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## Chapter 3

### Class and Horror Fiction at Mid-Century

In his pioneering work of genre criticism, *The Literature of Terror* (1996), David Punter makes a socio-political claim for the mode, suggesting that, “because of its historical or geographical distancing [...the Gothic...] does not appear to represent a ‘real’ world” yet it “may in fact be delivering that world in an inverted form, or representing those areas of the world, and of human consciousness, which are, for one reason or another, not available to the normal processes of representation” (Punter, 18). As we move through the twentieth century we witness a collapsing of these distancing techniques, so that the fiction under discussion in this chapter might be said to predominantly adopt a more ‘realist’ mode than that of writers such as Poe and Lovecraft. Yet, while it seems clear that figures such as Ray Bradbury, Fritz Leiber, Charles Beaumont, Robert Bloch, and Richard Matheson might collectively be thought of as representing a “midcentury shift of supernatural horror from the flamboyant cosmicism of Lovecraft and his colleagues to the mundane social realism that in some ways continues to dominate the field today” (Joshi, 2012: 561). The writing of these authors also signals an equally important shift towards an often more sympathetic depiction of the poor, reflecting what sociologist C.L.R. James saw in the mid-century U.S. as “an uncompromised hunger for what socialism alone could provide” (Brennan, 233). Where Lovecraft had frequently demonised the poor, writers like Bradbury, Leiber, Beaumont and Bloch offer their readers a decidedly more nuanced depiction of changing socio-economic factors and their effects on many within the U.S. Such writers often explore the pressures exerted on the individual by the “assumed humiliation of downward mobility” (Packard: 225) in an era when “the American dream [was] losing some of its lustre for a good many citizens who would [still] like to believe in it” (17)

Consequently, the writers discussed in this chapter tend to work contra to the prevailing trends in mainstream U.S. society, which in the 1940s and 1950s increasingly proclaimed the end of scarcity during a period of “great and unprecedented affluence” (Galbraith: 13), and, with it, the end of class; as Vance Packard notes in *The Status Seekers* (1959) “A number of influential voices have been advising us that whatever social classes we ever had are now withering away” (12). Such claims included the proposal that America was “the most truly classless society in history” and “one vast middle class” (qtd in Packard: 12). Yet, in line with Packard’s more sceptical views, many of the writers in this chapter suggest “Such a notion unfortunately rests upon a notable lack of perception of the true situation that is developing. Class lines in several areas of our national life appear to be hardening” (12). We once again find an example of class being repressed in the mainstream; as Packard suggests: “Since class boundaries are contrary to the American Dream, Americans generally are uncomfortable when the subject of their existence arises” (13). One of the places that these anxieties find a voice is in the work of the authors here, who utilise genre tropes and motifs to mask what is still considered unspeakable in the culture in ‘Realist’ terms.

In Bradbury’s short story “The Watchful Poker Chip of H. Matisse” the lower middle class character George Garvey, “a terrifyingly ordinary man” (59), becomes the cause celebre for a group of artists and intellectuals. Though these members of the avant-garde proclaim George to be “a colossal norm” and “American culture at absolute zero” they are nevertheless attracted to his homogeneity, his lack of cultural knowledge; as the narrator notes: “They came to study the dreadful vulgarity of this imaginary Mass Man they pretend to hate. But they’re fascinated with the snake-pit” (65). Garvey is for those

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artists and intellectuals around him emblematic of the formulaic mainstream of U.S. society: “a monstrous Ennui, produced by our materialistic society” (60). However, rather than encourage the reader to share tacitly in this elitist sniping, as a writer like Lovecraft might have done, Bradbury’s story is decidedly more complex. Though Garvey eventually seems to undo himself by attempting to fulfil the expectations of those around him, it is the intelligentsia’s attitudes towards Garvey that are critiqued, not Garvey’s initial position as “symbolic of the crowd” (64-5). In contrast to Lovecraft’s recurrent depiction of the poor as a “herd of crude and unimaginative illiterates” (qtd in Joshi, Kindle) the narrator of “The Watchful Poker Chip of H. Matisse” tells us that “Underneath, Garvey was a surprisingly brilliant man, but his unimaginative parents had crushed him in the Terribly Strange Bed of their environment. From there he had been thrown to a larger lemon-squeezer: his Office, his Factory, his Wife.” (63) Furthermore, Garvey is shown to possess a keen intellect, wishing to understand the appeal that his new ‘friends’ have in him, Garvey reads widely on a range of pertinent philosophical subjects in order to engage with his visitors on a more meaningful level. Yet Garvey’s attempts to further educate himself have the opposite effect and he is rejected by the other characters:

They departed in short order when instead of being a delightfully mass-minded, keep-up-with-the-Joneses, machine-dominated chap leading a wishy-washy life of quiet desperation, Garvey enraged them with opinions on Does Existentialism Still Exist, or Is Kraft-Ebbing? They didn’t want opinions on alchemy and symbolism given in a piccolo voice. (64)

It is clear that the horror in Bradbury’s story comes from the callous objectification and exploitation of the lower-middle-class by those with more cultural capital, “who swarmed like vultures ... eyeing their prey” (60). Garvey and his wife are trapped in their mundane, stultifying lifestyles not only by their material conditions; “Both worked at anonymous jobs. And sometimes even they could not recall the name of the colorless company which used them like white paint on white paint” (60) but by intellectuals who desire a bathetic Other against which to define themselves as superior: “they only wanted Garvey’s good old-fashioned plain white bread and churned country butter, to be chewed on later at a dim bar, exclaiming how priceless!”(64)

In its empathetic depiction of Garvey and its simultaneous critique of the elitist views of the middle class intelligentsia, “The Watchful Poker Chip of H. Matisse”, like many of the stories in Bradbury’s influential collection *The October Country* (1955), marks a significant shift in genre fiction. Bradbury’s writing is often set in a poor rural milieu in which poor or destitute characters are drawn out of desperation to making decisions that lead to horrifying outcomes. The apotheosis of this pattern is “The Scythe”. At the beginning of the story an impoverished farmer, Drew Erickson, and his family are travelling searching for work. We learn of the farmer’s hardships; he has “A farmer’s hands, with the farm blown out from under them by the dry, hungry wind that never got enough good loam to eat” (193) but also of his pride and self-respect: “Beggin’,” he said harshly. “Ain’t none of us ever begged before. Ain’t none of us ever goin’ to.” (194) Taking a wrong turn the group happens across an empty house with a sizeable wheat field next to it. Upon entering the house in order to ask for food to feed his starving children, Erickson discovers the dead body of the house’s previous owner, a scythe, and a note that bequeaths the house and field “to the man who is to come. Whatever his name or origin shall be, it will not matter. The farm is his, and the wheat; the scythe, and the task ordained thereto” (196). While initially hesitant over the meaning of the note – Erickson’s wife proclaims ““It’s too good to be true. There must be some trick to it” (196) – in truth the family cannot afford to pass up the offer

