'. As the 1940s Gothics came to be recognised for their appeal to female audiences, just as the 'realist' productions were thought to be of a 'paternalistic' nature, the tendency has been to see these films as being more closely associated with 'romance' rather than the darker aspects of the melodramatic.¹⁹ In fact British productions such as *Hatter's Castle*, distinguished as a melodrama enveloped in a Grand Guignol atmosphere, were recognised as genuine attempts to deal with darker themes of a less fantastic nature to the thrills supplied by the 'H' films.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Harper attributes the failure of *Crimes at the Dark House* (George King; 1940), a period melodrama of a more vividly gruesome nature, to a lack of female identification as a result of the heroine's insanity, thus illustrating the important role played by the female protagonists during WWII and the subsequent misinterpretation of melodrama as female-focused.

¹⁸ Gledhill, "An Abundance of Understatement", p.215.

¹⁹ Ibid.

As John L. Fell demonstrates, melodrama in films would often be associated with a number of “sub-species” derived from the stage, including such themes as “military, horror, nautical, crime, or the perils of city life.”²⁰ The appeal of melodrama would encapsulate a variety of cinematic styles, later defined on their own terms during the development of genre studies in the 1960s and ‘70s, including those now associated with the horror genre.

Hatter’s Castle stars Deborah Kerr as Mary Brodie, daughter of successful Scottish businessman John Brodie (Robert Newton), who is ejected from the grand familial home known as Hatter’s Castle after falling pregnant to Brodie’s new employee Dennis (Emlyn Williams). Known as a vain and arrogant man by his neighbours and rivals, illustrated by the pomposity of his own home, Brodie keeps a lover Nancy (Enid Stamp-Taylor) secret from his wife (Beatrice Varley) and young son Angus (Anthony Bateman). After betraying Brodie, by bringing one of his competitors to town, Dennis refuses to come to the aid of Mary and is subsequently killed in the Tay Bridge disaster. Now practically penniless and mourning the death of his wife and son, who commits suicide after being discovered cheating at school, Brodie crumbles and sets fire to his home whilst remaining inside. Following the death of her father, Mary is reunited with her admirer Dr Renwick (James Mason).

Based on the 1931 novel by A. J. Cronin, and set in 1879, the film follows the patterns of the Gothics prevalent during the war period in its historical setting and establishment of a vile and vindictive patriarch in James Brodie. Holding a domineering power over his family, the ‘monstrous’ character of Brodie and the manipulative Dennis, optimise a series of roles familiar to the Gothic created for the purpose of establishing a threat to the female protagonist. Whilst emphasising the

²⁰ Fell, “Dissolves by Gaslight”, p.26.

attraction of the film through the “vicious and licentious” character of Brodie, alongside the “slimy and unscrupulous” Dennis, *Kinematograph Weekly* illustrates how the “grim, composite portrait of period provincialism” should not deter the female audience, suggesting that such dark themes were more commonly associated with male audiences.²¹

In this instance “the harsh and, at times, sinister tones” are recognised as being “no impediment to female appeal” as *Hatter’s Castle* “like many of the near classics, has a subtle knowledge of feminine psychology” which it “stimulates emotionally.”²² Here, the reviewer infers a shift in the interest of the more ‘sinister’ type of cinematic entertainment towards psychological manifestations of the horrific provided through female identification. The manipulation of emotions, without resorting to the explicitly visual forms of the ‘supernatural’, is perceived as a feminine alternative to such sinister entertainment.

Two significant highlights of the film are recognised in the impressive recreation of the Tay Bridge disaster and the destruction of Brodie’s home, yet it is the “character drawing and detail rather than spectacle that lift the melodrama on to a higher plane” denoting the insignificance of the visually explicit in producing the desired reaction from audiences. The review not only questions the potential spectatorship for *Hatter’s Castle* but also reflects upon the film’s basis in a historical realm, chosen as a landscape within which to explore “realistic characterisation” rather than modes of fantasy.²³

Central to the story may be a “gloomy, sordid and ugly narrative” yet it is one which “is also life”, indicating a significant interpretation of the film as one which

²¹ Anon., “Hatter’s Castle”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.297, n.1805, November 20, 1941, p.20.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

deals with the obscene nature of reality in order to create an effect typically associated with the ‘fantastical’ realm of the supernatural.²⁴ These motifs would become increasingly common throughout the war, although it is these earlier efforts which embraced ‘realism’ more so than the later Gainsborough melodramas, a factor drawing considerable praise from the quality press.

In her review of film for *The Observer*, C. A. Lejeune singles out the sinister protagonist James Brodie as the key focus of the film’s Gothic feel, labelling him as “a beast...who lives in a crazy, self-made castle”, becoming the source of satisfaction for an audience deriving pleasure from his eventual downfall which provides “the biggest wallop in cinema history”.²⁵ Lejeune goes on to detail the final forty minutes of the film in a series of nine bullet points, emphasising the continuous descent into the sordid as a “tour de force, which will be remembered”.²⁶ The horrific connotations of the ‘beast’ in the castle, and the pleasure taken by the viewer in watching him receive his comeuppance, infers a satisfaction similar to the demise of the classic Universal ‘monster’. With an emphasis upon the psychological control of the female being Brodie’s destructive method, “the result is a character that holds and obsesses you.”²⁷

For Dilys Powell, writing in *The Sunday Times*, the film suits the Gothic tradition through the presence of the “egomaniac father [and] pregnant heroine pushed out of front door on inclement night” followed by the inevitable “downfall of the father”, but takes issue with the blend of realism and melodrama.²⁸ Following comparisons to *Wuthering Heights* (William Wyler; 1939), thought to have similarly

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ C. A. Lejeune, “The Films”, *The Observer*, November 16, 1941.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Dilys Powell, “Hatters Castle”, *The Sunday Times*, November 17, 1941.

won “no prize at the scenario show”, Powell concedes that “life itself often presents us with a plot as crudely daubed”²⁹ yet deems good melodrama to be that which is “given the emphasis of strangeness and terror”³⁰. Her thoughts regarding the incompatibility of melodrama with the travails of everyday life rejects the potentially sordid aspects of ‘reality’, in favour of the more fantastical creations associated with melodrama and horror. While Powell seeks to distance melodrama from realism, her argument illustrates how the darker themes of melodrama were becoming more closely linked to the unsavoury elements presented within real-life.

William Whitebait for the *New Statesman* applauds the strong cast headed by Robert Newton whilst suggesting that “the picturesque Scots town, the violence beginning with Victorian tyrannies and culminating in the Tay Bridge disaster [of 1879]” provides the story with “the distance that lends enchantment to melodrama.”³¹ This ‘distancing’ process was certainly part of an enchantment afforded to the melodramas of the 1940s, yet it also presented these films with the opportunity to tackle the more ‘obscene’ subject matter not seen within the ‘surface’ realities of the war film. As Powell’s comments indicate, melodrama would later be seen as far-removed from the realism favoured by the British critics although these ‘cruelly daubed’ plots of our own lives, confronted in films such as *Hatter’s Castle*, began to probe the darker side to reality not seen in the ‘quality’ productions.

The ‘Escapist’ Thriller Gaslight

Released in 1940, *Gaslight* is an earlier example of the Gothic melodrama. With an emphasis on psychological manipulation of the female by the patriarch, it is

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ William Whitebait, “Hatters Castle”, *New Statesman*, November 15, 1941.

seen as one of the better examples of British ‘chillers’ from the period through the serious approach to trappings reminiscent of the ‘spooky house’ films. As with the melodramas to follow, the plot shares similar themes of psychological torture by a sadistic male, leading to the emancipation of the central female character when we see the tables turned at the end of film.³² The Hollywood remake of *Gaslight*, released in the UK as *Murder in Thornton Square*³³, is now commonly recognised as the more famous of the two films, regardless of contemporary British reviews positioning the original as a remarkable achievement for the industry.³⁴

Opening in London, 1865, *Gaslight* concerns the death of spinster Alice Barlow (Marie Wright) after her home is ransacked by an unknown assailant believed to be in search of the famous Barlow jewels. Years later, Paul Mallen (Anton Walbrook) and his wife Bella (Diana Wynyard) move into Barlow’s former home, after which Paul begins to accuse his wife of acting out of character, leading her to believe her mind is slowly becoming unhinged. Upon the revelation that Paul is in fact Louis Bauer, nephew and murderer of Alice, he makes further attempts to drive his wife insane while he searches for the heirlooms he never recovered first time around.

³² See: Tessa Perkins, “Two Weddings and Two Funerals: The Problem of the Post-War Woman” in Gledhill and Swanson (Eds.) *Nationalising Femininity*.

³³ C.A. Lejeune, “The Films”, *The Observer*, July 16, 1944. Lejeune’s article on the release of *The Murder in Thornton Square* quotes a lengthy letter, written by “Cine-Technician” Sidney Cole, stating that British National had sold the film rights to *Gaslight* rather than attempting to show the film in the U.S.A. This resulted in MGM attempting to destroy all copies of the film in the UK to make way for the eventual Hollywood remake. According to Lejeune, one copy remained at the BFI. The British version became the last film to receive a Gala premier before the end of the war, thus making the destruction of prints by MGM even more significant. The eventual disappearance of *Gaslight* from the British market, and popularity of the remake, no doubt has assisted in some part to the dismissal of Britain relevance in the production of ‘macabre’ thrillers during the period.

³⁴ Kevin Gough-Yates, “Gaslight – NFT Programme Notes”, *BFI’s Distribution Catalogue*, Spring, 1969. Costing only £39,000, the film employed a number of imaginative production techniques in order to give the set of physical depth. Walls in the set were designed in order to allow the camera to pass freely through the house and the influences of the directors Dickinson studied at the Film Society (Carne, Prevert and Murnau) sparked his creative ingenuity whilst working on such a shoe-string budget. Dickinson’s creative flair highlighted in the film impressed producer David O. Selznick to such an extent that he was offered a long term contract to work in American which was turned down due to the directors commitments to the Ministry of Information’s film unit.

As he enters the upper floors of the house through the building next door to search for the jewels, the noises from above and constant flickering of gas lamps causes Bella to worry for her own sanity. Upon recognising Paul as Alice's nephew, former Police Inspector B. G. Rough (Frank Pettingell) eventually comes to her rescue helping to prove his guilt and allowing Bella to enact her revenge.

The "feminine angle"³⁵ of the film, as highlighted by *Kinematograph Weekly*, further illustrates a recognition of the appeal for such 'morbid' themes within the burgeoning female audience during the early war years. As with *Hatter's Castle*, the review emphasises the "Grand Guignol" character of Paul Mallen as being the crux in the "cultivation of the macabre", developed through an identification with the female protagonist.³⁶ Referring to the "terrific suspense", "tension", and praise as an "[e]xcellent thriller", the creation of the macabre atmosphere is afforded to psychological manipulation of the female protagonist rather than through grisly detailing.³⁷ *Monthly Film Bulletin* too shares a similar perception of *Gaslight* as a film in need of "relief from the Grand Guignol atmosphere" achieved in the music hall sequences, suggesting "the effectively produced" and "gripping story" requires some respite for the audience.³⁸ This too is aided in the performances of both Walbrook and Wynyard, the latter giving a "well-balanced, sensitive and appealing study of the hapless and helpless victim of a maniac" crucial to female identification with the lead.³⁹

Following routine praise from the British trade press, the film's release in June 1940 was met with some cynicism from the *Manchester Guardian* who had clearly

³⁵ Anon, "Gaslight", *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.279, n.1728, May 30, 1940, p.20.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ E.P., "Gaslight", *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.7, n.78, June, 1940, p.88.

³⁹ Ibid.

been impressed by the efforts made in the original play, yet saw little improvement in the cinematic release aside from the “elaborate” recreation of 1880s London, thought to be as convincing as any other reconstruction of Victorian London.⁴⁰ In a similar manner to *Hatter’s Castle*, this level of commitment to period setting is recognised as a key factor in the creation of macabre effect. Patrick Hamilton’s original play of a “grim little story” is praised for “gradual communication of reasonable horror”⁴¹, procured through commitment to realism and the psychological.

As discussed earlier, while the realist aesthetic was perceived to be a direct confrontation with the issues facing contemporary audiences, the melodramas were often recognised as escapist entertainment situated in the safe environments provided by period settings. Writing for the *Daily Sketch*, Elspeth Grant illustrates the suitability of a “hair-raising chiller” that will “make you look like a porcupine and chill you to the bone”, as a means of taking the viewer “right out of yourself” in order to forget the outside world.⁴² Grant refers to a recent “bright bit of American nonsense” incorporating elements of the musical and comedy, as another form of escapism which falls short of the entertainment value provided in the ‘chilling’ aspect to *Gaslight*.⁴³

The *Sunday Express* confirms that “thrillers have always been good “escape” entertainment” and this “clever psychological study” is deemed to be a perfect match for those seeking to escape from the war.⁴⁴ Campbell Dixon writes in the *Daily Telegraph* that while a story such as this “is not everybody’s idea of entertainment”, he recommends “even in these times it has its uses” as “we cannot escape reality by simply gazing at imbecility.”⁴⁵ Campbell’s review recognises how recent attempts at

⁴⁰ A.D., “Gaslight – A Film of a Play”, *Manchester Guardian*, June 12, 1940.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Elspeth Grant, “A Brilliant British Chiller”, *Daily Sketch*, June 14, 1940.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Anon., “Best Batch for Many Weeks”, *Sunday Express*, June 16, 1940.

⁴⁵ Campbell Dixon, “Gaslight – Fine British Thriller”, *Daily Telegraph*, June 17, 1940.

escapism have often failed to provide the necessary diversion, guaranteeing *Gaslight*'s ability to "grip one's attention like a vice" through a tale of "crime and cruelty, set against a background of Victorian respectability"⁴⁶.

This idea of providing refuge for wartime audiences became a theme common to these period films as A. Jympson Harman, writing for *The Evening News*, recognises in the creation of "strong drama which will send shivers down your spine"⁴⁷. Harman's humorous introduction to the review singles out a young woman sitting in the theatre who "giggled in all the wrong places" providing an "unintentional tribute to one of the chilliest of film thrillers", demonstrating the need for the audiences to "do something to relieve your emotions."⁴⁸ The "horrid bit of villainy" from Anton Walbrook, working alongside the "outstandingly good" direction of Dickinson's recreation of Victorian England, provides the "chilly thrills" purported to be the key factor in allowing viewers to "forget current events for an hour."⁴⁹ Harman's positive reaction to the suitability of "one of the chilliest of film thrillers" for a British audience dealing with the realities of the war provides an interesting alternative to the notion that horror, or 'chillers', were thought to be an unsuitable form of entertainment.

These words are echoed by C. A. Lejeune in the *Observer* who argues that escapist entertainment need not be a "confession of cowardice" but a chance to forget things for an hour or two in order to "relive and reinvigorate" and "grapple them again with greater vigour."⁵⁰ What is most significant in Lejeune's review of *Gaslight* is the discussion of the film along similar lines to those derived from the 'quality', or 'realist', aesthetic. While the review talks of a certain "school of thought that believes

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ A. Jympson Harman, "Chilly Thrills", *The Evening News*, June 14, 1940.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ C.A. Lejeune, "Another Way of Escape", *The Observer*, June 16, 1940.

we must have comedy at any price”, Lejeune refuses to position herself aside such suggestions believing “[g]ood comedy” to be ‘good’ at any time while a “bad comedy” at that particularly period seems “more horrible than ever.”⁵¹ She adds:

I believe – and I have found many people who agree with me – that the most helpful films today are those that compel your interest in the lives and problems of other people. Real people. Human people. People likeable, pitiable, or convincing enough to persuade you that somewhere, in some parallel dimension, there is a world of drama as urgent as your own.⁵²

Lejeune’s statement not only reflects upon the need to deal with issues of contemporary British society, it also demonstrates an acceptance of melodrama as a source of release through which the viewer is able to reflect upon their own existence, in a similar manner to the realist film. Lejeune sees no need to locate films reflecting upon the struggles of everyday existence within a contemporary environment as identification with real ‘human people’ may be found wherever conviction lies.

In this instance, *Gaslight*’s “bald and harsh” synopsis is developed into a “personal experience” of “an autobiography of bewildered weakness”, praised for “poignancy and grimness.”⁵³ The film’s representation of individual suffering at the hands of a maniacal husband clearly sets out to terrify and shock the audience, however, for Lejeune this is done so through identification and empathy provided in the representation of human behaviour. The “detailed inventory of everyday things” presents the viewer with a realism providing familiarity with certain sights and sounds “so deadly when they are no longer the symbols of safety.”⁵⁴ The accuracy with which the film recreates Victorian London is therefore seen to be of utmost importance in establishing the macabre style, directing the film’s success squarely at familiarity with

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

both the ‘everydayness’ of the settings and accurate portrayals of villainy and mental anguish by its stars.

The recognition of ‘chilling’ entertainment as providing the necessary escapism is again discussed by Paul Holt of the *Daily Express* who expresses the appeal of this “nice, creepy thriller” as a result of there being no “custard pie comedies [or] Keystone cops to chase the headlines out of your minds for an hour.”⁵⁵ In a similar manner to Lejeune’s reception of the film, the “nice gooey, creepy, murky plot of steps in the dark and strangling hands and the cold, calculating eye of insanity”⁵⁶ is seen as an alternative to comedy as escapist entertainment, with an understanding of the restraint with which the film approaches the ‘creepy’ angle. Holt recognises this subtlety in the performances of Walbrook and Wynyard, with the former acting through “cold, selfish, calculating eyes” which “turn wild and hunted as the net draws in on him”, matched in those of Wynyard, appearing “wide, defiant, frightened of the craziness they see mirrored in the looks of other people.”⁵⁷

P. L. Mannoock, for the *Daily Herald*, makes similar reference to the “[s]emi-hypnotic methods” of the lead actors proving suitably haunting performances, alongside the “macabre picturesqueness” within which “things go bump in the night”⁵⁸. The subtlety derived from an emphasis upon the psychological is noted by the *Sunday Express* as having a great deal to do with the atmosphere created through the use of music in establishing tension.⁵⁹ For Iris Conlay, of the *Catholic Herald*, the musical score “rattles through otherwise harmless sequences [causing them to] crawl

⁵⁵ Paul Holt, “A Nice, Creepy 80° Thriller”, *Daily Express*, June 14, 1940.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ P. L. Mannoock, “Films of the Week”, *Daily Herald*, June 16, 1940.

⁵⁹ Anon., “Best Batch for Many Weeks”, *Sunday Express*, June 16, 1940.

with corruption” while the “silent pauses” are “suggestive of horrors to come.”⁶⁰ As with both the Val Lewton productions arriving from Hollywood and the emerging Gothic melodramas, the desired effect of macabre entertainment was increasingly derived from psychological themes and, for the reviewers of both *Gaslight* and *Hatter’s Castle*, this provided the wartime audience with the most likely candidate for ‘escapism’.

Conclusion

Though set against the contemporary backdrop of WWII *The Night Has Eyes*⁶¹ presents a recognisably Gothic atmosphere, in a similar manner to *Hatter’s Castle* and *Gaslight*, through the 19th century décor of an isolated cottage on the Yorkshire Moors. As with Alan Kennington’s original novel the film follows two female school teachers, Mariam (Joyce Howard) and Doris (Tucker McGuire), as they venture onto the Moors in search of a missing colleague where they become embroiled in a plot of psychological manipulation and murder. As the BBFC reports for the submitted script suggest, the intentions of *The Night Has Eyes* followed other films of a similar nature in that the aim was to provide ‘sordid’ details for the purpose of horrifying audiences, yet the Board’s recommendations to remove some of the more explicit scenes did little to hamper these ambitions.⁶² Instead, it prevented the film venturing into the ‘H’

⁶⁰ Iris Conlay, “Murder in Victorianism is Quite Unbearable”, *Catholic Herald*, June 28, 1940.

⁶¹ BBFC, (2011). *The Night Has Eyes* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF000863> [accessed 11 April 2011]. Passed with an ‘A’ certificate March 1942 without cuts.

⁶² Colonel John C. Hanna, “The Night Has Eyes”, *BBFC Scenario Notes 1941-1942-1943*, October 9, 1941. One of the key provisos being that “[t]he death struggles of Mrs Ranger and Sturrock sinking in the bog should be cut as brief as possible, and gruesome details avoided”.

category whilst encouraging the filmmakers to take a subtler approach to the gruesome story.

As *The Times* reported, James Mason's "dangerous homicidal maniac" residing in his "sinister" house on the Yorkshire Moors, alongside the film's "ingenuity, and not a little cinematic skill [shown] by the quality of its dialogue", demonstrates an attempt to provide something "more than the ordinary "thriller.""⁶³ *The Night Has Eyes* followed the critical success of *Gaslight* and *Hatter's Castle* as another example of the type of Gothic melodrama also seen in the following year's 20th Century Fox production of *Jane Eyre*. The resemblance between Gothics such *Jane Eyre* and *The Night Has Eyes*, followed by the subsequent Gainsborough efforts, signified a shift toward a different breed of horror filmmaking, with the 'H' ban and the largely female audience no doubt playing a key role in maintaining this trend.

During the early stages of WWII, it became increasingly evident that the need for escapist entertainment would be crucial for British audiences frequenting the cinema, and this debate came to the forefront for those critics who saw importance in providing an alternative to the reality of war. More than just mere distractions, the atmosphere created in melodramas such as *Hatter's Castle*, *Gaslight*, and *The Night Has Eyes*, came to be seen as a more effective form of release for audiences than the 'light entertainment' of comedy or the musical.

The period setting for a number of the melodramas to follow as the war unfolded, not only provided the necessary distancing from the contemporary environment but also afforded these films the opportunity to face up to the 'morbid' underside to reality. While the 'quality' realist films protested to be honest depictions

⁶³ Anon., "New Films in London", *The Times*, April 13, 1942.

of society in the throes of war, the melodramas afforded the viewer with an interpretation of the darker, and more taboo, nature of everyday existence. Dilys Powell's review for *Hatter's Castle*, although against the consensus in favour of the film's treatment of 'realistic' traumas, demonstrates an understanding of the appeal for the darker side to reality while also regarding true 'melodrama' to be that which deals in 'strangeness' and 'terror'.⁶⁴

As the 'H' ban came into effect, several months after the release of *Hatter's Castle*, the assumption made by *Variety* that its basis stemmed from British audiences growing weary of macabre entertainment as a result of the constant threat of air-raids, blackouts, and possible invasion, is clearly refuted in the acceptance of the Gothic melodrama as suitable escapism.⁶⁵ As the 'H' films excluded from the screen during the period demonstrate, only a small number of 'fantasy' horror films were in fact upheld by the BBFC although, as the critical reception to the Gothic melodrama illustrates, a recognition of the 'horrific', 'chilling', 'macabre', 'morbid', 'thrilling', within a less 'fantastic' framework, would suggest a similar motivation behind their production.

As the war progressed and the British press began to reassess their opinions of realism and melodrama, it would be the former taking precedence over a rejection of the latter. While the interpretation of earlier melodramas displays an understanding of realism's potential to confront the more horrific aspects of the everyday, it also demonstrates how closely linked melodrama and horror actually were. A split between melodrama and realism became one of the main criticisms of the following

⁶⁴ Dilys Powell, "Hatters Castle", *The Sunday Times*, November 17, 1941.

⁶⁵ Anon., "H'wood Chillers Get Chill From British Censors; Too Jittery", *Variety*, v.148, n.12, November 25, 1942, p.3&39.

Gainsborough films, with the British press associating them more closely with low-brow fantasy over the quality of realism.

Chapter Five: “Romance and Gaiety” – Escapism and the Costume

Melodrama during WWII

Within the same *Kinematograph Weekly* article of April 1945, discussed in the previous chapter, R. H. Billings conceded that while several genres were not performing at the box office, the likelihood that the current trends should remain were unlikely. Billing states, “[t]he vogue for sentiment will no doubt pass. It always has! But what will follow? What type of film will next capture the imagination and cash of the unpredictable filmgoers?”¹ After already distinguishing the most popular films of the year as being far removed from mere sentimentality, it was clear that the Gothic inspired films discussed in the previous chapter had already ‘captured the imagination’ of an audience tired of the war film.

1945 began with the optimism that by the end of the year war in Europe would be over, reflected in the production schedules of many of the British studios who foresaw a declining interest in the ‘realist’ war film. Head of production at Gainsborough Pictures, Maurice Ostrer, expressed his opinions regarding this shift in *Kinematograph Weekly*:

¹ R. H. Billings, “Politics, “Shockers” and These Crazy Radio Comedies Always Fail!”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.338, n.1984, April 26, 1945, p.5.

I urge planning of our entertainments on lines that will enable our audiences to relax and to know beforehand that they are going in for a feast so long denied them – Romance and Gaiety.²

Ostrer points out that Gainsborough has already succeeded with this approach in the previous year with *Fanny by Gaslight* and *Love Story* (Leslie Arliss; 1944), although the production schedule at Gainsborough during the end of the war is far more complex than mere ventures into ‘romance and gaiety’.

Maurice Ostrer may indeed be accurate in his assessment of *Fanny by Gaslight* and *Love Story*, however, elements of murder, sexuality, and mistaken identity, are also central themes to both productions. The coming attractions including *Madonna of the Seven Moons* and *The Wicked Lady*, both dealing with the mystique of dual personalities and the criminality of their central characters, while *A Place of One’s Own* (Bernard Knowles; 1945), pitched by Ostrer as “romance of a more spiritual kind”³, in fact deals with the paranormal, spiritual possession and the ghost of a murdered invalid girl.

