

the most common way of defining what it means to be a 'monster' is to associate it with the 'abnormal' or 'concentrating on fear and violence, both have been the central topics of horror cinema since its earliest days.'

## CHAPTER TWO

### A world of monsters

'What's the boogeyman?' *(Halloween, 1978)*

#### THE HOUSE IS THE MONSTER

In the late 1950s, film director Roger Corman was trying to persuade exploitation specialists American International Pictures to fund his horror adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's classic short story *The Fall of the House of Usher*. 'But where's the monster?' asked the AIP executives, obviously finding it difficult to imagine a horror picture which did not feature a monster. 'The house is the monster,' replied Corman, who subsequently got the funding and made the film. Whether or not one believes this often-told anecdote (Samuel Arkoff, co-head of AIP, offers a different version in Naha, 1982, p.29), it does underline the importance of monsters to the horror genre. Monsters abound in horror, and to a certain extent the history of horror cinema is also a history of monsters. This does not mean that all films thought of as horror have monsters in them or that horror cinema has a monopoly on the representation of monsters. But it does mean that in order to grasp what is distinctive about the horror genre, it is helpful to have some sense of what the function of the monstrous is within it.

Critics and historians of the horror genre have offered numerous explanations and theories of the monstrous, with these relating both to 'monstedom' in general and to particular horror monsters. Some of this work focuses on the nature of the monstrous itself. What makes a monster a monster? Obviously one necessary element is that the monster has to be dangerous and that it does harm to the people it encounters. But simply being dangerous is not in itself enough to bestow monster status. Villains in general

– whether in thrillers, westerns, melodramas, and even some musicals – are all dangerous but they are rarely seen as monsters. Bearing this in mind, one possible way of separating out horror monsters from villains in other genres is by stipulating that these monsters should not only be dangerous but ‘impure’ or ‘unnatural’ as well.

This way of thinking about the monster often draws upon the anthropological work of Mary Douglas, and especially her book *Purity and Danger*. In this, Douglas argues that societies develop a meaningful social order through imposing classificatory systems upon ‘an inherently untidy experience’ (Douglas, 1984, p.4). In other words, order is created and managed through the division of objects and/or properties into distinct groups which are perceived as separate and discrete – categories such as living (as opposed to dead), human (as opposed to animal/non-human), male/female, young/old, etc.

From this perspective, the horror monster is a kind of pollutant; it embodies a crossing of borders and a transgressive mixing of categories. So far as our common-sense way of understanding the world is concerned, the horror monster is a thing that simply should not be. As Noel Carroll puts it in his book *The Philosophy of Horror*,

*they [monsters] are un-natural relative to a culture's conceptual scheme of nature. They do not fit the scheme; they violate it. Thus, monsters are not only physically threatening; they are cognitively threatening. They are threats to common knowledge . . . monsters are in a certain sense challenges to the foundations of a culture's way of thinking.*

(Carroll, 1990, p.34)

Carroll goes on to identify the different ways in which this can happen. Monsters can be categorically interstitial or contradictory, i.e. they blur or undermine distinctions between categories such as, for example, the living and the dead (the vampire, the zombie, the mummy, Frankenstein’s monster, more recent creations such as Freddy Krueger and Candyman), human and animal (the werewolf), or human and vegetable (the ‘intellectual carrot’ monster in the 1951 version of *The Thing*). They can also be incomplete, with various body parts missing; for example, the headless horseman in *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), the reanimated severed hands that wander through *The Beast with Five Fingers* (1946) and *Dr Terror's House of Horrors* (1964), or the disembodied brains that feature in *Fiend Without a Face* (1958). Or they can be formless, such as the shapeless monsters in the 1958 and 1988 versions of *The Blob* and the 1982 version of *The Thing*.

A related way of thinking about the monster involves the concept of abjection. The theoretical inspiration here is provided by Julia Kristeva’s

*The Powers of Horror*, a book that, like Douglas' *Purity and Danger*, shows no interest at all in horror cinema but from which nevertheless horror critics have borrowed extensively. Kristeva identifies the abject as that which does not respect borders, positions, rules' and which 'disturbs identity, system, order' (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). Abjection is described as a process integral to the formation of the self, one that involves the exclusion of those elements that might threaten or undermine the individual's sense of him- or herself as a distinct entity. Hence various bodily fluids and substances passing from inside the body to outside become abject inasmuch as they breach the body's borders. Similarly, the sight of our own internal organs is abject because it reminds us of our connection with a biological world against which – according to Kristeva at least – our identities have been constructed. In this respect, the ultimate abjected object becomes the human corpse, an object from which identity itself has been expelled.

In abjection we have a concept that has the potential to help us understand the biological nature of many horror monsters, not only in the way in which they confound distinctions between human and animal but also in their association with gross biological processes. One thinks here of the organic sliminess of numerous monsters as well as the way in which monsters often make visible or foreground aspects of human biology in a manner that renders that biology disgusting. A good example is provided by David Cronenberg's 1986 version of *The Fly*, in which the mutating scientist develops a form of external digestion, i.e. he vomits digestive fluids on to his food before actually ingesting that food. Significantly, much of this biological horror relates specifically to female biology, with menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth all providing potent sources of horror and the monstrous. (See Creed, 1993 for a discussion of this.) This does not just apply to female monsters – with examples including the menstrual telekinetic female in *Carrie* (1976), the woman who reproduces parthenogenetically via an external womb in *The Brood* (1979), the alien mother in *Aliens* (1986) – but also has a broader purchase within horror, with the biological itself sometimes implicitly gendered as 'feminine' as opposed to the more 'masculine' virtues of rationality and self-control.

The sexual politics of horror cinema, and in particular the potentially gynophobic and misogynist elements that can be seen to run through many horror films, will be discussed later in this book. What is important to note here is that the abject does not simply designate that which is disgusting and which threatens identity. The abject also offers a source of fascination and desire, seductively drawing our attention to the limits of our selfhood even as we seek to distance ourselves from that experience. As Kristeva puts it, 'abjection itself is a composite of judgement and affect, of condemnation and yearning' (Kristeva, 1982, pp.9–10). Applying this to some of the horror films

mentioned above, one can argue that the bloody sights of the parthenogenetic Nola in *The Brood* and the menstrual Carrie are not simply disgusting – although they are certainly that in some respects – but also invite and play to the fascinated gaze of the spectator. (Whether or not this is implicitly a male spectator is another issue to which this book will return at a later stage.) Similarly, Douglas, in her book *Purity and Danger*, identifies transgressive crossings of categorical borders as moments not just of danger but also of potential empowerment (Douglas, 1984, pp.94–113).

