

I

Pale Shadows

Narrative Hierarchies in the Historiography of 1940s Horror

MARK JANCOVICH

As Rick Worland points out, "Standard historical accounts of the horror film consider the 1940s a dismal decade for the genre. Apart from the stylish films produced by Val Lewton at RKO from 1942 until 1946, films not so highly regarded in their day despite their current stature, forties horror cinema is commonly remembered for tired sequels to respected originals ... numbing poverty row quickies ... or mocking genre send ups." Indeed, for this reason, the 1940s is still a crucially under-researched period within the genre (the other being the 1960s), in which not only has the period as a whole been misunderstood but also the different horror traditions within it.

One of the problems is the way in which the period's identity continues to be defined in relation to the 1930s, which operates as a canonized period in the history of the genre in relation to which the 1940s is simply defined as a reflection or shadowy double, something which has no life of its own but is only ever subordinate, dependent and inferior. As will become clear, most histories present the horror films of the 1940s as a mere continuation of the models from the 1930s, although most accounts also acknowledge that it was actually a quite different cycle. While the cycle that began with *Dracula* in 1931 came to an end in 1936, the cycle of the forties started after the 1938 release of a double bill featuring the 1931 versions of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, the successes of which demonstrated the presence of a market for horror in the period. As a result, caught between presenting the 1940s as both a continuation of the 1930s and a new cycle of film production, critics have

been unable to identify the actual character of the period and, as will be demonstrated, have claimed that the films of the 1940s were simply imitations of the 1930s models *and* that they represented a corruption of those models: they resurrected their form but not their spirit!

The following chapter will therefore examine the critical histories of the period (both academic and non-academic) and the ways in which they construct the period in terms of imitation and corruption. It is important to note, following Barbara Klinger and others, that even academic criticism must be seen as a form of social discourse that is implicated within processes of reception along with marketing, reviewing, distribution and exhibition.² For example, as Peter Hurchings argues, the "negative perception of sequel-heavy 1940s Universal horror is often intertwined with a prejudice against the sequel itself as a particular cinematic format, with the sequelization process seeming to mark the moment where innovation ends and exploitation begins."³ However, accounts of the 1940s also raise another issue, given the negative evaluation of imitation and repetition; there is a very real issue about the value of generic filmmaking itself, given that the generic element of genre filmmaking inevitably concerns the relation between films rather than that which distinguishes them from one another. The condemnation of the 1940s therefore reveals a position on genre in which identity is valued over conformity. In other words, it tends to value exceptional cases that mark themselves off as innovations or breaks, rather than those cases that are representative of more general patterns. Furthermore, not only is this position taken for granted as an incontestable value, but it also presents very real problems for our understanding of genre history. If that history is told through a concentration on, and analysis of, the exceptional case, the more common trends and patterns are either ignored or simply guessed at: they are not the object of analysis itself and hence the critic has no basis for establishing their character. Moreover, not only are there very real problems with the gendered nature of the privileging of identity over conformity,⁴ but one can also dispute the viability of an opposition between distinction and identity, on the one hand, and imitation and repetition, on the other. All texts are intertextual utterances that ventriloquize other texts, but all texts also involve a process of negotiation in which these other texts are processed. Even the deliberate attempt to copy always produces a new text that cannot have the same identity or meaning as its model.⁵

The first section therefore concentrates on the ways in which critical accounts have constructed the 1940s in terms of the 1930s, ways that can only present it as both an imitation and a corruption of the 1930s models and, in so doing, presents it as a period that has no identity of its own but is simply

defined by its dependence on, and hence inferiority to, a privileged original. The second section then moves on to think about alternative ways in which 1940s horror films can be related to those of the 1930s. If most accounts privilege the 1930s so that the character of the 1940s can only be a matter of inferiority rather than difference, corruption rather than transformation, the second section demonstrates the ways in which these histories work to canonize specific tendencies and marginalize or delegitimize others. Furthermore, this process is largely conducted in relation to the hierarchy of horror monsters in which a clear preference is established for Dracula and Frankenstein, Universal's leading monsters of the 1930s, over the Mummy and the Wolf Man, Universal's leading monsters of the 1940s. In other words, these later monsters represent different interests and concerns rather than inferior copies and, as a result, the constant critical complaints about the ways in which Frankenstein's monster changed during the 1940s can also be seen not as a process of entropy, depletion or loss but of conversion and retooling as a response to changed conditions.