For John Ellis, this period of British film history was one of “positive cultural identity” with a number of the films inspired by a ‘documentary’ style contributing to this new era of the “quality film.”⁴ This term coined by critics, sought to define the nature of this new output as being key to the development of film-making in the UK through honest depictions of the British way of life. In contrast to these ‘quality’ productions, the ‘prestige’ pictures made at Gainsborough during the 1940s were critically derided as obvious attempts to compete with Hollywood. As the 1930s came to a close, Gainsborough’s ambitions to present themselves as serious competition for the glamorous star-filled pictures from Hollywood led to the development of a house

² Maurice Ostrer, “Producers Must Veer to the Public’s Changing Tastes”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.335, n.1969, January 11, 1945, p.165.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Ellis, “The Quality Film Adventure”, pp.66-67.

style recognisable in its staple of stars similar to the major studios in the U.S.A. and an emphasis on ‘prestige’ film-making. Ellis draws from a number of quality British newspapers and magazines in order to convey how critics recognised that during WWII, “the glamour of day dreams faded” thus shifting production away from the “posed and gaudy” of the pre-war period as “naturalism came into its own.”⁵

The films included in the production schedule mentioned above suggests how the romance and light-heartedness of the ‘gaudy’ Gainsborough films, such as *The Man in Grey*, were just as concerned with death, murder and the paranormal. Earlier efforts at the studio during WWII focused primarily on light-hearted projects, such as comedies starring Arthur Askey, alongside their war-themed output including the modestly successful *We Dive at Dawn* (Anthony Asquith; 1943).⁶ However, as Robert Murphy has illustrated, in spite of the death and destruction of the war a morbid curiosity for the macabre remained.

This became recognisable in a series of spiritual horror stories, including *A Place of One’s Own*, thought to have derived from an interest developed within the public for the paranormal following confrontations with their own mortality.⁷ Other ‘spiritual’ productions, such as *The Halfway House* (Basil Dearden: 1944) and *Blithe Spirit* (David Lean: 1945), were indeed popular with both audiences and critics (see Chapter Six) yet their confrontation with the supernatural was presented alongside sentiment and humour.

⁵ Ibid., p.69.

⁶ Geoffrey Macnab, “Looking for Lustre: Stars at Gainsborough” in Pam Cook (Ed.), *Gainsborough Pictures* (London: Cassell, 1997), p.109. When Ted Black took over the studio from its founder Michael Balcon in 1936, he wanted films to be produced which would also appeal to a Northern English audience and in order to do so, made a series of comedy films starring Will Hay and Arthur Askey. Understandably, these films did not travel well and a number of their more ambitious efforts didn’t fare much better due to the lack of big stars.

⁷ Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel*, p.171.

The biggest box-office hits of 1945 and 1946, Ortus Films' *The Seventh Veil* (Compton Bennett; 1945) and Gainsborough's *The Wicked Lady*, derived their morbid nature from themes similar to the well-received Gothics-inspired films of the early 1940s. Although discussed as two very different productions by the British press, *The Wicked Lady* and *The Seventh Veil* were both identified as dealing with the 'macabre' in a series of ways, the former through the sordid nature of sexuality, murder, and criminality, the latter in its interpretation of psychoanalysis and the 'other'.

Tessa Perkins discusses these two films as playing a key role in British film history, questioning the role of women during WWII and the implication that in order to return back to the 'normality' of the pre-war period, the male must reclaim their dominant position within society.⁸ Janet Thumin recognises the importance of *The Wicked Lady* in terms of the cathartic release provided in its 'fantastical' narrative of a woman operating outside of the patriarchal order, offering the female viewer a greater understanding of "the moral values attached to various forms of behaviour, or to the consequences of one or another kind of decision."⁹

For Perkins, *The Seventh Veil* serves as an example of the type of sadistic patriarch familiar to the Gothic, in this case portrayed by James Mason, whose cruel treatment of the female cousin under his tutelage is not criticised as the cause of her psychological torment. Instead masculine authority is again restored at the end of the film when the problems of her own past, brought on by the women in her charge, are put to blame for her downfall. The freedoms afforded to women during the war were now being reclaimed as they were expected to fit back into their traditional role.¹⁰

⁸ Perkins, "Two Weddings and Two Funerals", pp.264-281.

⁹ Janet Thumin, "The Female Audience: Mobile Women and Married Ladies" in Gledhill and Swanson (Eds.), *Nationalising Femininity*, p.251.

¹⁰ Perkins, "Two Weddings and Two Funerals", p.277.

The film's central psychological theme came at a key point in 1940s cinema as its use in the entertainment film shifted from the 'low-brow' to a more respectable basis in realism. In his discussion of the critical reception of the 1940s 'psychological' film, Mark Jancovich has argued how the perception of these productions altered throughout the decade, as 'horror' and 'psychoanalysis' were often interchangeable. The rise in popularity of psychoanalysis during the 1940s was often seen on the screen within representations of Gothic fantasy, leading the New York critics to deride these films as a pretentious form of 'horror', until later in the decade when psychology became increasingly associated with cinematic realism.¹¹

The earlier melodramas, including *Hatter's Castle* and *Gaslight* discussed in Chapter Four, had been praised by the 'quality' press for their use of period settings as a means of confronting the audience with the more sordid elements of the everyday. However, Gainsborough's ventures into the more exotic style of melodrama would not be met with similar acclaim. *The Wicked Lady* was in fact recognised as being too 'fantastical' in its lavish attempts to live up to the prestige of Hollywood, regardless of its popularity with British audiences at the box-office.¹² The appeal for more sordid themes remained a constant during WWII, with *The Seventh Veil* also proving a success with critics. The press perceived the film's treatment of psychoanalysis as a realistic venture into the dark mysteries of the mind through contemporary methods of mental health treatment, whilst still working along the lines familiar to the Gothic.

This chapter will therefore examine the mixed reception from critics to two of the most successful 'melodramas' produced during the dying moments of WWII and subsequently released in the following months, noted for their appeal as 'thrilling'

¹¹ Mark Jancovich, "'Frighteningly Real': Psychology, Realism and Generic Transformation in the Demise of the 1940s Horror Cycle", *European Journal of American Culture*, v.31, n.1, April, 2012, pp.25-39.

¹² Perkins, p.264.

entertainment. Gainsborough's *The Wicked Lady* stars James Mason in a role familiar to the British audience through such films as *The Night Has Eyes*. These melodramas were often found at the top of the end of year popularity polls making it hardly surprising that Ostrer was keen for the studio to continue focussing on these productions throughout his short spell in charge, in spite of the critical backlash.¹³ However, Mason's other outstanding success of the period, *The Seventh Veil*, was received far more favourably for its attempts to deal with psychological themes in a series manner, despite these clear links back to the derided Gainsborough melodramas.

A 'Wicked Lady': Gainsborough's Box-Office Appeal and Critical Distain

In her defence of the Gainsborough melodrama, Pam Cook reflects upon the significance of their popularity with British audiences:

The hostile reception of some of these films at the time of their release suggests they were not perceived to be authentically British [...] Gainsborough Pictures [...] produced films which were both successful at the box office and, side by side with movies imported from Europe and the USA, made a significant contribution to British film culture [therefore] this marginalisation appears almost perverse.¹⁴

The roots of the Gainsborough melodramas stem from the 'Film Europe' movement of the 1920s and '30s when, for a time, Britain joined with Germany and France in an attempt to fend off the Hollywood hegemony.¹⁵ Weimar cinema had a clear influence at Gainsborough, and also on the work of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, with regards to "expressive gestures, spectacle, décor and effects" noticeable in the visual effects and designs common to the films made under Maurice Ostrer.¹⁶ For

¹³ Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel*, p.43.

¹⁴ Pam Cook, "Introduction" in Cook (Ed.), *Gainsborough Pictures*, p.2.

¹⁵ Tim Bergfelder, "Surface and Distraction: Style and Genre at Gainsborough in the Late 1920s and 1930s" in Cook (Ed.), *Gainsborough Pictures*, pp.31-32.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.32. By the mid-1930s, many of the British art departments were staffed, and often run, by a number of European or German exiles and their influence would be felt throughout the next decade. Elizabeth Haffenden costume designs were inspired partially by her tutor Rene Hubert, working

many artists, such as cinematographer Gunther Krampf, the power of film lay in visual effect and this emphasis aided in developing the Gothic style of the melodramas made at Gainsborough during the 1940s.¹⁷

Innovation and economical constraint also had an impact on the sinister style of the Gainsborough productions, working in tandem with the ambiguous nature of the film's plot.¹⁸ As a number of these production were studio bound, a more creative approach to lighting and design was required, shunning historical verisimilitude and instead opting for an anti-naturalistic expressionism.¹⁹

Following Ostrer's arrival at Gainsborough in 1943, a number of 'prestige' pictures influenced by both Gothic themes and the spectacle of Hollywood were put into production. These films presented stars such as James Mason and Margaret Lockwood with "the kind of torrid emotional roles which could not fail to make an impression on audiences."²⁰ Although Ostrer may have had the intention of creating pure escapism, this would be achieved through both moments of light-hearted gaiety and, perhaps more so, strong visuals accompanied by convincing performances of sinister criminality and macabre obsessions.

As the war progressed, the appetite for suspense and murder remained a fixture on production schedules, with the glamorously exotic, yet typically British, locations employed at Gainsborough providing audiences with a safe distance from which they

together in Erich Pommer's production unit at UFA during the '20s, whose work was centred on the close composition of all visual elements in order create true meaning in atmosphere and style.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.34.

¹⁸ Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel*, pp.168-9. As Robert Murphy has noted, the roots of these darker productions were influenced by the staff joining the studio in the mid-1930s.

¹⁹ Duncan Petrie, "Innovation and Economy: The Contribution of the Gainsborough Cinematographer" in Cook (Ed.), *Gainsborough Pictures*, pp.128-9. In much the same way that certain restrictions may have aided in the creation of Film Noir's visual style, the Gainsborough films chose minimal lighting alongside maximum aperture of the camera as a way of representing the gothic tone at the heart of many of these films. By using greater depth of field and low-key lighting, scenes of particular terror or passion are emphasised by the focus on detail and in turn the claustrophobic unease it implies.

²⁰ Macnab, "Looking for Lustre" in Cook (Ed.), *Gainsborough Pictures*, p.112.

were able to confront darker subject matter. As I have suggest in the previous chapter, realism featuring within the melodrama would often be defended by the British critics for its conviction and revealing nature, whereas the opposite could be said for the ‘prestige’ of the Gainsborough films, deemed to rely on fantasy alone as a result of ostentatious décor and historical inaccuracy. Following Leslie Arliss’s *The Night Has Eyes*, Gainsborough Pictures would also go on to produce a series of extremely popular melodramas along similar Gothic lines to the director’s earlier film for ABPC, two of which reunited Arliss with star James Mason.

Set in the days of Charles II, *The Wicked Lady* stars Margaret Lockwood as Barbara Worth, acquiring the title of Lady Skelton following the seduction of her friend Caroline’s (Patricia Roc) bridegroom Sir Ralph Skelton (Griffith Jones). Bored of her new rural life, Lady Skelton takes to highway robbery, whereupon she encounters fellow highwayman Captain Jackson (James Mason), soon becoming her accomplice and lover. After a foiled gold robbery, Lady Skelton kills one man and poisons another in order to keep her identity secret, before going on to implicate Jackson for his crimes after finding him in bed with another woman. Jackson is rescued during his execution and takes vengeance upon the Lady by raping her in her bedroom. In order to free herself of her husband, Skelton sits in wait for his coach with the intent to kill him although she actual shoots and kills Jackson after he attempts to warn Sir Ralph of her plan. Shot by Caroline’s new lover Kit (Michael Rennie) before she can get to her husband, Lady Skelton flees, only to die alone at home after Kit, who fell in love with Barbara before her wedding, admits he can no longer bare to be with a woman who committed such horrendous crimes.

Based on “The Life and Death of the Wicked Lady Skelton” by Magdalen King-Hall, the script was approved by the BBFC in March 1945 with only a few alterations²¹ in order for the finished film to pass through with an ‘A’ certificate later that year with no cuts.²² In the same month of its BBFC classification, *Kinematograph Weekly* located the film’s appeal within the “exuberant period fantasy and horseplay [...] too novelettish to build up big drama, or make a notable contribution to the screen” and “does not over-estimate the intelligence of the kinema-going public”.²³

The review also recognises the potential female draw at the box-office in its appeal to “the Dick Turpin in every woman”²⁴ confirming Tessa Perkins’s interpretation of the film as an expression of liberation, with the condemnation of Barbara’s behaviour at the end of the film representing the need to return to a life of domesticity.²⁵ The appeal of this ‘fantasy’ is also illustrated by *Monthly Film Bulletin* in a recognition of the film’s value as entertainment and also the sheer naivety of the storyline, described as a “novelette on high-quality art paper.”²⁶ Aside from the lavish settings, the review criticises the film for the mixture of 17th and 20th century idioms, in tandem with an unconvincing supporting cast, as being unconvincing to a believable portrayal of the period.

While the fantasy of Ealing’s *Dead of Night* was greeted with critical praise just two months prior, the same critics found *The Wicked Lady* to be an affront to an

²¹ Colonel John C. Hanna & Mrs N. Crouzet, “The Wicked Lady”, *BBFC Scenario Notes 1944 - 1945*, March 2, 1945. The suggestions made by the BBFC scenario team included the removal of scenes showing Jackson hanging and several lines referring to the hanging such as “Jackson’s putting up a fight. Must have a neck of a bull” and “why doesn’t somebody jerk his legs and end his misery”.

²² BBFC, (2011). *The Wicked Lady* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF019404> [accessed 11 April 2011].

²³ Anon., “The Wicked Lady”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.345, n.2014, November 22, 1945, p.24.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Perkins, “Two Weddings and Two Funerals”, p.275.

²⁶ K.F.B., “The Wicked Lady”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.12, n.143, November, 1945, p.130.

industry in development of its own national cinema, with the new Gainsborough film inflicting “dowdy fancy-dress inanity” upon the public. Simon Harcourt-Smith of *Tribune* conveys his frustration at the repeated success of these melodramas by suggesting that in the recent weeks following the end of WWII, “new films can claim no privilege as works of art” as, in general, they appear as “mere patterns of light and shade, mere noise to illuminate and warm a hall where you go as you might a bar in search of oblivion.”²⁷ Harcourt-Smith makes the connection between the successes of the costume film and the “tedium, grey ruin of modern life”, accepting the need to escape to “less troubled epochs than the present”, although he also calls for accurate evocation of the period rather than this “sexy charade”.²⁸

The “authentically Hollywood” nonsense of the period setting is criticised for attempting to compete with America’s own “yardstick of excellence”²⁹ signifying, for this critic, how the British studios still strived to compete with Hollywood through attempts to win over audiences with ‘prestige’ rather than ‘quality’. The reviewer makes a final warning to the British film industry against following such popular trends to the detriment of quality productions, which would later prove an actuality as studios began to pour their investments into attempts to challenge Hollywood spectacle, resulting in catastrophe for the British production.

The *Daily Herald* acknowledges *The Wicked Lady* as a “handsomely made romantic British period melodrama”³⁰ likely to repeat the success of Gainsborough’s *The Man in Grey*, yet takes exception to the use of modern dialogue alongside the lack of conviction in believing Margaret Lockwood could kill “anything bigger than a

²⁷ Simon Harcourt-Smith, “Films and Plays”, *Tribune*, November 23, 1945.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Anon., “She Was a Vain Hussy!”, *Daily Herald*, November 17, 1945.

bluebottle”³¹. In the *Herald*’s summary of the key plot points, the reviewer singles out the ‘morbid’ nature of the Lockwood’s character as likely to be the main draw for the film³². This is echoed by the *Evening Standard*, as the Lady’s evil nature “justifies the title considerably” and plays a crucial role in the inevitability of it providing a “considerable success” for Gainsborough. This success is also prescribed to an acknowledgment of the studio’s “polished and lavish” style which “looks expensive.”³³ The value of *The Wicked Lady* as escapist entertainment within darker realms is not denied by the critics, although the Gainsborough productions were deemed to lack the realistic tendencies giving earlier melodramas some credibility to such an approach.

The Daily Telegraph and *The Sunday Times* address similar problems, with the former applauding the “story of murder, lust and highway robbery” with “gusto and broad humour [that] should ensure a huge box-office success”³⁴, while the latter sees its downfall in covering the “old ground of every costume, wig, cloak, sword, and ruffle piece ever conceived.”³⁵ *The Listener* went as far as to state that “[t]he only time the picture comes alive is when James Mason is on the screen”³⁶ whereas Lockwood receives a worthy mention from *The Guardian*, who “does valiantly” in her portrayal of villainess Barbara whom “flounces evilly through a naughty career, which starts with intrigue, passes on to highway robbery, and closes after a series of murders.”³⁷ Again, the British critics distinguish the sordid as playing an instrumental part in the

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid. “A vain heatless hussy snatches a friend’s bridegroom and weds him, gambles away her mother’s brooch, becomes a lady highway-man, poisons an old retainer, shoots a peasant, betrays her highwayman lover to the gallows, and attempts two more killings before passing out.”

³³ Anon., “The Wicked Lady”, *Evening Standard*, November 16, 1945.

³⁴ Anon., “The Wicked Lady”, *The Daily Telegraph*, November 19, 1945.

³⁵ Anon., “The Wicked Lady”, *The Sunday Times*, November 18, 1945.

³⁶ Anon., “The Wicked Lady”, *The Listener*, November 22, 1945.

³⁷ S.W., “The Wicked Lady”, *The Manchester Guardian*, November 15, 1945.

film's success with the central performances contributing to this sinister atmosphere, while the ambition to capture the essence of Hollywood spectacle leaves little credibility or substance.

The *Daily Mail* makes a similar point, generalising the “masses and masses of people” who were likely to see the film as having little interest for “credibility in the dialogue” when they have Lockwood and Mason’s devious behaviour to keep them thrilled.³⁸ The *Daily Sketch* acknowledges this “often atrocious dialogue” in spite of the film being “gorgeously dressed and mounted, and admirably photographed”³⁹, with *The Times* questioning why “a film with so many exciting ingredients should, in performance, prove so dull”, attributing this failure for sticking “too obviously to a formula.”⁴⁰ Popular tabloid the *Daily Mirror* may have taken an opinion against the one held by the majority of the British press, praising *The Wicked Lady* as a “well-acted film teeming with thrills and romance in which a first-class cast make the most of some intriguing dialogue”⁴¹, yet they all follow similar lines in sharing a positive opinion of the film’s attempt to present a series of thrills within this lucrative framework.

The downfall of *The Wicked Lady*, as with other Gainsborough productions, lies within a lack of conviction spawned from attempts to add a ‘prestigious’ quality through lavish decoration and spectacle. As we have already seen in the case of *Gaslight* and *Hatter’s Castle*, accurate recreations of period settings provided a verisimilitude through which audiences were thought to identify and therefore invoke a stronger reaction to the ‘macabre’ themes. As the war was coming to a close, one of

³⁸ Anon., “The Wicked Lady”, *Daily Mail*, November 16, 1945.

³⁹ Anon., “The Wicked Lady”, *Daily Sketch*, November 16, 1945.

⁴⁰ Anon., “The Wicked Lady”, *The Times*, November 16, 1945.

⁴¹ Anon., “The Wicked Lady”, *Daily Mirror*, November 16, 1945.

the biggest box-office hits would reverse the trend by confronting the contemporary issue of psychoanalysis whilst also maintaining a relationship to the Gothic.

The Seventh Veil and Britain's Own 'Psychological Horror'

Escapism, as Gainsborough's Maurice Ostrer suggested⁴², would be key to the continued success of the British cinema in the post-war environment although Michael Balcon⁴³ foresaw that there could be no sure-fire way of guaranteeing a market for any particular genre through 1945 and beyond. Prior to the release of *The Seventh Veil*, Sydney Box's Ortus films had only been involved in one other production,⁴⁴ although Box brought with him the experiences of working on both wartime propaganda material and light-hearted comedies. This variety no doubt played some part in his awareness of what would be popular amongst British audiences, following the continued appeal of the Gainsborough productions. At the same time, a developing interest in mental illness and psychiatry would prove to be a great success in Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945) the following year, breaking box office records at the London Pavilion and the Strands Tivoli Theatre.⁴⁵

Whilst taking a break from Gainsborough, James Mason faced a similar masochistic role as those he made famous throughout WWII in a film earning producer Box, and his wife Muriel, an Academy Award for Best Screenplay in 1946. Produced

⁴² Maurice Ostrer, "Producers Must Veer to the Public's Changing Tastes", *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.335, n.1969, January 11, 1945, p.165.

⁴³ Anon., "Ealing Goes Escapist with Ghosts, Murders and Classics: Balcon's programme of Universal Appeal", *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.335, n.1969, January 11, 1945, p.187.

⁴⁴ Powell and Pressburger's *The 49th Parallel* (Michael Powell; 1941), a call to arms for America's involvement in WWII.

⁴⁵ Hedda Hopper, "Spellbound Breaks Admission Records", *The Miami News*, June 30, 1946, p.9.

by Ortus Films, the company Sydney Box established in 1940, *The Seventh Veil*⁴⁶ stars Mason as Nicholas, the overbearing guardian of concert pianist Francesca Cunningham (Ann Todd) who attempts suicide following an accident which left her unable to play. Undergoing hypnotherapy whilst in the care of Dr Larsen (Herbert Lom), Francesca reveals a series of incidents involving her past which would suggest Nicholas's somewhat sadistic treatment was the source of her psychological disturbances. However, when it is later revealed her traumas relates back to an incident when she was younger, Francesca realises Nicholas is in fact her true love with his cruel nature a result of his own jealousy concerning her previous lovers.

The Seventh Veil is situated at the centre of the shift in the use of psychology in cinema, as the contemporary issues of psychoanalysis become entwined with the Gothic nature of James Mason's apparently sadistic treatment of the long-suffering Francesca. This led British critics to discover how the true 'horror' of the film was linked to the realistic approach to mental illness. Its success as a dark psychological drama presents itself as a forerunner to Olivia de Havilland's performance as a woman suffering from similar deep-seated traumas depicted in *The Snake Pit* a few years later, and Ray Milland's role as an alcoholic facing his own psychological torment in Billy Wilder's *The Lost Weekend* (1945). The British trade press may have recognised *The Seventh Veil* for its particular appeal as a "woman's film", in terms of the series of romances for Todd's character, yet these links between psychiatry and the Gothic also demonstrate a wider appeal as horror.

⁴⁶ BBFC, (2011). *The Seventh Veil* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF009023/> [accessed 5 January 2012]. The film was not recorded by the scenario team at the BBFC, although it went on to be passed uncut by the Board in July 1945 with the obligatory 'A' classification.

Kinematograph Weekly praised the film as a “complicated yet intensely human case history of a brilliant but inhibited pianist” with particular emphasis placed upon the “fine music, faultlessly interpreted by Muir Mathieson and the London Symphony Orchestra”.⁴⁷ *The Seventh Veil* presents a familiar story of male dominance and female oppression perpetuated by the perils of passion seen in *The Wicked Lady*, with the ‘realistic’ treatment of the psychological, alongside the ‘high-brow’ classical orchestration, placing the melodramatic nature of the film on a higher intellectual level, thereby “establishing a new and exacting yardstick for the measurement of future box-office successes.”⁴⁸

Joan Lester of *Reynold’s News* applauded this “psychological melodrama with a fairly incredible plot” giving special mention to Sydney Box for his “excellent hour and half’s entertainment” proving him to be “a real gift to British pictures”⁴⁹, while the *Evening Standard* praise the “skill and good taste” making the film “shine like a jewel.”⁵⁰ The *News Chronicle* shared this optimism in its approach to “the popular tradition of psychoanalytical melodrama” arguing that, although it cost under £100,000 to make, in terms of entertainment “it can blandly face the Hollywood commercial product or its British imitation without the need to flaunt an extra and native charm.”⁵¹

The *Spectator* sees *The Seventh Veil* as the type of British production able to “satisfy a bigger proportion of the home market” and therefore reduce “the subservience to the American industry”⁵² in this country. In order to compete with the

⁴⁷ Anon., “The Seventh Veil”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.344, n.2010, October 25, 1945, p.26.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Joan Lester, “Seventh Veil Not *That* Kind of Picture”, *Reynold’s News*, October 21, 1945.

⁵⁰ Anon., “The Seventh Veil”, *Evening Standard*, October 19, 1945.

⁵¹ Anon., “The Seventh Veil”, *Daily Chronicle*, October 20, 1945.

⁵² Anon., “The Cinema”, *Spectator*, April 5, 1946.

overseas markets, *The Seventh Veil* demonstrates how productions “sparing of time, studio-space and money, should be our main stock in trade [allowing the] countless other (and more characteristically British) themes to be handled in a similar manner.”⁵³ Along with “its ability to couple graceful and gripping drama with surprise” the film “pays a compliment to the audience’s intelligence and imagination” with “a particular appeal to good and high class audiences”⁵⁴, adding emphasis to the clear distinction of its appeal as ‘quality’ entertainment despite the familiar trappings of the Gothic melodrama.

Monthly Film Bulletin criticise Mason’s character as “the man to whom wealth and a mysterious past permit a romantic license for ill-manners and egocentric behaviour”, referring to his usual “sardonic and brooding” roles, before going on to highlight the film’s “distinct virtues and distinct cinematic power” in providing thrilling entertainment, particularly in the “haunting” opening sequence.⁵⁵ The reviewer recognises the appeal of psychiatry but see how it falls flat when positioned in the framework of a “story of luxury and the romantic yearnings of the poor little rich girl” alongside Mason’s re-creation of a Victorian “romantically overbearing lord”⁵⁶. For this reviewer, *The Seventh Veil*’s relationship to the Gothic is thought to hinder the plausibility of the discussions of psychiatry, seeing the film as falling somewhere between Gothic fantasy and cinematic realism.

The *Daily Mirror* echoes the trade’s optimism for the film, citing it as “a new British picture which emphasises the big strides made by our product from both the artistic and the entertainment angles”, a blend with which the Sydney Box productions

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ R.M., “The Seventh Veil”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.12, n.142, October 31, 1945, p.118.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

are “obviously not afraid to experiment.”⁵⁷ The *Mirror*’s reference to experimentation with psychological themes establishes the film as an approved direction for British productions, as *The Seventh Veil*’s approach to mental illness and psychotherapy is treated in much higher regard than the Gainsborough films which share many other similarities.