Whether influenced by Douglas or Kristeva, this sense of the monster as an entity that breaches and potentially undermines a particular way of making sense of the world bestows upon the monster itself an ambiguous status. On the one hand, horror films can be seen to reaffirm social categories by driving out the ‘unnatural’ monster, but on the other hand the very existence of the monster reveals that these categories can be breached, that they – for all their apparent ‘naturalness’ – are fragile, contingent, vulnerable. In this respect, monsters not only represent threats to the social order but can also offer new possibilities within and transformations of that order.

Other critical approaches to the horror monster are less concerned with the nature of the monster itself and more interested in what the monster might represent. In other words, the question being addressed is not so much ‘What is a monster?’ as it is ‘What do monsters mean?’ Of particular importance in this respect are various psychoanalytical and socio-historical readings of horror that usually view the monster as either a symptom of or a metaphor for something bigger and more significant than the ostensible reality of the monster itself. The key difference between this way of thinking about the monster and the anthropology-based way outlined above is that here the monster’s true significance is hidden beneath the surface and requires analysis of some kind to bring that significance out into the open. By contrast, the monster’s categorical interstitiality or contradictoriness, or its abjected status, is usually on the surface, manifestly obvious for all to see.

The next chapter of this book will deal with the benefits and disadvantages of the psychoanalytical method as applied to an understanding of horror cinema. Suffice it here to note that psychoanalytical readings of horror tend to view the monster as an expression of fundamental psychological processes that underpin the films or the culture from which the monster emerges. For example, James Twitchell and Walter Evans both consider the horror monster as a figure that embodies in a coded manner fears and anxieties about adolescent sexuality. Twitchell argues that ‘modern horror myths prepare the teenager for the anxieties of reproduction’ while for Evans the power of monsters is related to ‘that dark fountainhead which psychically moves those masses in the American film and TV audiences who desperately struggle with the most universal, and in many ways the most horrible of personal trials: the

sexual traumas of adolescence' (Twitchell, 1985, p.7; Evans, 1984, p.54). The physical and psychological changes associated with adolescence – the sprouting of body hair, the rush of hormones, a lack of physical co-ordination, intense and confused sexual drives, etc. – are seen as the key to understanding the appeal of such horror monsters as the vampire (the trauma of sexuality), Frankenstein's monster and the werewolf (the trauma of lack of control over one's body), with the horror films themselves acting as a kind of juvenile therapy. The assumption here, of course, is that horror films are primarily for adolescents, not something that is always borne out by the evidence, although Walter Evans, as if in acknowledgement of this, suggests somewhat cryptically that 'Adolescents . . . may be of any age' (Evans, 1984, p.61).

By contrast, Robin Wood offers a more politicised engagement with the horror monster, one that seeks to combine psychoanalytical concepts with Marxist ideas about social oppression. For Wood, the monsters in horror are expressions of social and psychological repression (with the two inextricably linked) that can reveal truths about the political and social structures within which we all live (Wood, 1986). Others have seen the monster in terms of the representation of sexual difference, with the monster figured sometimes as a 'non-phallic' threat to male identity and power and sometimes as a 'phallic' threat to independent women (for example, Clover, 1992; Neale, 1980; Williams, 1984). Monsters can represent the id (i.e. the unconscious) or the superego (i.e. the conscience) and, where critics disagree over a particular monster's significance, they can sometimes be seen as representing both. (For example, see the contrasting discussions of Freddy Krueger, the monster from *The Nightmare on Elm Street* films, in Hutchings, 1996 and Rathgeb, 1991.)

As if this were not enough, horror monsters have also been interpreted as expressions of or as metaphors for socially specific fears and anxieties. From this perspective, monsters help audiences (and perhaps film-makers as well) to engage with and come to terms with those fears. For example, as already noted in the previous chapter, the 1930s Frankenstein monster, as well as various other monsters from that decade, might be viewed as articulating concerns about mass unemployment and an accompanying sense of powerlessness (O'Flinn, 1986). Similarly, horror monsters from the 1950s could be metaphors for the nuclear bomb or for some of the tensions associated with social change during that decade (or both), while 1980s and 1990s monsters might be metaphors for, among other things, AIDS. (On the 1950s see Biskind, 1983 and Jancovich, 1996; on the 1980s see Guerrero, 1990.) Interestingly, this 'monster as social metaphor' approach often assumes that audiences – and sometimes film-makers as well – are unaware, or at least not fully aware, of the true social significance of the horror monster. That is to say, the figure of the monster might help an audience to deal in imaginative terms with some troubling aspect of their social existence, but it does so in a manner

that is dependent upon no one, perhaps not even the film-makers, noticing what is actually going on. As with the psychoanalytical method, meaning here lurks beneath the surface, is figurative rather than literal, and requires some critical effort to get at it.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to fit these various approaches to the monster together into a cohesive whole. Adding to the complexity of the situation is the fact that it is not uncommon for critics to mix approaches, with socio-historical, psychoanalytical and anthropological terms intermingling with each other in discussions of particular monsters. For example, Barbara Creed's book *The Monstrous Feminine* deploys the concept of abjection in both a psychoanalytical and an anthropological manner, while Robin Wood's work on horror uses psychoanalytical concepts within a broadly socio-historical approach.