Finally, the third section then demonstrates that if the problem is that histories not only privilege the 1930s but also specific features of that period, then in order to understand generic history one must not only examine the processes of development over time but also the complex processes of product differentiation within a period. In other words, not only are histories dominated by the canon of 1930s horror, but this canon also privileges Universal horror films over other tendencies. Furthermore, by the 1940s, the Universal horror films were far from being the only game in town, but had settled for being a niche within a broader horror market. As a result, the critical focus on Universal not only obscures the range of horror production that characterizes the period, but also marginalizes trends that were central to understandings of horror within the period. The fact that many of these trends have been reclassified over the intervening years, so that they are no longer seen as examples of horror today, is itself a fascinating story but one that needs to be told elsewhere.⁶

Imitation and Corruption

As we have seen, most accounts of generic history are organized around a distinction between formulaic repetition and innovative transformation, or between imitation and difference, and the 1940s is firmly consigned to the negative pole of repetitions and imitation. For example, Alan Frank claims that, during the period, the "horror film continued to evolve imitations of

established themes,⁷ while Denis Gifford not only draws attention to a number of remakes in the period but even implies that these repetitions became repetitive: "There were more remakes to come."⁸ This problem is claimed to particularly afflict Universal's output during the period, and the studio is even seen as displaying an almost religious fanaticism in its enthusiasm for remakes and sequels. Gifford, for example, refers to the studio's "revivalist mission,"⁹ in which the word "revival" associates the studio's remakes and sequels with the missionary zeal of religious fundamentalism.

He also claims that "history was repeating itself" in other ways.¹⁰ Lon Chaney Jr. was forced to become "the New Karloff, the New Chaney"¹¹ and so stood in for earlier horror stars including his own father, Lon Chaney. Rather than a star with his own unique features, he is seen as inferior and dependent, only ever able to play sons rather than fathers, and inappropriately trying to fill other people's shoes: by the time of *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* (1943), it is argued, he had played so many of the monsters that he had only "one to go for full house,"¹² a supposedly dubious accomplishment that he achieved with his next film, *Son of Dracula* (1943). Chaney's problem is therefore tied to a more general complaint about the films, which were frequently attacked for having a "rehashed plot" or for being "still the same mixture as before."¹³ In a discussion of *The Ghost of Frankenstein* (1942), Gifford claims that "Karloff's monster remained unchanged" and, in his discussion of *The Mummy's Tomb* (1942), the process of repetition is taken even further: the makeup artist, Jack Pierce, "fashioned a mask that saved a deal of make up time" and "helped stuntman Edwin Parker look like Chaney look like Tyler look like Karloff, for once again the Waters of Khar unfold with their flashbacks."¹⁴ The sheer sense of tired irritation at these repetitions is clear here, and hence the sense that repetition involves nothing more than a law of ever diminishing returns.

Others also take issue with the Mummy series and attack the first of the 1940s' Mummy films, *The Mummy's Hand* (1940), with claims that it "is not so much a sequel as an imitation."¹⁵ It is also claimed that *The Climax* (1944) "virtually duplicates" *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925), although it is "distinguished by Karloff's carefully understated portrayal of a man obsessed."¹⁶ The assumption here is that imitations and duplicates are essentially worthless and, as James B. Twitchell claims of *Son of Frankenstein* (1939), they are simply "so predictable."¹⁷

Of course, the most common term associated with generic repetition is that of the "formula," in which it is suggested that, having once hit on a particular combination of elements, studios continue to endlessly reuse it. *The Mummy's Curse* (1944) is therefore said to be "very much to the formula

established in *The Mummy's Tomb* (1942) and *The Mummy's Ghost* (1944), although it is noted that the film does feature some "pleasantly photogenic Louisiana bayou settings" that are largely dismissed as mere window dressing that cannot hide the essential lack of identity.¹⁸ Even Andrew Tudor falls back on the term "formula" in his description of the period. The 1940s film horror therefore "drifts towards formula repetition" and *Ghost of Frankenstein* is claimed to "retain many of the standard ingredients — elaborate laboratory sets, threatened innocents, a crippled servant."¹⁹

Furthermore, the term *formula* identifies repetition as an uncreative process of rationalized industrial mass production. It even evokes the transgressions of horror's mad scientists who believe that life can be created simply through the reassembling of dead materials, but have no understanding of the soul. However, even those descriptions that do suggest a more creative process behind the making of these films are not necessarily positive. They also fall back on horror imagery, which directly associates the films with the monstrousness of their creatures. For example, Frank's description of *The Mummy's Hand* notes the absence of Karloff, who had appeared in *The Mummy* (1932), and claims that this "time Tom Tyler rose from the dead, chosen by Universal because of his resemblance to the younger Karloff."²⁰ This association between the process of sequelization and the reanimated corpses of many horror films is made even more overt by Gifford, who refers to *The Invisible Man Returns* (1940) as "Universal's second exhumation of the second wave of horror."²¹ The implication here is clear: that which has lived once should not be brought to life for a second time!

Even those films that were not sequels or remakes were not immune to criticism. For example, *Man Made Monster* (1941) is seen as a product that was similarly disinterred, although in this case Universal was claimed to have resurrected an unused script from the first wave of horror that had been held back for being "too much like *The Invisible Ray*": "Down from the shelf came a script written for Karloff and Lugosi."²² In much the same way, Carlos Clarens claims that both *The Invisible Man Returns* and *The Mummy's Hand* involved a "pirating [of] the best efforts of their originals."²³ Interestingly, critics are more generally generous to *Phantom of the Opera* (1943), and this may be because, as many note, it was a "remake, rather than a sequel."²⁴ It is still seen as inferior to its predecessor but, in this case, it is seen more as a homage to the original rather than the illegitimate plundering of its materials implied by the term "pirated," a term that the industry uses to describe copyright infringement.