The contemporary setting and treatment of mental illness was of clear significance to the critical success of the film in a period when realism was at the forefront of what was deemed to be cinema of ‘quality’. The *Daily Mail* alludes to the potential for success through a connection to the real-life issues of mental-illness becoming increasingly prominent by the end of WWII. The reviewer asks why “interest in physical illness is to be considered lowbrow” in the appearance of “ghoulish characters who talk cockney”, whereas “the cause of mental trouble is supposed to be above the head of the ordinary person” when,

in real life all of us, surely, are closely acquainted with at least one case of nervous disorder and are, unfortunately, likely to know many more before the full results of war become manifest.⁵⁸

The review demonstrates how mental illness had come to be associated within respectable forms of filmmaking, rather than the ‘low-brow’ horrors of physical deformity common to the fantastical Universal productions. This approach is seen to place the film intellectually out of reach for the very audience who were in the process of coming to terms with the serious social problems created by the war.

The link between the physically ‘ghoulish’ and the mentally ill demonstrates an understanding of the potentially horrific nature of mental illness and its manifestation on the screen. Not only did horror move away from such Grand Guignol

⁵⁷ Anon., “British – and a Winner all the way”, *Daily Mirror*, October 19, 1945.

⁵⁸ Anon., “Obsession”, *Daily Mail*, October 19, 1945.

apparitions, its psychological motivations would become entwined with the much more powerful nature of reality. *The Daily Telegraph* sees this as the resurrection of the German psychological film of the 1920s, commenting that “The Seventh Veil [...] following *Dead of Night*, suggests that the screen has rediscovered psychology: before long we may catch up with *Warning Shadows* and *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*.”⁵⁹ The reviewer’s belief that the current trend for British horror production signifies the ‘catching up’ with the celebrated film trends of the silent period⁶⁰, whilst maintaining the critic’s pursuit of the ‘quality’ film, again signals a shift in the understanding of the ‘horrific’ following WWII.

Conclusion

Some of the harsher critics of *The Seventh Veil* left no doubt as to its significance in terms of British production values, which *The Manchester Guardian* testifies to by stating that one may regard the film as “melodramatic and have doubts about its psychological basis; nevertheless the film has features of real interest.”⁶¹ On the other hand, *The Observer* sees its “tatty ending” as problematic for consideration as “a serious bit of cinema”, although it is argued that this “will not prevent it from being a vast and largely merited success.”⁶² The critical consensus, though often disenchanted by the relationship to the type of melodrama Mason had come to be associated, demonstrates an appreciation for its confrontation with the largely unacknowledged issues of mental illness and its potentially horrifying effects. The

⁵⁹ Anon., “The Seventh Veil”, *The Daily Telegraph*, October 22, 1945.

⁶⁰ *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Robert Wiene; 1920), *Warning Shadows* (Arthur Robison; 1923).

⁶¹ F.A., “Odeon – The Seventh Veil”, *The Manchester Guardian*, January 3, 1946.

⁶² Anon., “The Seventh Veil”, *The Observer*, October 21, 1945.

critical and financial success of the film demonstrates how the ‘serious’ treatment of mental illness, and therefore of the obscene side to reality, encouraged the development of horror from within the realms of the ‘everyday’.

Following the a positive response to the film upon its U.S.A. release⁶³ *The Seventh Veil* represented a point at which the British film industry came to Hollywood’s attention, looking as if though the promise of a national cinema would in fact come into prominence. A revival of *The Seventh Veil* at the Trivoli the following year gave the reviewer for the *Spectator* an opportunity to re-evaluate the impact of the film in relationship to the development of a series of projects attracting similar critical acclaim to that of the ‘quality’ films with ties to the melodrama.

Have we not here a demonstration that a good story filmed with assurance, carefully cast smoothly directed and tautly edited can mean more to the man-in-the-street – heaven bless his percipience – than all the bally-hooded sensationalism of screaming superlatives.⁶⁴

Here the critic distinguishes the film as standing apart for being both a critical and commercial success, appealing to a mass audience thought to be more closely linked to the derided melodramas at Gainsborough.

The success of the film is colourfully described as being “a box-office intoxicant which is neither sweet champagne nor devil’s brew” traversing the “middle path between the vulgar and the highbrow”, an example of which is witnessed within the “intelligent, medium-priced picture made with great technical polish” from Hollywood.⁶⁵ For this critic *The Seventh Veil* became “a type of film which the British industry has never previously achieved” in presenting a popular narrative alongside

⁶³ A.W., “At the Winter Garden”, *Variety*, December 26, 1945, p.15. *Variety* praised the film as “an intelligent and engrossing case history” providing a “genuinely intriguing offering to the film scene” within a “suspenseful and unusual treatment of a challenging theme.”

⁶⁴ Anon., “The Cinema”, *Spectator*, April 5, 1946.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

more intellectual themes, the path between the ‘vulgar’ and the ‘highbrow’ being the bridge between the darker ‘melodrama’ and quality of ‘realism’.

The *Spectator*’s proposal regarding the critical and box-office success of *The Seventh Veil* never previously being matched in the UK may be debateable, however, the promising developments within the industry during the war motivated the quality critics who strived for an equal balance between the popular and the acclaimed. In a series of ways *The Seventh Veil* had a remarkable impact upon the British critics, who recognised the significance of film which fulfilled the necessary requirements as a box-office draw, blending melodramatic thrills with the realistic depictions of mental illness.

As a hybrid of the type of popular melodrama represented by Gainsborough’s *The Wicked Lady* and the ‘realism’ of the war film, the appearance of *The Seventh Veil* on British screens came at a time when what was deemed to be ‘horrifying’ became increasingly concerned with the ‘everyday’ rather than the outright ‘fantastic’. The use of realism in the war film may have succeeded in presenting an interpretation of British society unsettled by WWII although, in the post-war period, it would look further into the ‘obscene’ thereby confronting audiences with disturbing themes deemed far more unsuitable than those represent by the Universal films or the ‘H’ certificate.

Chapter Six: Spiritualism and the Supernatural – Realism, Fantasy and Ealing's *Dead of Night*

Published in 1948, and comprising four leaflets produced by the British Council, *Since 1939* serves as a celebration of the arts in Britain during WWII in light of the restrictions facing the various industries. Featuring ballet, art, and music, Dilys Powell's contribution to the discussion of film emphasises her recognition of a new breed of British filmmaking deemed crucial in the development of the industry:

records of current history designed to perpetuate great events in our national struggle, and to inspire the nation by showing a picture of the day-to-day heroism of members of the armed forces, and of civilians in their many and varied war jobs. Under this pressure of necessity, documentary and war films reached a standard never before attained. Together with this development came an increase of activity in other kinds of film-making.¹

The 'other kinds' of film-making suggested by Powell were, in part, inspired by the war effort as a need to provide a variety of suitable productions for the British public and, in doing so, created a marketplace attractive to new audiences through an array of interesting subject matter.²

¹ Dilys Powell, "Films Since 1939" in Arnold L. Haskell et al. *Since 1939: Ballet, Films, Music, Painting* (London: Longmans Green & Co. Ltd., 1948), p.60.

² *Ibid.*, p.63.

As the documentary film moved away from the film societies and specialised cinemas into the mainstream theatres, represented by the ‘quality’ picture depicting “a fragment of actual life which still held the emotional tremor of fiction”³, other seemingly ‘fantastic’ efforts were too becoming inspired by the newfound interest in ‘real-life’. As Powell goes on to suggest,

[t]he British no longer demand pure fantasy in their films; they can be receptive also to the imaginative interpretation of everyday life. The serious British film has thus found an audience as well as a subject. If it preserves its newly-found standards of conception and technique, it will find not merely a national, but an international audience.⁴

Powell’s argument that British audiences no longer demand pure fantasy largely came as a reaction to the success of the Gainsborough melodramas, dismissed by the ‘quality’ press as harmful to the recent developments of realism.

However, several British productions made during WWII did not shy away from the supernatural fantasy typically associated with ‘low-brow’ horror or farcical comedies discussed in Part One, embracing spiritualism as a means of producing similar fragments of everyday life discussed by Dilys Powell. Towards the end of the war Ealing’s Michael Balcon followed Maurice Ostrer at Gainsborough in a move away from the realism championed in the British press, in an attempt to second-guess the demands of the post-war audience. For Balcon, the imperative became diversity of production in order to broaden the choices made available to the public, before going on to follow the most lucrative avenue presenting itself.

Most significantly, during a period wherein the ‘horrific’ was deemed unsuitable, the studio’s first film to go into production in 1945 combined the forces of Ealing’s team of directors to produce an omnibus ghost story. Mixing together the

³ *Ibid.*, p.70.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.95.

talents of H. G. Wells, John Baines, Basil Dearden and Charles Crichton, Balcon created a production defined by *Kinematograph Weekly* as incorporating:

a recurrent dream – a psychic experience based on a notorious murder of the ‘sixties – a sinister mirror – a ventriloquist’s doll that assumes human identity, a ghost with a sense of humour – these are some of the ingredients of one of the most unusual films to be attempted by Ealing Studios.⁵

When *Dead of Night* was eventually reviewed by *Kinematograph Weekly* later that year, the series of short stories directed by Alberto Calvacanti, Charles Crichton, Basil Dearden and Robert Hamer, were praised for ranging “from the comic to the macabre [whilst being] welded into an absorbing, thought provoking and entertaining whole”⁶.

Ealing’s attempt at a horror production, comprising a range of supernatural tales, reiterates Balcon’s proclamation at the turn of the year inasmuch as the portmanteau style demonstrates something of an experiment on the part of the studio, as well as providing some insight into the *type* of film deemed to be a suitable venture. The article detailing Balcon’s strategy for Ealing reaffirms his position in stating “a careful watch will be kept on public opinion and that, should fundamental tastes become evident, his programme will be readjusted to meet such changes”⁷, with the move towards fantasy and horror serving as a reflection upon the tastes of British audience.

Supernatural film *The Halfway House* provided a “countrywide hit” for Ealing with “[o]utstanding box-office receipts, letters of appreciation, and even sermons preached in churches throughout the country” following the provincial release. A number of letters were actually received by the studio from those who “are not normally filmgoers” but wanted to express their appreciation of a film which helped

⁵ Anon., “Ealing Goes Escapist with Ghosts, Murders and Classics: Balcon’s programme of Universal Appeal”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.335, n.1969, January 11, 1945, p.187.

⁶ Anon., “Dead of Night”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.343, n.2003, September 6, 1945, p.24.

⁷ Anon., “Ealing Goes Escapist with Ghosts, Murders and Classics: Balcon’s programme of Universal Appeal”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.335, n.1969, January 11, 1945, p.187.

to deal with their own grief whilst requesting more of the same.⁸ As Dilys Powell's discussion of period infers, a variety of film styles were beginning to embrace more mature themes and, in the case of *The Halfway House*, the realm of the supernatural would be treated with a degree of respect for those who suffered loss during the war. Rather than placing emphasis upon the potentially 'highly-coloured' imagery of the afterlife, the film treats the supernatural as a suitable locale for the discussion of grieving loss, allowing some semblance with the realism of human emotion.

Ealing's 1945 production programme may have emphasised the uncertain future of British film production, although little concern is shown in regards to the success of two of the more macabre efforts, in *Dead of Night* and *Pink String and Sealing Wax* (Robert Hamer; 1945), as the article emphatically announces them both as crucial to the studio following their success with *The Halfway House*. Just as the Gothic melodrama prevailed on British screens throughout WWII, the spiritual found its way into earlier production schedules with *Thunder Rock* (Roy Boulting; 1942) depicting the dead returning to life in order to inspire those not already involved in the war effort, demonstrating an alternative approach to the supernatural during the 'H' ban.

This chapter will therefore consider how such themes typically associated with 'horror' came to be accepted as both escapist entertainment and as means of dealing with the effects of war on society. The BBFC records for *Thunder Rock* demonstrate strong advocacy for the use of the supernatural in order to aid the war effort, while the reception to both *Dead of Night* and *The Halfway House* suggests how such themes were accepted by the 'quality' press as well as the masses.

⁸ Anon., "The Halfway House: Ealing Film Scores Countrywide Hit", *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.330, n.1947, August 10, 1944, p.30.

Spiritual Propaganda in Thunder Rock

Based on a 1939 play by Robert Ardrey, *Thunder Rock* serves as propaganda in encouraging support for the war effort, particularly in the direction of the United States who were not yet committed to Total War at the time of the film's release. The film stars Michael Redgrave as newspaper journalist David Charleston, a campaigner against fascism in the late 1930s who becomes disillusioned by the constant censorship imposed upon him by his editors and the lack of interest shown by the British public in his attempts to raise awareness of the ever-increasing threat of war in Europe. Taking a job as a lighthouse keeper on Lake Michigan, Charleston removes himself from a world ignorant of Germany's mounting pressure on Europe until he becomes transfixed upon a memorial plaque at the lighthouse for victims of an immigrant ship crash 90 years ago, taking the lives of those looking for a new life in America. The spirits of the dead appear to Charleston and re-account their own reasons for emigrating, leading the reporter to recognise similarities in his own desire to isolate himself from the world. His attempts to encourage the spirits to pass on to the afterlife fail, remaining with him until he realises his duty lies back home in the fight against fascism.

The original script submitted to the BBFC scenario team, by Charter Film Productions L.T.D. in March 1942, was instantly approved with only a few minor exceptions taken to the finished product.⁹ The opinion of scenario examiner Colonel Hanna, who summarised the script as "suitable for production as a film" with the only quarrel being the line from scene 55 "pick your nose, examine your naval", demonstrates little concern for the potentially horrific imagery of the dead returning

⁹ BBFC, (2011). *Thunder Rock* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF015337/> [accessed 15 November 2011]. Approved with an 'A' certificate uncut by the Board September 1942.

to life when compared to the importance of its propaganda message.¹⁰ Colonel Hanna's background would no doubt have played a big role in his decision to approve a film advocating military intervention, with his description of Charleston's behaviour as "cowardice" being particularly illuminating. It is apparent how this propaganda message took priority over other issues concerning the BBFC, with the supernatural being viewed as a means of bolstering support rather than inciting terror.

Given how Abel Gance's 1938 remake of his own film *J'Accuse* (1919) had previously received an 'H' certificate, it is interesting that no such restriction was imposed upon *Thunder Rock* at any stage of the Board's involvement, as both films deal with the dead returning to life albeit for different effect. Gance was responding to the increasing threat of another war in Europe he had already shown the futility of in the 1919 version, whereas *Thunder Rock* seemed to have proven more favourable in presenting a case for the necessity of this particular war.

For *Monthly Film Bulletin*, *Thunder Rock*'s "unusual theme" is aided through "experiments in technique"¹¹ with lighting and photography alongside the strong cast, yet this convincing portrayal of the supernatural did little to deter the BBFC from approving the film without exception. *Today's Cinema* praised this "[s]ocial fantasy" as "the most distinguished and significant British film seen in many a day" which "for all it fantasy, must prove inspiring to every onlooker."¹² *Thunder Rock* not only provided the "outstanding production qualities" recognised by *Monthly Film Bulletin*, but also demonstrated how fantasy came to be a suitable context within which to reflect upon the present climate, drawing parallels with the "world tribulations"¹³ of

¹⁰ Colonel John C. Hanna, "Thunder Rock Scenario Report", *BBFC Scenario Notes 1941-1942-1943*, March 14, 1942.

¹¹ E.R., "Thunder Rock", *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.9, n.106, October 31, 1942, p.126.

¹² C.A.W., "Thunder Rock", *Today's Cinema*, v.59, n.4777, September 18, 1942, pp.10-11.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Europe's past. In suggesting the performances of "the more prominent of the ghosts" can be regarded as "finely realistic", the review situates the supernatural beyond the sordid nature of the 'low-brow' "in a manner which is far removed, indeed, from the conventionalities of average screen fare".¹⁴

The Observer's C. A. Lejeune goes further in positioning the film's relationship to the 'quality' aesthetic by placing *Thunder Rock* alongside Noel Coward's *In Which We Serve*, a film nominated for Best Picture at the Academy Awards and serving as an instrumental component in the quality movement, favouring the 'message' over aesthetic consideration.¹⁵ Praised for engaging "the mature mind on equal terms" *Thunder Rock* is distinguished from other productions as being neither "pettish or infantile, callow nor smartly precocious [...] seeks neither to distract not to inflame, but to suggest ideas to those who are willing to receive them."¹⁶ Lejeune places the film on an intellectual level befitting the respectability and "effort" of quality productions and, while *In Which We Serve* set out to achieve a more emotive response from the viewer, this film appealed to intellect over anything else.¹⁷ Dealing with the realm of the "fourth dimension", Lejeune sees *Thunder Rock* as a film which "presents the theory of serial time as a proposition, not airy-fairy, but scientific and defensible" illustrating the apparent conviction given to themes common to the fantastic.¹⁸

The Manchester Guardian relates the "dramatic struggle of one man's mind" to the traditions of psychosis and delusion in the "cinematic masterpiece" *The Cabinet*

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Stuart Hood, "John Grierson and the Documentary Film Unit" in Curran and Porter (Eds.) *British Cinema History*, p.106.

¹⁶ C. A. Lejeune, "The Films", *The Observer*, December 6, 1942, p.2.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

of *Dr Caligari* (a film also deemed to share similarities with *The Seventh Veil*, discussed in the previous Chapter) yet takes issue in expanding the setting beyond the confines of the lighthouse maintained in the original play.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the reviewer deems this intelligent film as “more moving [...] and more interesting technically” than anything since the release of Orson Welles’s *Citizen Kane* two years prior. *The Times* further illustrates the dreamlike world “creation of Charleston’s mind” as the driving force, presenting a man “who has allowed the horrors of a world poised on the brink of war to pervert his judgement.”²⁰

The uncertainty of the British critics as to the actual nature of the ghostly apparitions, either as a product of Charleston’s mental anguish or something far more supernatural, is a key indicator of why the fantasy elements of the film may have been treated so favourably. Without relying heavily upon the presentation of Grand Guignol, nor attempting to explain the appearance of the dead as either a result of the supernatural or psychological disturbance, this approach demonstrates one of the ways in which fantasy was utilised during the war to convey particular themes outside of the low-brow.

Spiritual Sentimentality in The Halfway House

Just as *Thunder Rock* demonstrates how the supernatural came to be acknowledged by British critics as a particularly intelligent means of dealing with themes typically confined to the realism of the war film, Ealing’s *The Halfway House* followed in a similar manner with an intellectually inspired approach to loss and

¹⁹ D.S., “Picture Theatres”, *The Manchester Guardian*, April 6, 1943, p.3.

²⁰ Anon, “New Films in London”, *The Times*, December 7, 1942, p.8.

suffering during WWII. In a similar manner to *Dead of Night*, the film brings together a cross-section of society who gather at an isolated inn occupied by a mystical landlord and his daughter. The travellers reflect upon their upturned lives, with help from the seemingly supernatural wisdom bestowed upon their hosts, all of whom take on a newfound optimism for life on their departure. Whereas *Thunder Rock* employed representations of the dead in order to convince the living that sacrifice is needed in order to defend freedom, *The Halfway House* has a far simpler objective in suggesting peace awaits in the afterlife for those lost to war.

Monthly Film Bulletin's review praises the consistently high quality acting and dialogue of this "[f]antasy drama" yet finds fault in combining "the material world and the ghost world" through the "too realistic a medium"²¹ of film. The lack of differentiation between 'real' characters and the ghostly apparitions of the inn-keeper and his daughter, demonstrates a similar blend of supernatural and realism as the Val Lewton films of the period. While the story necessitates the mystery of the inn-keepers, the review points towards *Thunder Rock* as an example of camera angles being utilised effectively to emphasise the ghostly nature of the story. In this instance *The Halfway House* represents how fantasy, and the machinations of horror, were becoming further removed from the Grand Guignol and, in doing so, created a far more unsettling atmosphere.

The challenging storyline, discussed by *Today's Cinema*, presents "food for thought to intelligent patrons" setting the typically 'low-brow' realms of the supernatural aside for the "better-class patrons".²² The treatment of the "life-after-death" theme is one which calls for "considerable courage" on the part of Ealing

²¹ E.O., "The Halfway House", *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.11, n.122, February 29, 1944, p.13.

²² C.A.W., "The Halfway House", *Today's Cinema*, v.62, n.4993, February 11, 1944, p.22.

Studios, with the reward being a film for the more discerning viewer.²³ The significance of providing both an “eerie atmosphere” as well as comfort to “suffering humans” taking solace in the “spiritual comfort”²⁴ afforded to visitors of the inn, alludes to *The Halfway House*’s nature as a fantasy with links to themes of realism. The ghostly appearance of the inn, criticised by *Monthly Film Bulletin*, is acknowledged by *Today’s Cinema* as being “cleverly indicated” through the use of a radio relating the previous year’s news alongside the owners’ inability to cast a shadow, presenting a more acceptable representation of the supernatural.²⁵

While the trade press were divided over the physical manifestations of the supernatural, there is a clear recognition of fantasy and horror as something other than low-brow entertainment for the undiscerning viewer. In her discussion of *The Halfway House* and *Dead of Night*, Dilys Powell reflects upon the “promise of a talent for the handling of traditional ghost story” praising the latter for the originality of its story and demonstration of a “pictorial narrative rare in Britain or anywhere else.”²⁶

The acclaim afford to both films by Powell stems from, what she believes to be, a rise in newly founded talent within the British industry and a resolution to avoid the national crisis from having an impact upon the film text. In reference to the costume melodramas dominating the box-office during this period, her disapproval of such “inferior films [...] on trivial conventional themes trivially handled” distinguishes the Ealing film as being one of few standing out from the frequently derided forms of escapist entertainment thought to be in opposition to ‘quality’.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Powell, “Films Since 1939”, p.90.

Following the discussions of realism in *Thunder Rock* and *The Halfway House*, both of which presented the supernatural against a backdrop of WWII, *Dead of Night* moved away from sentiment and propaganda in order to purely horrify audiences.

Ealing's Triumphant Venture into the Supernatural

Tied together by the Basil Dearden directed story of architect Walter Graig (Mervyn Johns) who experiences a serious case of déjà-vu, *Dead of Night* features a group of individuals meeting at a country house party wherein they recount a series of personal occurrences seemingly supernatural in nature. The other tales shared by the guests are brought to life by three other directors coming into prominence during WWII, beginning with Basil Dearden's story of racing driver Hugh Grainger (Anthony Baird) who experiences a premonition of a bus crash through his recognition of the driver from a dream involving a hearse. The Alberto Calvacanti section tells the story of a young girl, Sally O'Hara (Sally Ann Howes), and her encounter with the ghost of a young boy who had been murdered some time before.

Joan Courtland (Googie Withers), in the Robert Hamer sequence, relates an incident involving the purchase of a haunted mirror previously owned by a murderer that nearly turns her husband into a killer himself. Charles Crichton's portion concerns two rival golfers George and Larry (Basil Radford and Naunton Wayne) who play for the chance to marry a woman named Mary, with whom they have both fallen in love. Losing the bet, Larry commits suicide by walking into a lake only to return as a ghost to haunt George until he promises to give up Mary after suspecting his friend of cheating him out of the bet. Calvacanti's second effort involves ventriloquist Maxwell Frere's (Michael Redgrave) apparent descent into madness as he displays increasingly disturbing behaviour around his dummy Hugo which begins to display a will of its

own. When Maxwell shoots his rival for supposedly stealing Hugo, the ventriloquist is charged with attempted murder following which he also ‘murders’ the dummy he believes has driven him mad. The film ends as it started with the architect being invited to the country house, thereby providing an explanation for the character’s confusion at the opening.

Aside from the contemporary English setting, there is nothing to suggest that it is a country overshadowed by the devastating effects of WWII, nor are there any attempts to address the issue in any indirect manner. Without using the tried and tested method of situating the macabre in exotic or historical locales, *Dead of Night* represents a similar confrontation with contemporary environments as the earlier Lewton productions had. As Michael Balcon had already suggested at the beginning of 1945, Ealing’s new strategy would be designed to provide escapism for the British audience, with the studio willing to take a few risks in order to find the right chemistry. For Dilys Powell, the film represented a “note of uncertainty which beautifully echoes the true terror of the supernatural; there are no facile explanations, only the appalling mystery of the irrational, the undeserved.”²⁷ Ealing struck a chord with both the trades and the critical press who deemed the film to be a refreshing treatment of macabre, following the general distaste for horror and the ‘H’ certificate.

Kinematograph Weekly’s categorisation of this “comedy melodrama”, comprised of a series of complimentary stories ranging from “the comic to the macabre”, sees the potential success for the film as being a result of the mixture of thrills and humour.²⁸ Being a “composite of all box-office essentials” yet managing to provide “something different”, the film is established as a key example of the

²⁷ Powell, “Films Since 1939”, p.91.

²⁸ Anon., “Dead of Night”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.343, n.2003, September 6, 1945, p.24.

creativity displayed by the thriving industry throughout the war.²⁹ Similar praise is bestowed upon the film by *Monthly Film Bulletin*, describing this ‘fantasy’ as “the smoothest film yet to come from an English studio”³⁰, while *Today’s Cinema*’s verdict of this ‘psychological melodrama’ located its appeal in the “tales of mystery, horror and the supernatural [...] featuring generous measures of excitement, thrill and suspense”³¹.

The trade reviews, all of which favoured *Dead of Night* as a key example of outstanding British production values, also distinguish the film as an exemplar of box-office success whilst also maintaining its appeal as horror. Following the news from Ealing Studios that their main focus would be in producing more ‘escapist’ films along the lines of *Dead of Night*, there remained an acknowledgment by the studios for horror as a popular cinematic approach, becoming increasingly apparent in the final stages of the war.

The British press, often more in tune with the ‘quality’ of realism, were on the whole in approval of Ealing’s approach to the supernatural and macabre. For *The Times* “a proper thrill of apprehensiveness runs down the spines of the audience”³² during the film’s opening sequences, while *Reynold’s News* recommends *Dead of Night* to those who “are fond of the macabre” and like having their “spine delicately chilled”.³³ The reviewer also makes reference to the film’s status as a “psychological thriller” before insisting on the “very ‘psycho’ but not quite so ‘Logical’” effect of attempting to strike a balance between realism and fantasy. In a similar manner to the relationship between the supernatural and realism in *The Halfway House*, *Dead of*

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ K.F.B., “Dead of Night”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.12, n.141, September 30, 1945, p.105.

³¹ C.A.W., “Dead of Night”, *Today’s Cinema*, v.65, n.5235, September 5, 1945, pp.10&13.