It is also clear that there is a tension in a lot of this work between providing an account of monstedom in general terms and trying to explain specific horror monsters. Does defining the monster simply involve the identification of a general function – the monster function – into which all horror monsters can be inserted? Perhaps so, but only to a limited extent. As noted above, monsters are threatening and generally they will chase and kill, or attempt to kill, their victims, and this will be so whether it is Frankenstein's monster, the werewolf, the vampire, the serial killer, Pinhead in the *Hellraiser* films, Candyman, Hannibal Lecter, the demon in *Jeepers Creepers* (2001), and so on *ad infinitum*. Similarly, one can usually identify the way in which monsters breach categories or (although this is a more contentious point) enact psychoanalytical scenarios. However, this consistency in monster function can arguably only be achieved through reducing monsters to the most basic level of their existence. Some accounts of horror make a point of doing this in their attempts to discover structures and concepts that underpin all horror films. As should be clear from the previous chapter, this book is concerned instead as much with the differences between horror films and horror monsters as with what they might all have in common. It is clear that horror monsters from the 1930s are very different in important respects from contemporary horror monsters. Moreover, at any given point in the history of horror, there will be significant differences between monsters, with these differences deriving from the various contexts (authorial, industrial, national, etc.) within which the monsters in question are being deployed. Any approach to monstedom that seeks to marginalise or efface these differences in the interests of producing a neat cohesive model of the monster's meaning can lead us therefore to an overly simplistic view of the horror genre in general. Horror's gallery of monsters comprises a richly varied if somewhat motley crew. While there might well be some shared familial resemblances, each monster has its own distinct identity and history, and in order fully to

understand horror monsterdom in general, one needs to come to terms with particular monsters. To demonstrate this, we can now turn to two horror monsters, the first a true horror star, Count Dracula, the second a more recent arrival, the serial killer.

### PRINCE OF DARKNESS

'You think I don't watch your movies? You always come back,' Buffy Summers informs Dracula as she stakes him for a second and final time in the opening episode of Season Five of the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Buffy is right, of course, for the history of Dracula in popular culture is a history of his constant regeneration, as the Count keeps appearing at different times, in different places and in different forms, from his introduction in Bram Stoker's 1897 novel up until the present day. Not only does he feature in stage, film and television adaptations of the novel; he also exists as an independent, free-floating character who stars or guests in narratives that have little or nothing to do with Stoker's novel.

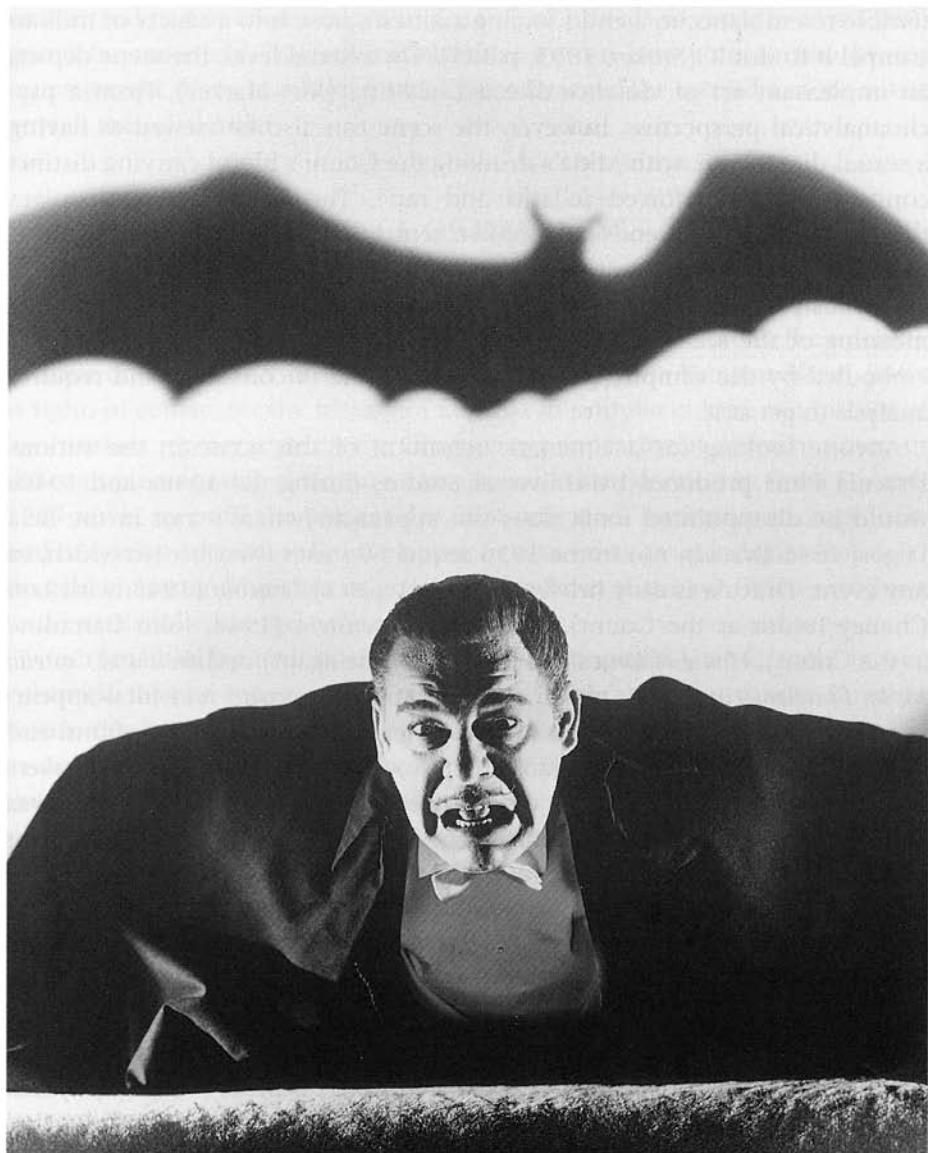
One possible explanation for the ceaseless popularity of Dracula in our culture is that he represents a fundamental truth about humanity. In other words, our fascination with the figure of the vampire is bound up with a need to explore some essential feature of our own nature. Critics, and especially those with psychoanalytical leanings, have wasted no time in identifying the appeal of Dracula as being in this respect primarily a sexual one. The encounter with the vampire, it seems, is erotic, with the penetrative biting and the sucking of blood it involves part of a transgressive non-genital sexual exchange between vampire and victim. Through this encounter – if one believes the critics, that is – all sorts of sexual anxieties (to do with infantile complexes, relation with parent figures, etc.) are articulated in such a way that, according to one critic, the Dracula narrative 'turns out to be a quite blatant demonstration of the Oedipus complex... a kind of incestuous, necrophilous, oral-anal-sadistic all-in-wrestling match' (Richardson, 1991, pp.418–19).

