

# THE COMPULSION OF REAL/REEL SERIAL KILLERS AND VAMPIRES: TOWARD A GOTHIC CRIMINOLOGY\*

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## ABSTRACT

The most gripping and recurrent visualizations of the “monstrous” in the media and film lay bare the tensions that underlie the contemporary construction of the “monstrous,” which ranges in the twilight realm where divisions separating fact, fiction, and myth are porous—a gothic mode. There appear to be two monstrous figures in contemporary popular culture whose constructions blur into each other, and who most powerfully evoke not only our deepest fears and taboos, but also our most repressed fantasies and desires: the serial killer and the vampire. The social construction of these figures, in feature films that invoke the genre traditions of the documentary, melodrama, horror-psychological thriller, and romance form a significant section of this article; it is the easy slippage between cinema-verité depictions and horror-psychological thriller narrative modes that renders the gothicization of the serial killer as vampire compelling. This social construction will not only cover the cinematic depictions of these figures and their significance in terms of a critique of popular culture, but also in terms of contemporary criminological theories concerning how to discuss “evil” in relation to depictions of crime and the deviant. The ongoing fascination with the serial killer, both in the Hollywood film and criminological case studies, points to the emergence of a “gothic criminology,” with its focus on themes such as blood lust, compulsion, godlike vengeance, and power and domination. Rather than assuming that film is a medium that tells us little about the reality of criminological phenomena, gothic criminology as envisaged here, recognizes the complementarity of academic and aesthetic accounts of deviant behavior.

## INTRODUCTION: MONSTERS AMONG US

Edward J. Ingebretsen (2001) writes: “Monstrous bodies are the remarkable presences that appear as signs of civic omen, or trauma, and which demand interpretation: they offer a bit of each, apocalypse as well as utopia.” Indeed, the etymological roots of the term “monstrous” may be arguably traced to their Latin roots, *monere* (to warn) and *monstrare* (to point to) (Picart, 2001), though monsters, as former portents of the divine, have a more complex genealogy than such an etymology can capture (Hanafi, 2000). Nevertheless, it is important to track the most gripping and recurrent visualizations of the “monstrous” in the media and film in order to lay bare the tensions that underlie the contemporary construction of the monstrous, which ranges in the twilight realm where divisions separating fact, fiction, and myth are porous. It is important to note the tensions of this narrative: the “monster” or contemporary “fallen angel” is simultaneously a figure of horror and repulsion, as it is of fascination and charisma; both subhuman and superhuman; and remarkably similar to the “normal” and strikingly deviant at the

same time. There appear to be two monstrous figures in contemporary popular culture whose constructions blur into each other, and who most powerfully evoke not only our deepest fears and taboos, but also our most repressed fantasies and desires: the serial killer and the vampire as creatures compelled to kill. The social construction of these figures, in feature films that invoke the genre traditions of the documentary, melodrama, horror-psychological thriller, and romance, form a crucial part of this article. This social construction will not only cover the cinematic depictions of these figures and their significance in terms of a critique of popular culture, but also in terms of contemporary criminological theories concerning serial killers' rationality and freedom of choice, or lack thereof, in committing these crimes. The ongoing fascination with the serial killer, both in the Hollywood film and criminological case studies, points to the emergence of "gothic criminology," with its focus on themes such as blood lust, compulsion, godlike vengeance, and power and domination.

### TOWARD A DEFINITION OF GOTHIC CRIMINOLOGY

Drawing from Haggerty's (1989: 16-17) description of the gothic novel and Stanford Lyman's (1990: 60-61) development from it of a "gothic sociology," a starting definition of gothic criminology can be stated. "The Gothic novel," George E. Haggerty tells us, "finds its most fruitful mode of evocation in delineating an imaginative response to the objective world that is grounded in the emotions." A Gothic criminology, by contrast, expresses itself in depicting the architectonic paradox of the supposedly objective moral universe--viz., the natural preternaturalism that has contributed to its construction. Where Gothic fiction instructs its horrified readers in the unreal horrors attendant upon a realistically imagined fictional world, Gothic criminology teaches its readers about the actual horrors that produce and prevail in the social construction of modernity. Where Gothic literature offers "scientifically objective terminology and clearly empirical observation as a means of establishing intensely private, subjective experience," Gothic criminology employs "preternatural imagery and occult fantasy to evoke in the reader an intellectual understanding of the actual world and to inspire a praxiological response to it."

Gothic criminology as employed in this article gestures towards an account that moves in between the realms of gothic fiction and film, which entertains its horrified and fascinated readers with unreal horrors attendant upon a realistically/cogently imagined fictional world, and factual cases (of serial murderers) framed in gothic terms, which are essential to plotting the social construction of where evil resides within modernity. Furthermore, a gothic criminology that examines the prevalent use of such preternatural imagery or occult fantasy can prompt a critical response to how crime is theoretically modeled and popularly constructed, and assist in the development of a praxiological response to both "real" and "reel" worlds, which are intertwined in complex ways.

The roots for a gothic criminology can be seen in the early writings of American sociologists such as E.A. Ross (1907) and Robert Park. Ross, an important speaker and writer in the Progressive Movement, published *Sin and Society* in 1907. In it, Ross described a new breed of monster, the *criminaloid*, responsible for bringing great suffering to the masses through the practice of unmitigated greed and lack of concern about worker safety or survival. Ross was referring to the "robber barons" of turn of the century American capitalism and their horrible

record on such issues as wages, factory and job site safety, use of child labor, etc. Ross, a small town resident by birth, was appalled at the disparities in wealth and power that had emerged in America's urban jungles such as New York (Burns, 1999).

Robert Park, later sociology chair at the University of Chicago, took a more global perspective on the phenomenon of "vampiric capitalism," in his journalistic critiques of western exploitation within Africa, both of its peoples and resources (Lyman, 1992). American sociology, after the 1920s, would reject the use of both journalistic and philosophical analyses of evil for a more thoroughly scientific methodology (Greek, 1992). However, the discipline then was left with great difficulties in discussing evil (now referred to as deviance) without transvaluing it as sickness (Menninger, 1973) or as sign of social malaise or anomie (Oru, 1987), leaving treatises on the nature of evil to more ethnographically inspired writings such as criminal biographies, novels, plays, and ultimately screenplays.

Gothic criminology seeks to return to the primordial origins of deviant human behavior, much as Lyman's (1978) *The Seven Deadly Sins* attempted to return the discussion of evil as socially constructed to sociological discourse. The criminal justice system and citizens alike, draw upon the combined work of true crime writers, FBI profilers, journalists and Hollywood screenwriters in their quest to flesh out the nature of serial killing. The focus on the twilight region of fact, fiction and myth is important because it gets at the ambivalent workings of the social construction of these contemporary monsters, employing an analysis of the cinematic depictions of these monsters (using categories such as class, gender, sexuality and race). The "compulsion model" of serial killers is certainly implied in film and explicitly scientized as fact in the behavioral profile literature produced by the FBI and other law enforcement investigators. Both the serial killer as vampire and the "mind hunters" (i.e., FBI Behavioral Science Unit) who relentlessly track them operate in keeping with the gothic tradition (Simpson, 2000).

The social construction of the monstrous as evil is clearly seen in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's (1996) introduction to *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. It may be summarized in the following way: the monster's body is a "cultural body" that serves as a harbinger of "category crisis," which renders porous categories of knowledge and form, and makes fluid the realms of fear and desire. Using language steeped in Christian theological allusions, Cohen tells us that the monstrous, like one of Dante's hellish creatures, guards the "borders of the Possible," and is "difference made flesh, come to dwell among us." Cohen's framework is important because it shows how the languages of theology and the Gothic imagination lurk, inhabiting the most secular of entertainment and "factual" realms. In all the films that we will discuss, we aim to excavate how formal Gothic modes form a symbiotic relationship with theatrical modes of horror and melodrama, in keeping with the political need to shape public notions of good and evil, normality and monstrosity, fact and fiction.

Rather than assuming that film is a medium that tells us little about the reality of criminological phenomena, gothic criminology as envisaged here, recognizes the complementarity of academic and aesthetic accounts of deviant behavior. By demonstrating the overlap of vampiric themes in serial murder films, "primordial evil," using Paul Ricoeur's phenomenology, becomes recognizable as an essential narrative feature of the dread that "senseless murderers," like serial killers, seek to inspire, eliciting the same type of response as a

vengeful deity. As Jack Katz (1990) stated: “Our original sense of deviance is through a nonreflective, sensual awareness of evil in the forms of dread, defilement, transgression, vengeance, sacrilege, sacrifice, and the like.” Such narrative patterns are discernible in the films that paint the converging portraits of serial killers and vampires, which we examine, using a gothic aesthetic. This is significant because traditionally, as Pirie (1977) points out, though there is a natural link between serial killers and vampires (as mass murderers), the two are usually set apart because of a conventional desire to separate a realistic account from an account of fantasy. Thus, he argues, “the true life psychopath is very rarely a source for vampire movies. There is a world of difference between the psychological horror of mass murder and the dreamy romantic atmosphere of the undead” (17). Yet contemporary characterizations of serial killers converge with those of vampires, making the gothic aesthetic not an obscure 18<sup>th</sup> century oddity, but a rhetorical feature of everyday life.

### **SOCIOLOGICAL COMMENTARIES ON CONTEMPORARY FASCINATION WITH SERIAL KILLERS IN REAL AND REEL LIFE**

Others have focused on the sociological and criminological significance of the serial killer craze. Caputi (1987) sees both the rise in serial killing and the cultural fascination with the phenomenon in fiction and film as indicative of male sexual dominance. Defining “sexual murder” as sexually political murder or functional phallic terrorism, Caputi (1987:2) argues that serial killer films include the following typical elements (64):

1. The films refer to Jack the Ripper and the established tradition of sex crime.
2. The killer corresponds with or gothically doubles with the police or media.
3. The mother is blamed for her son’s criminality, as a result of psychological or physical abuse.
4. The killer claims to love his victims, “helping” them by killing them.
5. The female victims are ultimately responsible for their own demise (either the killer mentions this or the plot construction naturalizes this).
6. The killer is waging a holy war against women, punishing them for their sexuality, aggression against men, feminism, etc.