Consequently, critics do not necessarily ignore the work involved in the making of sequels or remakes but rather that this work is seen as a meaningless

addition that adds nothing but rather subtracts from the original. For Tudor, the war period "simply extends the patterns already established in the 1930s," an extension that, it is implied, has no significance or value. On the contrary, he claims that in "some cases" the process of extension was taken to "desperate limits."²⁵ Similarly, Gifford claims that the makers of *The Mummy's Hand* "elaborate [a] single sequence into a whole new mythos," but still sees the series as a series of derivative sequels.²⁶

However, if 1940s horror has no identity of its own, these accounts do not suggest that it is the same as 1930s horror. Nor is imitation the highest form of flattery here but rather corruption, abuse and exploitation. *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* is referred to as Universal's first attempt "to ginger up fading box-office receipts by multiplying its monsters,"²⁷ while other accounts similarly presented imitation as necessarily involving dependence, loss and degeneration. As we have already seen, Chaney came to signify many of these problems. Like the films, Chaney could never be his father but neither could he achieve separation from him: he could never become his own man. Many critics, for example, recount his failed attempts to keep his own name, Creighton Chaney, and his complaint that he was eventually forced to take his father's name: "I am *not* proud of Lon Chaney Jr., because they had to starve me to make me take this name."²⁸ This is even seen as central to his star image, so that Twitchell claims he "simply could not play the title role" in *Son of Dracula*: his "father could have" but the "son couldn't." Lon Chaney Jr. was "the perpetual son, and he could act like one in his wolf man roles, but Dracula is anything but a child — he is only a parent, more specifically, only the father."²⁹ Chaney, it was claimed, was doomed to play those who exist in the shadow of their parents, who are unable to escape comparison with their more powerful progenitor, or are themselves mere shadows: insubstantial shapes that have no substance of their own and are entirely dependent on the presence of another, a double or reflection.

Similarly, John Brosnan claims that the films of the 1940s "were but pale shadows of the original versions produced a decade earlier."³⁰ However, it is also important to remember that, in horror, while the shadow may lack substance, it is also the Other, the doppelgänger, that threatens the identity of the original. For example, the horror films produced by Val Lewton in the 1940s are not only singled out for praise as the main exception to the rule of 1940s horror, but the praise is specifically reserved for their concern with shadows. In these films, "the use of shadows excels"³¹ and their "distinctive use of light and shade"³² is not simply a stylistic feature but linked to their very identity as films so that *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) becomes a "small masterpiece" because the "beauty of the film is that, hovering visually in

precarious balance between darkness and light, nothing in it is any more clear cut than the good or evil of [its character's] motives and actions."³³ Critics not only associate the shadows within these films with restraint, suggestion and imagination but also claim these shadows are related to more complex philosophical and moral themes that question the claims to identity, light and reason within them. However, while many of these critics celebrate these films, and horror more generally, for its use of the shadow, the sense that the 1940s films are shadows of the 1930s threatens the notions of patrimony on which their canonization of the 1930s depends. The shadow can productively call the identity of the original into doubt in the horror films themselves, but not in generic histories and their canons.

As a result, the imitation is not the same as the original but inferior, and this inferiority is identified with absence. The sequel to *The Mummy* is therefore distinguished by the fact that "Karloff was missing under the Universal bandages and fullers earth,"³⁴ while, in *Son of Dracula*, "Chaney is no Lugosi."³⁵ However, it is not just the stars that are absent but also, with them, the soul of their creations. It is therefore claimed that *Son of Frankenstein* "reduces [the monster] to a superhuman destructive force" so that he "becomes a sort of zombie and only reveals a little of the impulse towards humanity that flickered through *Frankenstein* (1931) and flared up in *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) in two brief moments."³⁶ Similarly, in *Ghost of Frankenstein*, the monster is even said to be "lacking Karloff's humanizing traits,"³⁷ and it is said of Chaney, who replaced him, that his "performance has robotic power, but lacks soul, even a man-made one."³⁸

However, the problem is not just a matter of substitutions, or even poor writing but is directly related to the process of sequelization itself, which is claimed to obey a law of diminishing returns in which "Each sequel was worse than the one before."³⁹ For Frank, Universal was "running out of the original inspiration that had led them to create their classic fantasy monsters," while others claimed a "lack of inspiration" within the period as a whole,⁴⁰ in which the endless sequels were exhausting the materials plundered from the 1930s films and were therefore part of an inevitable process of decline. For Frank, Universal's "mockery of the once-serious monsters" in their encounters with Abbott and Costello only had the effect of "confirming the decline in the serious side of the genre," while Hardy claims that "the forties, with few exceptions, continued the decline initiated in the second half of the 1930s."⁴¹ Similarly, for Clarens, by the time of *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* in 1948, Universal had effectively killed off whatever life there was left in their creations, and "was flogging a dead horse."⁴²