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(given their present situation) and so they decide to stay. At first, it seems that the family's luck has indeed changed and Erickson is glad that "We'll have work to do, stuff to eat, somethin' over our heads to keep rain off" (196), however, things quickly take a turn for the worse when the wheat Erickson cuts starts rots immediately and next morning has magically regrown. Erickson continues working but breaks down suffering an episode in which he believes the wheat is crying out in pain, that there are "sad voices, out there. In the wheat" (201). The symbolism is clear; Erickson has become a version of the biblical grim reaper, wielding his scythe to cut down those who are due to die. Wanting to leave this horrifying situation behind, Erickson is faced with the dilemma of departing a house stocked with copious amounts of food and which provides shelter for his wife and children; as his spouse asserts: "We're stayin' here, where we're sure of eatin' and sleepin' and livin' decent and livin' long. I'm not starvin' my children down again, ever!" (202-3) Resigned, as a result of his desperate conditions, to his macabre situation, Erickson continues at his work until eventually he realises that his scything is due to take the lives of his wife and children. Refusing to kill those he knows and loves, Erickson refrains from wielding the scythe only to witness a fire that consumes the house leaving his family in a seemingly comatose state, neither dead nor truly alive. It would seem that you cannot cheat death and Erickson is forced into cutting down the strands of wheat that represent his family. The job having taken everything from him, the story ends with Erickson still 'harvesting' his wheat field and an image that seems to embody the universal, and horrific, toil of the 1930's agrarian worker's seemingly never-ending struggle as: "the one who works insanely, wildly, without ever stopping, night and day ... on and on and on..." (210).

Joshi proposes that Bradbury's *The October Country*, alongside the work of his contemporaries such as Matheson and Beaumont, "fostered a modernisation of the supernatural by appeal to ... the mundanities of contemporary life in America, with the result that much of their work features a social criticism of the increasing blandness and conformism of their time" (2012: 561). This social criticism is evident in stories like "The Watchful Poker Chip of H. Matisse" wherein the reader is encouraged to empathise with the lower-middle-class Garvey and to see his increasingly outlandish attempts to create "a wondrous facade" to hide the "the ancient boor" (Bradbury, 1996: 68) he comes to see himself as, as the unwarranted effect of his encounters with the grotesque Alexander Pape and his clique. Instead of depicting the lower middle class Garvey as abject and horrifying because of it as Lovecraft might have done, Bradbury presents Garvey's transformation into the pretentious as monstrous. "The Watchful Poker Chip of H. Matisse" points the way to a more complex and multilayered engagement with poverty and the poor that typifies post-Lovecraftian genre writing. In his *Monsters of the Market* (2011) McNally notes Marx's indebtedness to Gothic tropes and motifs, proposing that "Pillaging popular and literary imagination, from vampire-tales to Goethe's Faust, he cast capitalism as both a modern horror-story and a mystery tale, each inexplicable outside of the language of monstrosity" (13). Duly, in their turn to a more sympathetic depiction of the poor the mid-century writers under discussion in this chapter embody a Marxian stance in which capitalism, rather than those at the bottom of its socio-economic hierarchies, becomes a force with "monstrous objective power" (1973, 831).

This is not to say that any of these writers were outspoken Marxists. Instead, their increased class consciousness may have partly been the result of more practical factors such as the mid-century death of the pulps as a viable avenue for publication and the subsequent need to engage with supposedly more 'upmarket' and less genre savvy readerships. By the late 1940s and early 1950s many of the pulp

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magazines had closed down and those that remained paid less and less to the writers whose work they published. This once relatively stable market had all but disappeared, and with it the major outlet for the more outlandish writing of authors in the mould of Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard and Clark Ashton Smith. Noticeably, Bradbury was the only genre writer of this period to have substantial success in getting his work into the 'slick magazines' and this was probably a result of his submitting stories under a pseudonym and his ability to successfully disguise genre fiction as something ostensibly literary. Instead, horror writers had to find alternative ways to reach their readers, often adapting to the changing conditions of the market. During the middle years of the twentieth century the pulps were replaced with a range of new popular forms including comic books, digest-sized science fiction magazines, and the emerging cheap paperback novel. Indeed, as any historian of the popular might have expected; just as the pulps were themselves castigated for their lowbrow appeal, so these 'new' popular formats were initially spoken of in a derogatory, and reductive, fashion; as "little more than second-rate trash. Literary flotsam. Schlock turned out to appease a gluttonous mass appetite for sex and sensationalism" (qtd in Davis 1984: xi). Yet such 'new' formats proved immensely successful, at least in commercial terms, and writers had to adapt to their requirements, or face losing their readerships. Bradbury, in a move that was emblematic of the problems facing horror writers, perhaps demonstrated a considered degree of commercial acumen in choosing to downplay the pulp roots of his first short story collection *Dark Carnival* (1947), minimizing "the copyright page references to the pulp origins of these tales ... [and] ... any references to the stereotype of low-carnival entertainment that broader market readers and critics always associated with *Weird Tales*" (Eller 2013: 136).

Increased levels of reflexivity with regards to class, and the position of genre fiction in the marketplace, are evident in Bradbury's "The Dwarf". The story, which tells the tale of a dwarf, Mr Bigelow, who visits a hall of mirrors in order to see himself reflected as 'normal' size, and the owner, Ralph Banghart, who plays an evil prank on him in an attempt to impress a woman, is fairly obviously symbolic in its characterisation and themes. Joshi has suggested that "the dwarf of the title is obviously a stand in for Bradbury himself, as he writes pulp detective stories ..." (kindle) and that "a more transparent symbol could scarcely be sought for Bradbury's own insecurity" (kindle) However, this symbolism does not detract from the evocative descriptions of the down at heel characters and setting. Indeed, if anything, it actually aids the allegory. While Bigelow is initially presented as a physically repulsive character, "a dark-eyed, dark-haired, ugly man who has been locked in a winepress, squeezed and wadded down and down, fold on fold, agony on agony, until a bleached, outraged mess is left" (4), we quickly come to empathise with his plight. Bigelow must put himself through this humiliation night after night because "he ain't got enough to buy a mirror like those. He might be savin' up, but where in hell in the world today can a dwarf work? Dime a dozen, drug on the market, outside of circuses." (6-7) We learn that the Bigelow's poor financial situation is down to his occupation as a writer, and furthermore a lack of confidence in his own ability that sees him write "just enough pulp detective stories to live" rather than getting rich "writin' for the big magazines" (8). As the female character in the story, Aimee, grows to empathise with, and even admire Bigelow, so the reader too is encouraged to feel sympathetic towards his predicament. Though the callous Banghart is bewildered by Bigelow's inability to get rich given the apparent quality of his writing, Aimee understands how the situation is not that simple. It is Aimee that makes a direct link between Bigelow's dire personal situation and his economic conditions. She suggests that the dwarf is suffering from a kind of writer's block born directly from his impoverishment: "Maybe because ideas come slow because he's down in the dumps. Who wouldn't be? So small that way? I bet it's hard to think of anything being so small and living in a one-