Newitz (1999) similarly focuses on the gender identity anxieties of (hetero)sexual murder as “the serial killer kills off the ‘feminine vulnerability’ in himself when he kills women, and thus proves himself a man.” In contrast, Jenkins (1994) criticizes Caputi for ignoring female serial killers (who more often work in health-related professions) and limiting her analysis to feminist perspectives. He views the rise of conservative Protestantism in the 1980s and 1990s as a major factor in the shift from images of serial killers as psychologically damaged human beings to monsters.

While Jenkins (1994:81) also discusses the decline of interest in the psychological background of serial killers, Grixti (1989: 153) sees the rise of depictions of real life monsters as indicative of the uncertainty in which we currently live and its resulting fears. “Feelings of fear ... derive from the conviction of loss of control and the sense of helplessness which become dominant in situations when the cognitive system can neither assimilate the environment into its own structure, nor adapt itself to the structure of the environment.” When environmental controls are weak, magical solutions for controlling the monstrous are sought. As each era has its own

fears, certain crime-related genres tend to dominate during these periods. Thus, gangster films emerge in the 1930s, film noir in the 1940s, science fiction in the 1950s, horror films in the 1970s, and serial killer films in the 1990s each dealt with their era's most troubling tensions (Rubin, 1999: 42).

Along a parallel track, Mark Seltzer (1998) discusses the rise in interest in serial killing as an example of America's "wound culture"--the "public fascination with torn and open bodies and torn and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound." As those who pass traffic accidents cannot seem to help but look at the carnage, the exploits of serial killers are depicted in documentaries, docudramas and fictional films, and large audiences avail themselves of these images. Similarly, Richard Tithecott (1997:9) describes the different ways in which we construct the serial killer in our own image. We are both "thrilled and horrified by what we see, that we exist in a kind of horror movie which we write and perform for ourselves daily."

Unnoted in previous literature except for Simpson's (2000) is a striking similarity between the mythic characterization of a vampire and the description of a serial killer: both kill out of an overpowering compulsion, and in similarly periodic and patterned ways. It is this interesting convergence between criminological theory and popular cultural representations that forms a significant section of this analysis. In other words, what enables the gothicization of crime and in this particular case, serial killers, is a narrative mode that moves across fact ("verité") and fiction (horror, melodrama). This movement across the narrative visual modes of the "authentic" documentary and the "fictional" is particularly evident in purported "true stories" of serial killers like Henry Lee Lucas and Ed Gein. In each of these accounts, the attempts to sketch the portraits of "real men" and to "explain" their supernatural compulsions to kill become reduced to gothic tropes. These "real men," gothicized into "reel archetypes" become either a monstrous cipher (*Henry*) or an offspring of *Psycho*'s Norman Bates, the conventional victim-monster (*Ed Gein*).

## THE GOTHIC VAMPIRE

Prior to examining how contemporary cinematic characterizations of serial killers have appropriated gothic vampire conventions, it is important to lay out a concise characterization of the relevant properties of the gothic vampire.

The gothic vampire is an undead entity that is compelled to drink human blood. Yet human blood represents more than just life, which this undead creature needs in order to rise. As Pirie points out, quoting Ernest Jone's *On the Nightmare*, "blood is frequently an unconscious equivalent for semen and emphasizes the amount of sexual reference that abounds in even the oldest of vampire lore" (12).

The romantic image of the vampire as both satanic rake and alienated being seems derived from Lord Byron's own self-portraiture. Indeed, Byron was fascinated by the vampire, and was described by a contemporary, Blessington, as 'taking the part of a fallen or exiled being . . . existing under a curse, pre-doomed to a fate. . . that he seemed determined to fulfill' (Pirie: 18). John Polidori, Byron's physician-drug provider during that fateful summer tryst with the

Shelleys in 1816 that spawned the twin gothic tales of *Frankenstein* and *The Vampyre*, is reputed to have stolen the idea from Byron (20). In an attempt to capitalize on his association with Byron, who by then had distanced himself from Polidori, the doctor developed the story and sent it in to the *New Monthly Magazine* under his name, but it was republished under Byron's name in 1819 (23-24). Nevertheless, it is Polidori-Byron's version that first establishes the image of the vampire as an aristocratic decadent and seductive, charismatic anti-hero, who feeds upon the blood of young girls. Bram Stoker's version immortalizes this same image, with its ambivalent tensions. Indeed, because of Stoker's influence, as filtered through numerous stage adaptations of *Dracula*, and even more Universal series horror movies of the 1930s and 40s and Hammer films of the 60s, "the vampire seems perpetually about to caress and violate the beautiful, reclining body of a mesmerized, and in some fashion, willing, virginal young woman" (Waller, 1986: 21).

Despite *Nosferatu's* (1922) deviation from Stoker's novelistic characterization of the vampire as a well-groomed, impeccably mannered demon, to a skeletal, contorted and shuffling monster, *Nosferatu* maintains a central feature of the mythology of the gothic vampire. This feature is simply that the landscape in which he operates must in some way correspond with his character. As Pirie notes: "The vampire may be the active agent of terror, but the passive agent is the landscape he inhabits" (41). To render the vampire an "authentic" or believable figure, one needs gothic settings that render his wild work "natural"—whether they be wooded English hillsides, a lonely stretch of east European moorland, or even the urban jungle setting of New York, among others. These comprise the main relevant characterizations of the cinematic gothic vampire; there are other more nuanced features that we take up later in our discussion of individual films.

### THE EMERGENCE OF THE MODERN VAMPIRIC SERIAL KILLER

Though Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) is often credited with ushering in the age of the modern horror suspense film, Mike Hodges (2001), in his documentary, *Murder by Numbers*, notes how serial killer movies emerged in the late eighties as a defining genre in mass entertainment. Similarly, though cinematic depictions of the vampire legend long predate the late 1980s where our discussion begins (e.g., most notably Murnau's *Nosferatu* in 1922, and Browning's *Dracula* in 1931), the vampire myth, as we will argue, has been given new impetus through its being integrated with the serial killer narrative. As we shall show, the most glamorous instance of this blurring of vampire and serial killer constructions is Anthony Hopkins' elegant portrayal of Hannibal Lecter—a figure of immense popularity, quite unlike the rat-like *Nosferatu*. It is important to note that the return to an ambivalent interpretation of the vampire-serial killer as an elegant and glamorous character, despite his odiousness, is actually more in keeping with Bram Stoker's novelistic interpretation of the character. As Pirie (1977: 26) points out:

. . . With brilliant ingenuity, Stoker disguises his anti-father and anti-Christ in smooth anglophile charm. In one of the very few biographical facts we have, Harry Ludlam quotes Stoker as often laughing to his friends about 'how he made his vampire monster wait hand and foot on Jonathan Harker. . . at the castle.' Even when *Dracula* is about to pitch Harker out of the front door into a pack of

wolves he speaks ‘with a sweet courtesy which made me rub my eyes it seemed so real.’

Though there have been precedents of the contemporary characterization of the serial killer-vampire figure, such as Lang’s *M* (1931), Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960), and Powell’s *Peeping Tom* (1960), in the interests of clarity and compression, the focus of this paper will remain on the period of the late eighties onwards and will concentrate on a collection of both well known and some more obscure American films like *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (produced in 1986 but not widely released until 1990), *Ed Gein: The True Story* (2001), *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), *Immortality* or *The Wisdom of Crocodiles* (1998), and *Hannibal* (2001). The first two films purport to have some connection to “true” stories of how these serial killers became transformed into the monstrous figures they became, and are crucial to illustrating the contemporary popularity of cinematic serial killer narratives; furthermore, they also illustrate how a gothic criminology connects reel worlds with the look of the “real” world, while still mythologizing the serial killer as a gothic construction. The last three films exploit the contemporary seductive glamour of the vampire myth to render the serial killer a charismatic and elegant *Übermensch*, transcending bourgeois distinctions of good and evil. Though there are other serial killer films that debut during this period (such as *Seven* (1995), *Copycat* (1995), *The Summer of Sam* (1999), *The Cell* (2000)), none of these films have either the pseudo-documentary quality that *Henry* and *Ed Gein* are packaged to have (and thus their implicit claim to factuality, alongside their gothic themes), or the overt references to the vampire legend that *Silence of the Lambs*, *Immortality* and *Hannibal* utilize (and thus exploit the mythic power of the vampire narrative, with the contemporary twist that eroticizes him). We aim to show how a “natural” slippage from the realms of the natural/ “cinema verité” to the supernatural/mythic is what enables the gothicization of the serial killer as vampiric.

It is also important to note that all of the main characters in these specifically chosen films are all white males—a rare area in which fact and fiction converge in so far as most serial killers who have been caught fit this raced and sexed demographic, with a very small majority being women, and African Americans constituting 10% (though their numbers appear to be on the rise), and Latino, Asian and Native American groups comprising about 2-3% (Bahn et al, 1995). Naturally, being white and male are neither necessary nor sufficient to becoming a serial killer (trauma, such as physical and/or sexual abuse, alcoholism or addiction, low self-esteem, deep seated hostility and a proneness to depression, reading and viewing of violent pornographic materials; all resulting in a powerful urge to indulge in compulsive and violent fantasies), but it is striking that in both the factual accounts and the popular imaginary, it is the white male who simultaneously occupies the dangerous and endangered positions of being the victimized Monster (the serial killer as abused son) and glamorous and superhuman predator (as vampiric seducer and genius).