³² Anon., “Dead of Night: A Supernatural Symposium”, *The Times*, September 5, 1945.

³³ Anon., “Dead of Night”, *Reynold’s News*, September 9, 1945.

Night underplayed its more fantastical elements in order to create a far more disturbing effect emanating from its connection to reality.

Ealing's creative achievement is seen by *The Observer* as helping "very materially to destroy the legend of American supremacy" with *Dead of Night* serving as an example of "something every studio tries to do and rarely achieves."³⁴ The significance of the psychological in creating a suitably macabre atmosphere, whilst also dabbling with the supernatural, is acknowledged in the reviewer's reference to Val Lewton's *Cat People* and *I Walked With a Zombie* as being the closest recent examples of successful attempts at "weird and terrible"³⁵. The connection made by the reviewer for *The Observer* demonstrates how both the Lewton films and the direction taken by Ealing with *Dead of Night* not only circumvented the restrictions on horror imposed by the BBFC, but also how these films were recognised as being effectively thrilling by dealing with the psychological over Grand Guignol.

Praise for Ealing's output during the war years has often been linked to the depictions of contemporary English life in the face of adversity, although the new approach taken by a number of British studios would be in the direction of spectacle and escapism. As John Ellis found in his study of 1940s film criticism, the restraint in British cinema of the period was a sign of good taste and intelligence, and the praise for the *Dead of Night* is surely a product of the film's resistance to overemphasis through psychological methods.³⁶ The reception from British critics recognised 'quality' in the film's ability to challenge audiences without succumbing to an

³⁴ Anon., "The Films: Dead of Night", *The Observer*, September 9, 1945.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ellis, "The Quality Film Adventure", p.79.

overemphasis upon the visually explicit, making it comparable to the films Lewton made for RKO.

Regarded by *The Observer* to be a “must see [...] tour de force”³⁷, Elspeth Grant of the *Daily Sketch* makes a similar appraisal of the film’s ‘chilling’ appeal with the suggestion that if the film “does not keep you in one long frisson” it will certainly supply a few “pleasurable thrills of terror.”³⁸ As with the comparisons made between this film and the Lewton productions, Grant sees the most memorable moments in *Dead of Night* as being those through which the implication of something sinister outdo the effects of the visually explicit:

Because the unseen is so much more frightening than the seen, and ghosts have a way of looking too, too solid in the celluloid, the most successfully macabre sequences are those touching on the phenomena of obsession and possession.³⁹

As John Ellis has suggested such “seductive imagery”⁴⁰ alone cannot produce a story which assists the visual narrative as the film must unify the visual and narrative in order to produce the most effective result. In the case of *Dead of Night*, one which generates horrific effect as a successful combination of the two.

Robert Hamer’s “The Haunted Mirror” (“a genuine hair-raiser”) and Calvacanti’s segment “The Ventriloquist’s Dummy” (“equally – if not more – scary”) are given special mention by Grant as the key examples of this indirect approach to the macabre, with particular significance afforded to the development of the psychological over the “seen” in invoking a reaction which “makes the flesh creep.”⁴¹ Maurice Cowan of the *Daily Herald* congratulates Michael Balcon “for having

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Elspeth Grant, “The Dummy That Ruled Its Owner”, *Daily Sketch*, September 7, 1945.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ John Ellis, “The Quality Film Adventure”, p.78.

⁴¹ Elspeth Grant, “The Dummy That Ruled Its Owner”, *Daily Sketch*, September 7, 1945.

succeeded where so many have failed” in producing a compendium of stories fitting together as though one long piece.⁴² The *Daily Mail* recognises the comedic moments as “a very pleasant relief from so much eerie tension”⁴³, while the *Daily Mirror* also applauded the creation of thrills “in the Grand Guignol finale” featuring Michael Redgrave’s “terrifyingly realistic” performance as the ventriloquist.⁴⁴ *The Manchester Guardian* sees the success of this final sequence as a result of Calvacanti’s “ability to make the most of the smallest incident”⁴⁵ through “skilful and imaginative photography”⁴⁶, without resorting to “well-fed phantoms springing from trick lenses [to] spoil its effects.”⁴⁷

Remarking upon how few films that have “grimly embarked on an adventure into the supernatural [and] survived the journey with any success”, *The Spectator* applauds a “strange and entertaining film”⁴⁸ without resorting to the less favourable tactics employed for similar effects:

Perhaps the film succeeds so well it has avoided all the mumbo-jumbo traditionally associated with such subjects. No mists rise from the dark marshes, no dark stranger knock at panelled doors, there is not even a bristling cat or a whining dog.⁴⁹

The list of themes befitting ‘horror’ of the pre-war period became a clear site of contempt for critics who now had become accustomed to the significantly greater realism, and restrained tone, of ‘quality’ British filmmaking. The views shared by the critics point towards the successful creation of a British production with clear intentions to horrify audiences without succumbing to the pitfalls associated with

⁴² Maurice Cowan, “Films: Dead of Night”, *Daily Herald*, September 8, 1945.

⁴³ Anon., “Dead of Night”, *Daily Mail*, September 7, 1945.

⁴⁴ Reg Whitley, “Dead of Night”, *Daily Mirror*, September 7, 1945.

⁴⁵ Anon., “New Films in London”, *The Manchester Guardian*, September 8, 1945.

⁴⁶ Anon., “Dead of Night”, *The Manchester Guardian*, September 10, 1945.

⁴⁷ Anon., “New Films in London”, *The Manchester Guardian*, September 8, 1945.

⁴⁸ Anon., “Dead of Night”, *The Spectator*, September 14, 1945.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

similar themes. The combination of the ‘quality’ and the need to present escapist entertainment for audiences coming out of the war, resulted in a type of horror production which pointed the genre towards ‘realism’ and away from Gothic ‘fantasy’.

These “natural” and “familiar” situations given in *Dead of Night* led *Evening Standard*’s Patrick Kirwan to go as far as to state that “the spectator’s blood curdles, his spine tingles his scalp-hair lifts in the most agreeable and titillating manner possible.”⁵⁰ Kirwan links the retelling of the macabre ghost story back to the appearance of Hamlet’s father, providing an explanation behind the undying love of ghostly tales for audiences throughout British history, before adding that Balcon’s foray into the supernatural proved to be “riotously and terrifyingly successful.”⁵¹ Kirwan goes further in his approval of the macabre story by lauding the sinister nature of Michael Redgrave’s dummy Hugo as “far more terrifying, and far more convincing a monster than Boris Karloff was”⁵², thereby placing emphasis upon the position taken by the critics in favour of the shift towards psychological horrors over the ‘low-brow’ style Karloff played such a key role in developing.

The critical success of *Dead of Night* may have signalled a victory for the horror film in Britain, yet it was to be the critically derided melodramas at Gainsborough which would make the biggest impact at the box-office. As we have seen with the critical reception of *Dead of Night*, its success lay in its combination of psychologically motivated thrills within realms more closely linked to the everyday than traditionally seen in the horror cycles of the past. Just as the British critics were in the process of establishing their own ideals for the ‘quality’ film in the UK, towards

⁵⁰ Patrick Kirwan, “The Lights Went Out”, *Evening Standard*, September 8, 1945, p.6.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

the naturalistic approaches stemming from wartime realism, the recognition of *Dead of Night* as an opposition to the garish spectacle of the Gainsborough melodramas signified not only a critical success for Ealing but also the appreciation of horror as part of this flurry of creativity in the British film industry.

Conclusion

Following the release of Ealing's *Dead of Night*, star and director of "The Haunted Mirror" segment (Googie Withers and Robert Hamer) were reunited by the studio for *Pink String and Sealing Wax* as part of their post-war schedule. The Victorian settings proving successful in *Hatter's Castle* and *Gaslight*, were once again utilised as a site for the murder, adultery, and suspense popular with British audiences throughout the war, most recognisably in the melodramas at Gainsborough. Withers's role as Pearl Bond, a publican's wife who manipulates the son of a domineering father into murdering her husband, is a descendent of the plethora of both villainous and tortured female roles throughout the period.

The new Ealing production would not be met with similar praise to *Dead of Night* as the Victorian setting for macabre themes appear to have been too closely linked into the popular forms presented at Gainsborough. The *Daily Herald* sees the contrast made between "strict domesticity and [the] sordid pub"⁵³ as providing a suitable juxtaposition from which to illustrate the more obscene nature of the everyday, while the *News Chronicle* recognises how the film's attempt to recreate the Victorian period leaves the impression that it is "trying to tell a sordid story politely"⁵⁴.

⁵³ P. L. Mannoek, "Films: Pink String and Sealing Wax", *Daily Herald*, December 1, 1945.

⁵⁴ Anon., "Strychnine and Old Rope", *News Chronicle*, December 1, 1945.

There is, however, some defence of the film in the praise awarded to Withers's "powerfully conveyed wickedness [...] the quintessence of heartless, fascinating slutdom and ten times more wicked than any "Wicked Lady"."⁵⁵ This direct criticism of Margaret Lockwood's earlier performance in the Gainsborough film may position the reviewer as more receptive of Ealing's attempts to bring some plausibility to the film, however, the overall consensus situates *Pink String and Sealing Wax* as a step back for the studio in attempting to draw from the success of the popular melodramas.

As the war progressed, British critics would often demand more of an industry displaying clear progress in the development of a cinematic style involved in confronting audiences with representations of society, set against the backdrop of a country brought together by war. For her 1941 review of *Hatter's Castle* Dilys Powell commended the film's attempt to tackle the darker aspect of our society, yet saw greater potential in moving away from melodramatic methods in order to do so,⁵⁶ with this opinion coming into greater focus as the war came to an end. The use of the supernatural in British cinema during WWII also developed, from propaganda purposes in *Thunder Rock* and sentimentality in *The Halfway House*, into a production fully realising the 'chilling' possibilities of conveying the fantastic through a more realistic interpretation. The relationship would be further complicated in the post-war period as the once lauded use of realism became the focus of criticisms typically associated with fantasy and the horror film.

The opinion held by the British critics regarding the power of realism came to be more closely associated with horror in the post-war period as the more obscene aspects of 'real-life' came under scrutiny for presenting something far more sinister

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Dilys Powell, "Hatters Castle", *The Sunday Times*, November 17, 1941.

and horrifying than anything derived from the explicitly fantastic. In presenting 'true' reflections upon society, the critical opinion towards these post-war films became divided in regards to the purpose of dealing with such sordid subjects. As the concluding part to this thesis demonstrates, a series of films made towards the end of the decade embraced the new found freedom realism afforded filmmakers during the war, searching further below mere representations of a 'surface' reality in order to draw upon the horrific nature of the everyday.

Part Three

Chapter Seven: “The Most Objectionable Story I Have Ever Had to Report on” – *The Body Snatcher* and Depictions of ‘Real Horror’

As the war drew to a close Hollywood began adapting to recent changes in society with the development of “new realism’s topical, controversial, and thus-far forbidden thematic”¹. This was part of a new era of realistic, gritty and controversial cinema, personified by the ‘Noir’ and influenced by documentary and the crime dramas of the 1930s:

The documentary method and attitude of mind [...] seeped into the commercial feature during the war and began infiltrating all genres to such an extent that it became a distinct type of realism not only practiced but preferred during the postwar period.²

This documentary method would also be met by an increased appreciation for psychoanalytical themes, in all forms of media, as Freudian analysis came to be recognised as a serious subject for cinematic purposes.

¹ Drew Casper, *Postwar Hollywood: 1946-1962* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p.369.

² *Ibid.*, p.358.

During the early half of the decade, psychoanalysis in the cinema would be viewed as pretentiousness by the New York critics who approached such methods with scepticism, typically associating cinematic representations of the psychological, or the psychoanalytical, with either the ‘avant-garde’ or the ‘low-brow’.³ By the end of WWII, the acceptance of psychoanalysis as a method employed in the rehabilitation of the returning soldier⁴ brought cinematic representations closer to realism and attempts to convey “the intrusive, primitive truth beneath the civilised veneer”⁵.

Noir’s such as Billy Wilder’s *Double Indemnity* (1944), “[w]ith its scenario of redemption through violence”⁶, revealed a darker side to the so-called Hollywood ‘realism’, concerned with a quick-fix approach to social issues, and would be developed in the director’s interpretation of post-war society in *The Lost Weekend*. With its depiction of the protagonist’s fall into the clutches of alcoholism, the film symbolised “a key moment in Wilder’s rebellion against the polite and seemly in American cinema”⁷ through a realistic treatment of the sordid side to society.⁸ As André Bazin’s work on the ontology of cinema suggests, the film screen represents a reflection upon “the ebb and flow of our imagination which feeds on a reality for which it plans to substitute”⁹ leading the troubling representations of reality depicted in such films as *The Lost Weekend* to become to be far more traumatic than those more closely linked to fantasy.

³ Jancovich, “Two Ways of Looking”, pp.49-50.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Casper, *Postwar Hollywood*, p.359.

⁶ Richard Armstrong, *Billy Wilder: American Film Realist* (London: McFarland & Company, 2000), p.34.

⁷ Ibid., p.41.

⁸ The film would go on to win four of the main Academy Awards at the 1946 ceremony.

⁹ André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Essays Selected and Translated by Hugh Gray* (London: University of California Press, 2005), p.12.

The Lost Weekend's creative use of styles commonly associated with the horror film worked alongside this realism, particular in those scenes depicting Don Birnam's hallucinations whilst incarcerated at Bellevue hospital, evoking realism through moments typical associated to fantasy. As Rosemary Jackson has argued, the *paraxis* between the 'real' and the *marvellous* represents a space wherein the viewer senses a hesitation before discovering which realm the 'fantastical' moments they are witnessing belong.¹⁰ In returning to reality, and thereby acknowledging that these 'horrifying' moments reside within everyday realm, moments of the fantastic offer an opportunity to deal with the more disturbing elements of society.

The Val Lewton productions for RKO draw upon such approaches in order to suspend disbelief more freely than the earlier 'supernatural' horrors, aided by the development of what Colin McCabe defines as "the unwritten metalanguage"¹¹ through which "the narrative discourse simply allows reality to appear and denies its own status as articulation"¹². Part of this *metalanguage* forms what Walter Benjamin refers to as *Jetztzeit*, or "time filled by the presence of now", a collision of past with the here and now when "an image of the past sparks a flash of unexpected recognition in the present."¹³

In his study of Shindo Kineto's *Onibaba* (1964), Adam Lowenstein discusses the representations of a post-Hiroshima Japan through depictions of the country during the 14th century¹⁴ and similar concerns can be seen within the Lewton productions, as

¹⁰ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Routledge, 1981).

¹¹ Colin McCabe, "Realism and Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses" in Antony Easthorpe (Ed.), *Contemporary Film Theory* (London: Longman, 1993), p.54.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.55.

¹³ Walter Benjamin, "These on the Philosophy of History" in Hannah Ardent (Ed.) trans. Harry Zohn *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1969), p.149.

¹⁴ Adam Lowenstein, "Allegorizing Hiroshima: Shindo Kaneto's *Onibaba* as Trauma Text" in E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang (Ed.), *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), pp.145-161.

argued by Alexander Nemerov, through a series of characters known as “icons of grief.”¹⁵ For Nemerov, these icons present an “infinity of connotation”:

They are versions of [Lewton’s] belief in the suggestive power of darkness, the allure of the unseen over what is plainly visible. But in the icons this illimitable darkness resolves into exact shapes, and though it continues to palpitate mysteriously, it also takes coherent form, and draws this coherence from the war.¹⁶

Therefore, Lewton utilised these small roles in his productions as a method of reflecting upon the reality of contemporary suffering and loss whilst maintain their role in the production of the macabre.

As the ‘H’ certificate no longer remained an option for the censors, in the period between June 1942 and June 1945, films typically falling into this classification were often deemed incompatible with the lesser ‘A’ certificate regardless of cuts made to ensure nothing of the ‘horrific’ remained. An example of these difficulties lies with the case of the notorious murders of Burke and Hare in Edinburgh during the early 19th century, as a script based on these events became the subject of a series of negotiations between the BBFC and a number of British producers attempting to bring this ‘real-life’ horror story to the screen throughout 1944.

Within the BBFC reports it becomes increasingly apparent that a number of scripts dealing with ‘reality’ were in fact clear attempts to move horror away from pure ‘fantasy’ and towards the obscene nature of the everyday. By November 1944, the Board hesitantly approved the Burke and Hare story for the screen, at which time Val Lewton had already gone into production on his own version, adapting Robert Louis Stevenson’s short story based on the real events. *The Body Snatcher* followed

¹⁵ Nemerov, *Icons of Grief*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.4.

previous Lewton productions for RKO in emerging from the BBFC with an ‘A’ certificate, albeit several months after the ‘H’ ban had already been lifted.

Contemporary trade reviews positioned the film as of a higher calibre to those similarly horrific in nature, specifically for conveying horror through more ‘realistic’ methods. The following chapter will demonstrate how the new era of realism in Hollywood became an issue for British censors when dealing with the ‘obscene’, bringing with it a different locale for horror. As with *The Lost Weekend*, *The Body Snatcher*’s ventures into the ‘fantastic’ are revealed to be a temporary result of psychological disturbances rather than supernatural occurrences, thereby situating the horrors firmly within the realm of reality. The film’s faithful recreation of its period setting also provided a safe distance from contemporary society in order to deal with issues of trauma and loss felt following the real horrors of the war, represented through characters experiencing their own grief and mourning. This combination led reviewers to establish the film’s horrific nature as that which lurks unseen within society, far removed from the supernatural and fantasy.

Burke and Hare at the BBFC

Prior to any script being submitted to the Board, the story had previously made an appearance as a stage play by James Bridie¹⁷ detailing the true story of Dr Robert Knox, lecturer of anatomy at Edinburgh University during the early 1800s, for whom Burke and Hare supplied the cadavers used by medical students. The only murder dealt with in the story is that of prostitute Mary Patterson and, although the act is not shown

¹⁷ At the Lyceum theatre, Edinburgh, in July 1930. Bridie would later go on to work with Alfred Hitchcock during the late 1940s.

explicitly, the death is inferred when her body is delivered to Anderson and the porter.¹⁸

Ealing Studios provided the Board with this version of the story for consideration in 1944, with Colonel Hanna's report inferring that a similar story had previously been submitted to the BBFC by the studio and rejected on similar grounds to the new adaptation:

There is not a single good character of any importance in the caste, and no moral lesson to be learnt. Its whole atmosphere is sordid and criminal. I think we can rely on our old standard that the lives of famous (or infamous) criminals are not suitable for exhibition on the screen, and two more notorious figures than Burke and Hare it would be hard to find.¹⁹

Mrs Crouzet agreed with Hanna's decisions, reporting that "the resurrectionists and Burke and Hare murders are too sordid and horrible to be subjects for entertainment, and I do not consider this story in any way suitable for production in a film, even with a 'horror' certificate."²⁰

The objections to the script positioned it far beyond the realm of the 'H' classification, with the insistence that films dealing with the sordid nature of 'real-life' had always been an issue for the BBFC, illustrating concerns regarding the perceived effects of realism when dealing its darker edge.²¹ While Ealing made no further attempts to produce a Burke and Hare story, a new version submitted by Theatrecraft Ltd.²² entitled "The Business of Death" caused something of a stir at the BBFC

¹⁸ Colonel John C. Hanna, "The Anatomist", *BBFC Scenario Notes 1944 - 1945*, May 27, 1944. The play itself was adapted for television in 1956 with its original title starring Alistair Sim as Knox and George Cole as his assistant, Dr Walter Anderson.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Mrs N. Crouzet, "The Anatomist", *BBFC Scenario Notes 1944 - 1945*, May 27, 1944.

²¹ For examples of how the BBFC discussed the influence of crime films on children and other susceptible audiences, see Sarah J Smith's *Children, Cinema and Censorship: From Dracula to the Dead End Kids* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005).

²² Theatrecraft Ltd. would go on to produce James Mason in *The Seventh Veil*.

throughout late-1944, as they would be subjected to several resubmissions of the script following repeated attempts to move the story further away from reality.

The first draft, reviewed by Mrs Crouzet, approached the story with an added emphasis on the deeds of the two murderers:

In this, Knox is married to Elizabeth, and the father of two young children, and Annabella is Knox's sister. He is not given such a bombastic, theatrical personality, and the atmosphere created is one of sympathy for the doctor. Most of the story is given over to the actual murders by Burke and Hare, with detailed showing of their sordid surroundings and women. The film ends with the hanging of Burke, release of Hare, and the unpopularity of Knox.²³

The focus on Knox's family may be seen as an attempt to add some light-relief to the macabre deeds of Burke and Hare, yet their actions implied within the script remained a primary concern for the BBFC.

Mrs Crouzet lists a number of scenes taken exception to, including page 20, "scene showing raising of the body from the grave", page 74, "prolonged screams from the cripple boy while he is being killed",²⁴ while Colonel Hanna's report suggests:

[n]othing is left to the imagination. We are shown every detail from the first plotting of this villainous couple, through the entire sequence of many of their murders – the callousness and conceit of Dr Knox, the trial and execution of Burke.

Hanna summarises the plot as "a horrible tale of sordid and gruesome crime [with] no redeeming feature and no moral lesson. Quite unfit for exhibition."²⁵ The grisly details listed by Hanna have clear links back to the visually explicit nature of the 'H' certificate although, now combined with objectionable relationship to the real-life

²³ Mrs N. Crouzet, "The Business of Death", *BBFC Scenario Notes 1944 - 1945*, June 29, 1944.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Colonel John C. Hanna, "The Business of Death", *BBFC Scenario Notes 1944 - 1945*, July 5, 1944.

crimes, “The Business of Death” became far more unacceptable and unlikely to be deemed suitable by the scenario team.

On the last day of July that year a new script “The Doctor and the Devils”, submitted by Gryphon Films, was described by Hanna as “almost word for word and scene for scene the same as the one “The Business of Death”²⁶. Coming only three weeks after the previous submission, Hanna notes the main differences as alterations to the names of the principle characters and no mention of Edinburgh or Burke and Hare:

The attempt to disassociate the story from actual history and present it as fiction does not remove the horrible atmosphere of a series of most revolting crimes amidst the most sordid surroundings. I think it is nearly if not quite the most objectionable story I have ever had to report on during my long experience with the board.²⁷

Mrs Crouzet also describes this as “a poor attempt to disguise this story of the Burke and Hare murders”²⁸ backing Hanna’s argument that the story held too many similarities to the real events, with a clear attempt to focus on the grisly details of the crimes perpetrated.

On August 22nd 1944, Hanna writes in response to a letter sent by a Mr Taylor of Gryphon Films in an attempt by the production company to defend their efforts in rewriting the script. In reference to Taylor’s letter, Hanna responds:

I am afraid I cannot agree that this story is “almost wholly fictional”, or that it could be described as “a discussion of the eternal fight between good and evil.” I remember the films of Sweeny Todd and Maria Marten, but I cannot recall a previous one on Burke and Hare. In my opinion, the two former ones quoted above bear NO resemblance to the subject. I do not recall any film based on, or closely resembling, the Jack the Ripper murders.²⁹

²⁶ Colonel John C. Hanna, “The Doctor and the Devils”, *BBFC Scenario Notes 1944 - 1945*, July 31, 1944.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Mrs N. Crouzet, “The Doctor and the Devils”, *BBFC Scenario Notes 1944 - 1945*, August 4, 1944.

²⁹ Colonel John C. Hanna, “The Doctor and the Devils”, *BBFC Scenario Notes 1944 - 1945*, August 22, 1944. Marie Adelaide Belloc Lowndes’ 1913 novel “The Lodger”, influenced by the Jack the Ripper

The BBFC were in no position to deviate from the exceptions taken to ‘real-life’ being the basis of a film with the intended purpose of providing horrific entertainment, and the attempts made to present the story as a work of fiction would appear to have been the only option available to the filmmakers.

Mr Taylor’s insinuations led to a meeting to discuss a new version of the script with director of the BBFC, Joseph Brooke Wilkinson, and Hanna himself on 15th September:

Some 24 cuts have been made and I agree that they have reduced some of the sordid and unpleasant atmosphere but I regret that, as I visualise it, I do not think this subject or treatment is suitable for exhibition in this country, or that it conforms to the standards which the BBFC have upheld in the past.³⁰

After once again agreeing to make further edits, both Hanna and Crouzet made their conclusive remarks on Taylor’s final draft which finally appeared to meet the BBFC’s standards:

After several resubmissions this script has at last been considerably toned down. Nothing will ever make it an attractive story, but I think if it is played very carefully, so as not to stress the sordid and ghoulish characters of Broom and Fallon, or show details of their crimes, it might just get through. I should be sorry to express a more positive opinion.³¹

The ‘toning-down’ of the explicit elements appear to have appeased the censors, yet the presence of the two Burke and Hare stand-ins (Broom and Fallon) came to be seen as a poor attempt to disguise the origins of the story. As the various proposals for the story were reviewed whilst the Board remained under the restrictions of the ‘H’ ban,

murders, had been adapted for the screen in 1927, 1932, and 1944 (by Alfred Hitchcock, Maurice Elvey, and John Brahm respectively). Colonel Hanna’s suggestion that he recalls no film “closely resembling” the murders suggests previous efforts to depict real-life crimes had provided enough distancing from their reality for them to be approved by the BBFC.

³⁰ Colonel John C. Hanna, “The Doctor and the Devils”, *BBFC Scenario Notes 1944 – 1945*, September 23, 1944.

³¹ Colonel John C. Hanna, “The Doctor and the Devils”, *BBFC Scenario Notes 1944 – 1945*, November 2, 1944.

the Burke and Hare story would have faced even harsher criticism in light of a number of similarly horrific films being upheld until after WWII.

Gryphon Films would be taking a risky gamble with this venture as the final filmed version still required approval by the Board for classification. However, the fact that no British version appeared was more likely a result of the impending Val Lewton production for RKO based on the ‘fictional’ story by Robert Louis Stevenson.