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room cheap apartment” (8). Returning to the symbolism that Joshi sees as so important, this explanation works on two levels. In one sense the dwarf is indeed physically diminutive; however Aimee’s words here also imply that Bigelow has been brought spiritually low by his relative poverty, that there is something tangible about the effects of poverty on artistic freedom of expression. Indeed, the fact that it is possible to read the prank that forms the climax of the story as hinging on the incapability of Bigelow completing an economic transaction; the character’s inability to buy an enlarging mirror for use in his own accommodation means he has to keep coming to the hall of mirrors and is at the mercy of Banghart, suggests that the message of “The Dwarf” is that we are doomed by our material conditions despite our personal hopes and dreams; as Aimee notes of Bigelow’s predicament: “Life fixed him so he’s good for nothing but carny shows, yet there he is on the land.” (10)

The story’s fairground setting is one instance of Bradbury’s preoccupation with carnivals - he would return to this setting numerous times in his writing (indeed, many of the stories in *The October Country* originate from an earlier Arkham House collection entitled *The Dark Carnival* (1947). Yet, Bradbury’s carnival - though it does share some elements in common - is not imbued with the liberatory force of Russian formalist Mikhail Bakhtin’s writing. Rather, as with “The Dwarf” Bradbury envisages the carnival as a pernicious entity, a force that both disgusts and attracts; Bradbury has spoken of his “old love and fright having to do with circuses and carnivals” (2013: 17). It tricks those in need, those who are on the bottom rungs of the social ladder by seemingly offering them a freedom from the societal constraints that appear to work to oppress them; a space in which to give in to their base desires and carnality, yet in actuality it works to trap them into something much worse than economic impoverishment. Bradbury’s *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (1962) brings together the author’s unique treatment of the ‘dark’ carnival as a horrifying, entrapping space, working several themes into a cohesive and terrifying whole that Stephen King has called “the fantasy genre’s version of Dreiser” and “Bradbury’s best work” (2002: 364).

The novel tells the story of two boys, Will Halloway and Jim Nightshade. At the beginning of the novel we join Will and Jim as Cooger and Dark’s Pandemonium Shadow Show arrives in their middle-American hometown. Though the class status of the two boys is not made overt the impression that we are given is that neither of them come from particularly wealthy backgrounds, indeed, like much of the autobiographical texture of the novel, the boys seem to share the “similarly impoverished roots” (Eller 2013: 5) of Bradbury himself. Will and Jim’s play time does not involve the purchasing of goods, they read their favourite books at the library where Will’s father is employed; after having “floundered in lots of places” (173), as a lowly janitor, and Jim comes from a broken home after his abusive father left him and his mother to fend for themselves. Furthermore, the place they live, Greenwood, is an average Midwestern town, with a barbers, a library and a school, however it is far from being an affluent, cosmopolitan space evident in the depiction of the carnival’s arrival as something special, able to freeze the townspeople with anticipation “mouth open, listening” (20).

Though *Something Wicked This Way Comes* is most frequently discussed as a rite of passage text; critics point to how it can be read as being about the loss of innocence in passing from youth to adulthood, the way that this transition is depicted is interesting if considered in terms of class. For, in one sense, the book’s allegory might be read as a kind of dark fable concerning the deceitful nature of capitalism, which promises to provide spiritual and emotional fulfilment if we engage in the required material transactions, but which ultimately seeks only to create opportunities for further transactions. It is

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noticeable at the start of the novel how far outside of the capitalist system Will and Jim are. They appear to exist in a kind of youthful, pre-capitalist Eden, in which "It was all so good" (12). Into this space, however, comes the seller of lightning rods, referred to thereafter as "the salesman" (5), who acts as a kind of advance guard for the carnival and asks the boys if they have any money to buy his products to which they reply in the negative: "the boys shook their heads" (5). Unperturbed, he proceeds to give the boys a lightning rod before moving on his way. This piques their interest in the supposed upcoming storm as well as the carnival it seems to presage. The opening section of the novel then details the varied ways in which the carnival drums up interest in its wares. Mr Crosetti, the barber, is hypnotised by the smell of cotton candy wafting over the town. Next, we witness Jim's father become entranced with the posters put up all over town: "Charles Halloway, not knowing why, crossed the street to watch the man pasting up one of the posters ... Halloway stared" (23). Then, the boys come across a poster that has blown down which advertises the attractions at the coming fair in a suitably hyperbolic fashion. Will, in particular, is excited by the prospect of acts such as "MR ELECTRICO!" and "THE SKELETON!" (28-29) and becomes spellbound by the thought of the carnival arriving: "Will thought of the smells and sounds flowing on the river of wind from beyond the darkening houses" (30).

The carnival is attractive to those who feel need ; as Will's father notes: "Need, want, desire, we burn those in our fluids, oxidize those in our souls, which jet streams out lips, nostrils, eyes, ears, broadcasts from antennae-fingers, long or short-wave, God only knows, but the freak-masters perceive itches and come crab-clustering to Scratch." (181-2). Though suggesting that they offer "Bargains galore!" (190) the carnival actually seeks to "buy souls" (181) from those who are desperate. At the centre of the carnival is a magical carousel which by "shrieking, plunging, going roundabout-back!" (69) can reverse the ageing process and make those who ride it younger. Miss Foley, one of the boy's teachers is the first to suffer at the carousel's hands. A lonely woman, she longs again to be young but discovers too late the truism "you can't get something for nothing" (178) when she finds she is isolated as a child-version of herself and has to join the other carnival workers in order to survive.

At the climax of the novel, and pursued by the carnival workers, Will's father discovers that the carnival has existed for many hundreds, if not thousands, of years and that it has fed off the base desires that human beings feel when they give in to their Dionysian impulses: "For being good *is* a fearful occupation; men strain at it and sometimes break in two. I've known a few. You work twice as hard to be a farmer as to be his hog" (121). That is to say that as long as there are those who feel that they can buy shortcuts to happiness then the carnival will continue. Consequently, in a allegorical move, the novel suggests that in order to combat the carnival, human beings must transcend the material and reach a state of self-contentment; as Jim's father does before he defeats Mr Dark "he accepted everything at last ... Jim, Will, and above all himself and all of life" (233). *Something Wicked This Way Comes* thus reaches a peculiarly conservative conclusion; rather than seek the radical liberation of the carnival, Will and Jim should keep their heads down, work hard, and do their best to avoid temptation of any sort, lest they find themselves part of the "grand march Nowhere, join ... [ing] the fools who wanted everything! Idiot thing to want: everything!" (253) Bradbury has claimed that "I love the book best of all the things I have ever written" (qtd in King 2002: 368) and it is not difficult to see why. It embodies a sense of wistful nostalgia for childhood while also interrogating the construction of that self-same childhood, finally offering the reader a stark reminder of the physic processes of becoming an adult. Childhood is tied to a state of innocence here, which is itself strongly associated with Christian

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virtues such as sex only within marriage, family, friendship and a strong Protestant work ethic. Ultimately, the novel can be read as advocating the message that a somewhat passive, un-ambitious approach to life garners the greatest (spiritual) rewards.