In film, one of the rare exceptions to the white perpetrator (which still corresponds with the factual racial demographics of serial killers, with minorities not being typical) is Bernard Rose’s *Candyman* (1992) and its sequels. *Candyman* is the revenge seeking spirit of a post-Antebellum black artist who made love to a young, white female patron only to suffer revenge at the hands of the girl’s father and an accompanying mob. *Candyman* had his arm hacked off, honey poured over his body to attract bees to sting him to death, and his body burned on a pyre.

His spirit now resides in the Chicago projects of Cabrini Green and attacks both residents and visitors to the apartment complex. Told as a gothic tale with Chicago depicted as a city beset by plague, Candyman seeks only to have the legacy of his fate remembered and continues to kill lest citizens forget what happened to him (and by implication the memory of all blacks who suffered at the hands of lynch mobs). He ultimately finds a white woman willing to be seduced by him in sacrificial exchange to save the life of a kidnapped black infant he holds hostage; she eventually becomes his bodily reincarnation after she, too, dies from burns, torched by a fearful and angry mob. Though subtle, this film also conflates and ambivalently glamorizes serial killing and vampirism. Candyman, like the vampire, possesses the capacity to hypnotize his prey, such that they appear to desire their victimizations. Candyman's kiss, which is marked by swarming bees emerging from decomposing flesh, underneath an elegant, fur-lined robe, parallels the bodily horror evoked by the vampire's physical Otherness clothed by his mythical wealth. The film's visual treatment of blood, which oozes as a rich, red fluid in copious amounts, is certainly symptomatic of both serial killer and vampiric cinematic narratives.

### **FACT AND FICTION IN PROFILING SERIAL KILLERS: *HENRY* AND *ED GEIN*, REAL OR REEL?**

Both *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* and *Ed Gein* purport in some way to connect with the "true stories" behind the myth of a particular "monster," such as Henry Lee Lucas or Ed Gein. In *Henry*'s case, the advertising rhetorical stress on "He's not Freddy, He's not Jason, He's *real* [italics mine]" shaped expectations of "authenticity" by making the claim that Henry Lee Lucas, the "real-life serial killer," was the basis of the film. Yet in both films, this implicit claim of laying bare "the truth" regarding how these monsters became what they were is problematic.

The attempt at simulating a "real-life" quality is particularly apparent in three sequences of *Henry*. The first is the opening sequence, which requires a detailed description of specific segmentism. This sequence uses a montage of scenes that seem to give the film a semi-documentary feel, which John McNaughton, the director, prefers to describe as a "cinema verité" style, thus giving it a more "arty" trademark. This opening sequence juxtaposes the two sides of Henry's life: the violent and the mundane. It begins with an extreme close-up of a dead face; the camera then pulls back in a circular motion to reveal the naked body of bruised woman with a bloody gash across her abdomen. Her body lies in a grassy field, which, in stark contrast, the background sound codes as idyllic through the use of the sounds of birds twittering and leaves rustling in the breeze. An unsettling musical score, Henry's leitmotif, overlays the sounds of nature. (This set of shots is interestingly coincident with the style of David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986), which also styles itself as an independent and "arty" film, despite its use of "pulp" material for its subject matter.)

A cut moves into an extreme close up of someone crushing a cigarette, and as the camera moves back gradually, we slowly see the figure of Henry (Michael Rooker), a soft-spoken young man, rise from yet another mundane meal at one of these ubiquitous "greasy spoon" diners. As he pays for his meal, he compliments the young waitress on her smile before he walks out to his car, as the camera looks up at his retreating back from a low angle.

The camera then pans across a liquor store counter to reveal the strewn bodies of a middle-aged couple whose faces are partially obscured by the crimson flow of blood that oozes from bullet holes in their head. The same haunting leitmotif returns as an acoustic flashback occurs: the sounds of a gun firing, a woman screaming, and a man barking: “Shut up!” Sirens wail as the musical leitmotif wanes.

Another abrupt cut to Henry, this time showing his face in a close-up, as he listens to country music while he is driving down the highway.

The camera pans from the bloody sheets on a bed to a blood spattered bathroom, where a woman who is provocatively semi-nude (wearing a garter belt, stockings, and high heels) is sitting on the toilet, her hands bound. Blood runs down her body, and a bottle is planted in the side of her face. The mundane sounds of a phone ringing and the water trickling mingle with the same leitmotif as an acoustic flashback occurs: a woman, aroused, coos “oooh baby”; a man shouts “shut up, bitch . . . die . . . die . . .die” with the sound of glass being broken intruding.

The opening sequence is particularly striking because it immediately breaks a standard feature of slasher/horror films: there is no lack of mutilated bodies on display, but instead of showing how the violence is actually done, it is almost a snapshot of the aftermath of the violence that we view. It is the acoustic flashback that *enacts* the scenes of violence for us, and yet because it is in the past, this enactment is muffled, and jarringly dissonant with the sometimes peaceful and beautiful, and at other times, everyday surroundings within which these extraordinarily brutal crimes have occurred. What results is a rupture: the film appears to set up the audience expectation that this is going to be a movie about “the real” and that it will eventually explain how and why these murders occurred. But like the faded sound track, inevitably, all the film leaves the audience with is a standard gothic trope: the image of monster as mysterious “lack” or absence: Henry’s portrait as a serial killer remains consistently out of focus.

In the scene that is supposed to provide a clear reason for why Henry kills, Becky (Tracy Arnold), in a dialogue that resembles the later conversations between Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster) and Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins) in *Silence of the Lambs*, tries to trade her vulnerabilities for intimate confessions from Henry. Becky offers her own confessions as an ill-fated go-go dancer who married a no-good husband who wound up in jail. She married hastily in order to escape from her abusive father, who would visit her bedroom at night, and hit her if she fought back. Using this as emotional capital, she asks why Henry killed his mother. The camera stays steadily in a close up on Henry as he looks at her, though as if unseeingly, with dead eyes and barely concealed anger and disgust. He recounts that his father was a drunk, and that his mother, a whore, would make him wear a dress and watch her go about her business with her customers. Unlike the earlier sequences, there is no acoustic flashback; the camera stays unflinchingly steady and unabashed, relying on no external dramatic gimmicks, once again lending the scene a look of documentary “realism.” The problem is that visual clarity is betrayed by the fuzziness and incoherence of Henry’s “authentic” confession: he contradicts himself, and cannot seem to remember whether he shot, stabbed or bludgeoned his mother to death.

The final scene of note is probably the scene that has generated the most controversy, which McNaughton labeled the “heart” of the movie: the “home invasion” scene. A *Rolling Stone* reviewer summarized this scene in the following way:

In the film’s most terrifying scene, the one that prompts the walkouts, Henry and Otis attack a suburban family and videotape the deed. “Take her blouse off,” Henry tells Otis, who is grabbing a struggling housewife. “Do it, Otis. You’re a star. Cinematographer Charlie Lieberman . . . turned a camcorder over to Rooker to shoot this scene as Henry would. The footage—grainy, unfocused, crazily angled—makes the carnage joltingly immediate (Travers, 1990).

What the review does not mention is that this three minute scene, shot once again, *cinéma-verité* style, without editing, in a long shot, produces an intense documentary realism that not only makes the audience believe it is a “real” thing going on in “real” time. That is, we believe we are peering through the camera’s lens at something diegetically occurring at that time. Yet the camera pulls back to show the two killers, Henry and Otis (Tom Towles), sitting on a couch, thoroughly absorbed in watching the violence, reviewing their earlier exploits raptly. The implication is obvious: that we, exactly like the killers, have thus far been visually consuming the film in the same way the killers are, as entertainment that looks “real.” Isabel Cristina Pinedo (1997) details some of the strongest reactions recorded by film critics:

As Hal Hinson reports, “it’s hard to know how to react. . . we feel as if we’ve been drawn into something we didn’t expect; as if unwittingly, we’ve become accomplices in the making of a snuff film” . . . Similarly, Eleanor Ringel declares, “Then, we’ve pretty much let down our guard, the filmmaker smacks us in the face with one of the most shocking sequences I’ve ever seen on film.”

What therefore emerges as a “real” depiction of Henry and Otis’s propensity for violence is revealed as something we, however ambivalently, share. The gaze of the camera is deflected from the “truth” about Henry and Otis, to the truth about us, the viewers. Once again, the “truth” regarding why Henry does what he does remains dim and obscure; despite the look of realism that characterizes his “portrait,” nothing more than a gothic cipher emerges.

In the final sequence, Henry gazes blankly at his image in a mirror at a hotel room; after his morning toilette, he leaves the hotel room that he is supposed to have shared with Becky the night before. But Becky is nowhere to be seen, and we are initially led to believe that he has perhaps abandoned her. The answer unfolds via a return to the narrative technique used at the beginning of the film: via an acoustic flashback. As Henry drives off, leaving behind him Becky’s bulky and bloodstained suitcase, we hear a woman’s screams. Henry’s “portrait” remains a gothic mask; the portrait that promises a close-up of the serial killer’s soul remains a bland surface, mirroring back the audience’s unsatisfied desire for “the truth” regarding how Henry became the soulless monster he became.

Similarly, *Ed Gein* begins (and ends) with bleak documentary footage of the well-known killer's arrest in his hometown of Plainfield, Wisconsin. Once again, the audience's expectations are primed to see "the truth" about why and how Ed Gein became the cannibalistic necrophiliac who created a "woman suit," and whose crimes provided the inspiration for *Psycho*'s Norman Bates, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*'s Leatherface and *Silence of the Lambs*' and *Hannibal*'s Hannibal Lecter. There is a clear "forensic" look to this film, which bears a certain resemblance to the look of "upmarket TV dramas, especially *Prime Suspect* whose first ever episode . . . dealt with a serial killer of prostitutes" (Atkinson, 2001).