Val Lewton Crosses the Atlantic

Production of *The Body Snatcher* took place over several weeks between October and November 1944³², prior to the green light being reluctantly given by the BBFC to the Gryphon Films version of the story. Stevenson’s short was written in 1884 and is set around the time of the Burke and Hare murders between 1827 and 1828, making direct reference to the real-life Dr Knox as the professor under which the two main protagonists were tutored. In this story the main focus lies with two students of Dr Knox, Wolfe MacFarlane and Fettes, entrusted with the duty of assisting the acquisition of fresh corpses. Suspicion arises when they are supplied with the corpse of a woman Fettes once knew and also when a man named Gray, who is seen having an argument with MacFarlane, finds his way onto the dissecting table. Fettes therefore believes his colleague to be a murderer although he is persuaded not to talk to the police lest he face the same fate. They are then sent by Knox to exhume the body of a recently buried woman and on their return journey her body takes the form of Gray’s, presenting a haunting vision of an already dismembered corpse.

³² Arthur Lenning, *The Immortal Count: The Life and Films of Bela Lugosi* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), p.339.

In adapting Stevenson's literary interpretation of the notorious murders, Lewton's film provides some distance from the real case of Burke and Hare whilst maintaining fundamental details central to the story.³³ In a similar hierarchy to "The Anatomist", Dr MacFarlane (Henry Daniell) is the head of a medical school where he works alongside new assistant Fettes (Russell Wade) and cabbie Gray (Boris Karloff), whose role is fleshed out to include a back story revealing how some years earlier he refused to implicate MacFarlane for their crimes.

Gray's hold over MacFarlane, alluded to in the short story, results in his death at the hands of the doctor with the cabbie subsequently reappearing as a traumatic hallucination on the part of MacFarlane, leading to the doctor's fateful plunge over a cliff. A number of brief allusions to Burke and Hare throughout the film appeared to have no effect upon the Lewton production as the film was passed by the BBFC in October 1945³⁴ uncut with an 'A' certificate. As with the earlier RKO productions, *The Body Snatcher* avoided the repercussions felt by the supernatural horrors with only the brief reappearance of the ghostly Gray momentarily suggesting something more 'fantastic' although, as in *The Lost Weekend*, this moment comes as merely a result of a hallucination.

Prior to his arrival in Hollywood Lewton began his career by writing a number of historical, romantic and crime novels, and this literary background would be used to full affect during his stint at RKO, playing a big part in the screenwriting process for the new Robert Louis Stevenson adaptation. The "literary atmosphere"³⁵ created

³³ The script for the film is credited to Phillip MacDonald, who also worked on the script for Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940), and Val Lewton himself under the pseudonym Carlos Keith.

³⁴ BBFC, (2011). *The Body Snatcher* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF004470> [accessed 14 April 2011].

³⁵ J. P. Telotte, "A Photogenic Horror: Lewton Does Robert Louis Stevenson", *Literature/Film Quarterly*, v.10, n.1, 1982, p.25.

by Lewton would be felt throughout in his productions, toning down the “conventional grotesquery of the horror genre”³⁶ prevalent throughout the Universal cycles, in the creation of a more poetic style:

Although Lewton often did not show significant actions, relying instead on the allusive potential of the character and setting, those things he depicted and the manner in which he avoided showing others demonstrate the truly cinematic sense he brought to his many horror subjects.³⁷

One of the key changes made by Lewton was the reworking of the multiple time frames and exclusion of the original narration to form a linear narrative, thereby allowing greater suspension of disbelief and bringing the horrific effects closer to reality. This is also recognised within a number of minor characters who, for Nemerov, bring the film’s themes much closer to home.³⁸

The young street-singer, who plays a prominent role in the deeds of Gray, serenades passers-by with the traditional song of separation and loss “Will Ye No Come Back Again” before later falling fowl of Gray’s murderous activities and appearing on MacFarlane’s dissecting table. Standing alongside a soldier whilst draped in a black hood, for a brief moment she appears to address the camera directly, as though imparting her own experiences onto the audience, thereby signifying her purpose, alongside several other female characters, outside the narrative of the film.³⁹

Themes of wartime trauma remain consistent throughout the film, reflected in a

³⁶ Ibid., p.26.

³⁷ Ibid., p.27.

³⁸ Nemerov, *Icons of Grief*.

³⁹ This frozen moment within the narrative of the film slows the action down to a point where time itself appears to stop and, when compared with the principles of action and constant development of 1940s films in general, we take notice and allow ourselves to respond to her address. The following scene shows a similar intent as Fettes naively sits atop a grave next to which a woman mourns the loss of her young son. She too is grieving a loss (“A fine lad he was. Gentle with all things”) although is preoccupied with the worry that grave robbers are at large. The mother of the child brought to MacFarlane suffers too, as we learn her husband died in the same accident that injured her daughter. This symbolism of the mourning woman relates to the reality experienced by those in the audience grieving for the nation.

number of characters in mourning or who have made their own sacrifices, encouraging identification with the audience. The injured child brought to be examined by MacFarlane, and the corruption of Fettes, both infer a sense of social disruption during the years of suffering and grief brought about by war. Also, a warning from MacFarlane's mistress following Gray's murder acts as a cathartic message to the doctor in reminding him that his burden will remain forever, echoing the long-lasting impact of war.

Opening with an introduction to the streets of Edinburgh, 1831, scenes of civilians passing through the serene city streets underscore the sinister side to the film, and society in general, as Gray will later pass through the same inconspicuous settings to claim his unsuspecting victims. The kindness displayed by Gray towards the injured child, Georgina Marsh (Sharyn Moffett), is held in stark comparison to MacFarlane's cold and clinical approach to her condition as he initially refuses treatment before being persuaded by Fettes. The girl's fear of the doctor, implying a distrust of the 'honest' face of society, can be thought of as a reflection upon contemporary society and the desire to see beyond 'façade' and into the obscene. As Water Benjamin suggests, "the past and present illuminate each other in such a fashion that the "official" continuum of history explodes"⁴⁰ thereby allowing the viewer to see the historical realms depicted within film as an analogy for their own reality.

On moral grounds, MacFarlane is no better than Gray although his position in society enables him to construct a respectable appearance, while the unkempt cabmen of the world symbolise what is thought to be the true face of society's ills. Fettes becomes the naïve eyes of an audience brought into this underworld through the

⁴⁰ Lowenstein, "Allegorizing Hiroshima", p.155.

bustling streets of Edinburgh, where ignorance allows a safe distance from the obscene by looking no further than the serene surface of reality.

J. P. Telotte defines this hidden terror behind MacFarlane's character as a form of "internal grotesquery"⁴¹ defining the visual as it forms a part of the human psychology, recognisable in the respectable front to the doctor's home and the basement in which he hides his macabre activities. In contrast, Gray's small and decrepit lodgings are covered in shadow and hidden at the end of one of the gloomy streets introduced at the start of the film. His 'front' comes as the face of the friendly cabman yet the home from which he plots his macabre activities hides close to the oblivious passers-by. In hiding his darker side from society, the film questions the sordid nature of the viewer's own reality by confronting them with such obscene matters. The real characters of Burke and Hare are only mentioned in the film on two separate occasions⁴² and yet their presence brings reality crashing down in confronting the viewer with representations of their heinous crimes acted out through Gray, something which the earlier scripts submitted to the BBFC failed to achieve.

At the end of the film, when MacFarlane hallucinates a vision of Gray on the body of a recently deceased woman, there is stark contrast to the preceding events as the viewer is momentarily taken out of world of 'reality' until later when it is revealed as merely a hallucination. The return to reality, and acknowledgement of the ghostly apparition as a hallucination, situates the horrific imagery within similar realms to the

⁴¹ Telotte, "A Photogenic Horror", p.34.

⁴² The first reference is made by one of MacFarlane's students who jokes about their crimes, for which he is scorned by MacFarlane. The second comes when MacFarlane's servant Joseph enters Gray's home in an attempt to bribe him for what he knows. Gray gets Joseph drunk and sings him a few lines from "Poor Daft Jamie", a song featuring one of Burke and Hare's victims and the details of his demise. Joseph admits he doesn't understand the song but wants to learn how they killed their victims, to which Gray replies by giving him a demonstration, leading to his death.

visions of Don Birnam rather than falling into the *marvellous*, or that which we know to be beyond plausibility.

Rather than existing within the supernatural realm typical of the Universal films, the connection with the everyday positions the characters and their actions closer to the ills of society. As Rosemary Jackson suggests, the presence of such non-supernatural 'demonic' figures became a key part of the Victorian literature:

A fantastic mode had always permitted a society to write out its greatest fears as 'demonic', or 'devilish': for the Victorian middle class, these were the threats of transformation of social and sexual mores. A 'devil' was no longer even equivocally super-human: it was a working-class revolutionary, a desiring female, a social outsider or 'madman'.

MacFarlane is certainly no super-human although he, with Gray forming part of his Jekyll and Hyde personality, embodies the fears of an uprooted post-war society no longer safe from the obscene underbelly hidden behind a respectable front.

At the end of the film Fettes walks back alone towards the town, his image accompanied by the departing words: "It is through error that man tries and rises. It is through tragedy he learns. All the roads of learning begin in darkness and go out into the light." Fettes's return to the place where these events first began, carrying the torch to light his path, signifies his salvation from the fate once bestowed upon him by MacFarlane, and a realisation of the potentially dark and disturbing nature of reality. The film as a whole could be said to reveal the true horror of a society coming out of war, with Fettes acting as substitute for the viewer, enlightened to the darker elements of a reality far removed from the supernatural.

A Creepy, Horrific Period Melodrama Unsuitable for the 'Highly Strung'

The initial concerns held at the BBFC for the proposed production of the Burke and Hare story, principally centred upon the reimagining of the infamous crimes perpetrated by the resurrectionists, became the key selling point for the British trade press. After listing *The Body Snatcher* in the “horror” category, *Monthly Film Bulletin* cast no doubt as to the film’s principal appeal by advising it as “[d]efinitely not a film for the highly strung or over imaginative” as a result of the “grim and macabre atmosphere...well maintained throughout the film”⁴³. After suggesting Bela Lugosi’s small role as Joseph plays little significance, Henry Daniell’s performance as MacFarlane in scenes depicting the growing tension between the doctor and Gray are singled out as crucial “in bringing to life this story”⁴⁴. This point indicates how the restrained approach taken to the villainous performances provides a far greater effect than an emphasis upon the ‘highly-coloured’.

Kinematograph Weekly categorise the film as “creepy” and a “shocker”, terms implying a similar intent to horror, before going on to position the adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson’s “famous essay in the macabre” alongside other respectable period productions based on literary classics, such as Stevenson’s own ‘The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde’.⁴⁵ Its respectable nature is also recognised in the use of the psychological for the production of “excellently timed and executed thrills”⁴⁶ addressing “Grand Guignol to the audience’s intelligence and reason”⁴⁷ particularly through the “sensibly discussed and diagnosed” condition of the “border-line cases”

⁴³ Anon., “The Body Snatcher”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.12 n.143, November, 1945, p.131.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Anon., “The Body Snatcher”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.345, n.2013, November 15, 1945, p.33.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

MacFarlane and Gray. The successful treatment of the psychological motivation behind the horrors committed by the doctor and his tormentor brings the reviewer to recommend *The Body Snatcher* as “a cut above the average horror picture”.⁴⁸ Emphasising the significance of the Burke and Hare story as a “part of history”, the review highlights the legitimacy behind a realistic approach to the creation of the macabre, providing “grisly but exciting drama.”⁴⁹

The realistic interpretation of 19th century Edinburgh is confirmed by *Today's Cinema* who list the film as a “[p]eriod melodrama” with a “well sustained” recreation of the period, marred only by “the unfortunate and by no means infrequent intrusion of strong American accents”.⁵⁰ The performances of British expats Karloff and Daniell may have been let down by Russell Wade and his fellow cast, yet the review indicates a positive response to the film as an honest representation of late-Georgian era Edinburgh. Regardless of the implication that “total dramatic impression” is somewhat hampered by moments of “sheer absurdity”, most likely in reference to the apparition of Gray at the end of the film, the treatment successfully “provides moments of genuine suspense in [the] heartless murder of [the] harmless street singer” and scenes depicting the operation upon the young girl.⁵¹

Interestingly, the reviewer chooses two particular scenes wherein suggestion plays a key function in developing suspense as very little is visualised on the screen. The former is a brief sequence of Gray riding his cab as he follows the singing girl out of shot before her voice is cut off abruptly, while the similarly short sequence of the operation lasts no longer than a few seconds and yet the image of the young girl's

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ J.G.W., “The Body Snatcher”, *Today's Cinema*, v.65, n.5266, November 14, 1945, p.12.

⁵¹ Ibid

small figure on the surgeon's table provides a suitably macabre image. These moments further illustrate how Lewton's productions survived the 'H' ban through a subtle approach to horror and the inclusion of such 'real' thrills.

Conclusion

The trade press's advocacy of the darker side to British history as a basis for cinematic entertainment demonstrates both an opposition to the ideology of the BBFC and also support for confrontation with the obscene over the supernatural or visually explicit. The New York reviews for *The Body Snatcher*, throughout May 1945, provide further evidence as to how Lewton's film was regarded as somewhat unique for horror audiences. John T. McManus, of *New York PM* proclaimed "The Body Snatcher is much too good for [...] the sorry parade of penny-dreadfuls streaming from the Universal and RKO studios through the gory portals of the Rialto theatre" and how "Dracula, in all his gory, was never arrayed like this."⁵² *New York Times* confirms that even though it is "certainly not the most exciting "chiller-drama" [...] it is somewhat more credible than most and manages to hold its own with nary a werewolf or vampire!"⁵³ *New York Daily News* praise the film as "the best Karloff picture to come in ages" and recognises the move away from the "hokum shockers" normally associated with the star, becoming instead "a thing of realistic horror."⁵⁴

The *Herald Tribune* reiterates the point made by the other papers in suggesting that "unlike the majority of recent horror pictures, this one does not attempt to gain its effect by the simple expedient of concentrating upon corpses" and, instead "the

⁵² John T. McManus, "Grave-Robbing Neatly Done", *New York PM*, May 27, 1945.

⁵³ J. R. L., "At the Rialto", *New York Times*, May 26, 1945.

⁵⁴ Wanda Hale, "On Rialto's Screen", *New York Daily News*.

emphasis is placed upon the relationship between two men.”⁵⁵ The New York press united in proclaiming that this film represented a new direction for horror in dealing with a realism not often challenged by the genre, with the psychological aspects to the story instrumental in supporting this move.

These reviews illustrate how both sides of the Atlantic displayed an admiration for a film clearly sold as ‘horror’, utilising both psychological and realist methods in order to appeal to the viewer’s intellect, whilst also bringing with it the necessary thrills required by the genre. In suggesting that the realist treatment of *The Body Snatcher* provides something far more terrifying than the supernatural horrors that preceded it, the reviews also reveal how the film managed to circumvent the restrictions imposed by the ‘H’ classification in toning-down the ‘highly-coloured’ visuals of the ‘low-brow’. This is aided by the film’s connection to contemporary WWII society, particularly through Nemerov’s ‘Icons of Grief’, which brought the sinister crimes even closer to home through audience identification and understanding.

The complications faced by the BBFC in approving a script of the Burke and Hare story demonstrate some of the concerns shown by the censors and critics alike in following the release of *The Body Snatcher*, as ‘realism’ presented the Board with similarly complicated issues as the ‘H’ film had in the preceding decade. Even though the ‘quality’ realist films of the war years were championed in the critical press as the epitome of British film production, the use of realism as a means of confronting social issues was a far more complex matter.

As WWII came to a conclusion, realism maintained its presence on British screens as a gritty, shocking, and obscene confrontation with controversial subject

⁵⁵ Bert McCord, “The Body Snatcher”, *New York Herald Tribune*, May 26, 1945.

matter, forcing the BBFC to rethink film classification in the UK. The supernatural horrors upheld by the ban would soon be released back into the British market at a time when the concerns surrounding the 'H' no longer remained as significant for the Board and the local authorities.

The prestige brought to *The Body Snatcher*, through its relationship to historical events and Stevenson's subsequent literary creation, worked alongside the story of psychological manipulation as an example of how the 'H' certificate no longer suited the 'horrific' creations of the supernatural. Lewton's film clearly marks a significant shift in the perception of what would be considered as horror, moving from Universal's monsters to the disturbing images encountered by Don Birnam at Bellevue. As Adam Lowenstein recognises:

well-known is the postwar transition of the horror film from its classic to modern phases, when all-too-human threats replace gothic, otherworldly monsters, and graphic violence replaces suggested mayhem. Could this transition itself be construed in part as a response to, and engagement with, the traumatic impact of the war? Does the modern horror film, like the art film, draw on the war for the fibre of many of its representations?

The impact of the war was clearly felt in the realistic approaches taken by the burgeoning new-wave across Europe, alongside the gritty Film Noir in Hollywood, although the praise bestowed upon the realistic approach taken to Lewton's film did not spark any new horror cycle as the previous decade had.

If the war had any impact on horror it was in the confrontation with the obscene nature of reality, seen in Wilder's *Lost Weekend* and later *The Snake Pit*, as the 'low-brow' productions held back by the 'H' ban would slowly vanish from the screens by the end of the decade. Critics and censors alike now recognised the horror prevalent in depictions of post-war society, particularly in the serious treatment of the psychological and mental illness.

Chapter Eight: Back to Bedlam – Representations of Mental Illness in Post-war Horror

Throughout the 1950s and '60s an international call for the deinstitutionalisation of the long-stay mental care homes, or psychiatric hospitals, sought to reduce the number of admitted patients by radically altering methods of diagnosis in order to assist with the long term objective of reintegration back into society. This call was sparked in the period following WWII when the return of a considerable number of shell-shocked veterans brought awareness to the conditions of some of these institutions, aided through representations in the media. As Cynthia Erb has suggested, society's treatment of the mentally ill demonstrates both how mental illness is understood in any given period and also, what this says about our culture as a whole.¹ Erb cites *Life* magazine's exposé "Bedlam 1946" as a significant factor in raising public awareness of the true conditions of the asylums, and its subsequent influence on discussions of deinstitutionalisation throughout the following years.²

¹ Cynthia Erb, "'Have You Ever Seen the Inside of One of Those Places?': *Psycho*, Foucault, and the Postwar Context of Madness", *Cinema Journal*, v.45, n.4, Summer, 2006, pp. 45-63.

² In Britain the Guillebaud Committee report of 1956, intended to examine the over-expenditure of the NHS, brought about the inception of the Care in the Community programme placing the responsibility of caring for the elderly and the disabled onto the local authorities (John Wiley & Sons Inc., (2011). *The Guillebaud Report* [online]. Available:

Val Lewton's *Bedlam* is one of a number of films during this period, including *The Lost Weekend* and *The Snake Pit*, to confront issues of mental illness in a similar manner to the journalistic exposés, seeking to address the inequalities suffered by the confined. Writing in 1946 Siegfried Kracauer reported on the rise in films "saturated in terror and sadism", inspired by the realist film of the 1940s, intended to highlight the brutalities of war and framed within everyday locales rather than the realms of the supernatural horrors of the past.³

Kracauer dismisses the likes of *The Lost Weekend* and *The Snake Pit*, in a similar manner to the New York critics referring to earlier films dealing with the psychological, for attempting to "invest horror with meaning" through the introduction of mental illness to audiences for the sole purpose of eliciting a sense of dread.⁴ However, he also acknowledges the potential for films dealing with the inequalities within society to provoke a response from the audience, intended to make the viewer question their own relationship with the outside world:

In acquainting us with the world we live in, the cinema exhibits phenomena whose appearance in the witness stand is of particular consequence. It brings us face to face with the things we dread. And it often challenges us to confront the real-life events it shows with the ideas we commonly entertain about them.⁵

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-9299.1956.tb01489.x/abstract> [accessed 12 July 2011]). These changes to institutional practices came as a result of both NHS funding cuts and similar exposés, in tabloids such as *The News of the World*, demonstrating how the hospitals did little to adapt to new attitudes towards mental illness. In fact it took nearly fifty years until real changes to integrate those with mental illness back into society were made with the "Caring for People" report of 1989 which pushed for care within in the home rather than institutions. [Great Britain Department of Health, *Community Care in the Next Decade and Beyond: Policy Guidance* (London: HMSO, 1990)].

³ Kracauer, "Hollywood Terror Films".

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.105.

⁵ Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp.304-5.

In attempting to confront mental illness within the context of the ‘real world’ these films sought to question audience understanding in a similar way to the conditions presented through the images and text of journalistic exposés.

As we have seen with Lewton’s *The Body Snatcher*, the issue of horror and realism became an increasing concern for the British censors who took exception to the sordid and unpleasant aspects of society as a means of cinematic entertainment, particularly within representations of British history. By moving away from the fantastical themes of the banned ‘H’ films, and tackling horror subjects stemming from realistic representations of the everyday, producers such as Lewton inadvertently provided the BBFC with a far more complex issue following the lifting of the ‘ban’.

Bedlam has no record of classification by the BBFC until the 1990s⁶, although the film had been shown in Britain as part of a revival of Lewton films in 1974.⁷ By the time of the film’s initial U.S.A. release in 1946, the BBFC would once again resume issuing ‘H’ classifications for those films deemed too ‘horrific’ and yet *Bedlam* proved to be unsuitable for classification during this period for similar reasons to those discussed by Kracauer.⁸ In recreating the sights and sounds of Bedlam in the 18th century, Lewton’s film would be censored for attempting to present a realistic interpretation of how the mentally ill were treated during this period, whilst also reflecting upon the discussions appearing in the press concerning contemporary revelations of similarly unethical treatment.

⁶ BBFC, (2011). *Bedlam* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AVV150245/> [accessed 20 July 2011].

⁷ Jonathan Rosenbaum, “Bedlam”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.41, n.490, November, 1974, p.260.

⁸ J. P. Mayer, *Sociology of Film: Studies and Documents* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), pp. 41. Mayer has discussed this period as one of change for the BBFC as it became necessary for the Board to understand the world beyond those decisions made some years earlier by a very small number of people.

This chapter seeks to demonstrate how Lewton's film played a key role in shaping the future of censorship during the early post-war period, as it presented the Board with subject matter unsuited to the long standing guidelines largely unaltered since the BBFC's inception. As filmmakers began to push the boundaries of what was once regarded to be 'family entertainment', the 'horrific' certificate presented the Board with the dilemma of what to do with more obscene subject matter that didn't tally with the 'low-brow' nature of the 'H'. As Cynthia Erb has shown, the media played a crucial role in raising awareness of the despicable conditions of the asylums during the post-war period and, considering Alexander Nemenov's interpretation of Lewton's films as reflections upon contemporary society, *Bedlam* itself could be seen as contributing to this social critique by bringing mental illness to the attention of the cinema audience.

The Confrontation with the True Face of Madness

Siegfried Kracauer's *Theory of Film* addresses how cinematic depictions of the everyday, no matter how insignificant to the overall narrative, spark a variety of reactions within the individual viewer "as just a fragmentary moment of visible reality, surrounded, as it were by a fringe of intermediate visible meanings."⁹ The viewer has a shared relationship with a number of these common images, as simple as birth or death, of which the observer has become disinterested or unaware. Film rekindles this interest by making links to the real world within the moving image:

If you disregard for a moment articulate beliefs, ideological objectives, special undertakings, and the like, there still remain the sorrows and satisfactions, discords and feasts, wants and pursuits, which mark the ordinary business of living. Products of habit and microscopic interaction,

⁹ Ibid.

they form a resilient texture which changes slowly and survives wars, epidemics, earthquakes, and revolutions.¹⁰

The relationship between the viewer and these glimpses of reality depicted on the screen increases the individual's awareness of the world around them, particularly when confronted with that which we chose to ignore or find too daunting to be able.

Writing in 1948 J. P. Mayer¹¹ relates the practice of cinema going to Aristotle's Poetics, a defining moment in the history of art and society as the philosopher considered the use of Tragedy as an emotional release through representations of fears and concerns within society. This *catharsis* "is the philosophical acknowledgment of an audience which has the need of being purified"¹² judged by Aristotle to be effective through presenting an interpretation of 'truth' in art.

Kracauer sites the Medusa born of Greek mythology as a way of highlighting how cinema provides a safe distance with which to come into contact with our own anxieties and fears. Through the reflection in his shield, Perseus can safely observe and defeat the monster, just as the cinema screen provides a safe distance for the viewer to acknowledge the existing 'horrors' of the real world and therefore "redeem horror from its invisibility behind the veils of panic and imagination".¹³ The realities of the post-war period presented viewers with a new gritty and harsh presentation of the world, challenging attitudes of what constituted suitable cinematic entertainment and also the larger issues dealt within the text of the films themselves.

Val Lewton's *Bedlam* confronts the viewer with representations of mental illness, in the context of the conditions prevalent during the 18th century, in order to

¹⁰ Ibid., p.304.

¹¹ J. P. Mayer, *Sociology of Film*, pp. 17-31.

¹² Ibid., p.29. Plato, on the other hand, believed that society would crumble without the recreation of a mythology as a way of presenting a moral code for society.

¹³ Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p.305.

address contemporary ideologies surrounding society's treatment of the mentally ill. Cynthia Erb¹⁴ sites Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation*¹⁵ in order to highlight how the history of mental illness progressed through a number of *epistemes*, or eras, through which the approaches taken to mental illness develops with each era's discrete practices, or "ways of knowing."¹⁶ Foucault's discussion of mental illness, informed by his own experiences working in a mental health hospital, serves to demonstrate the way in which madness had been misconstrued in earlier historical periods, with the author also calling for a move away from the "moralistic and authoritarian"¹⁷ ideologies of the mid-20th century.

The revelations made by the journalistic exposés became part of this new era of understanding, aided by the reports and photographic evidence of the poor conditions provided by the 3000 or so men filed as conscientious objectors during the war permitted to work-off their service within the United States mental hospitals.¹⁸ The revelations made by the exposés, followed later by similar reports on television, stimulated activity in the process of deinstitutionalisation for a new era of mental health care.

In sharing these images with the world, the articles gave the issue a sense of urgency whilst maintaining a safe distance from which to confront the reader's own anxiety concerning the reality of mental illness and its place within everyday existence. In Kracauer's words, the post-war exposés acted as Athena's shield, through which the viewer is able to acknowledge the dreadful truths behind the treatment of

¹⁴ Erb, "Have You Ever Seen the Inside of One of Those Places?", p.45.

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (London: Tavistock/Routledge, 1965).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.46.