Though Bradbury remained a prolific short story writer for much of his life he is perhaps best known to the general public for his longer works - novels such as *Something Wicked This Way Comes* and *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), a position which exemplifies the mid-century shift from the pulp magazine as the primary purveyor of horror to the emergence of the cheap paperback or two bit novel. Though paperback novels had been around since the 1930s when advances in the printing process designed initially to advantage magazines (such as the advent of faster rotary presses and quicker drying glue) had enabled the production of cheap books on a mass scale, it was not until the post-war period that conditions really allowed for the paperback format to take off. However, as Christine Berberich points out, while “printing presses could now manufacture paperback books more easily and more rapidly ... the publishing process still cost money – so the requirement for paperback publications was high sales” (2015: 34), often meaning hundreds of thousands. One way of achieving these increased sales was to target previously untapped markets beyond traditional booksellers such as “newsagents, supermarkets ... petrol stations [...and...] railway termini” (Berberich 2015: 34). Paperbacks therefore had to appeal to the most readers possible, but also distinguish themselves in the public’s perception from the lowbrow competition. The positioning the paperback as a culturally edifying object then became of paramount importance; as a 1939 press release for the pioneering paperback company Pocket Books proclaimed: “It has also been assumed that cheap books – for the 25 cent market – must be of a low common denominator – the sort that will compete with the “pulp” and “trash” market and magazines of vast circulation. I venture to question those traditional beliefs” (qtd in Davis 1984: 39). Horror, frequently seen as one of the most lowbrow (and disreputable) of genres, faced particular problems appealing to the mainstream or casual reader who was wary of the paperback form. Though there were exceptions to the ‘no-horror’ rule, these examples tended to come in the form of recognised Gothic classics such as Pocketbooks’ 1939 reissue of *Wuthering Heights* and American News Company’s *The Haunted Hotel and 25 Other Ghost Stories* (1941); which was populated by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century work of Wilkie Collins, Poe and Guy de Maupassant. Conversely, more contemporary fare, such as *The Werewolf of Paris* (1933), initially provoked complaints and was duly removed from circulation by Pocketbooks in an attempt to avoid controversy.

One possible way forward, as we have seen with Bradbury’s work, was to blend genres to the point that the reader felt assured they were not reading something too unsavoury. Though Bradbury himself took “a negative view of the intellectual authors who were intent on making strong distinctions between serious and popular literature” (Eller 2013: 2), and strongly disliked the idea of writing to order for particular publications: what he called ‘slanting’ “to the genre or slick markets” (Eller 2013: 1), much of his work does mix elements of horror with other genres to commercial effect.

One writer who could not be accused of ‘slanting’ was Fritz Leiber. While much of Leiber’s work “falls outside the domain of supernatural horror” (Joshi 2012: 548) the writing that might be considered horror manages to successfully update often tired genre tropes for an early twentieth century reader. This skill has seen the writer given the accolade of originating “the modern urban Gothic” (Goho 2014: 181) and as influencing a “long line of writers from Bradbury to Ramsey Campbell to Clive Barker” (Joshi 2012: 550). Indeed, Leiber’s greatest achievement might be considered his ability to tease out the contemporary resonances in well-known Gothic archetypes - such as the ghost, the vampire, and

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the witch - renewing them for a mid-twentieth-century readership. Leiber's first collection of short stories, published by Arkham House, *Night's Black Agents* (1950) contains much of his best work in this area. Amongst the tale in this pioneering volume is "Smoke Ghost", perhaps Leiber's best known story. Often considered "the prototype for the urban horror story" (Joshi 2012: 548), "Smoke Ghost" is significant for the way in which it utilises a concept of the urban and industrialised poor to create a very contemporary type of horror. The story follows Catesby Wran, as he rides to work on Chicago's elevated train system each day. Wran, a lonely, and emotionally isolated individual, thinks he sees a spectre on Chicago's "drab city roofs" (2011: 8) but this ghost is very different from the traditional "thing in white" (2011: 5) found in gothic tales. Instead, he tells us that this is "a ghost from the world today, with the soot of the factories on its face and the pounding of machinery in its soul. The kind that would haunt coal yards and slip around at night through deserted office buildings" (2011: 5). Born out of the "melancholy little world of tar-paper, tarred gravel, and smoky brick" (2011: 8), this spectre is depicted as the embodiment of the malign forces that exert control over the working class individual's life during the early part of the twentieth century: "the jangled century of hate and heavy industry and total wars" (2011: 5). Much as more traditional ghosts were often 'born' out of some act of injustice committed against them, so the "Smoke Ghost" seems to embody the nascent coalescing of a sense of Marxist class-consciousness: "the hungry anxiety of the unemployed, the neurotic restlessness of a person without purpose, the jerky tension of the high-pressure metropolitan worker, the sullen resentment of the striker, the callous viciousness of the strike-breaker, the aggressive whine of the panhandler, the inhibited terror of the bomb victim" (2011: 5-6). Leiber's use of Horror to provide social criticism is obvious here. We learn that Catesby was diagnosed as a "sensory prodigy" (2011: 11) as a child. His enhanced perception enables him to see things before normal people can, and what he sees during the story is that "It's a rotten world ... It's time the ghosts, or whatever you call them, took over and began a rule of fear. They'd be no worse than men" (2011: 6). "Smoke Ghost" might also be seen as re-energising one of the political functions of the Gothic. In his survey of the genre James Goho suggests that one of the primary functions of the eighteenth century instance of the Gothic was to expose "the decadent social edifice for what it really was – violent in enforcing a rigid social ... order" (Goho 2014: 182). In a story such as "Smoke Ghost" we can see how Leiber manages to update this purpose, revealing the oppressive nature of contemporary society and the effects it has on those who have to live on the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. At the end of the tale, Catesby saves himself from the "the brute" (2011: 18) by relinquishing control to it: "I will praise, I will sacrifice. In smoke and soot and flame I will worship you forever" (2011: 18). Yet this ending is only temporary, and much as Goho suggests a Marxist return of the repressed inherent to early instances of the genre: "in a distorted manner [the Gothic] gives a voice to the underclass, releasing taboos and speaking out on societal ills, dislocations and disparities" (2014: 183), so Leiber seems to resist any sense of closure. Catesby contemplates that with the titular entity "mankind had once again spawned a ghost" (2011: 18) that cannot be destroyed in an easy fashion.