Yet there are clear problems to taking the movie's claim to "authenticity" simplistically. In order to explain Ed's (Steve Railsback, who had played Charles Manson in an earlier film, *Helter Skelter*) actions, the movie resorts to creating the monster-behind-the-monster, popularized by Hitchcock's *Psycho*. Ed's mother, Augusta (Carrie Snodgrass), whose misdirected and excessive religious zealotry, physical abuse, sexual repression, and "bedtime" stories of the more lurid sections of the Book of Revelation from the Bible, emerges as the reason why Ed becomes what he is. There is evidence to support the view that many of Ed's complexes arose from his tangled relationship with his mother, but the film, in deflecting the responsibility of monstrosity from the abused son to the abusive mother, simply falls back on stock representations of the mother-as-devouring-and-poisonous-figure, yet another standard gothic fixture. In one scene, Ed prays to his mother's grave, asking that she be returned to him; a raven suddenly hovers in circles in the sky, breaking the stillness with its cries. Later, as Ed sets out to claim his first victim, Mary Hogan (Sally Champlin), a quick close-up of the raven implies that his mother's "ghost" (whether as a subjective delusion or an objective fact is immaterial in this characteristic blend of horror and psychological thriller) is present and urging him on to commit the crime. (The popular *Crow* films use a similar motif.) Unfortunately, this way of framing the story can be traced to the all-too-familiar Hitchcock rendition of Robert Bloch's novelistic rendition of Gein's life, in which it is the "monstrous mother," a product of pop psychology and Gothic cinematic representations, which constitutes the compulsive urge for why Gein commits the heinous acts that have granted him a certain mythic status.

Repeatedly, the movie makes allusions to Hitchcock's *Psycho*. When Ed re-enters the general store to murder Collette Marshall (Carol Mansell), the camera is at an extreme high angle, looking down at the dwarfed characters, as if from the point of view of a bird of prey; this is a signature Hitchcock-ian move. The resemblance to Anthony Perkins' Norman Bates has been noted by film reviewers. For example, Carl Cortez (2001) remarks: "Steve Railsback stars as Gein and plays him as a maniacal little simpleton. In fact, Railsback seems to be resurrecting the ghost of Anthony Perkins (via Norman Bates) in this performance, but missing the humanity Perkins brought to his famous *Psycho* role." Later, when Ed has been arrested and is committed to an asylum, the Hitchcock-ian flourishes are all over the place: the camera zooms into a close-up, with the shadows of the outline of a window in low key lighting at Ed's back, often signifying entrapment in the Hitchcock-ian universe. Like Hitchcock's Norman, Ed's monologues, shot in close-up or medium close-up, reveal a character steeped in self-delusion and madness, in contrast with his quiet and self-effacing veneer. The ending inserts the same documentary footage of Ed being arrested, but this time, zooms into the interior of the car where Ed sits, a diminutive figure that tries to cover his face with his gloved hands. The juxtaposition of the documentary footage once again is supposed to bolster the authenticity of the look we

have at Ed Gein—but the style of the montage sequences built around the embedded documentary bear such a striking resemblance to *Psycho* that it is difficult not to collapse Hitchcock's Norman into Chuck Parello's Ed. As the closing credits begin, we are shown Ed uttering a prayer as he lights a match as asks that “this evil spirit [be stopped] from invading [his] body;” then he is shown exhuming his mother's body from a high angle shot in low key lighting; then he is shown in close-up fiercely enunciating his mother's views concerning whores; then placidly calling the mental institution that houses him a “good place” where people treat him “nice”[ly]—only to grin and say that one drawback to the place is that there are some people who are “really screwed up.” The closing sequence ends with a black background that states matter-of-factly that he died at the asylum and was eventually buried beside his mother and brother. Yet the last image we see is of Ed, tearfully and vehemently proclaiming his mother “a saint”—a portrait not altogether different from Hitchcock's wild-eyed and tight-lipped Norman, whose thoughts, revealed through a voice-over, are those of his “mother” deciding to be “silent” just in case anyone is watching. Gein's mother, played by Carrie Snodgrass, is a tall and thin woman with a low, husky voice, who repeatedly calls Ed “boy”—once again a derivation from *Psycho*, rather than from “real life” because Gein's mother was obese (which explains why the women Ed killed were large—a fact that *Silence of the Lambs* more accurately details in its graphic depiction of “Buffalo Bill”'s skinned victims).

This brings us to the second feature film that *Ed Gein* references repeatedly in its gothically styled “true” rendition of Gein's portrait: Jonathan Demme's *Silence of the Lambs*. When Brian Hillman (Frank Worden) descends into the darkness of Ed's basement to find Colette Marshall's nude body hanging upside down from the ceiling, gutted like a deer, the scene is shot like Clarice Starling's (Jodie Foster) penetration of Jame Gumb's (Ted Levine) basement. In both, the subjective point of view is used, and the camera pans over the details of contents of the underground, bringing to light its obscene contents. Later, as Sheriff Jim Stilwell (Pat Skipper) sits, dumbfounded at the discovery that the quiet man who used to babysit his young boys is someone who finds lurid descriptions of Nazi war crimes entertainment, the scene is shot in a manner again reminiscent of the ending of *Silence of the Lambs*. A fast-paced montage, transitioning in keeping with the flashing of cameras taking shots (very like the ending of *Silence*. . . , after Clarice has shot Gumb and the contents of his basement are being documented), reveals the numerous items that abound in Ed's house of horror: a heart steeped in blood in a skillet on the stove, various body parts floating in a bottled solution, the “woman suit” and the belt of human nipples resting on a mannequin. Finally, the scene in which Ed emerges from his farmhouse, clad in his “woman suit” (from a dried facial mask and wig to labia strapped on to his pelvic area) is eerily reminiscent of the haunting scene in *Silence* . . . where Gumb cavorts and poses nude in front a camera, as he pulls his penis between his legs to make himself appear female. Yet the impact of both scenes is different: while Gumb's cavorting scene is terrifying, Gein's is oddly funny, particularly when he scurries back into his farmhouse, as if terrified that someone would see him, after he has spent the past two minutes beating his drum of human skin and carrying on loudly, like a stereotypic “savage.” If Henry's portrait is dimly lit and out of focus, Ed's portrait is too well lit and obscured by prior renditions, resulting in the “real” Ed emerging as a caricature. The result, as one critic notes, is that “the original cannibal now seems like a pale imitation” (Ed Gein, 2001). Nevertheless, both *Henry* and *Ed Gein* fall back upon gothic tropes in order to “explain” the unnatural compulsions of these two well-known serial killers.

In the same way one could take issue with *Henry* for removing all traces of a homosexual liaison the real life Otis claimed he and Henry had, one could take issue with *Ed Gein*'s implication that the murders of Mary Hogan and Bernice Worden (Colette Marshall in the film) took place within days or months, rather than three years. Nevertheless, one common "truth" that both portraits draw of these two serial killers is that they were abused sons—and as such, emerge as figures both imperiled and perilous; sympathetic and horrifying; all-too-human and unrecognizably monstrous. A key symptom and expression of this liminal space they occupy as simultaneously dangerous and endangered is that they suffer and are empowered by a compulsion to kill in a patterned, ritualistic way. The easy slippages between fact and fiction, and the ambiguous positioning between the "documentary" look, the "arty" independent film look, and the splatter film look, are precisely what enable the gothicization of these narratives of real serial killers, as enduring reel life myths.

### CONVERGING MYTHS: SERIAL KILLERS AND VAMPIRES

In *Silence of the Lambs* (1990), *Immortality* (1998), and *Hannibal* (2001), the figures of the vampire and the serial killer blur into each other. For example, the face of the monstrous in *Silence*. . . is initially visualized through Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins), a brilliant but institutionalized psychiatrist known as "Hannibal the Cannibal." Admittedly, there are technical differentiations between cannibals and vampires, but *Silence of the Lambs* and *Hannibal* conflate these two, such that Hannibal's vampiric and hypnotic gaze (which is characteristic of vampires, not cannibals) becomes inextricable from his blood-soaked, man-eating teeth (which is ambiguously placed in between cannibalism, an atavistic "real life" horror, and vampirism, a supernatural horror). More pertinently, in terms of the history of film (as opposed to literature), there is certainly precedent for the conflation of cannibalism with vampirism in zombie films like George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), which spawned a host of derivatives, like *Horror Express* (1972), *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* (1972), *The Living Dead at Manchester Morgue*, also released as *Don't Open the Window* (1974), *Fear No Evil* (1981), *One Dark Night* (1982), *Zombie* (1979), and *Dawn of the Dead* (1979). According to Gregory Waller, Romero's presentation of the living dead in *Night of the Living Dead* was derived from Richard Matheson's novel, *I am Legend*, which strips vampires of their ability to transform themselves in mists or bats, their legendary wealth, and of their need to be invited into a home in order to invade it (275). *Silence of the Lambs* and *Hannibal* continue this conflation of vampirism and cannibalism, but restore to the serial killer-cannibal the vampire's aristocracy, combined with a supernatural intelligence and the ever-present threat of his barely contained physical power, which "rationally" explain Hannibal's ability to terrorize and feed on others' terror.

In *Silence of the Lambs*, Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster), a student at the FBI academy, probes Lecter for clues in an attempt to identify and apprehend a serial killer nicknamed Buffalo Bill (Ted Levine). Lecter, who feeds Clarice tidbits of information in return for details of her personal history, becomes one of the film's ambivalent figures of monstrosity: intriguing and horrifying at the same time. It is not difficult to catch the allusions to the myth of the vampire in the film's characterizations of Hannibal.