Whether or not one accepts this as an explanation of Dracula's meaning so far as any particular telling of the Dracula story is concerned, problems arise when these ideas are applied to the whole range of representations of Dracula, not just those in cinema but also those in culture generally. Take, for example, a scene that is crucial to many psychoanalytical readings of the novel, the scene where Dracula forces Mina to drink blood from a cut on his chest. 'With his left hand he [Dracula] held both Mrs Harker's hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom.... The attitude of the two had a

terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten's nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink' (Stoker, 1993, p.363). On a literal level, the scene depicts an unpleasant act of violence directed at Mina (Mrs Harker). From a psychoanalytical perspective, however, the scene can also be viewed as having a sexual dimension, with Mina's drinking the Count's blood carrying distinct connotations of enforced fellatio and rape. The latter reading involves thinking about the scene in figurative terms and suggesting that its 'true' meaning was probably not consciously put there by the author nor was it consciously available to the novel's original readership. In other words, the meaning of the scene, which crystallises the perverse, non-genital sexuality embodied by the vampire, is locked away in the unconscious and requires analysis to get at it.

Anyone looking for a cinematic rendition of this scene in the various *Dracula* films produced by Universal Studios during the 1930s and 1940s would be disappointed for it does not appear anywhere – not in the Bela Lugosi 1931 *Dracula*, nor in the 1936 sequel *Dracula's Daughter* (in which, in any event, Dracula is only briefly glimpsed), *Son of Dracula* (1943, with Lon Chaney Junior as the Count), *House of Frankenstein* (1944, John Carradine as the Count), *House of Dracula* (1945, Carradine again) or *Abbott and Costello Meets Frankenstein* (1948, which featured Lugosi's second and final appearance as Dracula). In fact, there is no on-screen biting in any of these films, and at no point does Dracula sport fangs. This does not mean that the film-makers were not aware of the vampire's erotic appeal. After all, the 1931 *Dracula* was released on Valentine's Day under the slogan 'The story of the strangest passion the world has ever known'. But this eroticism is, for reasons of censorship if nothing else, more low-key than in the novel, ethereal rather than physical, with much more being made by the film-makers of Dracula's mesmeric dominance of women than his sexual seduction of them.

By the time the British company Hammer released its first version of *Dracula* in 1958 (with Christopher Lee in the title role), censorship had relaxed somewhat, and Hammer was able to offer a more robustly physical and sexual rendition of the vampire's story, with various buxom, negligee-clad women succumbing to the Count's seductive power in full view of the camera. Despite this new openness, however, there was still no sign of a scene in which Mina drinks Dracula's blood. In fact, one would have to wait until 1965, and Hammer's *Dracula – Prince of Darkness*, for horror cinema's first very tentative attempt at such a scene. Here Dracula confronts his intended female victim, bares his chest and cuts himself so that the blood flows – and that is as far as he gets for he is almost immediately interrupted by the arrival of the forces of good. For its later *Dracula* films, Hammer would often return to Stoker's novel for ideas – for example, versions of Renfield, a character absent from the 1958 *Dracula*, show up in both *Dracula – Prince of Darkness*



Another Dracula: Lon Chaney Junior in a publicity still for *Son of Dracula* (1943). Courtesy of Universal Studios Licensing LLLP.

(where he is called Ludwig) and *Scars of Dracula* (1970), and the scene in the novel where Dracula scales a wall in lizard-like fashion finally appears in *Scars of Dracula*. The scene in *Dracula – Prince of Darkness* in which the Count cuts open his chest should be seen in this light, although its severe truncation renders it a decidedly enigmatic moment, one which members of the audience unfamiliar with Stoker's novel must have found baffling. Why did

Hammer not allow the scene to progress further? Perhaps because it was just too perverse for the rather strait-laced Hammer film-makers who, for all the iconoclasm of their work, tended to adhere to a fairly conventional moral outlook. (Of course, one should also consider why Hammer bothered to include a version of the scene that was stripped down to the point of incomprehensibility. Answering this would probably involve thinking about the speed with which Hammer was churning out horror films throughout the first half of the 1960s, a speed which meant that sometimes elements were included in films without being thought through or fully integrated into the overall narrative.)

Finally, in the 1979 version of *Dracula* (in which Frank Langella plays the Count), a woman gets to drink Dracula's blood. However, the tone of the scene is quite different from Stoker's version. Stoker stresses both the violence involved in Dracula's encounter with Mina and her subsequent traumatisation. The 1979 film presents the scene in a much more ambiguous way. Although it begins with Dracula announcing that he will be master of this woman (here, in a film which switches round virtually all of Stoker's characters' names, renamed Lucy Seward), the scene that follows is presented as a love scene, and the drinking of blood a consensual act involving no physical violence from Dracula. Throughout the film Lucy has proved far more assertive than previous Dracula heroines, and it is never clear to what extent she is coerced into a relationship with the Count and to what extent she wills it herself. The film concludes with her apparently still on Dracula's side, smiling enigmatically as a shape that might or might not be the Count flies off into the distance. The assertiveness of the heroine is taken yet further in Francis Coppola's film *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) when Dracula (played by Gary Oldman), having opened up a wound on his chest, decides that it would be for the best if Mina did not drink of him. Mina has other ideas, however, pushes him back on the bed and starts sucking away. (By the time we get to Buffy's encounter with Dracula in 2000, matters are even more forthright. After drinking the vampire's blood – decorously from his arm rather than from his chest – Buffy proceeds to beat up Dracula and then stakes him.)

We seem to have travelled some distance from the violated heroine presented by Bram Stoker in 1897 to the altogether more proactive Mina presented in Coppola's film, with this journey involving multiple re-imaginings of Dracula as he and associated characters are constantly modified to make them relevant and engaging for successive audiences. Arguably it is here, in the creative work of regeneration, that one finds a key to understanding Dracula's cultural significance. It should be clear that Dracula is in no way a fixed, stable figure but exists perpetually in a state of flux, with this having implications for the way in which he is viewed and interpreted by film-makers, audiences and critics. Instead of seeing the Count as an entity

emerging spontaneously from some inner recess of our collective psyche (as some psychoanalytical accounts would have it), it is perhaps more apt to think of him as a focus for cultural and economic activity as film-makers periodically seek to resurrect the vampire in a form that will be both interesting and profitable. This does not mean that psychoanalytical approaches cannot illuminate the Count's significance at any point in the creative development of that figure, but it does suggest that any interpretation of Dracula that views him independently of the history of his various manifestations in culture (with these involving appearances not just in cinema but on the stage, in literature and on television as well) fails to engage with the creative energies that have helped keep Dracula alive over the decades.