Indeed, Abbott and Costello are frequently seen as representing a decline

process. As Ivan Butler claims, after *Son of Frankenstein*, "James Whale's great original joined Dracula on the sad path to the Abbott and Costello travesty."⁴³ Similarly, while Tudor complains that most films of the war period were "sim-plications of the classical model,"⁴⁴ Twitchell claims that the Abbott and Costello films represent the end result of "the process of vulgarization" that distinguishes the period.⁴⁵ For some, the problem was that these films mark the point at which "unconscious parody finally gave way to deliberate spoof"⁴⁶ and, for others, it marks the final stage in a move away from a serious literary culture through adaptation and sequelization until the films "were made by hacks to be shown *only* to kids." As Twitchell puts it: "No further innovations followed"; "there was no other more immature audience eager to 'have a look.'"⁴⁷

Repetition and Identity

However, while most agree on the general features of the period, there is more disagreement over the quality of specific films, and quite where the break between the 1930s and the 1940s is to be marked. For example, Gifford refers to *Son of Frankenstein* as the "first of the new horror films, the last of the great ones,"⁴⁸ and it is interesting to note that Mel Brooks' homage to Universal horror, *Young Frankenstein* (1974), is a virtual remake of *Son of Frankenstein*, rather than the previous two films in the series. Of course, one could argue that he makes this choice because this film marks the moment when the series began to become formularized, but it also demonstrates that this is also the image of Universal that has passed into popular consciousness. However, others simply deal with the Universal films of the 1940s in their chapters on the 1930s, and privilege the Lewton productions by giving these films their own chapter. For example, Ivan Butler's *The Horror Film* (1967) has a chapter on Dracula and Frankenstein, which presents the Universal films of the 1930s as central, and the reprint has a chapter on "Val Lewton and the Forties Cycle," which focuses exclusively on Lewton's productions.⁴⁹ Similarly, Carlos Clarens dedicates a chapter entitled "Children of the Night: Hollywood, 1928-1947" to a discussion in which the Universal horrors of the 1930s are predominant, and then devotes an entire chapter to the RKO films of the 1940s, "More with Less: Psychological Horror, Val Lewton and Jacques Tourneur."⁵⁰ Finally, Reynold Humphries spends two chapters, in which the 1930s are privileged over the 1940s, and covers figures such as Dracula, Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, the Wolf Man and King-Kong, but devotes a third chapter to Lewton alone.⁵¹

However, the key Universal monsters of the 1940s were not Frankenstein and Dracula, the key Universal monsters of the 1930s, but rather the Mummy and the Wolf Man, and neither the 1940s films that featured the Mummy nor those that featured the Wolf Man were sequels to films from the previous decade. The four Mummy films made in the 1940s were made eight years after the first and last Mummy film of the previous decade, Karl Freund's *The Mummy*. Furthermore, while Freund's *The Mummy* is often revered for "its sobriety and refusal to shock,"⁵² others have, ironically, noted that this 1932 "original" itself was "a chance to 'remake' *Dracula*."⁵³ In contrast, *The Mummy's Hand*, and the Mummy films that came after it, bear little resemblance to the 1932 film, which has only one brief scene that features anything like the bandaged Mummy that has entered popular memory, a figure that is the creation of the later films. *The Mummy's Hand* does not even try to present itself as a continuation of the Freund film, but clearly sets out to start the series over from scratch. A new Mummy is unearthed, with a new backstory, new set of characteristics and a new name: Karloff's mummy was called Imhotep while the mummy of the 1940s is Kharis.

Nor is Kharis the self-motivating seducer of the 1932 film, but rather a conflicted character who is caught between an eternal transgressive desire for his lost princess, and a stern religious law that binds him to its will through the figure of a high priest. In the first film, he is the instrument of holy vengeance directed against the archaeologists who have defiled the tomb of his Princess Ananka, but eventually the high priest transgresses religious law himself and so provides the opportunity for Kharis to revolt against his master. The second film, *The Mummy's Tomb*, follows much the same story although it transposes the action to New England where Kharis tries to finish off the mission of vengeance from the previous film. In the third film, however, the story shifts and while Kharis and a high priest are still trying to repair the violation to the princess's tomb by returning her body to its rightful resting place, the narrative also focuses on a young woman of Egyptian heritage who is a reincarnation of the princess and suffers a crisis of identity in which she is caught between her two selves: a modern, independent woman and the reincarnation of Kharis' lost object of desire. Furthermore, rather than a mere formula reread, Bruce Kavin has seen this film as a "self-deconstructing masterpiece" that "exploits every formula it can, turning them against themselves, right up to the climax where the monster, for once, gets the girl."⁵⁴