Dr. Chilton (Anthony Heald), the administrator of the asylum, in tones meant to frighten Clarice (and the audience) describes Lecter as “a monster. A pure psychopath” (Tally, 1989). Chilton, briefing Clarice on her way to visit Lecter for the first time, shows her a snapshot that proves that the madman is capable of extreme physical violence. The audience is spared from sharing Clarice’s look at the photograph. Nevertheless, Chilton’s graphic description of Hannibal’s devouring of one of the woman’s eyes and her tongue, while his blood pressure remained constant as eighty-five, leaves a powerful mental imprint precisely because of the absence of the specific image of the nurse’s mutilation. Indeed, Lecter menaces not simply by assaulting, but by possessing a terrifying ability to insinuate himself into the minds of his patients/victims (and the audience). The other characters in the film recognize this subtle threat. “Believe me,” FBI section chief Jack Crawford (Scott Glenn) warns Starling, “You don’t want Hannibal Lecter inside your head.” Craig McKay, the film’s editor describes Lecter as “leaning back, drinking it all in, vampirically” as he elicits personal information from Clarice (Bliss and Banks, 1996). One of the guards echoes this sentiment when he asks Clarice whether Lecter is “some kind of vampire.” Traditional concepts of monstrosity clearly inform the film’s portrayal of Lecter; nevertheless, he is tellingly characterized in terms of an attractive and fascinating monster—in keeping with contemporary (and original novelistic) characterizations of vampirism as a suave Count Dracula (rather than a clumsy and inarticulate Frankensteinian creature) who achieves penetration not so much by force as by the allure of his Otherness.

Alongside his apparent elegance, the film figures Lecter’s monstrosity in terms of his ability to return the gaze—to echo, even in confinement, the voyeurism of Norman Bates. It is important to note that in *Silence*. . . Ed Gein’s cannibalism was split apart from his gender uncertainties and fetishistic obsession on obese women’s flesh. Cannibalism, conjoined with vampirism’s ability to hypnotize and seduce, became a feature of the powerfully heterosexual, upper-class and brilliant Dr. Lecter; and the desire to become a woman, conjoined with vampirism’s gender uncertainties, became a feature of the gender-disturbed, blue-collar and not-so-brilliant Jame Gumb.

The exchanges between Clarice and Lecter in the psychiatric ward reveal the complex interpenetrations of the vampiric gaze. His first appearance was carefully staged: Clarice finds the doctor, awaiting her approach, standing in the middle of his well-lit, glassed-in cell, staring out at her. Lecter’s monstrous gaze, like Dracula’s, is uncontained by his cell, penetrates, threatens, and controls the scene. The cell was carefully designed to promote this effect. Demme recalls in an interview that “Kristi Zea—the production designer—and I spent a tremendous amount of time trying to deal with the bars on Lecter’s cage,” eventually opting to dispose of the offending obstructions altogether (Smith, 2001). Demme was concerned with showing each character’s face clearly, transmitting an unobstructed gaze between Lecter and Clarice, his protégé and analyzand (*The Silence of the Lambs*, 2001). Later, Lecter’s wardens fit him with a mask, which, although it obscures his face almost entirely, leaves his eyes expressively visible. The specially constructed and eminently recognizable prop reveals the significance of his monstrous and hypnotic gaze.

As reviewers of the film and observers of pop culture have noted, Lecter became a wildly popular figure, enacting on a larger scale the dynamic of Clarice and her strange attraction to the “therapist.” Novelist A. L. Kennedy observes “the nice folks in my cinema just cheered” at the

triumphant ending where Hannibal Lecter announces his intentions for yet another cannibalistic dinner date (Kennedy, 1995). Anthony Hopkins, celebrated for his performance of the character, explains that he wanted to defy the expectations of the audience when it came to the horror of Hannibal Lecter. “The thing is not to act in a frightening way,” he explains, “I meant to play Lecter very friendly and very charming, very silky and seductive (Seidenberg, 1991).” David Sundelson (1993) describes Lecter’s ambivalence with the oxymoronic phrase “flashes of highbrow savagery.” As Hopkins implies, his character’s monstrous power emerges not *despite* but precisely *because* of his genteel, cultured dignity.

While his propensity to create gourmet meals from his victims does indeed horrify, he stands in clear contrast to the simply offensive “Multiple” Miggs and the other inmates of his ward. Maintaining a calm, commanding presence in his cell, Lecter never physically threatens Clarice; instead, he plays an almost gallant role. Hopkins himself describes Lecter as the “prime dark angel” of the film’s fairy-tale structure, emphasizing the grotesque attractiveness or elegant savagery of his character. He acknowledges that the story is “all very erotic” (Grobel, 1994). Critics have observed the intimacy and implied attraction of Lecter’s relationship with Clarice, and the film itself does nothing to dispel the notion. For example, upon Clarice’s arrival in Memphis, Lecter remarks, since she had gone to all that trouble to interrogate him again, “people will think we’re in love.” His caress of Clarice’s hand, shot in close-up at the conclusion of this scene, emphasizes that Clarice’s interests on some level involve more than simple questioning. The allure of Lecter’s monstrosity, the film reveals, brings Clarice back time and again.

Driving home the charisma, rather than the repulsiveness, of Lecter’s monstrosity, the editing process cut out the most overt representations of his violence from the final version of the film. Chilton, for example, shows Clarice a photograph documenting Lecter’s assault on a nurse, but the film does not treat the audience to the same view. The most violent scenes (Lecter’s escape from the Shelby County courthouse) emphasize his power and brutality but at the same time deny the graphic details. At the conclusion of the attack, the camera switches from a low-angle shot to a high-angle view of the madman calmly surveying the domesticated cell, a phonograph, his drawings, and (ironically) a copy of *Bon Appetit* accessorizing the scene (*The Silence of the Lambs*, 2001). Ted Tally’s (1994) discussion of the editing process reveals that shots of Lecter’s escape elaborating upon the madman’s brutal violence were cut, ostensibly in the interest of pacing. The resulting rendering, however, not only moved the plot along but also produced the image of Lecter as a brilliant, refined, and dangerously sympathetic character.

Similarly, Po Chih Leong’s *Immortality* centers principally on Steven Grlscz (Jude Law), a strikingly handsome London medical researcher, who seduces women before he kills them and drinks their blood. In the scene that reveals his modus operandi, after he has saved Maria Vaughn (Kerry Fox), from committing suicide by preventing her from throwing herself on the tracks of an oncoming train at a Tube station, he woos her and they become lovers. One night, Grlscz (pronounced “Grolsch”) brings Maria flowers, and they commence a romantic evening together. The cinematic coding of Steven as a vampire grows particularly strong in this scene. He and Maria play a game, in which they sit far apart, and he asks her whether she trusts him, and he commands her to close her eyes. She half-jokingly replies that she does not trust him, but obeys. The camera shoots from overhead, to reveal the top of Grlscz’s head and the shadow it casts; gradually, the shadow of his head lengthens impossibly, and we cut to a close up of Steven

gazing upon Maria's face, which is in shadow. The shadow disappears and Maria opens her eyes (a point of view the audience shares) to find Steven sitting at the far end of the room. She laughs in astonishment and delight, thinking that it is a magic trick meant to amuse her. Grłsz again commands her to close her eyes, and he repeats the same "trick," this time kissing her on the forehead and nose and withdraws from kissing her lips when she leans forward with her eyes closed. The third time, Grłsz places a thick silver band on her finger and commands her to open her eyes. To the audience familiar with the cinematic traditions of vampire lore, the signs are all there: the vampire's irresistible seductive charm; the expressionist shadows cast against a surface in order to signify the approach of the vampire; the use of the vampire's ring to claim a bride. The vampire's ring, signifying his authority, his supernatural powers, or heritage, is cinematic, rather than literary in origin, and seen in a multitude of movies such as *House of Frankenstein* (1944), *The Vampire's Ghost* (1945), *Blood of Dracula* (1957), where the ring is now a medallion, *Horror of Dracula* or *Dracula* (1958), *Taste the Blood of Dracula* (1970), and *Dracula Today* or *Dracula A.D. 1972* (1972).

A sharp cut ensues to reveal a steamy erotic scene in which the lovers kiss each other passionately on the stairs; in the bedroom, Steven holds Maria's hands behind her back as they fall on the bed. He climbs on top of her, running his hand along her face, as she responds, aroused. The low angle close up at his face, from her point of view, reveals him to be strangely detached. At the height of her passion, he suddenly covers her mouth, twists her face sideways, and bites her neck, as blood spurts on the wall. She struggles but he holds her down, continuing to sink his teeth into her neck. The camera moves further back to show that the blanket has become drenched with blood, and he sits up, his mouth ringed in crimson. The deep brilliance of blood, introduced very early in the film (as blood drips from a car somehow suspended high up among some trees on to Steven's hand as he looks up), is also a hallmark of vampire films, and is a consistent feature as the plot unfolds. In addition, later shots of Grłsz also show him wearing a long black coat that swirls like a cape around him, reminiscent of the black cape that the archetypal vampire usually wears.