¹⁷ Erb, "Have You Ever Seen the Inside of One of Those Places?", p.46.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.47.

the mentally ill, and therefore scrutinise its place within their own reality. Just as Cynthia Erb argues, these articles were of significant value in shaping public opinion regarding the treatment of mental illness. However, the immediate post-war climate on either side of the Atlantic no doubt felt a surge in interest for the care and protection of both the returning soldiers and society in general, as the injustices seen during WWII sparked similar confrontations in society as a whole.

The behaviours witnessed in the hospitals triggered comparisons to the treatment of those suffering with mental disabilities in Nazi Germany during the euthanasia programmes, making the title of the *Life* magazine photo-essay, “Bedlam 1946”, all the more appropriate.¹⁹ The fact that Lewton’s production of *Bedlam* arrived within this climate denotes the producer’s direct confrontation with this particular social issue in a similar manner to his earlier productions.²⁰ The latter half of the 1940s sought to challenge the cinema audience’s perception of a number of controversial social issues, with mental health being a key example. This followed a series of films throughout the earlier half of the decade capitalising upon the popularity of psychology, seen as sensationalist treatment of a taboo subject. The more ‘accurate’ portrayals of mental illness worked in a similar manner to the earlier journal exposés, bringing the ‘obscene’ imagery to the attention of the viewer and therefore making it an issue to confront within their own reality. As Kracauer states, “[w]e literally redeem this world from its dormant state, its state of virtual nonexistence, by endeavouring to experience it through the camera.”²¹

¹⁹ Ibid., p.48.

²⁰ Nemerov, *Icons of Grief*. Such as: the direct confrontation with juvenile delinquency in *Youth Runs Wild* (Mark Robson; 1944) and implied themes of loss and longing during WWII in *The Body Snatcher* and *The Curse of the Cat People* (Gunther von Fritsch and Robert Wise; 1944).

²¹ Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p.299.

Representing the Present in the Past

The opening titles of *Bedlam* introduce the viewer to “London 1761, the people of Eighteenth century called their Age of Reason”, alongside images of William Hogarth’s *A Rake’s Progress* depicting the artist’s own representations of the notorious Bethlem Hospital in London, from which the film takes its inspiration. We are introduced to the world of Master George Sims (Boris Karloff), responsible for those confined within the walls of St. Mary’s of Bethlehem asylum, as he cruelly allows one of the patients to fall to his death from the roof. Protégée of Lord Mortimer (Billy House), Nell Bowen (Anna Lee) calls in to visit Sims requesting a tour of the asylum, a common occurrence during the period as the inmates were often treated as a curiosity by the wealthy.

Upon witnessing the shocking conditions the confined are subjected to, Nell begins to identify with their plight in spite of Sims’s description of the unfortunate patients as animals to be caged and locked away from the outside world. Nell confides in Quaker Hannay (Richard Fraser) as they contemplate on how they as individuals may help to improve the conditions witnessed in Bedlam, pleading with Sims to put her ideas into action. However, after Sims informs Mortimer of the costs such changes would incur, Nell’s ideas are dismissed and her meddling in the affairs of the Master lead him to suggest Mortimer should have his protégée committed to Bedlam.

After Bowen pleads for support from politician John Wilkes (Leland Hodgson), who requires evidence of Sims’ activities to take any action, the Master hesitates no further in convincing Mortimer to sign the commitment papers. Whilst incarcerated, Bowen comes to understand the needs of the patients and takes care of the less ‘dangerous’ inmates, one of whom calls her “an angel in this darkness” and

uses a flipbook to animate his drawings of Nell caring for those around her. He suggests projecting a light behind the images to reveal to the world the good work she has performed and the other conditions of Bedlam, thereby providing a direct comparison with the potential for cinema to draw attention to the issue of mental illness in contemporary society. After Sims notices her efforts he places her in a cell with one of the more dangerous patients, known as The Lion, whose implied threat is neutralised after Nell spends time talking with him rather than believing Sims's warning.

When Sims eventually threatens to 'cure' Bowen with a new treatment, the inmates set upon him and force him to face a fair 'trial' presided over by a former judge, leading to his death at their hands. Prior to his murder, Sims states his behaviour as a result of fear that he may lose his place in society: "The comforts and authority. What little I have of riches. What that world thinks, I must think. What they do I must do." Sims's opinion acts as a reflection upon similar ideologies presented by the exposés discussed by Cynthia Erb, that the issue of mental illness had long been marginalised from society through its representations to the outside world.

While Erb accuses *Bedlam* of attempting to "capitalize on sensation"²², Lewton's endeavours to introduce serious social meaning into his films has been well documented as he strived to present intelligent and stimulating subject matter, whilst simultaneously appeasing the studio's ambitions to rival Universal's successes as purveyors in horror.²³ In locating the film within a reimagining of the Bethlem Hospital depicted in Hogarth's painting, whilst also tackling the topical subject of mental

²² Erb, "Have You Ever Seen the Inside of One of Those Places?", p.50.

²³ Nochimson, "Val Lewton at RKO", p.9.

illness, *Bedlam* produces a level of “psychological instability”²⁴ in the viewer as Lewton utilises the realms typically suited to the Grand Guignol in challenging preconceptions of the ‘mad’:

In an inversion of movieland conventions, Lewton initially evokes the clichéd images of terror with which Hollywood usually regards the mentally ill, but only in order to subvert them. A closer look at the inmates finds even the most damaged among them quite touching.²⁵

Here, Martha Nochimson suggests how Hollywood’s depiction of the mentally ill was re-appropriated for the purpose of reflecting upon society’s conventions and recent discussions within the media.

As the film suggests, the corruption surrounding those who are entrusted with caring for the confined is in fact the far more sinister aspect to the narrative, as we later come to sympathise with the patients who are subjected to a series of humiliating rituals by their Master. This, in turn, reflects upon Foucault’s idea of mental health care in the mid-Twentieth century as being authoritarian and somewhat placed on the peripherals of society.

David Russell’s account²⁶ of the real Bethlem hospital illustrates how “[l]iterature continues to feed into life and play its part in the evolution of clinical services”²⁷ as the controversies throughout the hospital’s history frequently drew criticism from both social commentators and patients themselves. One of whom,

²⁴ Ibid., p.12.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ David Russell, *Scenes From Bedlam: A History of Caring for the Mentally Disordered at Bethlem Royal Hospital and the Maudsley* (London: Baillière Tindall, 1997). Madness, since the Great Confinement of the 17th century, had been pushed to the periphery of a society fearing the darkness of unreason and its encroachment into the everyday world. Although a great number of reforms had taken place in order to treat the mad humanely rather than with references to their ‘animalistic’ behaviour, the patients within these institutions remained helpless without public support.

²⁷ Ibid., p.148.

novelist Antonia White, based her 1954 novel *Beyond the Glass*²⁸ on personal experience of Bethlem during her time as a patient there between 1922-3.²⁹ In 1750 poet and journalist Christopher Smart, under the pseudonym Mrs Mary Midnight, was so effected by the scenes witnessed during his visit that he was compelled to cut the ‘tour’ short in order write an account of the agitations of the patients.³⁰ The social critics from early periods of Bethlem’s history would now be contemporised by similar critiques, within written exposés and also a post-war cinema concerned with a realist approach to filmmaking as a means of inciting shock and dismay within the viewer, through accurate representations of mental illness in opposition to earlier cinematic interpretations.

As the previous chapter demonstrates, cinematic interpretation of the everyday realm plays a significant part in re-imagining our rational world and also how ventures into fiction enable the viewer to confront the unmentionable elements of contemporary life. J. P. Telotte views *Bedlam* as the “most disconcerting challenge to the modern world and its rule of reason”³¹ through a fictionalised representation of the common perceptions of madness within society, namely “a most feared image, that of unreason in its undeniably human aspect.”³² For Foucault, these perceptions held throughout the period depicted in *Bedlam* up until the time of writing in the mid-Twentieth century, mainly as a result of how mental illness was represented within society.³³

²⁸ Antonia White, *Beyond the Glass* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1954). Although her story was not entirely negative, White discusses some of the difficulties faced when attempting to adapt to the nurse’s rules and the grimness of isolation.

²⁹ Russell, *Scenes from Bedlam*, p.146.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.142.

³¹ Telotte, *Dreams of Darkness*, p.168.

³² *Ibid.*, p.169.

³³ Foucault, *Madness in the Age of Civilisation*.

Through reflection upon our day-to-day world of social order and reason, Lewton's film attempts to underline the oppositions to this surface reality in order to highlight the link to the unseen world of criminality, insanity and unreason.³⁴ The patients depicted on the screen are portrayed as being part of an unsympathetic society with no apparent course of treatment for their wellbeing made apparent, with Master George Sims representing the need to establish a clear divide between the confined and the outside world.

The character of Nell Bowen is positioned as the link between the worlds of reason and madness, making the point that it is not the mad themselves who are to be feared but rather the authoritarian ideologies of men such as Sims. This understanding echoes similar attempts made in historical critiques of Bethlem and the contemporary exposés. RKO may have been in the business of providing shocking entertainment in order to challenge Universal's domination of the horror market, yet the film provoked a reaction from the BBFC which emphasised the disturbing nature of mental illness over the traditionally supernatural realms of the horrific.

"The Unpleasant Scenes of Lunatics"

Telotte attributes the effectiveness of mental illness as a topic of the fantasy and horror genres to the processes of the psyche, as "our traditional proscriptions against madness, arising not only from a fear that it might prove contagious like a disease, but also the challenge it poses to our normal perspective."³⁵ The fear of mental illness is therefore taken to be routed deep within the unconscious of the viewer, with cinematic

³⁴ Ibid., p.172.

³⁵ Ibid., p.183.

depictions of this taboo issue challenging audiences to engage with their own preconceptions and fears surrounding the topic. The BBFC too felt it necessary to keep representations of the treatment of mental illness away from cinema screens by refusing to approve the script for *Bedlam* as a suitable subject for exhibition. The acceptance of deinstitutionalisation was clearly well underway in the U.S.A. during this post-war period although this process would develop at a slower rate in UK, highlighted in the BBFC's unwillingness to accept mental health care as a subject for entertainment.

On 22nd June 1945 Colonel Hanna and Mrs Crouzet, along with new examiner Lieutenant Colonel Fleetwood-Wilson, submitted reports in response to a script by RKO Pictures under two provisional titles, "Chamber of Horrors" and "A Tale of Bedlam", eventually appearing in film form as Lewton's *Bedlam*. Hanna responded positively to the story's theme as a "fairly accurate history of the period" whilst also displaying concern for the careful treatment of the subject matter. Recommendations made to the script by Hanna include the removal of scenes depicting "the more brutal and horrible conditions" such as "Sc 39 The sounds and sights of bedlam" and "Sc 135 – 140 Scenes of lunatics in cells", with an additional warning regarding the final scenes depicting the trial and death of Sims.³⁶

In contrast to Hanna's comments, Mrs Crouzet viewed the story's realistic intent to be the primary reason for refusing approval of the script for a British release:

I consider the detailed pictures of Bedlam, and all the incidents showing the treatment of the lunatics, quite prohibitive. As the whole story is centred in and around the asylum, I do not consider it a suitable subject for production as a film.³⁷

³⁶ Colonel John C. Hanna, "Chamber of Horrors", *BBFC Scenario Notes 1944-1945*, June 22, 1945.

³⁷ Mrs N. Crouzet, "Chamber of Horrors", *BBFC Scenario Notes 1944-1945*, June 22, 1945.

The shocking story presented to the Board may have been recognised as a genuine part of British history, in a similar manner to Burke and Hare in *The Body Snatcher*, and yet the key issue taken exception to by the scenario team was formed by the negative impression given in depicting the harsh realities of mental health as a reflection upon British social history. This is also made apparent within Fleetwood-Wilson's appraisal of the script, echoing Mrs Crouzet's suggestions almost word for word before going on to state that, "although it is written about Bedlam in the 18th century, there is little of real historic interest in the story."³⁸

As J. P. Mayer suggested, the censors were in a position whereby their own personal ideologies regarding the scripts presented for approval shaped what was deemed suitable for British audiences, informed by the outdated guidelines set out by the Board some thirty years prior. One such ruling is highlighted by Fleetwood-Wilson in reflecting upon the "many unpleasant scenes of lunatics" stating simply that as the "whole story is about a lunatic asylum [it] contravenes the ruling as laid down by the BBFC."³⁹

Fleetwood-Wilson's reference to the prohibitive nature of scenes depicting the asylum, and the inmates confined within, are likely to have derived from a number of these rules born out of an era when the BBFC was still in its infancy.⁴⁰ These include:

7. Cruelty to young infants and excessive cruelty and torture.

[...] 17. Scenes tending to disparage public characters and institutions.

³⁸ Colonel Fleetwood-Wilson, "Chamber of Horrors", *BBFC Scenario Notes 1944-1945*, June 22, 1945.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Hunnings, *Film Censors and the Law*, pp.67-69. Considering the BBFC never followed any specific code it makes his suggestion of an individual ruling regarding the asylums rather difficult to pinpoint. The initial principles, set out by the first president of the Board G. A. Redford in 1913, merely insisted on no nudity or portrayals of Christ although these rules began to be expanded with the assistance of the local authorities. The most detailed account of the rules followed by the BBFC came with the Cinema Commissions Report of 1917 containing evidence of forty-three rules highlighting the Board's efficient operation, recognised as "T. P. O'Connor's 43 Rules".

[...] 24. Gruesome murders and strangulation scenes.

[...] 31. Scenes suggestive of immorality.⁴¹

Even though these selections from the list gave more than enough ammunition for the Board to refuse permission for the exhibition of *Bedlam*, the controversy surrounding ‘topical’ subject matter (which may also be seen as ‘exploitative’) became a serious concern for those who viewed cinema as mere entertainment. Point 17 indicates the potential difficulties filmmakers may have faced when attempting to tackle a subject relating to controversial subject matter, as any negative references to existing institutions or recognisable persons could have potentially presented the Board with further cause for concern.

One particular case came as a result of the American actress Evelyn Thaw’s performance in *Shadows on My Life* (Joseph A. Golden & Julius Steger; 1917), a retelling of the actress’s tragic life story, as the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association took exception to some “unsavoury publicity”⁴² surrounding the film. This case played a role in shaping a new set of rules, devised in November 1924 by the London County Council and recommended to all other local authorities by the Home Office, one of which stated:

No cinematograph film shall be exhibited which is likely to be injurious to morality or to encourage or incite to crime, or to lead to disorder, or to

⁴¹ Ibid., pp.408-409.

⁴² Ibid., pp.69-70. Shaw had been involved in a great deal of personal tragedy when her husband Harry Thaw murdered Evelyn’s former lover Stanford White in a fit of jealous rage. After the trial and subsequent imprisonment of Harry, Evelyn’s role in the film was almost a direct retelling of the incidents leading to her husband’s arrest and subsequent incarceration at a hospital for the criminally insane. A resolution was soon passed citing that any production which exploited the notorious events of her life would be against the best interests of the industry even though the film had already received a certificate from the Board. The General Council of the CEA for Great Britain and Ireland went a step further in making it clear to that they would continue to act on any other decisions made by the Board by requesting that they “ban films exploiting notorious persons, by analogy with their existing policy in relation to films based on notorious books.” By making the comparison between the two mediums the CEA were making it clear that they believed the future of cinema, and the BBFC, would rely on maintaining good wholesome family entertainment without resorting to exploitation as a means of gaining extra admissions.

be in any way offensive in the circumstances to public feeling, or which contains any offensive representations of living persons.⁴³

The depiction of mental illness on the screen could be seen as not only reflecting negatively on British institutions but also on its marginalisation from contemporary society, a similar view shared for a number of post-war films confronting ‘obscene’ aspects British life. These opinions would also be extended to the propaganda films believed by O’Connor to be products intended solely for the purpose of gaining sympathy by enlisting public support on specific subjects.

The BBFC believed that any film highlighting the effects of hereditary or contracted diseases, illegal operations, slave trading, etc. had no place in theatres designated as locations for entertainment purposes, “and there is no question that such exhibitions would prove highly offensive to very many people who frequent the modern cinema.”⁴⁴ The propaganda film was recognised as ‘speciality’ filmmaking confined to designated theatres as the BBFC remained adamant that such screenings should not take place alongside the regular programmes sold as entertained. The combination of ‘social issues’ and the fiction film would therefore present the Board with a particularly challenging issue throughout this post-war period.

“Nothing to Titillate Even a Censor”

The *New York Times* review of the *Bedlam* during its release in 1946 confirmed how the story exposed an alternative side to British history, uncommon amongst the patriotic imagery frequenting cinema screens throughout the country during WWII. Presenting the viewer with one of “the great shames of eighteenth-century England”,

⁴³ Ibid., p.78.

⁴⁴ Anon., “Untitled”, *Bioscope*, December 18, 1919, p.89.

the reviewer compares the “filth, cruelty and unbelievable squalor”⁴⁵ depicted within the film to the aforementioned interpretation by Hogarth. Anna Lee’s performance as Nell is commended for the “spark and compassion” shown as “the crusading young girl”⁴⁶ whose plight allows the viewer to become invested in her sympathetic approach to the mentally ill.

In praising the production as “several cuts above the average run of so-called horror films”⁴⁷ the reviewer agrees that the film falls firmly within the genre but also illustrates that the “sociological theme”⁴⁸ pushes *Bedlam* away from horror conventions, establishing itself as a commentary upon an important social issue. This status would challenge the BBFC’s position on the ‘H’ certificate as the film did little to represent the supernatural realm typically defined by the classification. Although the Gothic design links the film to the earlier ‘H’ productions, the reviewer goes some way in distinguishing the potential for horror beyond mere ‘fantasy’. The *New York Post* argues that *Bedlam* presents “nothing to titillate even a censor” with “an oddly sober view of insane asylums”⁴⁹, indicating that the horrific reaction to the film comes only as a result of the realistic interpretation of mental illness rather than an outright attempt to shock audiences through the creation of the supernatural.

Whilst also distinguishing *Bedlam* as horror, the contemporary American reviews emphasise the film’s function as social commentary on a taboo subject matter through a confrontation with the obscene nature of reality. Horrific effect is seen as a result of the viewer’s own understanding of mental illness and the sense of dread it arouses. As the reviewer for the *Post* suggests, the film presented very little in terms

⁴⁵ E. J. B., “At the Rialto – Bedlam”, *New York Times*, April 20, 1946.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Archer Winsten, “A Horror Item at the Rialto”, *New York Post*, April 20, 1946, p.14.

of graphic imagery to perturb the censor and yet the ban imposed by the BBFC implies that the conventions of the earlier ‘supernatural’ horrors would be far out-weighted by confrontations with the everyday.

In her post-war study of British cinema since 1939, Dilys Powell suggests how propaganda films crossing over into the fiction provided the audience with a broad picture of everyday life. Films such as *Love on the Dole* (John Baxter; 1941) may have “held no flattery for the British” but honestly portrayed the idleness and poverty which the black years between the two wars created.⁵⁰ British films of the period were known for this creative flourish sparked by the war and, as Powell argues, “[i]t took a war to compel the British to look at themselves and find themselves interesting”⁵¹. However, the censors clearly had their limits to how far filmmakers looked, particularly from beyond British shores.

Conclusion

The 1974 release of *Bedlam* in Britain, some 28 years after its arrival in America, was discussed by the press as being part of this cycle of films in the latter half of the 1940s tackling the treatment of mental illness and its social concerns.⁵² Writing nearly 30 years after the initial release, these reviewers had a clear grasp of the film’s intention and elaborate on them further than the 1946 U.S.A. critics. *The Daily Mail* recognises the film’s faithful recreation of the “infamous lunatic asylum”⁵³, while *The Sunday Telegraph* attributes this particular aspect to be a key reason behind

⁵⁰ Powell, “Films Since 1939”, p.77.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.83.

⁵² Hugh Herbert, “Reviews-Bedlam”, *The Guardian*, September 26, 1974, p.12.

⁵³ Anon., “The Real Boris”, *The Daily Mail*, September 27, 1974.

its lack of success at the BBFC.⁵⁴ *The Daily Mirror* and *The Evening Standard*, on the other hand, imply the decision made by the BBFC was intended to protect audiences recovering from the mental anguish of WWII unable to handle scenes of the asylum, whilst also criticising the film as a “tenth-rate piece of hokum”⁵⁵ which would “hardly rate a U certificate”⁵⁶ by 1974 standards.

Writing for *The Times* in 1974, David Robinson sees *Bedlam* as a film that “haunts rather than terrifies”⁵⁷ through an emphasis upon the treatment of the patients, something which the writer regards to be a hindrance to the overall narrative. Robinson’s recognition that a film made some thirty years earlier still manages to leave a ‘haunting’ impression gives some idea as to the potential effect a production made in the dying stages of WWII may have had on 1940s audiences. The *Guardian* recognises this significance in referring to Peter Weiss’s 1963 play “Marat/Sade” as a comparison to scenes from *Bedlam* in which Sims forces inmates to act out a masque for the amusement of Lord Mortimer, thereby highlighting social injustices perpetrated by the ruling classes.⁵⁸ The reviewer makes a comparison to *Spellbound* and *The Snake Pit* in order to demonstrate how the understanding of mental illness developed through this period from an elitist approach, seen in Hitchcock’s film, towards attempts to create more accurate representations of institutionalisation.

The next chapter will further discuss the debates surrounding *The Snake Pit* and why representations of mental health became an issue for the censors in the post-war period when earlier efforts, including *Spellbound*, passed through the BBFC with

⁵⁴ Tom Hutchinson, “Bedlam”, *The Sunday Telegraph*, September 29, 1974.

⁵⁵ Peter Forster, “It’s the 1946 Show”, *The Evening Standard*, September 26, 1974.

⁵⁶ Arthur Thirkell, “Bedlam”, *The Daily Mirror*, September 27, 1974.

⁵⁷ David Robinson, “A Rough and Randy Childhood”, *The Times*, September 27, 1974, p.10.

⁵⁸ Hugh Herbert, “Reviews-Bedlam”, *The Guardian*, September 26, 1974, p.12.

no cuts.⁵⁹ The case of Evelyn Thaw and the introduction of a ruling stating that no film should be detrimental to public sensitivities nor living persons, give some idea as to why *Bedlam* may not have been approved by the BBFC, and also provides some insight into the understanding of realism and horror in the post-war period.

While *The Body Snatcher* may have received a classification from the BBFC despite dealing with the sordid side to British history, it is *Bedlam*'s confrontation with a serious social issue which deemed the film to be unsuitable as cinematic entertainment. Although the scenario team were of the opinion that the film represented an accurate part of history, Fleetwood-Wilson and Crouzet's comments infer an awareness of the impact Lewton's film could potentially have upon the understanding of mental illness. While the historical setting distanced the film from contemporary society, and therefore direct comparisons with modern facilities, *Bedlam* addressed a social issue particularly significant during the post-war period, within which many individuals would be coming to terms with their own personal traumas.

Bedlam may not have been commercially shown in Britain for another 28 years, however, the issues surrounding the treatment of mental health patients would become one of a number of 'adult' themes dealt with at the end of the 1940s. This adult subject matter created tension amongst the censors and the critical press as the Board began adapting to post-war liberalism, sparking an ambition to confront society with the 'obscene'. *Bedlam* plays a crucial role in the history of British film censorship, representing a turning point for horror and also realism as a critique of society, eventually leading to the more adult themes represented by the 'X' certificate.

⁵⁹ BBFC, (2011). *Spellbound* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF013326/> [accessed 15 September 2011].

As the end titles of *Bedlam* imply, the real location for the film would go on to lead the way to “enlightened and sensible treatment of the mentally ill” in a similar manner to the realistic interpretations of mental illness on the screen and debates within the press.

Chapter Nine: “It was good to get out into the fresh air after seeing this film” – *The Snake Pit* and the End of the ‘H’ Certificate

As Siegfried Kracauer has suggested, while cinema was often accused of mere sensationalism it also has an insistence on

rendering visible what is commonly drowned in inner agitation [and] aims at transforming the agitated witness into a conscious observer. Nothing could be more legitimate than its lack of inhibitions in picturing spectacles which upset the mind.¹

During WWII British critics distinguished moments of reality as being set against the more conventional approaches taken by cinema, praising realism for being the antithesis of Hollywood ‘prestige’. However, during the post-war period such approaches would be recognised by some as an attempt to “upset the mind”. Writing for *Cahiers du Cinema* in 1969, Jean-Louis Comolli describes “an increasingly apparent recourse” of the fiction film following WWII “to the modes of direct cinema”² as realism began to encounter all aspects of everyday life. The combination of ‘reality’ and ‘fantasy’ resulted in a response from the BBFC and the British press

¹ Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p.58.

² Jean-Louis Comolli, “Untitled” in Christopher Williams (Ed.), *Realism and the Cinema: A Reader* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), pp.225-243.

suggesting such an approach often resulted in a ‘horrific’ effect, subsequently presenting a challenge to their release in the UK.

When *The Snake Pit* was passed by the BBFC in May 1949, with an ‘A’ certificate following a series of cuts,³ the film raised questions as to whether or not the current ratings system would hold out much longer. Following the appointment of Arthur Watkins as Secretary, by new president Sidney Harris in 1947, there would be a mixed reaction to his ambitions for a cinema reflecting upon a changing society:

To a certain extent he wanted it to reflect post-war changes in Britain – the rise in crime and rediscovery of sexuality – but he soon discovered that this Stendhal-like view of cinema as a mirror of society was opposed by his predecessor’s appointments within the BBFC.⁴

Watkins’ point of view suggested an ambition to curb the trend for cutting films of an adult theme during the latter part of the 1940s by looking for an alternative to this process. However, this would prove to be a controversial decision particularly as the two new script supervisors, Lieutenant-Colonel Fleetwood-Wilson and Madge Kitchener, took exception to the new found tolerance for social issues in the cinema.⁵

Earlier Hollywood productions dealing with sex and violence were often approved by the Board because of an ‘exoticism’ distancing the narrative from realities of contemporary Britain. In the years following 1945, British productions such as *Brighton Rock* would bring these sordid themes much closer to home.⁶ As Arthur

³ BBFC, (2011). *The Snake Pit* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF034101/> [accessed 28 September 2011].