For Kavin, the Mummy itself is "a walking repetition compulsion,"⁵⁵ a figure condemned by "neurotic possessiveness" to "the deathless persistence of compulsive fixation."⁵⁶ In other words, rather than simply a series based

on a repetitive narrative formula, it is one in which repetition is central to the very being of its central monster. The fulfillment of his desire therefore results in death for both himself and the object of his desire. Able to finally possess her, his embrace turns her into a mummified corpse and the two sink into a boggy grave united together for eternity, or at least until the next sequel where they are disinterred and separated by what seems to be a Works Progress Administration project that is trying to modernize a backward Louisiana: it's never quite clear how they have got from New England to Louisiana. Like the earlier film, *The Mummy's Curse* follows a dual narrative in which Kharis strives to be reunited with his lost Ananka and she suffers a crisis of identity: suffering from amnesia, she is unable to know whether she is a modern independent young woman or doomed to return to Kharis's mummifying embrace. In this way, the films can be seen to raise a series of concerns about women's wartime situation, which seemed to offer social, economic and cultural independence but over which hovered a possible return to prewar domesticity when the men returned home at the end of the war.

Similarly, *The Wolf Man* (1941) has no narrative connection to Universal's one previous werewolf film of six years earlier, *Werewolf of London* (1935), and it also starts from scratch with a new character, Lawrence Talbot, and a new set of traits for its monster. Thus, while it has been claimed that *The Wolf Man* "strengthens the rather weak myth of *The Werewolf of London*,"⁵⁷ Frank claims that "the new werewolf lore dreamed up by writer, Curt Siodmak, including the now 'traditional' belief that a werewolf should be killed with silver [and] was a considerable improvement on [Universal's] previous efforts in the genre."⁵⁸ Twitchell goes one better and claims that "what Bram Stoker did for the vampire, Curt Siodmak did for the werewolf":

In this sense, what the folklore *nosferatu* is to the modern vampire, the ancient werewolf is to the modern Wolfman. Both mythic archetypes had to be domesticated, personalized, elevated from lore to art, and then returned in a new form to lore. They have changed their manners, been humanized.⁵⁹

In other words, "Universal's Wolfmen had almost nothing to do with werewolf folklore, but instead came from the genius of Curt Siodmak."⁶⁰ *The Wolf Man* is no sequel or imitator but rather the original from which our current sense of the werewolf as a figure derives.

If some critics assert Siodmak's status as the author of the Wolf Man as we currently understand it, Lon Chaney Jr. also asserted a proprietary claim that emphasized its originality. Despite the discomfort during the lengthy ordeal of filming the transformation process, Gifford claims that "Chaney loved his Wolf Man: 'he was my baby.'"⁶¹ Elsewhere he claimed: "Of course

I believe that *The Wolf Man* is the best of my horror films — because he is mine!"⁶² Unlike the other monsters that he played, Chaney believed the Wolf Man to be his own creation, an original rather than a monster that was already identified with an earlier performance or incarnation. As Brosnan is keen to clarify, "Henry Hull had played a wolf man in the 1935 film *Werewolf of London* ... but Chaney's was the definitive version."⁶³

As a result, not only is this version usually seen as "the definitive Wolf Man,"⁶⁴ but it also is often seen as one of "Universal Pictures' three great horror films."⁶⁵ While some accounts grudgingly accept it as one of the better examples of Universal's 1940s horror films, others imply that it was one of the 1930s films exactly because it was a classic. William K. Everson claims that it was "one of the best of the new brand of Universal thrillers,"⁶⁶ that was not only "stylish"⁶⁷ but placed a greater stress "on characterization than on plot."⁶⁸ Similarly, Frank claims that *The Wolf Man* was a case of "Universal finally getting it right,"⁶⁹ and Leonard Wolf claims that the film has "a special power."⁷⁰

Indeed, the Universal horror films of the 1940s are dominated by these two horror monsters in relation to which the Universal monsters of the 1930s were clearly subordinate. There was no *Dracula* series, and although there are a number of poverty row vampire films, *Dracula* is largely absent from the Universal films of the 1940s. He does not reappear until *Son of Dracula*, which was made after the established success of the Mummy and Wolf Man series, and after the success of *The Ghost of Frankenstein*. Furthermore, as critics note, the film is not really interested in *Dracula* but rather in the daughter of a Southern plantation dynasty who comes under his influence. As Dillard notes, in the film, "Kay's morbid psychology which predisposes her to vampirism is more truly the heart of the film than Count Alucard — *Dracula* himself."⁷¹ In this film, *Dracula* does not invade America but is actively drawn there by Kay, and he remains a largely world-weary and passive presence throughout the story and is only ever moved to action to protect Kay and her desires. Indeed, in the most celebrated scene within the film, Kay seems to virtually summon *Dracula* up as she stands by the water's edge waiting for his coffin to rise from its depths, for him to rise from it, and be drawn across the surface towards her. It is hardly surprising, then, that there are numerous critical complaints about Chaney's interpretation of the Count and that there was no follow-up until *Dracula* joined the Wolf Man and Frankenstein's monster for *House of Frankenstein* (1944) and *House of Dracula* (1945).