However, there is some difficulty with labeling Steven a vampire. If he is one, he is very different from the standard cinematic depiction. He does not have fangs, he can walk in broad daylight, he can touch crucifixes, and he is a medical researcher who reveals genuine compassion for his patients. Yet there are also clear hints that he is something other than human—perhaps even superhuman. For example, he moves faster than any ordinary human being can, as evidenced in the single fight sequence (reminiscent of Hong Kong martial arts films in which Leong specialized) in which Grłsz effortlessly overcomes an entire gang of thugs in order to save Anne from being raped. In addition, Grłsz almost unconsciously assimilates other peoples' attributes to become his own; it is as if he is a blank slate upon whom the imprint of those who grow close to him (and thus become marked as potential victims) are burnt in. Thus Maria's ability to write the opposing lines "I love you" and "I hate you" simultaneously later become transmuted into his ability to compose lines of poetry and to draw a portrait of Anne Levels (Elina Löwensohn), his final prey and love interest. Grłsz also possesses the ability to expel all the negative emotions his victims have felt toward him by coughing up a daggerlike crystal (a theme that has Cronenberg-ian resonances with its emphasis on the physical externalization of emotional tensions, such as in *The Brood*). His "unnaturalness" as a serial killer and gothic creature is visualized in the scene where he squats at a beach, after he has

disposed of Maria's body. The camera shoots him from a low angle, as he sits, a dark, brooding figure with his hands clawlike, and his body heaving strangely, like a bird of prey momentarily resting.

The title of the film was originally *The Wisdom of Crocodiles*, which illuminates one main theme of the film. During scenes of lovemaking with Anne, Steven, in a voiceover, tells his new lover that human beings have three brains: a human brain, which overlays a mammalian brain, which in turn overlays a reptile brain. Thus, Steven concludes his bizarre "bedtime story" with the words that every time the psychiatrist asks someone to lay on the couch, one is in effect being asked to lie down with a horse and a crocodile.

As the movie continues, we find out that Steven is more "crocodile" than human; though malice is not one of his flaws, like a vampire or a serial killer; he is compelled to kill, and to kill ritualistically in a patterned way. When he is ready to kill his victim, he lines his bed with a disposable silver sheet, which catches most of the blood, and becomes his victim's shroud. Every month, he must feed upon a woman's blood, not for her blood itself, as popular vampire lore would have it, but in order to consume the love that resides in her blood so that he may continue to live. When he genuinely falls in love with Anne, and fights the compulsion to kill her off, his body fails to heal, and in a haunting sequence that mimes the progression of AIDS, his body begins to degenerate.

Yet like the serial killers immortalized through film in both "cinema verité" and popular horror genres (of which psychological thrillers constitute a subgenre), Grlscz emerges as a figure both sympathetic and terrifying. It is clear that he detests his condition, and is in search of that mythic woman who could love him "perfectly" and thus cure him of his affliction. Steven seems more like a victim driven to kill by his own nature, rather than a sadistic predator who enjoys his victims' suffering. In addition, Grlscz's friendship with Inspector Healey (Timothy Spall) may have been initially motivated by selfish motives (i.e., he saves the inspector, who was tailing him, from a gang of thugs perhaps in order to throw suspicion off himself as a murderer), but the friendship between the two men later deepens and is cemented by mutual confessions. Grlscz also assimilates one characteristic feature of the inspector: the habit of crushing the very end of a burning cigarette with his fingertips. This acquisition of bodily "signatures" is a sign of intimacy usually reserved for one of his female victims. In the final moments of the film, which are slightly reminiscent of one of the concluding sequences of *Bladerunner* in which Rick Deckart (Harrison Ford) hangs from a ledge as Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer), Anne hangs perilously from the side of a building as Steven hangs on to her. She has chosen to jump rather than to become his victim, and it appears that he is determined to claim his prize. After struggling in vain with him, she uses the ornamental chopstick she had used to prop up her hair (an Oriental family heirloom that signified that the owner of the chopsticks would always be safe and well fed) to stab Grlscz's hand repeatedly. He somehow manages to swap hands, and like Roy Batty (with his own hand impaled by a nail), who unexpectedly saves the bladerunner who had come to kill him, Grlscz pulls Anne to safety and allows her to escape as he bleeds to death. The final sequence of the film shoots from high above, once again in a Hitchcock-like style, to reveal Grlscz, clad from head to toe in black, his bleeding hand punctured, as if by stigmata, and his body twitching in the final throes of fear and pain. Grlscz thus emerges as a stylish, charismatic,

and even sacrificial vampire-serial killer figure, with whom the audience identifies, despite his monstrosity.

Finally, Ridley Scott's *Hannibal* takes this process of identifying with a glamorously compelling and deadly vampiric character or "dark angel" even further. Whereas *Silence* . . . was peripherally about the relationship between Lecter and Starling, and particularly in Thomas Harris' original novel, more about Starling's determination to make it in an alpha-dominated male profession, the hinge upon which *Hannibal* turns is the cult worship of the seductive and malevolent doctor. As Todd R. Ramlow (2001) observes: "As the character's immense popularity suggests, there is something about Lecter that appeals to 'us,' there appears to be some level on which 'we' all wish we could be a little more like him, which is precisely what the filmmakers are banking on." Charles Taylor (2001) puts his finger on the pulse of this hybrid of slick and arty cinematography with necro-thriller content when he declares: "Scott's 'Hannibal' is the apotheosis of serial-killer chic, the prestige movie version of a Manson T-shirt. No longer a villain, Lecter is now the hero, the superior being given the power of judgment over all the other characters—the serial killer as arbiter of taste." One way in which this identification between monster and audience is forged in *Hannibal* is by creating an even more odious monster in Mason Verger (Gary Oldman), a former victim whom Hannibal had "hypnotized" to rip off his own face, as Hannibal fed the pieces to the dogs. Another way is to focus on the degree of corruption within the FBI, embodied particularly in the Justice Department ladder climber, Paul Krendler (Ray Liotta), who accepts payments from Verger in order to disgrace Starling, and thus transform the distressed agent into unwitting bait to lure out Hannibal. As Ridley Scott (2001) remarks in the director's commentary on the film, Hannibal, like Clarice, is "pure in his own way"—he seems to have a sense of honor and ethical responsibility to those who do not violate his sense of civility, such as Clarice and Nurse Barney Matthews (Frankie Faison). In fact Hannibal in this sequel, unlike *Silence of the Lambs*, seems compelled to kill only if his sense of "good manners and taste" are assaulted. Thus, a narrative device that *Hannibal* uses, in order to put the audience squarely on his side has been used in a prior film: Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*. In both films, what appears to be an omniscient or objective point of view is revealed to be the killer's point of view such that his murderous acts seems justified. In *Hannibal*, all of the doctor's victims are varieties of what he calls "free range rude," including the avaricious, the lustful, and the pedophilic. Thus, it only seems poetic justice (tinged with very dark, sardonic humor) when he murders them, in a Dante-esque fashion, such that their deaths mirror their crimes. (*Seven* uses a similar approach, as each of the victims representing the seven deadly sins is murdered by getting their "just desserts.") For example, Inspector Francesco Pazzi (Giancarlo Giannini) is hanged and gutted, like his famous ancestor, for similar crimes of greed and treachery (to Hannibal). Mason Verger is condemned to being eaten by the man-eating hogs he had bred to make Hannibal suffer; the death he had dreamt of inflicting on Hannibal becomes his own. Paul Krendler is forced to eat delicately spiced and sautéed pieces of his own brain in front of the horrified and drugged Clarice, in atonement for his "rudeness" to Clarice. In all of these instances, it is Hannibal's point of view that justifies why these punishments are fitting and just. And in all of these instances, it is Hannibal's equanimity that renders the gore "entertaining" because we are drawn into sharing his point of view, without realizing it, in contrast with *Henry*'s "home invasion" scene mentioned earlier.

The allusions to the vampire myth continue in *Hannibal*. Director Ridley Scott (2001) describes Hannibal's videotaped appearance during his murder of Pazzi (seen from the point of view of Clarice, who is viewing the footage) as reminiscent of *Nosferatu*, one of the most famous German expressionist depictions of the vampire legend. As Hannibal walks through the streets of Florence, with his Borsali hat tipped at a rakish angle, his coat billows around him like Dracula's cape. Like the vampire, Hannibal seems to glide effortlessly through doors, and moves into and out of places with a speed and silence impossible to humans. Like the count, Hannibal flirts suavely and successfully with women, such as the inspector's wife, Allegra Pazzi (Francesca Neri), and seems to be able to hypnotize his prey into inflicting pain upon themselves, like Mason Verger. Like the vampire, Hannibal possesses an uncanny command over animals; the man-eating hogs avoid him, and Krendler's guard dog is clearly intimidated by him. Like a vampire that "sleeps" until he is awakened, Hannibal is in "hibernation" and comes out of a "ten year retirement" only when he hears of Starling's disgrace. (One movie review (Elliott, 2001) puns: "He's back . . . in all his gory"—drawing parallelisms between this contemporary vampire, and an earlier equally fashionable Frankensteinian monster: the Terminator.) Artie Megibben (2001) once again renders explicit the Gothic appeal of *Hannibal*:

Ever since the night Renfield met Dracula, moviegoers have had an appetite for blood-sucking villains with class. And not since Bela Lugosi has a villain had more class and style than Anthony Hopkins' Hannibal Lecter. He quotes the classics. He's a patron of the arts. And his fangs are as acquainted with Bulugar caviar as with the soft, supple flesh of his victims. Hopkin's Lecter does not so much snarl as purr—whispering seductive innuendoes set to opera music—an approach matched only by Eden's subtle serpent.

Thus, though both the serial killer and vampire movies we have surveyed end up with a similar conclusion regarding the nature of voyeurism in relation to the visual (i.e., that part of the visual pleasures of these films is that we share the killers' points of views at various points), it is interesting that our reactions to this realization is very different in *Henry*, as opposed to *Hannibal*. Perhaps it is because *Henry* seems too "real" with its rootedness in the blue collar world and the gritty streets of Chicago, and its use of cinema verité, in contrast with *Hannibal*, which is an unabashed glorification of the serial killer as genius, vampire and dark angel rolled into one, with its polished cinematography, Florentine locale, lush mise en scene, and beautiful musical score. It is clear that the issue of class clearly creates a different type of identification in these two genres. Nevertheless, there is a clear sense in which the cinematic representations of serial killers and vampires, as "mythic" and "real" figures, blur into each other as simultaneously dangerous and endangered creatures who are driven to kill by compulsions as strong as the reflex to breathe. And it is the "authenticity" of easy slippage across the cinematic modes of "documentary" and "fiction" that enables the gothicization of serial killers as vampiric.