⁴ Matthews, *Censored*, p.119.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ In 1947, the Board passed *Brighton Rock* with an ‘A’ certificate (BBFC, (2011). *Brighton Rock* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF023378/> [accessed 29 September 2011]) although Fleetwood-Wilson and Kitchener both had a number of objections to the script, warning that “Brighton Town Council may not appreciate having this unpleasant and sinister tale located in their holiday resort” in representing the controversial issue of gang violence in Britain (Madge Kitchener, “Brighton Rock”, *BBFC Scenario Notes 1946-1947*, March 4, 1947). The film eventually tagged on a message following the opening credits making it clear the events depicted take place between the two Wars and the police now had control of the criminality depicted within the film, making it easier for the BBFC to pass the film unedited.

Watkins sought to avoid cutting important films designed to confront controversial issues, the relationship between the ‘H’ and ‘A’ classifications presented the Board with the problem of having to define these more ‘adult’ productions as either ‘family entertainment’ or ‘horrific’. The debates surrounding the release of *The Snake Pit* in Britain demonstrate a disparity between attitudes towards mental illness for the purpose of entertainment, as a number of critics viewed the film as an attempt to exploit a serious subject for the purpose of horrifying audiences. Alternatively, more liberal responses inferred that the horrific reaction to the film proved its effectiveness as a critique of public awareness of an ‘obscene’ subject.

Several weeks prior to the film’s release in the UK nurses from five London hospitals, who had merely seen stills from the film, wrote to the Minister of Health and the BBFC, “[t]he treatment of mental patients in American hospitals, as depicted in the film, is foreign to the attitude of nurses in British mental hospitals.” They go on to add:

As the general public are in almost complete ignorance of the care and attention given to patients in our hospitals, they would probably associate the American treatment with British hospitals.⁷

This “ignorance” could be interpreted as exactly what the film attempts to address in presenting forms of mental health treatment the BBFC were in the habit of keeping from cinema screens.

Some of the most shocking scenes depicted in *The Snake Pit*, such as hydrotherapy and electric shock therapy, remained a recognised form of treatment in Britain up until the 1970s making the concerns of British nurses particularly questionable.⁸ Protecting the image of mental health care in Britain seemed to be the

⁷ Anon., “Snake Pit Film Must Be Banned – Say Nurses”, *Daily Herald*, March 29, 1949.

⁸ Russell, *Scenes From Bedlam*, p.65.

main concern over making any serious reforms, particularly following the amalgamation of the infamous Bethlem and Maudsley hospitals in 1948. During this period, patient intake was more favourable towards higher social classes, and those who had not yet been certified, in order to create a healthier appearance than had been the norm.⁹

This chapter addresses how ‘realism’ challenged the very nature of British censorship in the post-war period, during which the BBFC were confronted with a series of issues typically recognised as unsuitable for exhibition in the UK. Furthermore, the reception to *The Snake Pit* demonstrates how the ‘horrific’ nature of the film came as a result of confrontations with the ‘obscene’ side to realism rather than from the realms of fantasy. The question of whether or not the cinema screen represented a suitable location for the depiction of educational or sociological subjects is evident following the reaction in the British press towards *The Snake Pit*, and this issue played a key role in the changes to both censorship and horror at the end of the decade.

The Changing Face of Realism in The Snake Pit

As WWII drew to a close, the place of realism in British cinema would be questioned by Ealing’s Michael Balcon in the wake of a string of films praised by critics for a commitment to recreating, quite often, true incidents through the use of

⁹ Ibid., p.59. The end of the war also saw the creation of a trade union branch of the Confederation of Health Service Employees (COHSE) for nurses within Bethlem hospital as they struggled against the poor pay and hours which had been suffered by many throughout the centuries within the various establishments.

cast, locations and characters, without the over-emphasis of particular events.¹⁰ For Dilys Powell, these films created a “movement towards concentration on the native subject, the movement towards documentary truth in the entertainment film”¹¹ indicating how the war encouraged British studios to take representations of society more seriously. An editorial taken from *Documentary News Letter*, of May 1943, highlights the significance of ‘realism’ and its continued use in British cinema:

The real world is made up of people and things, and ideas about people and things. All these can be made exciting and attractive without building fantasies to cloak their true nature [...] whatever method is used it must be to the point that men and women welcome the idea of living in the real world.¹²

Balcon’s approach to realism proved a success throughout the war although, by 1945, questions were being raised as to whether or not the public had seen enough.

Gainsborough’s Maurice Ostrer voiced similar concerns in *Kinematograph Weekly* early in 1945, predicting that:

War films will not be popular. Men and Women on the home front as well as those who have fought overseas have already had a surfeit of war and all its ghastly consequences. During a war – or at least during the early part of a war – a useful purpose is served by showing people at home the horrors of warfare at the front in order to stimulate the war effort and so bring the war to a speedier conclusion.¹³

Producers such as Ostrer recognised the importance of the war film as a means of stimulating public interest, yet both he and Balcon agreed that changes to production schedules were required. Balcon made a call for productions to “mirror contemporary life whether it be in contemporary subjects or in classics which have a present-day

¹⁰ Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel*, pp.36-39. A realist approach created with the experience of Harry Watt and Alberto Cavalcanti recruited from John Grierson’s GPO Film Unit.

¹¹ Powell, “Films Since 1939”, p.78.

¹² Anon., “Editorial”, *Documentary Newsletter*, May 1943, p.1.

¹³ Maurice Oster, “Producers Must Veer to the Public’s Changing Tastes”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.335, n.1969, January 11, 1945, p.165.

application.”¹⁴ While Ostrer foresaw a return to escapist entertainment, Balcon recognised the significance in developing representations of society as a continuation of the ‘quality’ aesthetic of the war years. This return to the realist approach divided both critics and censors, previously unanimous in their praise of the realist war film, with *The Snake Pit* being central to the debate.

The film depicts the treatment of newlywed Virginia Cunningham (Olivia de Havilland) at the Juniper Hill State Hospital where she has been admitted following the increasingly erratic behaviour witnessed by husband Robert (Mark Stevens), revealed to the viewer through flashback during therapy sessions with Dr Kik (Leo Genn). Through these flashbacks Virginia’s apparent issues with forming close relationships are related back to the guilt over her father’s death, in which she played no part, and the subsequent distancing felt from her mother. Before Dr Kik helps Virginia to understand this guilt complex, she is subjected to a series of submersion and shock therapies, whilst being goaded by Nurse Davis (Helen Craig) whom is jealous of doctor-patient relationship. After provoking Virginia into an outburst, Davis moves her into the ‘snake pit’, a section of the hospital containing the more severe patients. She is subsequently helped by Kik to make her way back through the various ‘levels’ in the hospital, the ‘pit’ being the highest, in order to prove her sanity and suitability for discharge. Following Dr Kik’s ‘cure’, Virginia leaves the hospital with the assumption that she will go on to be a mother and supportive wife following the discovery of the true reason behind her mental breakdown.

“The Snake Pit”, a novel by Mary Jane Ward, was submitted to the BBFC for consideration by Alexander Korda’s London Film Productions Ltd, who adapted a

¹⁴ Anon., “Ealing Goes Escapist With Ghosts, Murderers and Classics”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.335, n.1969, January 11, 1945, p.187.

number of literary classics and stage plays for the screen throughout the late-1940s¹⁵. Before the film eventually surfaced as a Twentieth Century-Fox production, Colonel John C. Hanna reported to London Films why such a production would be “quite unsuitable” for exhibition:

The entire story is morbid and depressing. There is no indication of any course of treatment by which the patient is cured – in fact the more she sees the doctor the worse her condition appears to get.¹⁶

Hanna’s comments are interesting for a number of reasons, most obviously for his concern that the patient be fully cured by the end of the film, which inevitably takes place in the final version of Anatole Litvak’s production. The original novel, based on the author’s own experience as a mental health patient, explains how the psychoanalytic treatment by Dr Kik offers no absolute cure, with the protagonist being transferred to an alternative doctor offering the support and confidence to get her back to a functioning level.¹⁷ Hanna’s comments demonstrate both a misunderstanding of mental illness within society and a need to follow cinematic convention of the ‘happy ending’, providing a reasonable explanation for the illness and an inevitable cure.

These facts do not concern either of the censors as Madge Kitchener confirms in her analysis of “this unpleasant book”:

Dramatic action will probably be sought in the lunatic woman’s pitiful delusions, grotesque behaviour and occasional violence. As the therapeutic is described from only the patient’s point of view it appears almost horrific.¹⁸

Rather than being treated as a genuine attempt to address the plight of the mentally ill, the proposed production is criticised for underrepresenting the ‘educated’ (and authoritarian) opinions of those controlling the institutions themselves. The London

¹⁵ Including Oscar Wilde’s *An Ideal Husband* (Alexander Korda; 1947) and Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (Julien Duvivier; 1948).

¹⁶ Colonel John C. Hanna, “The Snake Pit”, *BBFC Scenario Notes 1946 - 1947*, April 30, 1946.

¹⁷ Mary Jane Ward, *The Snake Pit* (London: Cassell and Company, 1947).

¹⁸ Madge Kitchener, “The Snake Pit”, *BBFC Scenario Notes 1946 - 1947*, May 3, 1946.

Film's proposition was ultimately rejected by the Board, although Twentieth Century-Fox's final version of *The Snake Pit* was instantly lauded in the U.S.A., by Bosley Crowther at *The New York Times*, for addressing an issue worthy of cinematic representation.

Aside from the reworked ending invested in Freudian analysis, Crowther praised the studio for having the "imagination and temerity" to rework the novel for the screen without succumbing to "the obvious temptation to melodramatise insanity."¹⁹ His review applauds the film for sticking "rigidly to documented facts", following the book with a "rare fidelity" resulting in an "illuminating presentation of the experiences of a psychotic in an institute."²⁰ The review recognises the film as an attempt to "expand and enlighten our lucid minds" through "a cryptic but trenchant revelation of a crying need for better facilities for mental care", achieved within the particularly harrowing moments.²¹ Crowther views *The Snake Pit* as "frankly quite disturbing", with a warning that children "might be terrifically disturbed", yet this comes as a result of a mature theme being dealt with in an honest manner.²²

The critic re-evaluated his opinions on the film several days later, concerned with the chance it may "baffle and frighten the youthful, unsettle the slightly obsessed and agitate ugly reactions quite contrary to its best intents."²³ Crowther commends the film for being "as forcible as "The Lost Weekend," with which it most closely compares", questioning whether "the whole business of merchandising films should not be radically altered, not only for the good of the public but for the health and

¹⁹ Bosley Crowther, "The Screen in Review", *The New York Times*, November 5, 1948, p.29.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Bosley Crowther, "The Snake Pit: Question of Exhibition Raised by New Film", *The New York Times*, November 14, 1948, p.1.

prosperity of the industry.”²⁴ He cites another Fox production dealing with the mental health of a young women, *Shock* (Alfred L. Werker; 1946), in order to illustrate the studio’s ventures into mental illness for the purpose of providing light-hearted entertainment.

The lack of a ratings system in the U.S.A. at the time of the film’s release would suggest that Crowther’s concern with marketing draw parallels with the issue of censorship in the UK, as the BBFC had no clear classification with which to alert audiences to the ‘adult’ themes of films such as *The Snake Pit*. He recommends screening the film in “theatres of limited capacities catering to an adult clientele” in order to draw the “discriminating patrons”, a suggestion similarly echoed in discussions surrounding the film in the UK.²⁵

Debates over the film in the UK began early in 1949 when the *Sunday Express* reported that, although there were as yet no plans for a showing in London, “British censorship has a rule against showing inmates of lunatic asylums on the screen”²⁶, referring to the outdated methods of the BBFC as a potential barrier to the release of *The Snake Pit* in the UK, regardless of its status as a possible “film of the year”.²⁷

The following month a *Daily Mail* report from a screening in Brussels reflects upon the film’s potentially controversial nature, as “nine people had fled from the theatre but 2,800 stayed”²⁸. However, the article attempts to address the significance of the audience which remained to watch the film in its entirety, giving approval to

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Stephen Watts, “A Film of the Year May Be Banned Here”, *Sunday Express*, January 16, 1949. Perhaps in reference to T. P. O’Connor’s 43 rules discussed in the previous chapter.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Anon., “The Lure of The Snake Pit – and the Nine Who Fled”, *Daily Mail*, February 26, 1949.

The Snake Pit as “a fine film, worth seeing, and constructive”²⁹. The conflicting opinions surrounding the film are illustrated by one particular viewer who asks “how good it is amid the tension of post-war Europe”, with another insisting that it was “about time we faced these emotional problems”³⁰, thereby drawing attention to some of the key concerns of realism in the latter half of the 1940s.

The article also provides a significant insight into audience responses to *The Snake Pit*, presenting the film as somewhat horrifying, with the reviewer noting how “girls clung to their escorts [although] nobody screamed or fainted” when confronted with the “chilling detail” of life inside the asylum, which “spares none of the horrors.”³¹ This reaction to the film, as Bosley Crowther implied, would be seen by the British press as either a result of sensationalising mental illness or a natural response of an enlightened audience confronted with a shocking truth.

Director Anatole Litvak spoke to the *Daily Herald* following news that the film would be passed by the BBFC with a number of cuts and with the added proviso that only adults may be permitted. The director responded by stating, “[i]t is not a horror picture [...] I do not think the censors have spoiled it.”³² Litvak’s insistence that *The Snake Pit* not be treated as a horror film serves as a reminder that the ‘H’ classification came with a similar ‘adults only’ warning, and his film would no doubt encourage audiences to draw understandable parallels.

The BBFC issued a statement explaining this decision:

In view of the nature of the subject, the film has been given most careful consideration and it appeared to the Board to be a sincere and moving picture. With the removal of certain scenes and incidents which seemed

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Anon., “Snake Pit Scenes Cut – Adult Only”, *Daily Herald*, April 13, 1949.

likely to cause apprehension or distress, the Board has decided to pass the film for exhibition to adult audiences only.³³

The decisions being made by the Board at this point remained under the restrictions imposed by the increasingly out-dated rules established in the BBFC's infancy, and would no longer stand up to the challenges presented within the post-war environment. The 'A' classification accompanying *The Snake Pit*, alongside the additional cuts and 'adults only' warning, serves as an indication of how the Board were increasingly being forced into making clear distinctions between 'adult' and 'family' entertainment.

In order to maintain both the approval of the local authorities, who still held the power to ban or cut any film, and the film producers, renters and exhibitors, who were not favourable of the increasing number of harmful cuts being made, the Board had to respond with a satisfactory alternative to current film classification. Debates within the British press would play a crucial role in the understanding of realism and how its impact as a more adult style of filmmaking informed the changes being made at the BBFC.

A Divide amongst the British Press

Not since the 1920s had a film caused such disarray at the BBFC as did the adaptation of James Hadley Chase's 1939 British crime novel *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* (St. John Leigh Clowes; 1948). Submitted to the Board for approval in 1944, the novel had already been rejected by Colonel Hanna who took exception to the level of violence and crime. By 1947, presumably after a series of negotiations, the new

³³ Ibid.

team of Kitchener and Fleetwood-Wilson found themselves in a position to approve the story suitable for production.³⁴ The film, with its incestuous overtones and violence, came under the fire of local watch committees after eventually being passed uncut with an 'A' certificate by the Board in March 1948.³⁵

Monthly Film Bulletin described the film as “the most sickening exhibition of brutality, perversion, sex and sadism ever to be shown on a cinema screen”³⁶ with the only saving grace being that the film is boring enough to avoid drawing in a large audience. The blame lay squarely with the BBFC for such an “extraordinary oversight” in giving the film an 'A' certificate, thereby permitting children under the age of sixteen into screenings.³⁷ London County Council took matters into their own hands by making their own cuts, while Surrey County Council went as far as to ban the film in any form.³⁸ What was deemed to be a vital error on the part of the BBFC left the Board in a precarious position, making their decisions regarding *The Snake Pit* crucial in reaffirming their position as a body operating free from state control.

The 'adult' warning accompanying *The Snake Pit*'s 'A' certificate acted, in part, as a safety net for the BBFC following the perceived error in approving *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* for exhibition. However, distributors would further be required to include an additional warning at the opening of the film assuring audiences that the conditions represented on the screen were not typical of those within British

³⁴ Matthews, *Censored*, p.122.

³⁵ BBFC, (2011). *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF001213/> [accessed 10 October 2011]. The film was passed uncut with an 'A' certificate in March 1948.

³⁶ Anon., “Reviews – No Orchids for Miss Blandish”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, v.15, n.172, April 1948, p.47.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

hospitals, an addition made following the concerns of the aforementioned mental health nurses.³⁹

Leonard Mosley, writing for the *Daily Express*, warned viewers of the “nervous, ultra sensitive” type to avoid this film which “plunges like a needle into the cuticles of your nerves, [...] makes you want to groan with pain [and] hovers like a sinister shadow in your brain long, long, long after you have seen it.”⁴⁰ This colourful description of the viewer’s experience not only alludes to a form of suffering endured by the audience, as if playing part in a horrific experiment, it points towards a lasting aftereffect as something not to be forgotten. It would be these “moiling horrors”⁴¹ which played an integral part to the discussions of the film in the critical press.

Jympson Harman, in *The Evening News*, considers the film as “the most distressing picture I have ever seen”, questioning its suitability for exhibition in theatres designed for family entertainment and also the role of the BBFC in the post-war period.⁴² Harman praises this “honest film, with dignity and integrity” in opposition to “Hollywood’s silly little tales of psychiatry [which] pale before this passionate realism” whilst also recognising the problem of exhibiting the film in an environment intended for the purpose of entertainment, comparing the experience to “spending a Bank holiday in an operating theatre.”⁴³ The intention of the advisory message included at the start of the film may have been to stress the differences between conditions seen in the film and the state of health care in Britain, yet Harman recognises how the confrontation with an important social message may still

³⁹ Leonard Mosley, “This Terrible Film: Why Was It Made?,” *Daily Express*, May 19, 1949.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid. The review also includes mention of the cuts to the film made in order to tone-down the screams heard on the soundtrack, a recognisable exception taken by BBFC’s scenario team when reviewing scripts thought to be of a ‘horrific’ nature.

⁴² Jympson Harman, “Snake Pit – The Most Distressing Film I Have Ever Seen”, *The Evening News*, May 18, 1949.

⁴³ Ibid.

encourage British audiences to “appreciate the problem of caring for the mentally sick.”⁴⁴

Harman’s opinions were reaffirmed in *The Star* who recognised that “[s]uch a picture can hardly be described as entertainment but it is a sincere and courageous treatment of a serious subject”⁴⁵, while *The Daily Telegraph* approved of both Twentieth Century-Fox’s decision to make the film and also the BBFC’s removal of “the more appalling incidents”⁴⁶ in order to draw the emphasis away from mere sensationalism.

Socialist paper the *Daily Worker*, on the other hand, comments on how the “horrors are not overstated” in its “facile treatment of a serious and delicate subject.”⁴⁷ The *Daily Worker* concerns itself with the lack of description injected into scenes depicting Virginia’s cure, calling for an explanation as to why particular treatments are illustrated in the film. The conflicting opinions of the *Telegraph* and the *Worker* represent both sides of the discussion concerning the use of realism in the film. While the former sees the film as encroaching upon the limits of what may be deemed acceptable within cinematic entertainment, the latter demands further interrogation into the details of the processes of mental health care in order to give a more accurate portrayal.

Nevertheless, the scenes regarded as most shocking by the critics depict treatments commonplace within British institutions during this period and the cuts made to the film predominately dealt with these ‘therapeutic’ methods.⁴⁸ Paul Holt of

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Anon., “Seeing The Snake Pit”, *The Star*, May 18, 1949.

⁴⁶ Campbell Dixon, “Cuts in ‘Snake Pit’ Justified”, *The Daily Telegraph*, May 19, 1949.

⁴⁷ S. Ross, “The Snake Pit”, *Daily Worker*, May 19, 1949.

⁴⁸ The methods of treatment undergone by protagonist Virginia, including shock treatment and cold water submersion, continued to be practiced within mental health hospitals for several decades after

the *Daily Herald* opines that, after seeing both a cut and uncut version of *The Snake Pit*, “there is no good reason why the film should not be shown or why it should be cut.”⁴⁹ He argues against the perception of the film as a “peepshow” and encourages its recognition as a serious story shedding light upon those “who lose their way [and] find it hard to fight their way back to sane living again because they believe they have been forgotten by the outside world.”⁵⁰

Holt includes in his article a list of the final cuts made to the film which draw parallels between the exceptions taken to mental illness by the BBFC, seen in the scenario team’s response to the script and the rejection of *Bedlam* illustrated in the previous chapter. For the released version of *The Snake Pit*, the removal of the scenes depicting the “terror and agony” of Virginia as she undergoes the aforementioned therapeutic methods served both the concerns of the BBFC and the British mental health hospitals themselves, yet chooses to ignore the reality documented by author Mary Jane Ward herself.⁵¹

“A Dangerous Mistake”

Whilst in favour of its mature subject matter these responses to *The Snake Pit* reflect upon the difficulty of releasing the film into a British market mainly designed to provide entertainment for all ages, with only the ‘horrors’ of the ‘H’ classification being distinguished as unsuitable for children. Furthermore, this issue sparked a series

the release of the film, illustrating that there was clearly more to be said about the state of mental health care within the UK than what the British nurses were contesting even before viewing the finished film.

⁴⁹ Paul Holt, “Why Did They Trim Snake Pit At All?”, *Daily Herald*, May 19, 1949.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

of debates within the mainstream British press highlighting the apparent inadequacies of the BBFC's classification process. The basic two-pronged approach to film classification was clearly no longer viable following the arrival of a wave of films from overseas which sought to confront the complexities of post-war society.

Fred Majdalany of the *Daily Mail* so succinctly summarises this appeal for adult cinema in reference to the honest portrayals of mental illness *The Snake Pit* delivers:

The fact that the cinema – so often the wayward adolescent of the arts – can produce anything as grown-up as this film is a heartening thing. This film should most certainly be shown.⁵²

A number of critics saw the importance of not censoring a mature and significant issue, while others suggested that Hollywood had no business challenging social problems, accusing the filmmakers for merely playing upon sensationalism. *The Observer* sees *The Snake Pit* as a glimpse at “a sick Hollywood rather than a sick world” and treats the more shocking footage cut from the film as being “calculated violence” on the part of the filmmakers, seeking to alleviate curiosity in the morbid spectator in order to achieve “a nice fat dollar balance by exploiting the mentally irresponsible.”⁵³

The Times believes the film to have “no missionary ambitions”⁵⁴ while the *Manchester Guardian* regards Olivia de Havilland's performance as “the film's saving grace, redeeming it from mere horror or, alternatively, claptrap.”⁵⁵ These opinions are certainly understandable considering how, particularly up until the post-war period, psychological themes were often taken as a pretentious addition to ‘low-brow’ horror (see Chapter Seven) until Hollywood began to tackle more serious social issues, and psychoanalysis would be deemed more acceptable.

⁵² Fred Majdalany, “Show ‘The Snake Pit’? Yes, Yes, Yes!”, *Daily Mail*, May 19, 1949.

⁵³ C.A.L., “The Snake Pit”, *The Observer*, May 22, 1949.

⁵⁴ Anon, “The Snake Pit”, *The Times*, May 20, 1949.

⁵⁵ Anon, “The Snake Pit”, *Manchester Guardian*, May 21, 1949.

The critics who had once celebrated the use of realism in the fiction film during WWII, as a reflection upon national climate, now viewed a similar approach to post-war social concerns as inappropriate for the purpose of pure entertainment. Typically seen as sub-standard, educational documentaries were not in the business of spectacle thus making a film such as *The Snake Pit*, without the glamour and grandeur, harder for the 1940s audience to decipher or even show an interest in. The restrictions imposed by the limitation of fictional storytelling in the Hollywood tradition led a number of critics to dismiss the film as subservient to the ‘quality’ aesthetic of the war years, precisely because of the need to adhere to the rules of narrative in the entertainment film.

In her review for *The Sunday Times*, Dilys Powell draws on both sides of the argument in praising the film’s convincing interpretation of reality before going on to condemn it for doing just that. Powell commends the honesty and conviction of the performances as being “quite foreign” to Hollywood, aided by a “unusually intelligent” screenplay providing a realistic interpretation of compassion rather than a vulgar attempt on the part of the filmmakers to use the more horrifying scenes “to make ones flesh crawl”⁵⁶. Powell’s concern for this “dangerous mistake” of a film emanates, not from the realistic interpretation of mental illness but rather, the “over-simplified and romanticised and therefore, in contrast to the rest, unconvincing” inquiry into the cause of Virginia’s mental collapse.⁵⁷ As with the implications made by the *Daily Worker*, this criticism stresses the importance of more accurate portrayals of the methods used to treat mental illness over focussing upon the successful treatment of one particular patient.

⁵⁶ Dilys Powell, “A Dangerous Film”, *The Sunday Times*, May 22, 1949.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

The attempt to address the controversial subject of mental illness was approved by the majority of the critics, yet the interpretation of Freudian methods as the ultimate cure for patients such as Virginia is regarded as dangerous when not fully explained to the viewer. Powell sees how the film's horrific nature may be recognised through the "impression that a mental hospital is a place of torture where cure is merely accidental", an issue thought to have been easily avoided had the filmmakers elaborated on the "quarter-truth of realism."⁵⁸ Here Powell's concerns lie with the stark comparisons between the futile treatments Virginia is subjected to and the 'miracle cure' of psychoanalysis, resulting in a confused message for an audience unfamiliar with the 'approved' methods of mental health care.

Writing for *The New Statesman and Nation*, Ritchie Calder echoes these dangers in his defence of British mental hospitals by suggesting that the film may have such an effect as to discourage individuals from seeking the help they need. The "romanticised" Hollywood model is criticised for not elaborating upon the attempts to convey realism, with the film's resolution representing an effort to draw the viewer back into established narrative conventions rather than elaboration upon its social critique, leading some to regard the film's intent as a foray into horror.⁵⁹

By over-melodramatising the end of the story, critics disapproved of the terrifying impression of mental hospitals, positioning its lasting effect along similar lines to the horror genre, as the attempt at social critique is lost in the film's final stages. Matthew Norgate, writing for the *Tribune*, recognises that in the transition from novel to the screen, "social document has not been replaced by Grand Guignol, through one fears that an appetite for the latter rather than the former will account for

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ritchie Calder, "Private Worlds", *The New Statesman and Nation*, May 28, 1949.

the film's popularity."⁶⁰ Norgate, in a similar manner to Powell's critique, foresees audiences misinterpreting the film as a venture into the traditions of Hollywood entertainment, rather than a revelatory insight, with the controversies surrounding its release in the UK seen as providing added appeal for horror aficionados.