Similarly, while Frankenstein's monster did reappear in *Son of Frankenstein*, Universal's first attempt to cash in on the success of the *Dracula* and

Frankenstein double bill, the next *Frankenstein* film was not until *The Ghost of Frankenstein* in 1942, which was, once again after the success of the first two Mummy films and the first of the *Wolf Man* series. Furthermore, while it was a major success, the monster's next appearance was in *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, a film that is clearly focused on the continuation of Lawrence Talbot's narrative and relegates *Frankenstein's* monster to the position of second fiddle. Indeed, these priorities become clear in the casting. The film stars Chaney as the *Wolf Man* rather than the monster, which he had played in *The Ghost of Frankenstein*: Chaney was insistent that "no one else [would] play his baby."⁷² Indeed, this positioning of the monster is a cause of concern for many critics, which clearly demonstrates their investment in the 1930s films rather than the priorities of the 1940s.

One of the few critics to actually present the difference between the 1930s and the 1940s as being more than a simple issue of inferiority is R.H. W. Dillard. He clearly has a preference for the 1930s rather than the 1940s, but his preference is based on a choice between their ways of seeing the world: he does not see them as attempting to do the same thing but with different levels of success. Also, he does not present these differences as simply the result of a radical break but rather relates the dominant tendencies of the 1940s to tendencies that were already present, if marginal, within the 1930s:

The films of the 1940s, which were mainly American, reduced the range of their parabolic quest from the spirit to the flesh, from the metaphysical to the psychological. Finding their roots in the sexual and psychological concerns of earlier films like *Florey's Murders in the Rue Morgue*, Lambert Hillyer's *Dracula's Daughter*, and Mamoulian's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the films of the 1940s defined the human being primarily as a physical (as opposed to spiritual) being. The human psyche was no longer capable of the metaphysical yearning and force of Henry *Frankenstein*, but rather became the victim of mental aberration which should be cured.⁷³

As Dillard notes, *The Wolf Man* is "cast in the terms of Freudian psychological understanding," while films such as *Son of Dracula* also focused on psychological pathology rather than spiritual corruption.⁷⁴

Furthermore, the *Wolf Man* and the Mummy, like so many monsters of the period, are figures driven by compulsions over which they cannot exercise their will. They are doomed by their desires and their inability to control them. It is hardly surprising then, that their films lack Christian frameworks. Both are the products of pagan and pre-Christian religions, and their monstrousness is not related to their defiance of, or opposition to, the Christian God as is the case with both *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*. Unsurprisingly, then, Christian symbols are no defense against them.

Landscapes of Fear: Mapping 1940s Horror

Again, however, there is a need for caution. If the 1940s were not a mere continuation of the 1930s, neither were the 1940s a radical break from the previous period. Decades are never neatly divided off from one another, nor is any decade homogeneous and undifferentiated. Rather, generic development is a complex process in which each period is made up of a series of different tendencies that are not only defined in relation to one another but also draw on, and rearticulate, elements from earlier periods. In other words, most histories not only privilege the 1930s over the 1940s but also Universal over other areas of production. However, the Universal horror films were not only a diverse group, of which the Mummy and the Werewolf cannot be seen as fully representative,⁷⁵ but horror-related materials were being produced by all the other major studios and by the poverty row studios such as Monogram and the Producers Releasing Corporation. Furthermore, while other studios certainly tried to learn from Universal, any attempt to simply replicate its strategy would have been to play a losing game. Any attempt to simply imitate Universal would always suffer by comparison and, as a result, product differentiation was an important element of horror production as various studios sought to enter the horror market, but also to capitalize on their own assets and distinctive characteristics.

As a result, one of the problems with most histories is that they concentrate on narrative history rather than intertextual mapping. These narrative histories tend to search for the clear line of cause and effect, in which dominant trend gives way to dominant trend as a central logic unfolds. However, historical periods can only be adequately understood if one maps the range of intertextual options available, and the ways in which the meaning of each option is defined in relation to the other available options. As we have seen, each new text cannot be a simple reproduction of an existing model but is always engaged in a process of negotiation and transformation, and this process works both within and between periods. In other words, genre history is a complex process of assemblage, in which each new text is only ever constructed through the articulation of existing elements, a process that necessarily reworks the meanings of these elements. As a result, no text or period can ever have a pure and autonomous identity that is defined outside social structures and processes, but neither can it be a simple reproduction, replica or copy.

This concern with intertextual mapping also raises another issue about genre. As Rick Altman demonstrates, many accounts of genre history impose terms retrospectively, so that later understandings of a genre can work to

exclude earlier ones. Neither *Dracula* nor *Frankenstein* were seen as horror on their initial release but rather as film versions of theatrical hits.⁷⁶ It was only later, after they had given rise to a cycle of films, that the notion of the horror film even came into existence and was then retrospectively projected back onto these two films. However, it is not just that the meaning of individual films can change over time, but also that, even once they have been created, generic terms themselves change meaning. As James Naremore illustrates, the term "film noir" had a different meaning in the late 1940s to that which it had in the late 1950s and, as a result, many films that were seen as central to "film noir" in the late 1940s were seen as marginal a decade later. Indeed, some films, such as *The Lost Weekend* (1945), which were seen as central in the 1940s, were completely excluded from the category of "film noir" by the late 1950s.⁷⁷