## **DISCUSSION: THE COMPULSIONS OF "REAL" SERIAL KILLERS**

Though it may now be impossible to separate real serial killers from their reel life counterparts, as the two have been conflated over the last twenty years in the popular imaginary (Jenkins, 1994), a summary of the prevailing behavioral science perspective as generated by the

law enforcement community (and criminologists sympathetic to the law enforcement perspective) is in order to serve as a point of comparison with fictional, cinematic imagery. This perspective has come to the forefront within criminology, as traditional psychological and sociological explanations cannot adequately explain the nature of sadistic serial murder.

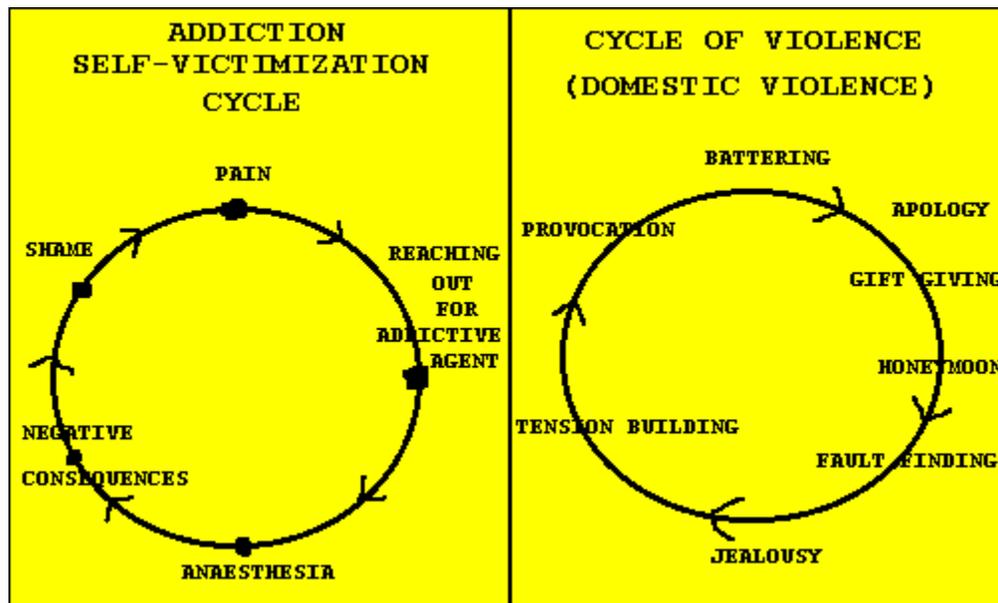
Robert Ressler (n.d., Court TV), considered by some as the original "Profiler," coined the phrase "serial killer," based on twenty years of tracking down killers for the FBI. Because he grew up in Chicago, Ressler first became fascinated with the criminal mind during the "Lipstick Murders" in 1946. He eventually studied psychology as a way to understand what motivates this type of criminal behavior and the "demon" that pushes a killer over the edge, as well as to establish a pattern that could have some predictive power in determining the killer's next violent act. While he worked with the FBI, Ressler perfected the art of the interview. There he worked closely with other agents, including Pierce Brooks, a former LAPD detective who helped found the FBI's Violent Criminal Apprehension Program in 1985 (Ressler and Shachtman, 1982). Through numerous visits to prisons and scores of conversations with convicted killers, he was able to explore whether a killer is driven by an "irresistible compulsion or a compulsion that cannot be resisted." This "compulsion model" is important to delineate because it outlines how the imaging of the serial killer-vampire figure intersects with a theoretical model of what motivates serial killer behavior.

A serial killer, according to Ressler, is someone whose violent crimes must have claimed more than three victims, at different times, places and events. This type of crime involves some premeditation or planning that is spurred by an overriding fantasy, formed early, which "drives" this type of killer to commit repetitive crimes. Dr. Helen Morrison, a Forensic Psychologist at the Evaluation Center at Chicago, adds the following characterization: that a serial killer, by the time he is an adolescent, is totally focused on sexual fantasies in an "experimental" sense. She cites a higher body count than Ressler; no less than ten homicides of a brutal, violent and ritualistic nature (i.e., a "cookie cutter" format) are required in order to establish that the killer is indeed a "serial" killer (Bahn et al, 1995).

Robert Hazelwood, a former supervisory Special Agent of the FBI, forms a clear taxonomy that distinguishes between a "serial" killer, a "spree" killer and a "mass" killer. A "serial" killer, like Gacy, commits murders with a certain "periodicity;" a "spree" killer, like Starkweather, may commit several murders separated by time and place, but all these murders are connected to one incident; a "mass" murderer, like Manson or Smith and Hickock (*In Cold Blood*), kills four or more people at one location at one time. Hazelwood also makes the provocative suggestion that serial killers have existed as long as humans have existed, and that myths concerning "werewolves" probably emerged because of the degree of mutilation wreaked on their victims by serial killers (Bahn et. al., 1995). Lycanthropy remains an important Hollywood theme, as modern American tourists find themselves turned into werewolves in the primordial English countryside (*An American Werewolf in London* (1981)) or the primitive subterranean worlds of Paris (*An American Werewolf in Paris* (1997)).

What is common to all of these characterizations of serial killing is the powerful effect of violent fantasies, which serve as a compulsive force that impels these individuals to kill in a periodic or cyclical and ritualistic way. Much of what is meant when we talk about "cycles" of

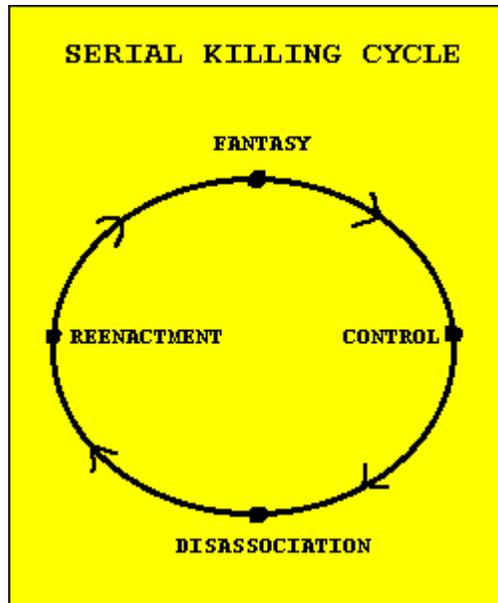
sexual fantasy is based on the vaguer notion of "biological or natural clocks". This is what enables the more or less accurate prediction of when the perpetrator needs to strike again. Although a basic understanding of sexual urges and needs is called for, we are concerned here with *abnormal* sexual urges and needs, particularly those that call for repeated or serial behaviors. In this sense, therefore, we can make comparisons to other addiction processes, such as the Victimization cycle and the Cycle of Violence associated with Domestic Violence, as in the following diagrams (Nashville Metro PD):



With the addiction cycle, there's a distinctive "shame - pain" sequence, although with minor forms of dysfunction, the shame part may only be low self-esteem. The part that determines the addiction is when the person comes to associate continued use of the addictive agent with relief from pain (Lindesmith's theory of addiction). And the pain can be anything, even something as mild as the stress or hassles of living. There are a number of addictive agents. Here's a partial list: alcohol, drugs, work, money, control, power, food, sex, pornography, approval, relationships, physical illness (hypochondria), exercise, cosmetics, academics, intellectualism, religiosity, perfectionism, cleaning, organizing, materialism, and collecting things.

With the battering cycle, there's a relatively short battering incident in which the person is out of control, followed by a period of apology, gift giving, and a "honeymoon" phase in which the batterer is trying to be contrite with "hearts and flowers." Then, the batterer starts fault finding and becoming verbally abusive. Jealousy develops, and the domestic partner can usually sense the tension building. This leads to a state of fear, helplessness, and inability to control the environment, which usually serves as ample ground for a precipitating or provocation incident (provocation if the partner "provokes" a scene to get it over with), which leads again to a battering incident.

Using the addiction and battering cycles as models, the serial killer fantasy re-enactment cycle may thus be diagrammatically represented:



Fantasy occurs well in advance of the crime, and for the serial killer, fantasy evolves into a compulsion. The subsequent behavior keeps true to the flavor of the original fantasy. For some, a symbol, such as a buck knife, represents the original fantasy, or more accurately, a link to the unrealized fantasy waiting in the mind for an opportunity. The crime itself is also the fantasy played out by the offender. The script is cast and well rehearsed in the mind. The victim is only inserted into a role that the offender needs for the fantasy to come true. Sometimes the victim will be called by a name that is of special importance to the offender. The fantasy becomes the motive and establishes the offender's signature.

Control refers to the way in which the offender keeps the world he creates with the victim true to his fantasy. Domination is the primary characteristic that is enhanced by sadistic sex, torture, mutilation, and murder. Some offenders feel they do not have control until the victim is dead, so they kill immediately, and then turn to freely mastering the corpse. Others will take their time, engaging in repeated torture, escalation, and de-escalation of torment with the victim. As one serial killer interviewed by Tomes (2002:33) stated: "As you strangle someone their eyes go through several stages. First fear and anger, second, total panic, third, complete surrender, and lastly the 1000 yard stare of the dead. Also, if you are still raping a woman as she dies-when her body goes into final death spasms, her pussy grabs and pulls on your dick as if it is milking it." Control is also expressed in the staging and ritual displays at the crime scene as well as in the location choice of the assault. Jack Katz (1990), in his discussion of monstrous, premeditated murder emphasizes the importance of time and place to the perpetrator's attempt to control every aspect of the event. Similarly, Kenneth Burke (1965) recognized the importance of "scene" as motivation for human behavior. For example, standing at night on the edge of a precipice overlooking the sea might itself impel the onlooker to jump and commit suicide. Likewise, Katz's killers wait for the dead of night and imprison their victims in basements or other confined spaces prior to carrying out their murderous acts. The discussion of deeply rural areas, abandoned farmhouses, and dark cellars, as places that serve as clichéd or "natural" backdrops for such murders or where bodies are dropped or buried resonates with the Gothic imagery that fills such descriptions (Simpson, 2000: 33).