With stories such as "Smoke Ghost" we return, once again, to the motif of the city or urban space as horribly sentient, exerting a terrifying toll on the weakest members of society, who become unwitting victims of larger forces beyond their control. In "The Inheritance" the unnamed central narrator thinks that his luck might be about to change when he inherits his uncle's rented apartment and belongings. Prior to this windfall the narrator was bankrupt and on the verge of homelessness: "I was broke ... after hitch-hiking all the way to the city, I'd been disappointed to hear that there was no real money involved ... Still, I was thankful I had a place to sleep" (Leiber 1977: 44). Therefore, the narrator accepts his



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inheritance with relief, even though his uncle's apartment seems to be in a rundown part of town: "I ... looked down three stories at the dirty street" (1977: 43) and makes the narrator feel as though he is "inheriting his [uncle's] loneliness" (1977: 45). While the narrator seems aware that "People can inherit some pretty queer things" (1977: 43), he is unprepared for the discovery that his police lieutenant uncle was actually responsible for 8 horrific murders in the "decrepit" (1977: 55) part of town. The story reads as a Naturalist piece of horror writing, with the narrator being trapped into recreating his uncle's murderous tendencies in spite of his dawning realisation that his relative was not who he seemed to be. In particular, the narrator's financial situation means that he is largely powerless to escape his fate; as he suggests at one point "But where else could I go with forty-seven cents and my lack of gumption ... I would have to live in this room for some time." (1977: 48)

Indeed, in many ways, "The Inheritance" epitomises the effects that the Depression had on this particular group of mid-century genre writers, functioning as a kind of contemporary evidencing of the earlier Naturalist belief in "human life as subject to larger forces than any within the consciousness" (Lloyd-Smith 2004: 111). Indeed, much as Naturalist writers often attempted to reflect this belief by "reduc[ing] their characters to pawns of great forces, clinging to the illusion of self-determination while acting under influences they can barely understand" (Lloyd-Smith 2004: 111), so the writers under discussion in this chapter repeatedly write characters that are trapped into horrific situations and modes of behaviour with no chance of escaping. The Great Depression then becomes the most powerful way of conveying this fatalistic sentiment for Bradbury, Bloch and Leiber. It is perhaps not surprising that these three writers should use the Depression in this manner given the effects of the economic downturn lasted throughout much of the 1930's and 1940's, years which might be considered formative for these specific writers. Each writer lived through the Depression and might be considered to have acquired a subsequent loss of faith in the rich and powerful. Bradbury had witnessed the era of 'Bread Lines' and mass unemployment, developing both "a dislike for the idle rich and ... captains of industry" (Eller 2013: 33) and, one would imagine, a subsequent proclivity towards the unwarranted suffering of poor; as Eller suggests "[Bradbury] held an instinctive love of equality" (2013: 233). Similarly, Bloch experienced the degradations of the Depression first hand; as Lester Del Rey notes "his early teens were spent during the Great Depression ... Financial disasters plagued his family and forced them to move away from all the friends he had made ... he had to remain at home to protect a younger sister while his mother worked to support the family" (1977: xi). Leiber, though not threatened with poverty in the same way as other writers, Benjamin Szumskyj suggests that Leiber's worldview was influenced by the poverty he saw others suffering from: "at a time of Depression ... Leiber saw men who had faith and hope, not money (anti-materialism) as being the strongest" (2007: 180). Consequently, this group of authors explore poverty and class in a complex, multifaceted and often distinctly self-conscious manner. Though all three of these authors arguably shared Lovecraft's marginal status, both financially and culturally, for much of their working lives, they frequently embrace this marginality, utilising yet subverting previously employed tropes and motifs to aid their writing in its deconstruction of long held national myths of egalitarianism and social mobility. Consequently, we find a much more sympathetic depiction of those who bore the brunt of the Depression's worst excesses in their writing, with the sense of a more realist horror than Lovecraft ever achieved resting on a conscious shifting from demonising the poor themselves to the society that has effectively abandoned them; as the narrator of "The Inheritance" notes at the beginning of the story: "They say there's no law against being a failure, but there is, as I've found out. After a childhood in easy circumstances, things got harder and harder. The Depression. Family dying. Friends going off.

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Jobs uncertain and difficult to find. Delays and uncomfortableness about government assistance” (Leiber 1977: 44).

While “The Girl With the Hungry Eyes” can be read as another instance of the city as predator, with the eponymous billboard advertisement “a vampire-like being ... which sucks away [...people’s...] lives” (Goho 2014: 193) it also serves as a critique of the destructive effects popular culture and advertising have on stimulating, yet ultimately denying, our (sexual) desires; as the narrator suggests: “there’s something a little perverted about trying to capitalize on sex that way” (2011: 19). The narrator of the story occupies an interesting position, separate to “the mob slaving up at [the Girl]” (2011: 19), he is nevertheless, both partly responsible for, and a victim of, the titular character. After a brief introductory preamble, the story charts the short period of time when the narrator was the titular Girl’s personal photographer.

In a similar fashion to “The Inheritance”, a sense of economic desperation runs throughout “The Girl With the Hungry Eyes”. It is financial desperation that initiates the narrator’s meeting the Girl. He tells us that “Business was lousy” (2011: 21) and that looking for a model to fulfil a potential contract with a girdle company he encounters a girl who walks into his office out of nowhere. Though not impressed with her “underfed look” (22) and the “cheap dress” (22) she is wearing, the narrator agrees to take some photos of her on the proviso that “If somebody should ever want to use a photo of you, which is about one chance in two million, I’ll pay you regular rates for your first time. Not otherwise.” (2011: 22). Not expecting much, the narrator is all the more amazed when all of his clients request the Girl model for them. The distinction seems to be that they have not met her “in the flesh” (2011: 24) but rather only as a commoditised image that they have been programmed to desire: “modern advertising gets everybody’s mind ... wanting the same things” (2011: 27). This notion of a manufactured sense of lack, which the Girl is seemingly able to fulfil, relies then on the creation of a masochistic impulse in the individual. Indeed, the Girl’s appeal is directly linked to a sense of her being poor, in need, and therefore controllable by the viewer; as the narrator comments upon first meeting her, that she has “the hungriest eyes in the world” (2011: 21). However, the sting in the tale is the reveal of the sado-masochistic rather than masochistic nature of this ‘relationship’. Though the apparently subservient image of the Girl encourages us to see ourselves in a position of empowerment, feeling that we have control over this individual given her gender and class, the reverse is actually true as we become willing dupes to that feeling of empowerment; as the narrator explains of the Girl’s abject ‘allure’: “she’s the smile that tricks you into throwing away your money and your life. She’s the eyes that lead you on and on, and then show you death. She’s the creature you give everything for and never really get. She’s the being that takes everything you’ve got and gives nothing in return” (31).