A survey of the various Draculas shows certain trends and tendencies emerging over time. For one thing, as should be apparent from the discussion above of the scene where Mina drinks Dracula's blood, the female non-vampire characters in Dracula films become increasingly powerful and independently minded. In Stoker's novel, they are essentially helpless creatures requiring the protection of men, and their passivity continues unabated – through all the Universal and Hammer Dracula films – until the 1970s. As already noted, the female lead in the 1979 *Dracula* is different, more assertive and, so far as one can make out, not particularly wanting to be rescued from Dracula. To a certain extent, her appearance can be seen as reflecting changing social mores in the 1970s, and especially the inroads made by feminism during this period into traditional patriarchal assumptions about what women were and how they should behave. It is significant in this respect that strong, assertive female characters begin to show up elsewhere in the horror genre in the late 1970s, notably in slasher films such as *Halloween* (1978) and *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* (1980) and the various sequels and 'rip-offs' that followed. It quickly became a convention of this type of film that the monster would be defeated not by a male hero, as would have been the case in earlier types of horror, but instead by a teenage female, dubbed 'the final girl' by Carol Clover (Clover, 1992). Whether this final girl can be seen as a positive, progressive representation of women is another matter, however. Certainly the slasher films were heavily criticised, by feminists and others, in the late 1970s and early 1980s for what was perceived as their misogynist terrorisation of women. More recently, Carol Clover has argued that these films are more complex and ambiguous than previously supposed, although she too holds back from seeing the slasher as 'progressive' in any straightforward way. (The slasher film will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.)

Comparable ambiguities are apparent in the treatment of Lucy in the 1979 *Dracula*. On the one hand, her intelligence and assertiveness are presented as attractive features, and in this she can be seen potentially as a positive representation of the female. But on the other hand, the film is very much

concerned to 'contain' Lucy via a romantic liaison with a male, and in the world the film conjures up of inadequate males – this is the Dracula film where, uniquely, Dracula stakes a doddering Van Helsing – the only male up to the task appears to be Count Dracula himself. As noted above, this contradiction – between seeing Lucy as an independent character and presenting her as an object to be fought over by men – remains unresolved at the film's enigmatic conclusion.

The 1979 *Dracula* also offers a further development of something already apparent in earlier versions of Dracula, namely the transformation of the Count himself into a romantic figure. It is hard to think of Stoker's Dracula in this way. While occasionally urbane, he is never described as physically attractive; on the contrary, he is, more often than not, utterly repulsive. This sense of the vampire is carried over into the first major cinematic adaptation of the novel, F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), in which the actor Max Schreck provided a memorably animalistic version of the Count. However, the casting of Bela Lugosi in the 1931 *Dracula* (he had also played the part on Broadway) marked a first step in the cinematic domestication of the Count, transforming him from the wild thing envisaged by Stoker into something more dapper and civilised. Not especially handsome by contemporary standards, Lugosi nevertheless received considerable fan mail from a female audience. Later Draculas – notably those played by Christopher Lee, Frank Langella and Gerard Butler in *Dracula 2000* (2000) – would similarly benefit from matinée-idol good looks and, in comparison with Stoker's Dracula, would exhibit a youthfulness and vitality often lacking in the male characters surrounding them. Dracula films also increasingly present the vampire as a mournful, lonely figure seeking out the one woman who will make his life meaningful, with this reaching its culmination in Coppola's *Dracula* and *Dracula 2000*. Associated with this is a tendency to view Dracula in more sympathetic terms as a rebel or outsider whose defiance of social authority has potentially a noble dimension – implicitly in the 1979 *Dracula*, explicitly in the 1992 version. (It is interesting in this respect that in recent years the vampire has been presented – in the novels of Anne Rice, in the television series *Angel* – as a hero whose sensitivity marks him as superior to run-of-the-mill humans. It seems that the transformation of the vampire from villain to something altogether more positive is now complete.)

Stoker's original 1897 novel can be seen as a kind of invasion narrative in which the vampire, a mysterious figure from the East, threatens to invade both British society – via the proliferating infectiousness of vampirism – and the British body, with this clearly answering to various social anxieties in Britain in the late-Victorian period. In contrast, cinema has never shown much interest in the idea of invasion but instead has presented the story of Dracula as a perverse romantic one. One possible reason for this shift of emphasis is

that it focuses the narrative and makes it more linear and manageable for film-makers, as opposed to the sprawling and disjointed narrative structure provided by Stoker. In addition, anxieties about alien incursions from the East would not have especially concerned American and British audiences and film-makers from the 1930s onwards, when Dracula was making his mark in cinema, whereas the idea of Dracula as 'the terrifying lover who died yet lived' (to borrow a phrase from the poster for the 1958 *Dracula* produced by Hammer) seems to lend itself much better to development as a story concept.

The persistence of Dracula over decades also means that representations of this figure, especially the post-Lugosi ones, are produced in the full knowledge of, and often as a response to, what has gone before. This particularly relates to what might be termed the 'I am Dracula' moment, the moment where each film has to introduce its own version of the vampire. For instance, the introduction of the Count in Hammer's 1958 film mimics Bela Lugosi's famous appearance on the castle staircase in the 1931 film (a scene which many remember as Dracula's first appearance, although by then he has in fact already appeared twice in the film). Again Dracula stands at the top of a staircase and proceeds down it towards his English visitor, not Renfield, as in the 1931 version, but instead, as in the novel, Jonathan Harker. (Although Terence Fisher, the director of the Hammer *Dracula*, claimed in interviews not to have seen the Lugosi film, elsewhere, in other interviews, he displayed a knowledge of the staircase scene. The 1931 Lugosi *Dracula* was still being shown in British cinemas in the mid-1950s and was also beginning to show up on American television, so it is possible that the audience for the Hammer *Dracula* would have also been able to make a comparison between the Universal and the Hammer versions.) The parallels between the two scenes serve mainly to underline their differences from each other. While the Lugosi version presents us with a large, gloomy set through which a squat, thickly-accented vampire moves slowly and ponderously, Hammer gives us a smaller, cosier castle, with Dracula himself moving with speed and grace and speaking with an impeccable English accent. The fact that the Hammer version was in lurid Eastmancolor rather than black-and-white also served to distinguish it from its predecessor and was a selling point on the poster for the Hammer film. It is clear that at least part of the effect of Hammer's sequence depends on its both invoking the Lugosi version and at the same time differentiating itself from that version. Later Dracula films too, including Hammer's own sequels to the 1958 *Dracula*, would also constantly be looking backwards, referring to and borrowing from earlier Dracula films if only to show how different, special and up-to-date the latest version actually was (with Coppola's 1992 film especially assiduous in this respect).