The Times Educational Supplement takes a similar approach in stating that the poster for the film, depicting twisted faces and the repetition of "children under 16 not admitted", will no doubt

create an anticipation of horror which tickles human weakness [and] it seems probable that that a large section of the audience is impelled, not by an interest in mental sickness, but by the knowledge that the film might have been banned, has been censored, and will probably frighten them.⁶¹

The attempts made by the BBFC to avoid any confusion as to the mature nature of the film, with the 'adults only' warning, resulted in drawing an audience through its association with the horrific. Following several years of indicating the unsuitability of the 'H' films, through a similar 'adults only' warning attached to the number of horror productions imported from Hollywood, the likelihood that *The Snake Pit* would be treated in a similar manner provided the BBFC with another impetus for instating a new form of classification, embracing all forms of 'adult' storytelling.

As discussed earlier, Secretary Arthur Watkins began attempts to rework the structure of the BBFC by seeking to loosen some of the restrictions placed upon films dealing with more adult themes. In the case of *The Snake Pit*, the Board had the opportunity to make strides in this direction, even though the uncut film would never be received with unanimous praise following the disaster of *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*. The critics were willing to accept representations of controversial topics,

⁶⁰ Matthew Norgate, "Shock Treatment", *Tribune*, May 27, 1949.

⁶¹ Anon., "The Snake Pit: Sympathy in an Alien World", *The Times Educational Supplement*, June 10, 1949.

including mental illness, and yet ultimately the BBFC were held responsible for not ensuring such films were clearly being distinguished as something other than the typical fare represented with the 'U' and 'A' classification.

Conclusion

The perception of *The Snake Pit* in the critical press presented a film which both shocked and terrified audience whilst also illustrating the ability of the fiction film to convey social meaning through realist methods. So much so that it was feared the British public may consider this interpretation of reality to represent universal truth. An article written by filmmakers Jay and Stephen Black for *The Daily Mail*, June 1949, gave an account of their own attempts to investigate the state of mental health care in the UK, through a potential Central Office of Information film in response to the Hollywood dramatization.⁶² It was thought that a documentary approach to the investigation of conditions within the British hospitals would help to dispel any of the uncertainties held by the public as a result of *The Snake Pit*'s release. The article further supported the belief that the fiction film served little purpose when attempting to address particularly sensitive subject matter, siding with the opinion that an educational film to be screened in specialised theatres represented the most appropriate means of addressing the issue.

As *The Snake Pit* moved towards the provinces, a surprisingly small number of local authorities took a stand against its exhibition, with the Quaker-influenced council for the city of Birmingham being one of those in favour of its release.⁶³ A

⁶² Jay & Stephen Black, "No 'Snake Pits' in Britain", *Daily Mail*, June 6, 1949.

⁶³ Anon., "Birmingham's Yes To 'Snake Pit'", *News Chronicle*, June 20, 1949.

report detailing one unfortunate woman who was had to be admitted to Arlesey Hospital⁶⁴ after seeing the film did little to hamper its release across the UK however, the *Manchester Guardian* were impelled to call for an investigation into the effects of cinema on society rather than allowing the BBFC to retain their position as moral guardians for the entire nation.

The article implies that “cinema is much more than mere entertainment, and yet films are still being made, treated, and censored as if it were not”⁶⁵, insisting that fictional films which romanticise topics such as psychology, may be regarded as “rubbishy dishonest” as their effects become misunderstood and false:

While “The Snake Pit,” by being an outstanding commercial success, is encouraging the film industry to believe that honesty may after all be the best policy, it would be a still greater achievement if it led to a genuine inquiry into the cinema’s social effects.⁶⁶

The film clearly sparked new debates surrounding the use of realism within fictional narratives, perceived by some of the critics as more horrifying than the ‘H’ classification, with the relationship between fiction and realistic interpretations of the everyday creating a sense of verisimilitude not common to standard Hollywood fare.

As the new decade dawned, Arthur Watkins and his colleagues at the BBFC would be under increased pressure to develop a new form of film classification, one which stood for the more adult themes being dealt with in the post-war period rather than merely those films previously associated with the ‘H’ classification. The release of *The Snake Pit* in Britain had a lasting effect at the BBFC as discussions pertaining to the purpose of realism in the cinema, following several years of success during WWII, required the Board to rethink their position on ‘adult’ audiences. The critical

⁶⁴ Anon., “Wife Sees ‘Snake Pit’ Then Enter Mental Hospital”, *Daily Mail*, June 16, 1949.

⁶⁵ Anon., “The Snake Pit”, *Manchester Guardian*, September 26, 1949.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

response, emphasising the film's relationship to the 'horrific', left the impression that the more obscene nature of the everyday would become a site for the truly disturbing, as the line between 'fantasy' and 'reality' no longer provided a safe distance for the audience. Following on from the achievements of the Val Lewton's productions for RKO earlier in the decade, 'normality' would prove to represent a terrifying realm from which to procure the requisite shocks and horrors, with *The Snake Pit* situated closer to reality than the semi-fantastical realms of the Lewton films.

Conclusion

Discussions of British cinema, particularly during the 1940s, often assume an opposition between realism and fantasy or, as it is also known, 'realism and tinsel'. However, through an analysis of critical reception and censorship discourses at the time, this thesis has demonstrated that this distinction and division was nowhere near as clear and secure as is often argued. On the contrary, it demonstrates the very clear sense that realism was often associated with fantasy and vice versa, in that realism was often explicitly associated, not with verisimilitude, or the reproduction of the surface appearances of reality, but rather with the obscene or the taboo, that which lay hidden beneath the surfaces of reality. For the censors and critics alike, the hidden side to reality became more closely associated to themes tackled within fantasy rather than those established within the realism of the war film.

While a great deal of work on this distinction has since fought to counter the argument that fantasy, or 'tinsel', was of less worth to realism, little has been attempted to understand the application of such terminologies to a broader range of films than those originally caught up in this argument. Critics fought for realism during WWII as they perceived it as being crucial for a maturing Britain cinema, one spawned by a relaxation upon BBFC restrictions, allowing filmmakers to tackle a number of social

issues previous deemed unsuitable for cinematic entertainment. When filmmakers sought to utilise this freedom in order to convey the darker aspects of a post-war society, the same critics demonstrated a similar distaste for realism as they once had for the melodrama. This change of heart came as a result of the sordid subject matter post-war realism strived to deal with, whereas the ‘quality’ of realism can now be seen as merely a reflection of a surface reality unwilling to look further into the more troubling elements of society.

Prior to a number of significant changes made at the BBFC later in the decade¹, the Board continued to approach censorship with the same leniency towards these social issues afforded to them during WWII, although this ultimately led to a revival of pre-war opposition from the local authorities. As with the mixed reaction to *The Snake Pit*, from critics and moral guardians alike, the controversy surrounding the Board’s approval of *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* became one of the last acts of the BBFC’s ‘old guard’ as a new team would be put in place to face the challenges presented by post-war filmmakers seeking to break away from the longstanding ideologies held by the censors.²

¹ Hunnings, *Film Censors and the Law*, p.129. Following the retirement of Colonel Hanna from his role as scenario supervisor at the end of 1946, and the deaths of the Board’s President Lord Tyrell in June 1947 and Secretary of the Board Joseph Brooke Wilkinson in July 1948, the end of the decade brought with it a new era for the BBFC. However, Wilkinson’s influence from thirty-six years as Secretary would continue to be felt. Before his death Wilkinson arranged the appointment of Sir Sidney Harris as the new President, following his role as part of the Home Office delegation in 1912 resulting in the establishment of the BBFC. Harris was recruited from the Children’s Department of the Home Office bringing with him the new Secretary Arthur T. L. Watkins, who would quickly establish himself as the face of the BBFC and would later be recognised as the chief censor when the President took a more subsidiary role. The introduction of the new scenario team, consisting of supervisor Lieutenant-Colonel Fleetwood-Wilson and assistant Madge Kitchener, did little to support Watkins’s more open approach to cinematic representations of the new social climate in Britain. This new team were lacking in their understanding of the BBFC’s history and the progressions made following the arrival of a new Labour government.

² Matthews, *Censored*, pp.120-1. The result of which would often be the filmmaker’s refusal to acknowledge the recommendations made by the scenario team with little or no repercussions felt by the time of the film’s classification.

C. A. Lejeune labelled the film a “repellent piece of work” which had managed to “have scraped up all the droppings of the nastier type of Hollywood movie [...] for sheer brutality”³, while *The Manchester Guardian* argue that as “the British film industry is supposed to be struggling to preserve its character” this very “un-British” production of the type of “tough, brutal American film [...] looks and sounds so hopelessly untrue”⁴. This attempt to demonise *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* inevitably resulted in invaluable publicity for the film, creating a huge success in those areas where it was made available.⁵

These comments made by the British press were also clearly aimed at a series of Hollywood productions later categorised as Film Noir which, as I have already shown, held connections to both realism and horror. As the cases of *The Body Snatcher*, *Bedlam* and *The Snake Pit* show, these links between realism and horror became more apparent in the post-war period as an increasing interest with the more sordid and unsavoury became the target of the both the critical press and local authorities. The release of *Brighton Rock* drew similar parallels from critics, with Dilys Powell emphasising the “acute feeling of actual place” leading the viewer to believe “that the victim really is trying to hide among the crowds of the pier”.⁶ This realism “heightens the sense of horror” brought to the film in its confrontation with the sadistic behaviour of the teen gangs who also add the “touches of grotesquerie” emphasising the “face of violence.” C. A. Lejeune commends the film for drawing the “audience triumphantly behind the front of Brighton in the holiday season, into an underworld [...] where sleazy lodging-houses bed shameful secrets”⁷.

³ C. A. Lejeune, “No Orchids for Miss Blandish”, *The Observer*, April 18, 1948, p.2.

⁴ Anon., “No Orchids for Miss Blandish”, *The Manchester Guardian*, April 17, 1948, p.3.

⁵ Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel*, p.188.

⁶ Dilys Powell, “Brighton Rock” in George Perry (Ed.), *The Golden Screen: Fifty Years of Film – Dilys Powell* (London: Headline, 1990), p.70.

⁷ C. A. Lejeune, “Holiday at Brighton”, *The Observer*, January 11, 1948, p.2.

Within a climate wherein the previously upheld 'H' films were once again unleashed onto the British public, horror derived from the realms of fantasy no longer proved to be the controversial issue it once had prior to the ban.⁸ One of the first 'H' films passed by the Board following the end of the ban, *Jungle Captive* (Harold Young; 1945)⁹, was recommended by *Today's Cinema* to only the "most uncritical of horror fans" with the 'H' certificate providing "a good indication of the type of entertainment it has to offer"¹⁰. The familiar "scientific fanatic [...] elaborate experimental apparatus [...] baying of hounds [...] and the gallery of evil looking characters"¹¹ all fit into the type of "hokum" *Kinematograph Weekly* prescribes to providing "unintentional laughs" rather than the intended thrills.¹²

It becomes necessary, therefore, to understand the 1940s as a period in which, rather than being synonymous with the quality war film, realism also represented similar sordid themes to those dealt with in the critically derided fantasy productions. It would be these realist films which led to the removal of the 'H' and introduction of the 'X' certificate in 1951, as what the former stood for was now longer relevant when considering what was deemed unsuitable younger viewers.¹³

This is also significant when we consider the 'H' ban as something other than the removal of horror from British screens during the 1942-45 period. A number of

⁸ Matthews, *Censored*, p.124. During this period, nearly half of the film submitted to the Board were being cut in order to receive the 'A' certificate. In a wave of measures taken by the Board, reminiscent of the 'H' ban and the drastic cuts brought to the Universal films of the 1930s, *The Miracle* (Roberto Rossellini; 1949) was banned for blasphemy and depictions of labour pains. French comedy *Occupe-toi d'Amélie* (Claude Autant-Lara; 1949) faced the same fate for its overt sexuality while *Manon* (Henri-Georges Clouzot; 1948) was rejected for scenes of the protagonist suggestively touching a corpse.

⁹ BBFC, (2011). *Jungle Captive* [online]. Available: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF019148> [accessed 10 February 2011].

¹⁰ J.G.W., "Jungle Captive", *Today's Cinema*, v.67, n5432, December 10, 1946, p.18.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Anon., "Jungle Captive", *Kinematograph Weekly*, v.358, n.2069, December 12, 1946, p.22.

¹³ Arthur Watkins was particularly in favour of introducing a new classification, making it abundantly clear that certain films were of an undeniably 'adult' theme and therefore alleviating the need to make aggressive cuts to, or even ban, these new 'realist' productions. As with the 'H', the 'X' effectively kept all children under sixteen out of the screenings.

'H' films released prior to the ban were also linked to realism in a similar manner to those 'sordid' productions of the post-war period.¹⁴ 'H' certificated film *Hell's Kitchen* highlights the issues of young offenders, while *A Child is Born* takes place in a frantic labour ward as a number of women from a cross-section of society wait to give birth.

Describing *Boy Slaves* as an "ugly, bone-honest, and rather terrifying indictment of sweated child labour" *The Observer* also makes a recommendation that the film is "emphatically not for children, but you can't lightly forget it"¹⁵, with *The Times* also arguing that "while there is nothing original in the methods of presentation the story at least exposes a cunning trick [...] practiced upon such gangs by unscrupulous employers."¹⁶ The realistic treatment of a serious social problem therefore presented *Boy Slaves* as somewhat horrific in its frank portrayal of child labour, and in doing so gave the film added gravitas.

The 'H' certificate was therefore more than merely a symbol of the horror film, standing as a protective measure established by the BBFC following pressure placed upon the Board by the local authorities. The 'H' ban represents further action taken to ensure both that valuable film stock would not be squandered on these often unseen films and also to ensure that the BBFC rulings remained consistent throughout Britain during the final years of war. Alongside a number of films arriving from Hollywood, stepping away from the Grand Guignol aesthetic of the 1930s cycle, British

¹⁴ Following the lifting of the 'H' ban in 1945, the short film *United Nations War Crimes Film* (United Nations War Crime Commission; 1945) was not only the first 'new' film to be handed the classification it was also the last 'non-horror' production to be dealt with in such a way before the arrival of the 'X' certificate.

¹⁵ Anon., "Films in Suburbs and Provinces", *The Observer*, December 10, 1939, p.17.

¹⁶ Anon., "Boy Slaves", *The Times*, July 3, 1939, p.12.

melodramas of the early-1940s also play a vital role when considering the place of horror in British cinema.

The development of genre studies in the 1960s and 1970s left little room for further analysis of 1940s horror beyond the Universal films, and later the Val Lewton productions, although the historical context of their production suggests that the wide range of films discussed within this thesis were clearly intended for a similar purpose. That is to say the Universal cycle, and those seeking to replicate its success, were only seen as an extension of similar ‘thrilling’ entertainment derived from melodrama, with an added emphasis upon the Grand Guignol.

What I hope to have highlighted here is the significance of looking beyond the commonly held perceptions of realism and ‘tinsel’ in British cinema during the 1940s, particularly when only a small selection of films are selected for either side of the debate. The relationship between horror and realism becomes crucial to this debate as the lines drawn between the two became increasingly blurred in the following decade. While the successful Hammer horror films of the late-1950s brought the Grand Guignol of the Universal cycle back to life in full-blooded colour, this period was also one of critical and financial triumphs for social realism, as some of the more sordid elements of the late-1940s realist film were now deemed acceptable for the development of a national cinema.

Following the turn of the decade, horror would once again meld with realism, mirroring similar developments discussed within this thesis, as *Psycho* and *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell; 1960) inspired a run of films, including *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (Robert Aldrich; 1962) and *The Nanny* (Seth Holt; 1965), displaying clear links back to Lewton and the psychological film of the 1940s. The comparisons

between fantasy and realism within the horror film during both periods raises significant questions as to the role both play in the wider context of film history. As British realism in the 1940s and 1950s challenged the established conventions of cinema and censorship, horror naturally formed below the surface, emerging stronger and more visceral than the fantastical origins from which it came. A similar study of realism and fantasy in this later period may provide useful to the understanding of British horror cinema and also the second wave of the critically lauded realist film.

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- Bowery at Midnight* (Wallace Fox, Monogram Pictures Corporation, UK, 1942).
- Boy Slaves* (P. J. Wolfson, RKO Radio Pictures, UK, 1939).
- Brighton Rock* (John Boulting, Associated British Picture Corporation, UK, 1947).
- The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Robert Wiene, Decla Filmgesellschaft, Germany, 1920).
- The Cat and the Canary* (Elliott Nugent, Paramount Pictures, U.S.A., 1939).
- The Cat and the Canary* (Paul Leni, Universal Pictures, U.S.A., 1927).
- Cat People* (Jacques Tourneur, RKO Radio Pictures, U.S.A., 1942).
- Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, RKO Radio Pictures, U.S.A., 1941).
- The Climax* (George Waggner, Universal Pictures Company, U.S.A., 1944).
- Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (Anatole Litvak, Warner Bros., U.S.A., 1939).

The Corpse Vanishes (Wallace Fox, Monogram Pictures Corporation, U.S.A., 1942).

Crimes at the Dark House (George King, Pennant Picture Productions, U.S.A., 1940).

The Curse of the Cat People (Gunther von Fritsch and Robert Wise, RKO Radio Pictures, U.S.A., 1944).

Dark Eyes of London (Walter Summers, John Argyle Productions, UK, 1939).

Dead Men Walk (Sam Newfield, Producers Releasing Corporation, UK, 1943).

Dead of Night (Alberto Cavalcanti, Charles Crichton, Basil Dearden and Robert Hamer, Ealing Studios, UK, 1945).

Double Indemnity (Billy Wilder, Paramount Pictures, U.S.A., 1944).

Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (Victor Fleming, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, U.S.A., 1941).

Dr Renault's Secret (Harry Lachman, Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, U.S.A., 1942).

Dracula (Tod Browning, Universal Pictures Corporation, U.S.A., 1931).

Dracula's Daughter (Lambert Hillyer, Universal Productions, U.S.A., 1936).

Experiment Perilous (Jacques Tourneur, RKO Radio Pictures, U.S.A., 1944).

Fanny by Gaslight (Anthony Asquith, Gainsborough Pictures, UK, 1944).

Foreign Correspondent (Alfred Hitchcock, United Artists, U.S.A., 1940).

Frankenstein (James Whale, Universal Pictures Corporation, U.S.A., 1931).

Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man (Roy William Neil, Universal Pictures Company, U.S.A., 1943).

Gaslight (Thorold Dickinson, British National, UK, 1940).

The Ghost and the Guest (William Nigh, Producers Releasing Corporation, U.S.A., 1943).

Ghosts in the Night (William Beaudine, Monogram Pictures Corporation, U.S.A., 1943).

The Halfway House (Basil Dearden, Ealing Studios, UK, 1944).

Hatter's Castle (Lance Comfort, Paramount British Productions, UK, 1941).

Hell's Kitchen (Lewis Seiler & E. A. DuPont, Warner Bros., U.S.A., 1939).

Henry Haunts a House (Hugh Bennett, Paramount Pictures, U.S.A., 1943).

The Hound of the Baskervilles (Sidney Lanfield, Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, U.S.A., 1939).

I Walked with a Zombie (Jacques Tourneur, RKO Radio Pictures, U.S.A., 1943).

In Which We Serve (Noël Coward, Two Cities Films, UK, 1942).

Invisible Agent (Edward L. Marin, Universal Pictures Company, U.S.A., 1942).

The Invisible Man (James Whale, Universal Pictures Company, U.S.A., 1933).

The Invisible Man Returns (Joe May, Universal Pictures Company, U.S.A., 1940).

The Invisible Man's Revenge (Ford Beebe, Universal Pictures Company, U.S.A., 1944).

The Invisible Woman (A. Edward Sutherland, Universal Pictures Company, U.S.A., 1940).

Island of Lost Souls (Erle C. Kenton, Paramount Productions, U.S.A., 1932).

J'Accuse (Abel Gance, Pathé Frères, France, 1919)

J'Accuse (Abel Gance, Société de Production et d'Exploitation du Film J' & F.R.D, 1938).

Jane Eyre (Robert Stevenson, Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, U.S.A., 1943).

Jungle Captive (Harold Young, Universal Pictures, U.S.A., 1945).

The Lady and the Monster (George Sherman, Republic Pictures Corporation, U.S.A., 1944).

The Leopard Man (Jacques Tourneur, RKO Radio Pictures, U.S.A., 1943).

The Lodger (Alfred Hitchcock, Gainsborough Pictures, UK, 1927).

The Lodger (Maurice Elvey, Twickenham Film Studios Productions, UK, 1932).

The Lodger (John Brahm, Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, U.S.A., 1944).

The Lost Weekend (Billy Wilder, Paramount Pictures, U.S.A., 1945).

Love on the Dole (John Baxter, British National Films, UK, 1941).

Love Story (Leslie Arliss, Gainsborough Pictures, UK, 1944).

The Mad Ghoul (James Hogan, Universal Pictures Company, U.S.A., 1943).

Man in Half Moon Street (Ralph Murphy, Paramount Pictures, U.S.A., 1945).

The Mad Monster (Sam Newfield, Producers Releasing Corporation, U.S.A., 1942).

Madonna of the Seven Moons (Arthur Crabtree, Gainsborough Pictures, UK, 1945).

The Man in Grey (Leslie Arliss, Gainsborough Pictures, UK, 1943).

Manon (Henri-Georges Clouzot, Alcina, France, 1948).

Man with Two Lives (Phil Rosen, Monogram Pictures Corporation, U.S.A., 1942).

The Miracle (Roberto Rossellini, Tevere Film, Italy, 1949).

The Mummy's Tomb (Harold Young, Universal Pictures, U.S.A., 1942).

Murder in Thornton Square (U.S. Title Gaslight, George Cukor, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, U.S.A., 1944).

The Nanny (Seth Holt, Hammer Film Productions & Associated British Picture Productions, UK, 1965).

The Next of Kin (Thorold Dickinson, Ealing Studios, UK, 1942).

The Night Has Eyes (Leslie Arliss, Associated British Picture Corporation, UK, 1942).

Night Monster (UK title House of Mystery, Ford Beebe, Universal Pictures, U.S.A., 1942).

No Orchids for Miss Blandish (St. John Leigh Clowes, Tudor-Alliance, UK, 1948)

Occupe-toi d'Améle (Claude Autant-Lara, Lux Compagnie Cinématographique de France, France, 1949).

The Old Dark House (James Whale, Universal Pictures Corporation, U.S.A., 1932).

One Body Too Many (Frank MacDonald, Paramount Pictures, U.S.A., 1944).

Peeping Tom (Michael Powell, Michael Powell (Theatre), UK, 1960).

The Phantom of the Opera (Rupert Julian, Universal Pictures Company, U.S.A., 1925).

Phantom of the Opera (Arthur Lubin, Universal Pictures Company, U.S.A., 1943).

The Picture of Dorian Gray (Albert Lewin, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, U.S.A., 1945).

Pink String and Sealing Wax (Robert Hamer, Ealing Studios, UK, 1945).

Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock, Shamley Productions, U.S.A., 1960).

Rebecca (Alfred Hitchcock, Selznick International Pictures, U.S.A., 1940).

Remember Pearl Harbour (Joseph Santley, Republic Pictures Corporation, U.S.A., 1942).

The Return of the Vampire (Lew Landers, Columbia Pictures Corporation, U.S.A., 1943).

San Demetrio London (Charles Frend, Ealing Studios, UK, 1943).

Secret Agent of Japan (Irving Pichel, Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, U.S.A., 1942).

The Seventh Veil (Compton Bennett, Ortus Films & Theatrecraft, UK, 1945).

The Seventh Victim (Mark Robson, RKO Radio Pictures, U.S.A., 1943).

Shadows on My Life (Original title "Redemption", Joseph A. Golden & Julius Steger; Triumph Films, U.S.A., 1917).

Shock (Alfred L. Werker, Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, U.S.A., 1946).

The Snake Pit (Anatole Litvak, Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, U.S.A., 1948).

Son of Frankenstein (Rowland V. Lee, Universal Pictures Company, U.S.A., 1939).

Spellbound (Alfred Hitchcock, Selznick International Pictures & Vanguard Films, U.S.A., 1945).

Spooks Run Wild (Phil Rosen, Monogram Pictures Corporation, U.S.A., 1941).

The Thirteenth Chair (George B. Seitz, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation, U.S.A., 1937).

This Happy Breed (David Lean, Two Cities Films & Cineguild, UK, 1944).

Thunder Rock (Roy Boulting, Charter Film Productions, UK, 1942).

The Undying Monster (UK title *The Hammond Mystery*, John Brahm, Twentieth Century-Fox Corporation, U.S.A., 1942).

The Uninvited (Lewis Allen, Paramount Pictures, U.S.A., 1944)

United Nations War Crimes Film (United Nations War Crime Commission, 1945)

Warning Shadows (Arthur Robison, Pan-Film & Dafu Film, Germany, 1923).

The Way Ahead (Carol Reed, Two Cities Films, UK, 1944).

We Dive at Dawn (Anthony Asquith, Gainsborough Pictures, UK, 1943).

Went the Day Well? (Alberto Cavalcanti, Ealing Studios, UK, 1942).

What Ever Happened to Baby Jane? (Robert Aldrich, Seven Arts Productions, U.S.A., 1962).

The Wicked Lady (Leslie Arliss, Gainsborough Pictures, UK, 1945).

The Wolf Man (George Waggner, Universal Pictures Company, U.S.A., 1941).

Wuthering Heights (William Wyler, Samuel Goldwyn Productions, U.S.A., 1939).

Youth Runs Wild (Mark Robson, RKO Radio Pictures, U.S.A., 1944).