Similarly, a large number of 1940s films are now distinguished from horror by terms such as "film noir" and the "paranoid woman's film," although both these terms were products of later periods. However, as I have argued elsewhere, the films that are currently associated with these later terms were usually identified with horror in the period.⁷⁸ As a result, while generic terms can help us to understand how individual films have been understood in relation to one another, they can also work to obscure the ways in which they have been related to one another in specific periods. Furthermore, they may even create the sense of distinctive categories, in which no such sense had existed previously. For example, the films identified as horror, film noir and the paranoid woman's film today were not seen as distinct categories in the 1940s, but were all identified as horror films. Part of the reason for this was that horror itself had a significantly different meaning to that which it has today, and was seen as virtually synonymous with "mystery,"⁷⁹ a generic term that was not limited to a concern with detection but was more concerned with the strange, eerie and uncanny. The films associated with horror, film noir and the paranoid woman's film today were therefore seen to share a common identity through their associations with mystery and often featured narratives of psychological disorientation, in which their protagonists find themselves trapped within worlds that are fundamentally illegible and unpredictable.

It is therefore significant that the period covered by this cycle starts in 1938 and ends in the late 1940s. In other words, the cycle starts in a period of uncertainty, during which America was moving towards involvement in World War II, and it ends after the period of readjustment that followed the war, a period in which it was feared that post-war depression would replace wartime affluence and one that was also witnessing a complex renegotiation of gender relations. Not only was a generation of men returning from the war

to expectations and responsibilities that they had never known, or from which they had long been separate, but many women had enjoyed social, economic and cultural independence that was no longer seen as viable as the men returned. In other words, the immediate post-war period was a period of anxiety and uncertainty for both men and women, as the terms of their relationships had to be fundamentally renegotiated.

As a result, while Dana Polan has argued that the war demanded narratives that were immediately legible and predictable, in which the resolution is known and assured from the outset,⁸⁰ there was a strong tradition of filmmaking that followed a completely different course. Nor are these films simply the deconstructive "other" of this affirmative narrative. On the contrary, the affirmative narrative itself was a response to very real uncertainties about the outcome of the war, uncertainties that were made explicit in the mystery films of the period. In other words, the period from the late 1930s to the late 1940s was one in which the social world could not be easily read and outcomes could not be easily predicted. In this context, illegibility became a central concern, and fog became a central image. Nowhere is this clearer than in the Universal Sherlock Holmes series of the 1940s, a series that, as I have argued elsewhere, were clearly marketed as horror films during the period.⁸¹ Certainly, Holmes could always be relied upon to solve the mystery at the heart of each film but, none the less, most films within the series started with a credit sequence that emphasized illegibility and uncertainty, rather than comprehension and resolution. In this credit sequence, Holmes and Watson are confronted by an impenetrable fog into which they peer with fear and determination as they walk forward purposefully, a gun aimed ahead of them as they attempt to protect themselves from threats that may lie in the obscure distance.

Conclusion

It is only when one starts to move beyond a canonization of the 1930s that the character of 1940s horror begins to become clearer. Rather than simply a degenerating continuation, a shoddy imitation or a pirating of 1930s models, the 1940s was a new cycle with different priorities to those of the 1930s. Not only were the key monsters of the 1940s Universal horror films like the Mummy and the Wolf Man, rather than Frankenstein and Dracula, but also the very concentration on Universal studios obscures the range of films that were understood as horror in the period or associated with the genre. For example, in 1944, the *New York Times* explicitly discussed "a new horror

cycle" that was far more ambitious than "the forerunning vampire, werewolf and Frankenstein chillers,"⁸² and it identified a range of films that were representative of this new cycle: *Gaslight* (1944), *Dark Waters* (1944), *Hangover Square* (1945), *Phantom Lady* (1944), *Laura* (1944), *Woman in the Window* (1944) and *Spellbound* (1945). Few of these films are classified today as horror films, and it is only when we start to reconstruct the intertextual associations by which they were understood as horror films in the 1940s that we can begin to understand what the term "horror" meant within the social discourses of that period, rather than simply accept, or simply revise, the canon of horror that was constructed by histories of horror written in the late 1960s and early 1970s in relation to the prevailing definitions of genre of that later moment.⁸³