Perhaps the apogee of the city as a monstrous, omnipresent force in Leiber’s early writing is “The Hound”, Leiber here reworks the werewolf motif, reconfiguring the city as an almost tangible, physical force that seems to be hunting its prey, David Lashley. Goho notes “In this story, it is the city itself that is the horror” (2014: 185), and while Lashley is ultimately saved from the hound of the title, the story’s depiction of the city as a place in which “every bolt and stone seemed subtly infected, whose every noise carried shuddering overtones” (Leiber 1977: 94) is enough to convey a sense of the oppression that Lashley feels in the urban environment: ““nothing whatever in the city promised him refuge” (1977: 100). Here again, Leiber utilises the Naturalist device of the unwitting victim who is subject to forces beyond his ken. Lashley is a member of “the working class” (1977: 90) and is effectively trapped in the city because of his material circumstances, he considers himself “a not-very-competent young

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man tied down to the task of supporting parents whose little reserve of money had long ago dribbled away" (1977: 94-95), hinting at a reading of the titular hound as a literary manifestation of the colloquial 'wolf at the door'. Indeed, at one point in the tale, Lashley himself seems aware, if not able to interpret, the historical usages of the wolf in contemporary popular culture, commenting "What the wolf or hound in that earlier cartoon had represented – war, famine, or the ruthlessness of the enemy – he could not say" (1977: 90). The multifaceted symbolism of the hound is perhaps its greatest strength in Leiber's story. It is at once, an embodiment of Lashley's precarious financial positioning and the fears he has concerning the 'city's' uncaring response; the threat of looming War and enforced conscription (we are told that Lashley's only acquaintance, Tom Goodsell, has already been called up); and a manifestation of the urban environment's "endlessly varying howls and growls" (1977: 89).

Though Leiber did write novels, much of his longer work in the field of horror seems less occupied with class. Leiber's contemporary witchcraft text, *Conjure Wife* (1953), is a pertinent example here. While the novel seems to utilise a sense of post-war paranoia concerning the changing status of women to inform much of its horror, it is noticeable that the horrific actions of its female antagonists' are driven primarily by their desire for increased social prestige and status; as the protagonist notes "they lay awake nights plotting to poison the people between their husbands and the president's chair" (1991: 58)

The central character in the novel, Norman Saylor, is a sociology lecturer at a small New England college, eager for a chairmanship that has just become available: "now with Redding's retirement he was assured of the sociology chairmanship, and then it would only be a matter of months until one of the big universities came through with the right offer" (1991: 5-6) His wife, Tansy, has been indulging in witchcraft, "conjure magic" (1991: 14), as a means of safeguarding her husband from pernicious 'attacks' cast by the other faculty wives, who are all powerful witches. All of these women seem to desperately seek greater power; Evelyn Sawtelle is "dominated by a desire for social prestige" and spends most of "her time in unsuccessfully attempting to be snobbish" (1991: 142), while we are told that Hulda Gunnison "should have been the mistress of a feudal domain, She is a born tyrant and grows fat on it." (1991: 142) Head of this 'coven' is Mrs Carr, a ninety year old woman who, in a repeat of Leiber's use of the psychic vampire motif, has fed on the younger students and faculty members: "she feeds on their feelings and innocence and enthusiasms" (1991: 176). In line with many postwar depictions of powerful female characters, Carr is positioned as "a creature who threatens to castrate and devour" (Spicer 2002: 90) both her male and female subordinates, in this case, quite literally, as she attempts to possess Tansy's more vital, youthful body.

In *Conjure Wife* the university campus functions as a kind of microcosm of the capitalist practises, prevalent in the U.S. at large, one in which the geographical and social proximity of its residents serve to intensify the sense of rivalry; as Norman suggests at one point: "it's a devilishly competitive and jealous world. And competition in an institution can be nastier than any other kind, because it's so confined" (1991: 92). University students are seen as libertarian and bourgeois "monsters of unwholesomeness and perversion" by the "lower classes" (1991: 46), yet ironically it is some of the staff that are, in fact, revealed to be monsters. The novel's dubious gender politics – it seems to imply that all women that seek power are monstrous – link Leiber's text to the hard-boiled tradition and its similarly paranoid depictions of controlling women. Empowered by changes to the class system following the Second World War, such women often served to "challenge ...the postwar consensus

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that women should be fulfilled by the roles of wife and mother” (Spicer 2002: 91) and in hardboiled narratives were used to question, and frequently condemn the notion of the independent woman.

Leiber’s contemporary Charles Beaumont was also criticised for his depiction of female characters, perhaps a result of his writing for publication in new men’s magazines such as *Playboy* and *Esquire*. Indeed, men’s magazines such as *Playboy* became increasingly important to genre writers as the century progressed, offering the community access to a wider readership than the declining fortunes of the genre magazines allowed for, much higher pay rates, and “something that had largely eluded [them]: respectability” (Liptak). At *Playboy* Hugh Hefner had long demonstrated a keen interest in genre fiction as had his first associate editor, Ray Russell. As the Encyclopaedia for Science Fiction notes, Hefner had been an “avid reader of *Weird Tales* during the 1940s and had even joined the ‘Weird Tales Club’” and when he got the chance, *Playboy* repeatedly published fiction by a number of genre writers including Bradbury, Richard Matheson, Robert Bloch and Beaumont. Beaumont also found success writing teleplays for the seminal television series *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964). Indeed, while “the notion of the horror host as auteur was best ... was conveyed by Rod Serling” (86) Beaumont, as the second most prolific contributor after Serling, was also instrumental to the show’s success, as were a number of other contemporary genre writers (including, initially, Bradbury, George Clayton Johnson and Matheson amongst others). While this study’s focus on fiction precludes a detailed examination of *The Twilight Zone*’s important position as perhaps the most high profile pop cultural genre platform during the early 1960s it is enough here to note the sociological emphasis of *The Twilight Zone*; as Brock suggests: “Serling ... was a champion of the underclasses, preoccupied with social justice” (129). Numerous episodes evidence this focus, with examples such as “Walking Distance” (1:5), “The Big Tall Wish” (1:27), and “The Masks” (5:25) demonstrating the skillful manner in which the genre trappings of the show “allowed Serling to deal with questions of social justice and ethics that would otherwise not have been acceptable for broadcast” (Beeler, 56)

Undergoing something of a renaissance amongst genre critics, Beaumont is responsible for some of the most interesting examples of genre fiction from the mid-century. S.T. Joshi has written of Beaumont’s stories: “[they] simultaneously draw upon the heritage of supernatural literature and shine a pungent light on the social and psychological angst of the period (Joshi, 2012: 572), an approach evident in “The Vanishing American”, which examines feelings of personal and social alienation through a genre lens. The central character of Beaumont’s tale, Mr Minchell, is a low paid office worker, a man who has got used to being ignored by his colleagues: “He stretched and said good night to the people who filed past him. As usual, no one answered” (Beaumont: 24). On his forty seventh birthday Minchell begins to believe that this general obliviousness has somehow led him to become invisible; to “vanish” (29). A woman in a lift seems to take no notice of him, he realises that his supervisor has not spoken to him in ten years, and his wife and child appear to operate with no sense of his being there when he’s at home. Though Beaumont leaves it intentionally ambiguous as to whether or not Minchell has literally disappeared from sight, the factors for this disappearance are made overt. As Minchell thinks over his situation he realises that “he had not just suddenly vanished” (30) rather:

He had been vanishing gradually for a long while. Every time he said good morning to that bastard Diemel he got a little harder to see. Every time he put on this horrible suit he faded. The process of disappearing was set into action every time he brought his pay check home and turned it over to

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Madge, every time he kissed her, or listened to her vicious unending complaints, or decided against buying that novel, or punched the adding machine he hated so, or.... (31)

The story suggests that Minchell's condition is the direct result of the spiritually and intellectually stunted existence he is subject to in 1950s corporate America. Indeed, Minchell appears to become the living embodiment of Packard's later claim (1959), that "Employees in big offices ... are finding their work roles fragmentized and impersonalized ... there has been a startling rise in the number of people who are bored with their work and feel no pride or initiative or creativity" (16) The stultifying nature of his occupation has detached Minchell from his 'true' identity, dehumanising him to the extent that he seriously considers that he may have died but be condemned to continue in his job, like "a story he'd once read in a magazine ... about a man who dies and whose ghost takes up his duties" (26). Minchell feels trapped by the lack of any viable alternatives to the demands of the dominant capitalist system: "Then he thought about going back to work tomorrow and the next day and the day after that. He'd have to, of course. He couldn't let Madge and Jimmy starve; and, besides, what else could he do?" (31). Consigned to "go on punching the clock and saying good morning to people who didn't see him" (31), in a last ditch attempt to recapture some sense of self, Minchell decides to climb a great stone lion statue "he'd always wanted to ride ... since he was a child" (28). This act of self-expression leads others to see Minchell in what serves as a metaphor for the life-enriching tendencies of the imagination when unfettered from material concerns.

No such release is afforded the protagonists of Beaumont's macabre "Free Dirt". Very much in the vein of E.C. Comics' version of poetic justice, "Free Dirt" details the avaricious exploits of Mr Aorta, a man whose life seems devoted to "the acquisition of something for nothing" (55). Significantly, Aorta's desire to save and make money has warped his view of others. He is not above lying to and tricking those around him in order to get what he wants; the story opens with Aorta conning a restaurateur into giving him a free meal, we find out he often steals food from a local grocer, and that he regularly pretends to be homeless to beg for money on the street. However, this grasping, materialistic approach to life, where others become pawns to be duped for monetary gain, is what ultimately leads to Aorta's untimely demise as he becomes a literal part of the system of commerce he sought to exploit. Certainly, Beaumont does not hold back in depicting Aorta as an individual who receives an almost sexual gratification from the saving of money: "Mr Aorta felt a familiar sensation come over him. It happened whenever he encountered the word FREE – a magic word that did strange and wonderful things to his metabolism" (56). In this case, Aorta sees a sign outside the local cemetery advertising "FREE DIRT" (56) and he is keen to get as much of it as he can. Indeed, we are told that the dirt itself does not hold any special appeal for Aorta, rather it is the act of acquiring something for nothing that brings him pleasure: "the fact that it was dirt which was being offered Free did not oppress him. He seldom gave more than a fleeting thought to these things" (56). Forcing a neighbour to lend him the use of his truck, Aorta proceeds to exploit this offer to its fullest, moving immense amounts of 'free dirt' to his barren backyard in order that it might become a makeshift allotment and thus prevent him from having to spend any money on food in the future. The venture is initially successful and Aorta looks forward to the saving he will make: "Mr Aorta glanced at his checkbook balance, grinned indecently, and went to look out the back window" (59). Unfortunately for Aorta he needs to continually replenish his soil but the stocks of free dirt he has been drawing from so heavily are running extremely low. Seemingly oblivious to the role he has played in the situation, Aorta is nevertheless angry that his crops might not survive without fresh dirt: "this Mr Aorta could not abide, for he had

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put in considerable labor on the project and this labor must not be wasted" (60). Aorta duly decides to steal dirt from the cemetery by removing it from newly excavated but supposedly 'unoccupied' graves. Sure enough Aorta saves his crops, and tucks in to a gargantuan bounty, feasting until he feels "a sweet pain ... an almost sexual satisfaction" (61) from his ill-gotten harvest. Pained but satisfied, Aorta happens to catch sight of "A white fronded thing, a plant, perhaps only a flower" (62) on the rim of a ditch that, upon closer examination, looks like "a hand, a big human hand, waxy and stiff and attached to the earth" (63). Inspecting the 'hand' close up, a now increasingly ill Aorta falls into the ditch, which turns out to be "deeper than he'd thought" (62). Writhing with pain from over eating, Aorta is unable to climb out of the ditch and a gathering gale blows more and more of the dirt in on top of him until he is buried alive. Lest the sense of poetic justice be missed, the epilogue of the story details Aorta's funeral and the manner in which he is "laid ... to rest in a place with a mouldering green woodboard wall: the wall had a little sign nailed to it" (64). In a critique of the futility of desire for ever more material wealth, ironically Aorta finds himself commoditised, turned, against the wishes expressed in his dying screams, into a part of the very system of material goods that he was so enamoured with in life.

The effects of wealth are tackled no less favourably in "The Murderers". The story tells of two rich but bored individuals, Herbert Foss and Ronald Raphael, who set out to enliven their "infernally dull" (141) lives by murdering someone. In contrast to the "unbearably bourgeois" motives of those cases they have read about they believe that their aesthetic approach to the act will see them escape arrest. Duly they choose their victim from the "old men and women who sit on hard benches" (141) in the downmarket area of "Bughouse Square" (141), "passed many dark stores, many dirty gray brick apartments and hotels of clapboard" (143). This decision is significant for it seems to suggest the murderers' motives are driven by an elitist belief that there are people out there who will not be missed because of their class status: "a nobody, a nothing, without friends or relatives"(142). Raphael and Foss eventually find an individual, James Oliver Fogarty, who fits this category: "an old man ... his beard was the colour of Georgia mud. He was smoking the butt of a peeling cigar whose tip glowed red against his wrinkled leather skin. And his clothes were rags" (142). Exploiting the old man's need for a place to sleep, Raphael and Foss offer him lodging in their quarters, and return with him back home. The murderers' view Fogarty as an object to be used for their pleasure: "a fatted calf ... *exactly* what we wanted!" (144). After toasting to Fogarty: "To James Oliver Fogarty: R.I.P!" (146), and deciding upon the best way to dispatch him: "Club him to death with an *objet d'art*" (147), the two would-be murderers argue over which of them is going to do the deed.

Throughout "The Murderers" Raphael's and Foss' elitist world view is ridiculed, they believe that they will be able to commit the perfect crime because they do not share the base motives of the common criminal, but, in fact, they are hindered by this self-same desire to distinguish themselves from the masses: "We would be worse than bourgeois; we would be *common*" (151). Similarly, their condescending belief that Fogarty is nothing but a "poor old schmoe" who doesn't know "what he's got coming" (148) turns out to be incorrect, as he turns the tables and cons them, waiting until they are heavily drunk so that he can steal all of their most valuable possessions; as Prosser suggests, "Despite their high social standing, their wealth and their cleverness, and their roles as elitists, both young men have been upstaged and outwitted by one of life's derelicts" (63).