The self-consciousness this involves is apparent in other areas as well. The 1931 film gives considerable time and space to the need to convince those of

its characters who do not believe in vampires that such things actually exist. Later *Dracula* films are much less patient with such people. Jonathan Harker in the 1958 Hammer *Dracula*, for example, is not the unsuspecting innocent found in Stoker's novel but instead a vampire hunter who already knows all about the undead. Given the persistent popularity of Dracula in our culture, the question addressed by each film gradually becomes not so much 'Why should sane, rational people believe in vampires?' as 'How is it possible for anyone not to have heard of Dracula?' By the time we get to *Dracula 2000* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the air is thick with awkward jokes about and references to Dracula as a popular fictional character.

This short overview of patterns and tendencies in the development of Dracula has, of course, only scratched the surface. There is more to the Universal Dracula than Lugosi, for instance, with both Lon Chaney Junior and John Carradine providing interesting variations on the Count. And what about the comedy Draculas played by George Hamilton in *Love at First Bite* (1979) and Leslie Nielsen in *Dracula – Dead and Loving It* (1995)? Or the European Draculas, not just Max Schreck in *Nosferatu* but also Klaus Kinski in *Nosferatu the Vampire* (1979), Christopher Lee in the Spanish *El Conde Dracula* (1970) and Udo Kier in *Blood for Dracula* (1973). There are also some notable television Draculas: in America John Carradine in 1956 and Jack Palance in 1973, in Britain Denholm Elliot in 1969 and Louis Jourdan in 1977.

The more one considers the commercial reality of Dracula, the harder it becomes to find any single interpretation that can bind together all versions of the Count into a cohesive whole. His appearance changes over time, moving from the dapper vampire offered by Lugosi and Lee to the more Bohemian, long-haired look preferred by Gary Oldman and Gerard Butler. His relationship with the characters who surround him also shifts from one film to the next. The fact of his foreignness, something vital to the novel, is played up in some films (the 1922 *Nosferatu*, the Lugosi version) and played down in others (the 1958 and 1979 versions, for example). Even those elements that might be seen to define Dracula in a very fundamental way – the sexual dimension of vampirism, Dracula as a figure transgressively crossing the barrier between life and death – turn out to be not in themselves meaningful but rather are only made meaningful by film-makers who inflect and revise them for their own purposes.

Of course, this begs the question of why it is that Dracula has been so successful and has such a sustained presence in horror in comparison with some other horror monsters. Compare Dracula in this respect with the mummy, a monster that has been around in horror cinema for decades but which has generated neither the number nor the range of interpretations associated with Dracula, largely, it could be argued, because of the limitations inherent in the concept of the mummy itself. Notwithstanding the

inventiveness of film-makers such as Karl Freund (director of *The Mummy* in 1932) or Seth Holt (director of *Blood from the Mummy's Tomb* in 1971, an adaptation of Bram Stoker's novel *Jewel of the Seven Stars* (1903)) and the reworking of the mummy in recent action adventures *The Mummy* (1999) and *The Mummy Returns* (2001), the history of mummy films in general suggests that there is only so much you can do with a cloth-wrapped ancient Egyptian. By contrast, the Dracula narrative as initially envisaged by Bram Stoker in 1897 offered a greater potential for meaningful development, with its heady mix of passion, death, aristocracy and the supernatural. Importantly, however, Dracula has only become an important, long-lived cultural icon because of the subsequent elaborations of his identity, many of them bold and imaginative, produced by film-makers, writers and artists. In other words, Dracula has remained alive because cinema, and to a lesser extent other media, has kept him moving, changing, transforming. And, if Buffy the vampire slayer is right, there is more still to come, for if the history of horror tells us anything, it is that Dracula always comes back.

### KILLING MACHINES

While Dracula is a venerable horror monster that is long established in the genre, the serial killer represents a more recent development in the world of monsterdom. It could be argued that, unlike Dracula, the serial killer is not a proper horror monster at all. For one thing, unlike all major preceding horror monsters the serial killer exists in real life as well as in fiction. In his book *The Philosophy of Horror*, Noel Carroll defines horror monsters as 'any being not now believed to exist according to reigning scientific notions' (Carroll, 1990, p.35). Such a definition clearly applies to vampires, werewolves and ghosts, and, if stretched a little, it can also apply to pseudo-scientific entities such as Frankenstein's monster which, in the 1930s versions at least, tended to be the product of a fictional science that existed at some distance from real science (although Hammer's 1960s Frankenstein films, made in an era of significant surgical-medical advances, would close that distance somewhat). But such a definition would seem to exclude serial killers from horror monsterdom for while most of us do not believe that vampires or werewolves actually exist, it is hard for anyone to deny the existence of real-life serial killers.

However, Carroll does qualify his definition by pointing out that while some monsters might exist in reality, 'their presentation in the fictions they inhabit turn them effectively into fantastical beings' (Carroll, 1990, p.37). Carroll illustrates this point by reference to *Jaws* (1975), a film in which the shark behaves in a manner hitherto unknown in the history of sharks,

demonstrating superior intelligence and a preternatural ability to survive attempts to kill it. Similarly, the serial killer in film fictions can be seen as quite different from real-life serial killers. So far as can be made out, the reality of serial killers is a sad, dreary one, with the killers themselves pathetic, dysfunctional and rather tedious individuals who murder in a desperate attempt to install significance in their empty, meaningless lives. By contrast, serial killers in films are considerably more exciting. Sometimes they are powerful and virtually indestructible (in this respect, not unlike the shark in *Jaws*, a monster which has some affinities with the serial killer). On other occasions, they can be charming, articulate, cultured and altogether more intelligent and sophisticated than the people trying to catch them. Serial killer Hannibal Lecter, to date 'star' of four films, is undoubtedly the epitome of the latter type. Joan Smith has noted of him that 'a real serial killer once observed that Hannibal Lecter . . . was entirely unconvincing: anyone as charismatic as Lecter, he pointed out, would not need to commit murder' (*The Guardian* G2, January 8, 2002, p.12).