Notes

1. Rick Worland, "O.W.I. Meets the Monsters: Hollywood Horror Films and War Propaganda, 1942-1945," *Cinema Journal* 37.1 (1997): 47.
2. Barbara Kluger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).
3. Peter Hutchings, *The Horror Film* (London: Longman, 2004), 20.
4. See Joanne Hollows, *Feminism, Community and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); and Mark Jancovich, "Naked Ambitions: Pornography, Taste and the Problem of the Middlebrow," *Scope: An Online Journal of Film Studies* (June 2001).
5. See V.N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (New York: Seminar Press, 1973); and Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
6. For a more detailed discussion of the cultural politics of these particular definitions, and particularly their exclusion of the female-centered, "quality" horror films of the 1940s, see Mark Jancovich, "Rebecca's Ghost": Horror, the Gothic and the du Maurier Film Adaptations," in *The Du Maurier Companion*, ed. Helen Taylor, (London: Virago, 2007). See also Mark Jancovich, "Two Ways of Looking: Affection and Aversion in the Critical Reception of 'Lowbrow Horror' in the 1940s" (forthcoming).
7. Alan Frank, *Horror Films* (London: Hamlyn, 1977), 42.
8. Denis Gifford, *A Pictorial History of Horror Movies* (London: Hamlyn, 1973), 26.
9. *Ibid.*, 133.
10. *Ibid.*, 126.
11. *Ibid.*, 131.
12. *Ibid.*, 141.
13. *Ibid.*, 131.
14. *Ibid.*, 139.
15. Phil Hardy, *The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Horror* (London: Aurum, 1985), 75.
16. *Ibid.*, 84.
17. James B. Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 185.
18. Hardy, *The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Horror*, 86.
19. Andrew Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 35.
20. Frank, *Horror Films*, 44.
21. Gifford, *A Pictorial History of Horror Movies*, 129-131.
22. *Ibid.*, 135.
23. Carlos Clarens, *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1967), 150.
24. Frank, *Horror Films*, 47.

25. Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists*, 34.
26. Gifford, *A Pictorial History of Horror Movies*, 133.
27. Hardy, *The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Horror*, 81.
28. John Brosnan, *The Horror People* (London: Macdonald and Jane, 1976), 20.
29. Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures*, 144-5.
30. Brosnan, *The Horror People*, 73.
31. Ivan Butler, *Horror in the Cinema* (London: Zwemmer, 1970), 72.
32. Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists*, 34.
33. Hardy, *The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Horror*, 82.
34. Frank, *Horror Films*, 44.
35. *Ibid.*, 47.
36. Hardy, *The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Horror*, 71.
37. Frank, *Horror Films*, 46.
38. Gifford, *A Pictorial History of Horror Movies*, 139.
39. Butler, *Horror in the Cinema*, 46.
40. Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists*, 34.
41. Hardy, *The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Horror*, 74.
42. Clarens, *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film*, 153.
43. Butler, *Horror in the Cinema*, 52.
44. Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists*, 35.
45. Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures*, 55.
46. Clarens, *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film*, 151.
47. Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures*, 55.
48. Gifford, *A Pictorial History of Horror Movies*, 124.
49. Ivan Butler, *The Horror Film* (1967) (reprinted as Butler, *Horror in the Cinema*).
50. Clarens, *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002).
51. Reynolds Humphries, *The American Horror Film: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002).
52. Clarens, *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film*, 111.
53. David J. Skal, *The Monster Show: A Cultural History* (London: Plexus), 168.
54. Bruce Kavin, "The Mummy's Pool." In *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*, Ed. Barry E. Grant (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1984), 16.
55. Kavin, "The Mummy's Pool," 13.
56. Kavin, "The Mummy's Pool," 15.
57. Hardy, *The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Horror*, 78.
58. Frank, *Horror Films*, 46.
59. Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures*, 220.
60. *Ibid.*, 83.
61. Gifford, *A Pictorial History of Horror Movies*, 136.
62. Brosnan, *The Horror People*, 22.
63. *Ibid.*
64. Frank, *Horror Films*, 46.
65. Leonard Wolf, *Horror: A Connoisseur's Guide to Literature and Film* (New York: Facts on File, 1989), 235.
66. William K. Everson, *Classics of the Horror Film: From the Days of Silent Film to the Present* (Cranbury, NJ: Citadel, 1974), 214.
67. *Ibid.*, 5.
68. *Ibid.*, 214.
69. Frank, *Horror Films*, 42.
70. Wolf, *Horror*, 3.
71. R. H. W. Dillard, *Horror Films* (New York: Monarch, 1976), 4.
72. Gifford, *A Pictorial History of Horror Movies*, 141.
73. Dillard, *Horror Films*, 3-4.
74. *Ibid.*, 5.
75. During the 1940s, Universal initiated a number of horror series that included the Inner Sanctum, Invisible Man, Captive Wild Woman and Sherlock Holmes films.
76. Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI, 1999).
77. James Naremore, *More Than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
78. See Mark Jancovich, "Bluebeard's Wives: Women, Quality and the Horror Film of the 1940s" (forthcoming).

79. Mark Jancovich, "The Meaning of Mystery: Genre, Marketing and the Universal Sherlock Holmes Series of the 1940s," *Film International* 17 (2005): 34-47. See also Leo Hamdel, *Hollywood Looks at Its Audience* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1950).

80. Dana Polan, *Power and Paranoia: History, Narrative and the American Cinema, 1910-50* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

81. Jancovich, "The Meaning of Mystery."

82. Fred Stanley, "Hollywood Shivers," *New York Times*, May 28 (1944): N3.

83. See Jancovich, "'Rebecca's Ghost';" and "'Two Ways of Looking.'"