Katz goes on to note the godlike persona of the killer. The gothic killer takes life away as a vindictive god does, without warning or remorse. Like a primordial god, the killer, in his total control of the victim, is an object of dread. In this sense the contemporary serial killer has replaced the mythical monsters of previous ages. According to Philip Jenkins (1994: 16): “. . . popular stereotypes of these threatening outsiders have come to assimilate most of the characteristics that in earlier societies were attributed to a variety of chiefly imaginary external enemies, including vampires, werewolves, and cannibals. All represent the threat of a reversion to primitive savagery, manifested most blatantly in acts of cannibalism and mutilation.”

Unlike Lombroso's (1911) atavistic evolutionary throwbacks, the modern serial killer lives among us unrecognizable by outside physical features that might give away his primitivism. Monsters, as contemporary factual and fictional accounts tell us, are not “out there,” completely discernible through an obvious physical aberration, but reside within ourselves and the enclave of the “normal.”

Disassociation refers to how the offender successfully blends back into society, the thick superficial veneer of personality that is entirely disassociated from their violent criminal behavior. Serial killers carry their abilities at self-protective behavior to an extreme, although not to the point of multiple personality. They are intelligent to avoid detection, but they often “overtry” to avoid leakage to their true nature. Many are married or in a relationship, but they are disassociated. For example, New Jersey's “Ice Man” Richard Kuklinski left his wife and two daughters' home only to kill; otherwise he was the perfect house husband. The depth of the fantasy determines the depth or degree to which they disassociate. The offender knows fully well what behaviors are not acceptable to society, and to disassociate, they seek out “respectable” jobs, mates, and social activities that offer the best “front.” In captivity, they often make model inmates. As a case study illustrating this point regarding serial killers, speaking of Jeffrey Dahmer, Tithecott (1997: 18) said remarked: “Dahmer is ‘the average-looking man,’ a ‘former tennis player, the son of middle-class parents,’ who has the appearance of being ‘a nice guy.’ But Dahmer, the boy next door, is also he who emitted ‘wolflike howling’ and ‘demonic screams’ when he was arrested, and when we read that ‘many witnesses quoted in the press have attested to his extraordinary Jekyll-and-Hyde transformations when drinking,’ we have little trouble in constructing Dahmer as the latest descendant of Stevenson's character(s). When we tell stories about our monsters, we like to imply that their monstrosity is everywhere, only hidden from view, concealed within.”

Reenactment is a behavioral aspect involving attempts to relive the fantasy. Reenactments are almost always sexual in nature, involving acts of masturbation, uses of pornography, or playing with souvenirs, trophies, or props. These things stimulate the offender, but they also reinforce the escalatory aspect of a serial killer's fantasy because the only thing they can control at this point is themselves. It is at this point also where the planning for future crimes occurs.

There's an additional way to think about the stages in this cycle, and that is to think of them as phases (Norris, 1989: 23-35). During Phase 1 (aura phase) twisted thoughts occur as the killer fantasizes about his next victim. Next, Phase 2 (trolling) begins as the killer goes out to

look for the perfect victim. During Phase 3 (seduction) the trap is laid, often using “lures.” Phase 4 (capture) occurs when the victim is at her/his most vulnerable moment, as there is no escape from her/his captor. This is followed by Phase 5 (the kill) in which the perpetrator’s suppressed emotions are let loose. During Phase 6 (totem or trophy) the killer collects souvenirs or leaves props at the scene as reminders. Phase 7 (depression) follows the crime. This appears to be a withdrawal period, as the euphoria from the kill disappears, leading to a restarting of the cycle.

Whether the methodology employed in profiling is ultimately successful in catching such criminals is hotly debated. As former FBI agent William Tafoya pointed out regarding cases such as the Unabomber, real profiling, despite its claims to success, has had a very spotty record (Witkin, 1997). Other critics of profiling include Philip Jenkins (1994: 70-72) and Philip Simpson (2000). Pat Brown (n.d.), herself a sexual homicide investigator, goes even further in criticizing the limited utility of profiling:

To date, the general procedure has been to send in crime scene and autopsy information and limited details concerning the crime and the victim to a profiler who then sends back a report. The process pretty much stops at this point. The investigators add it to their pile of data using whatever they feel has some merit . . . The fact that there is no literature proving profiling to be of any measurable benefit to the investigative process is disturbing.

Are profilers therefore truly any better prepared to prevent future killings or to capture killers on the loose than the quasi-superstitious, quasi-scientific Dr. van Helsing of the vampire tales were equipped to stop Draculas? Only time will tell.

## **CONCLUSION: GOTHIC CRIMINOLOGY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS**

If this were a traditional criminological analysis, we would in all likelihood at this point analytically compare what is “known” about real serial killers to the media and filmic stereotypes in which they have been socially encrusted. Some of that work has been done admirably, such as that by Douglas and Olshaker (1998), who differentiate between the “facts” of the “real” Ed Gein versus his mythicized split screen personae, like Hannibal Lecter (the cannibal) and Jame Gumb (who skins his victims to create a “woman suit”). Like Rafter (2000), we believe such a turn has limited utility when discussing the complex world of film as embedded in the everyday—or at least yokes the discussion of film to very limited parameters. While such an approach might be useful for the serious academic or real life profiler, the fact remains that for ninety-nine percent of the population, the discussion of serial killing is a porous mixture of fact and fiction, scholarly and journalistic accounts, and profiler and academic studies. The persistence of an approach rooted in discussions of evil, over a more scientific, “bias-free” clinical analysis parallels the distinction between fictional film with its reliance upon agreed-upon societal myths and stereotypes, and documentary with its matter-of-fact approach to reality. Both may be needed to offer a more complicated and nuanced picture of this phenomenon, particularly as this paper has shown that the line between fact and fiction is not static or fixed—which does not mean there is no such thing as “fact,” but that “facts” are always complexly imbricated with “fiction,” just as “fiction,” in order to appear authentic and narratively compelling, must possess verisimilitude. The existence of evil within the world is communicated through gothic constructions, through

the rhetorical and visual positioning of, among other examples, serial killers, genocidal dictators, or the corporate disregard for human life brought on by “vampiric capitalism” (Lyman, 1992).

Thus, serial killer mythology, as one instance of gothic criminology, is a societal construction; a genealogy of its origins shows that it is difficult to sift fact from fiction in a clear, unproblematic way. As Hodges (2001) points out, the FBI profiling unit read both crime fiction and true crime accounts, before turning to the interviewing of actual killers. In addition, discussion of whether film depictions of serial killers differs from the profiler accounts is impossible to sort out, as just as profilers rely upon crime fiction, crime fiction writers such as Thomas Harris spend considerable time interviewing profilers and reviewing their case files (Snyder, 2002). While the Harris characters are composites and their behaviors embellished, the verisimilitude to real life killers remains.

Similarly, FBI BSU members Ressler, Burgess, and Douglas admit the connections with fictional detective novels and their fascination with details (Simpson, 2000:79). Crime scene analysis, whether forensic or psychological, looks for clues in the smallest of items found at the crime scene. Just as the naturalized serial killer descriptions have their origins in the supernaturalized Gothic mode, the contemporary mind hunters (the profiler/detectives) do as well. As Simpson (2000: 80) points out, the profiler “magically” discerns the killer’s identity by constructing a text from crime scene clues: “The act of reading carried out by profiling represents a pseudoscientific attempt at mastery or control of the unknown author’s ‘literary’ project. In fact, profiling is an attempt to appropriate the text’s language in order to identify the author...The profiler enters into an oddly personal power struggle with a completely imaginary enemy as manifested in the physical traces left behind by a real but anonymous individual. ...The sympathetic bond between detective and criminal illustrates the literature of serial murder’s easy merging of the Gothic romance with doubling.” Doubling, derived from the gothic notion of the *Doppelgänger*, is a literary device in which two characters are used to display different sides of one personality. A “good” character, in order to track down and capture an “evil” character successfully, has to enter into the mindset of his predator-prey, and in effect become like him. When asked about the toughest aspect of being a profiler, John Douglas (2000) responded that he is often quite ill, as he must reenact the crimes in his own mind over and over again in order to solve them.

Further exploration of the gothic nature of serial killer films and their depictions of murderers and those who try to catch them is certainly apropos, in order to explore the complex, twilight realm between fact and fiction called the “gothic,” which we all inhabit. Gothic criminology represents a return to the primordial origins of deviant behavior, and as such allows for the reintroduction of the notion of evil into criminological discourse. Often without acknowledgement criminology has borrowed from gothic accounts, but secularized them in the quest to scientize the discipline. For example, Edwin Sutherland’s (1949) classic *White Collar Crime* is largely a restatement of E.A. Ross’ earlier *Sin and Society* (1907). Other works of the first generation American sociologists, who were strongly tied to the Social Gospel movement, appear in secularized versions of texts on social problems (Greek, 1992). As serial murder may be unexplainable in reference to traditional theories of deviant behavior, contemporary criminological theory regarding the social construction of monstrous crimes may be

supplemented fruitfully by discussion that is more inclusive of approaches drawn from literature, philosophy, and film.

### ENDNOTES

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