As is the case with Dracula, the concept of the serial killer, in both fact and fiction, has its own distinct history. The term itself was not coined until the mid-1970s but since then has often been used retrospectively to describe crimes from earlier periods, most notably the Jack the Ripper killings that took place in London in 1888. (As social historian Judith Walkowitz has noted, the Ripper killings offered a curious mixture of fact and fiction, with much of the 'Jack the Ripper' phenomenon, including the name itself, an invention of the media: Walkowitz, 1992.) The concept of the serial killer does not really gain much purchase in cinema until *Manhunter* (1986), *Henry – Portrait of a Serial Killer* (1986) and *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), although thereafter it rapidly becomes a widely used term. Again, however, the term has been used retrospectively to refer to cinematic representations of killers that were not labelled as 'serial killers' at the time of their production.

Of particular significance in this respect are four films directed by Alfred Hitchcock: *The Lodger* (1926), which draws some of its inspiration from the Ripper killings, *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), in which the murderer of a series of women returns to his small-town home, the classic horror-thriller *Psycho* (1960) and *Frenzy* (1972), in which an obsessive repeat-murderer stalks through Covent Garden. Of these, it is *Psycho* that sets one influential pattern for representing the serial killer, namely the serial killer as psychological case study. Here the obsessive actions of the killer – in this case Norman Bates (although this also applies to a certain extent to Uncle Charles, the killer in *Shadow of a Doubt*) – are seen to derive from some trauma in the killer's past and/or from some underlying mental condition. For Norman Bates, the trauma relates to his murder of his mother and her lover, and his subsequent killings emanate from his attempts to deny that his mother is dead.

Robert Bloch, who wrote the novel upon which the film of *Psycho* was based, took as his inspiration the real-life serial killer Ed Gein, a mother-fixated recluse who not only killed people but also dug up corpses from the local cemetery and took to wearing human skin. Other films about Gein, notably *Deranged* (1974) and *Ed Gein* (2000), have followed the 'case-study' approach in their exploration of the killer's bizarre relationship with his mother as the source of his aberrant behaviour. (Ed Gein was also one of the sources for *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* in 1974 and *The Silence of the Lambs*. After Jack the Ripper, he has the somewhat dubious distinction of being the serial killer who has most influenced the development of horror cinema.) Similarly, the murderous behaviour of the Tooth Fairy, the serial killer in *Manhunter* and in *Red Dragon* (2002, an adaptation of the same novel that had inspired *Manhunter*) and of Buffalo Bill in *The Silence of the Lambs*, is shown as having a basis in the warped psychologies of the killers, psychologies that need to be understood in order that the killers can be caught. Hence the importance in both films of the profiler, the person who can see into the mind of this particular type of monster.

A contrasting use of the serial killer can be found in a 1964 Italian film *Sei donne per l'assassino* (literally 'Six Bodies for the Killer', although the English release title was *Blood and Black Lace*), a *giallo* directed by Italian horror maestro Mario Bava. In this, a masked, black-gloved figure stalks female models working for a fashion house and murders them in a variety of extremely violent ways, including strangulation, stabbing, burning, suffocation and drowning, with the film itself sparing no details of these killings. At the end of the film, it is revealed – in a plot twist that anticipates the *Scream* films – that there are two killers using the mask disguise, one male and one female, with the male motivated by greed and the woman by her love for the man and her need to protect herself from blackmail. Here the serial killers are not presented as 'ill' but instead just as criminals. More importantly, the film's emphasis is not so much on either the identity or the motivation of its killers, both of which are revealed in a very desultory way, as it is on showing these killers as killing machines, as faceless, impersonal, emotionless murderers who efficiently despatch a series of female victims and show none of the mental trauma displayed by, say, Norman Bates in *Psycho*. As has been noted by critics, in both approving and disapproving terms, the killings themselves are presented as aesthetically pleasing spectacles, featuring inventive uses of colour, light, camera movement and editing, with the killer acting as the masterful organising agent behind the spectacle.

Connections can be drawn between a *giallo* like *Sei donne per l'assassino* and the American slasher film of the late 1970s and early 1980s. As with the *giallo*, in the slasher the monsters tend to be presented as killing machines rather than as psychological case studies as they kill off a series of teenage victims

with mechanical efficiency. While *giallo* and slasher alike offer explanations for their killers' behaviour, these are sketchy at best and rarely involve a sustained exploration of the killer's psychology. In the slashers, for example, the killer is often motivated by a desire for revenge for some unpleasant act directed against it or against a loved one in the past – note in this respect *Terror Train* (1980), *Prom Night* (1980) and *The Burning* (1980) as well as more recent films such as *Cherry Falls* (2000) and *Valentine* (2001). Of course, there are also differences between the *giallo* and the slasher. The killers in *Sei donne per l'assassino* are mature and sophisticated individuals, and their choice of disguise, weapons and scenarios of death reflects a sense of style. By contrast, the slasher-killer is usually presented as immature and with his violence often betraying an inarticulate child-like rage. But in all these films – *giallo* and slasher alike – the serial killer tends to be masked and/or constantly lurking in darkness, not there as a psychologically individuated character but rather as a principle of threat and violence.

Hannibal Lecter – in *Manhunter*, *The Silence of the Lambs*, *Hannibal* (2001) and *Red Dragon* – can be seen to combine some of the elements associated with different types of serial killer. He displays the sophistication and culture of the *giallo* killers and, especially in *Hannibal*, is very much the stylish serial killer about town. However, while he is not masked (other than when he briefly dons human skin and a restraining mask in *The Silence of the Lambs*) and has a compelling, charismatic personality, he is never offered up for the psychological case-study approach. (The novel *Hannibal* does tentatively explore his psychology, but these elements are not present in Ridley Scott's adaptation of the novel.) In this, he is presented as a different type of serial killer from the Tooth Fairy in *Manhunter* and (especially) *Red Dragon* and Buffalo Bill in *The Silence of the Lambs*, for while both of these 'lesser' serial killers are ultimately knowable in psychological terms, Lecter himself remains supremely enigmatic.

But there is more to Lecter than this. The combination he offers of charm and brutality is reminiscent of that displayed by classic villains in Gothic literature – with examples including Montoni in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Count Fosco in Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1860) and Silas in J. Sheridan LeFanu's *Uncle Silas* (1864) (Hutchings, 1996). His intellect links him with other criminal masterminds, from Dr Mabuse, the criminal mastermind who featured in several Fritz Lang films, to any number of megalomaniac villains in James Bond films (all of whom in any event can be seen as lineal descendants of the original Gothic villains). He is also the latest in a long line of mad psychiatrists that stretches back to the 1930s. A composite monster, then, Lecter represents a curious mixture of the old and the new, and it is arguably this quality, which facilitates a constant shifting back and forth between different persona (psychiatrist, raconteur, cannibal,

etc.) that renders him both so fascinating and so appalling. (John Doe in *Seven* and Daryll Lee Cullum in *Copycat* are close relatives of Lecter in this respect, similarly enigmatic and masterful although lacking Lecter's chilling charm.)

Critics and theorists have offered a variety of explanations for the popularity of the fictional serial killer. One response, which is especially associated with the slasher film, is to see this fascination with the killer as an expression of misogyny, a misogyny that is apparent in the killers, in the films and in the broader culture that supports the films (for example, Clover, 1992; Williams, 1984). Another is to view the serial killer, not just the fictional ones but the real ones as well, as a product of and response to a society that is becoming increasingly depersonalised and fragmented (Jancovich, 1992, pp.104-9). The effectiveness of such interpretations is to a large extent determined by the specificity of their definitions of the serial killer itself, for, as we have seen, there are distinctive types of serial killer existing in culture, with different aesthetic and narrative strategies associated with each, and arguably different meanings as well. As is the case with Dracula, the more general the interpretation, the more likely it is to miss important differences between fictional (and real) manifestations of the serial killer.

Of course, this does not mean that general issues regarding the cultural significance of the serial killer are unworthy of attention. Something clearly needs to be said about the fact that most serial killers – not just in fiction but in reality as well (although what the relationship is between fiction and fact so far as serial killers are concerned is not always clear) – are male. This in itself does not automatically support any charge of misogyny; not all films about serial killers feature women as their main victims, although many do. But it can be connected with the fact that the majority of horror monsters are also male. Why should this be? Such is the variety of horror monstedom, there is probably no single answer to this question. However, constantly posing the question in different contexts and in relation to different groups of films can help to illuminate the complex sexual politics of the horror genre.

Another general issue, which has already been raised in the previous chapter, relates to whether the serial killer actually belongs to the horror genre. Some would consider many of the films cited above as thrillers rather than as horror films. One possible response here is to identify Gothic or horror-specific elements within a range of serial killer films in order to justify their inclusion within the horror genre. Such elements might include a reliance on notions of repression, especially so far as the relation between past and present is concerned, or the sheer amount of violence and gore on offer in many serial killer films. It is also possible to view the serial killer, for all his realist credentials, as an impure or interstitial creature, as someone who breaches social categories of meaning in a manner akin to that of Dracula and

other 'classic' monsters. Noel Carroll's suggestion that Norman Bates in *Psycho* can be seen as blurring distinctions between living and dead and between male and female can be applied to other serial killers as well, for this is an area of horror cinema rich in images of not only deathly pale-faced murderers but also ambiguously gendered ones (Carroll, 1990, p.39; for a discussion of gender ambiguities in the American slasher film, see Clover, 1992). In addition to this, the serial killer can be taken as an important vehicle for a fairly broad change occurring in horror from the 1960s onwards, one that involved an increasing stress in the genre on contemporary settings and psychopathological dramas. As noted in the previous chapter, this change does not happen uniformly across the different horror-producing countries, and the serial killer takes different forms at different times in, say, Italy, America and Britain, but it does seem that this particular monster, while not restricted just to horror, does occupy an important place in the historical development of the horror film.

Seen in this way, the many faces of the serial killer direct us to some questions – about the gender politics of horror, about the way that the horror film changes over time – that can perhaps more profitably be explored through analysis of particular serial killers in the contexts within which they were produced by film-makers and received by audiences. Stressing the relative modernity of the serial killer should not obscure one further general point, however, which is that most horror monsters are in a sense serial killers. They kill a series of victims within particular narratives, and the more successful of them continue killing from one film to the next. Dracula and Frankenstein's monster, the werewolf, and the Moon Killer from *Doctor X* (1932) are all serial killers. So are Freddy Krueger from the *Nightmare on Elm Street* films, Candyman and Jason from the *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* films. From this perspective, serial killing becomes a basic function of all monsters, another way of thinking about the threat they pose.

So, for example, when in *Halloween* the serial killer Michael Myers survives being stabbed in the neck, in the eye and in the chest and, shortly thereafter, being shot six times at point blank range and falling out of an upstairs bedroom window, something very fundamental is being said not just about this particular serial killer but also about monsterdom in general, and that is that monsters, and not just Dracula, always come back. But as a brief survey of representations of Dracula and the serial killer demonstrates, they do not always come back the same. They change, they mutate, they transform in their ongoing attempts to surprise and confound us. Because of this, critical accounts both of monsterdom in general and specific monsters are constantly struggling to keep up with the inventiveness that forever pushes onwards the horror genre and its monsters. After all, what single 'explanation' of vampirism could possibly encompass not just all versions of Dracula but also

the poetic subtleties of Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1932), Harry Kumel's *Le Rouge aux lèvres* (1971) or Guillermo del Toro's *Cronos* (1993) as well as, say, the martial-arts vampirism of *Blade* (1998)? Similarly, what theorisation of the serial killer could encompass all the variations played by cinema, and culture in general, on that monster, with faceless and impersonal killers intermingling with killers possessing distinctive personalities as well as more local variants such as the one noted by Steven Schneider: 'the creative merging of realistic serial killers with demonic, otherworldly forces, in films such as *Exorcist III* (1990), *The Frighteners* (1996), and *Fallen* (1998)' (Schneider, 2000a, p.176)?

While horror offers a world of monsters, each horror monster within that world has its own specific place and its own time. It might be a Transylvanian castle in the nineteenth century. It might be a cabin in the woods in contemporary America. Or a motel. Or a cellar. Or a sewer. Or even a spaceship at some point in the future. And each monster has its own distinct characteristics and moves through the history of horror in its own particular way. Although it might seem strange to invoke a need for sensitivity in the context of a discussion of monsters, it is clear that any attempt to explore monsterdom does need to be sensitive to all these specificities, to all the little peculiarities and differences that make each monster the distinctive thing that it is. Only in this way can we come to understand the world of monsters in general.