A cynical, often darkly comic, worldview permeates many of Beaumont's stories demonstrating the growing convergence of horror with noir, elsewhere "A Death in the Country", "The Night Ride" and

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the chilling the “The Hunger”, also explore deviant characters or motivations. Much of Beaumont’s fiction contains a “sociological theme” (Prosser: 63) that examines the effects of societal deprivation and inequality upon the individual and their interactions with others: as Prosser suggests in the case of “The Murderers”: “The rich are different from others, Beaumont seems to be saying ... they have everything the material world has to offer, but they lack a sense of ethics and morality” (Prosser: 63)

Robert Bloch, also offered the mid century reader a blend of genres, infusing his horror writing with the grit and realism of hard-boiled fiction and modern newspaper headlines but offering a decidedly harder edged approach than his contemporaries such as Beaumont and Leiber. Indeed the noir overtones of much of Bloch’s horror fiction reflect a decidedly more practical, workmanlike approach to writing than either of his contemporaries. Bloch would often consciously angle his output to particular publications and audiences, raising the ire of many his associates such as Fritz Leiber who criticised his friend’s desire to “make money by catering to current trends and some of the mean appetites of the mob” (qtd in Eller 2013: 182)

Much like Bradbury’s writing, Bloch’s more ‘realist’ approach is often credited with extending the appeal of horror beyond traditional genre audiences; Szumskyj suggests that Bloch’s “stark realism ... helped to redefine horror and make it accessible even to those outside the genre” (2009), while Bloch himself proposed that “Fear is the main thing. Only it has to be a fear that is close to reality, something that people can recognize as part of the world around them. The more familiar, the stronger it is.” (1993: 15) A central part of this ‘realist’ approach is manifested in the class concerns of Bloch’s writing. Perhaps partially borne from his early life when he “struggled with poverty and unhappiness” (Lane 2009: Kindle) before the success of *Psycho* catapulted him to financial success, many of Bloch’s stories reflect upon the repressive conditions that many lived in at the midpoint of the twentieth century. “American capitalism specifically comes in for a harsh critique” (Simpson 2009: Kindle). Indeed, Leiber accurately summarises the importance of class in Bloch’s writing when he recalls Bloch “as a slender, serious, sensitive young man, keenly and responsively-sympathetically- aware of the plight of people, especially young people, ground down by the Depression and caught up in the fantastic, heartless buying and selling machinery that was America” (qtd in Flanagan 1979: 25). Though relatively few of Bloch’s short stories deal directly with the issue of class; status, and the detrimental effects prizing material wealth can have on the individual, haunts much of the writer’s work. In “All on a Golden Afternoon”, a Dr Prager visits the wealthy Hollywood actress, Eve Eden. Born Wilma Kozmowski, Eden is on the verge of quitting her job and walking away from the “two swimming pools, an eight car garage, and a corps of resident angels with power mowers” (Bloch 1977: 154) because they have failed to make her happy. Lower down the socio-economic scale, “The Hungry House” sees the central couple trapped into staying at the haunted house they move into because “They’d taken a five year lease, secretly congratulating themselves on the low rental ... they had nowhere else to go; they had searched for months to find a home” (Bloch 1977: 55). “The World-Timer” sees a greedy psychiatrist travel to a parallel Earth without “prurience and poverty” (Bloch 1977: 259) in which society and the family unit is organised in a radically different fashion meaning there is “no fear of the domestic situation; it was not a life-long trap in which both parties became enslaved to a consumer economy ... the element of economic competition virtually vanished; there was no need to pile up great accretions of consumer goods ... The state regulated employment and recompense but did so benevolently” (Bloch 1977: 261).

Mention must be made here of “I Like Blondes”. Though the story is ostensibly a sort of quasi-science fiction one due to the final reveal of the narrator’s extraterrestrial origins, it can also be read as a sly

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critique of intensifying post-war trends objectifying women based upon their physical appearance (the story was perhaps ironically first published in *Playboy*). For the narrator, Mr Beers, mistaken for “a disgusting old man” (Bloch 1977: 141), has a proclivity for women with blonde hair and spends his nights attempting to ‘hunt’ them down. Though initially, the narrator’s rhetoric seems in line with his rakish demeanour; he speaks of “my business” (Bloch 1977: 144) and of avoiding the “prize heifers” (Bloch 1977: 143), he is in fact preying, in both senses of the word, upon the blonde women he encounters. Interestingly, on this particular night we witness this alien in sheep’s clothing have most success with those at the bottom of the socio-economic scale, exploiting their desperation and weakness for his own gain. The narrator picks up a blonde by the name of Shirley Collins, who is paid to dance with men at the dance-hall; impressed by her naivety he surmises that she is probably a “small-town girl ... who quit school and came to the city. Perhaps she came with some man. If not, she met one shortly after her arrival. It ended badly, of course. Maybe she took a job in a restaurant or a store. And then she met another man, and the dance hall seemed easier.” (Bloch 1977: 144). Beers is able to easily impress Collins with his money, we are told that she was “positively drooling” (147) after he “fans five twenties from the roll” (147) and offers her some of the cash. Consequently, at the end of the story, the reader is left with a sense of horror as they consider, not only the fantastical implications of the narrative, but also the ease with which Beers has been able to prey upon blondes because of the ingrained inequalities in American society surrounding gender and class.

The issue of class equality in the U.S. also plays a part in Bloch’s “That Hell-Bound Train”. The story reads like a contemporary spin on the Faust myth, but with a more ambivalent ending. “That Hell-Bound Train” follows the character of Martin, the son of a poverty stricken “Railroad Man” (Bloch 1977: 271) who used to sing of the titular method of transport when drunk. Following his father’s premature death Martin tries to eke out a meagre existence in a series of low paid jobs but soon realises “he wasn’t getting anyplace” (Bloch 1977: 271). Consequently he turns to crime but finds that even that doesn’t give him enough to live on. Perhaps inevitably Martin finds himself drawn back to a life on the railroads but even this, it seems, has fallen victim to the vagaries of modernisation:

So he tried to get on the railroad like his Daddy had, but they told him times were bad; and between the truckers and the airlines and those fancy new fintails General Motors were making, it looked as if the days of the highballers were just about over. (Bloch 1977: 272)

The suggestion that Martin is doomed to a life of poverty through no real fault of his own is overwhelming, and the reader might be forgiven for thinking they had discovered a more Naturalist bent to Bloch’s writing than is usually apparent. However, it is not long before Martin encounters a train whose whistle shrieked “like a lost soul” and whose wheels “screamed like the damned” (Bloch 1977: 274). The conductor of this train offers Martin a deal, his soul for anything he wants. After some consideration, Martin decides that he wants “to be able to stop time” (Bloch 1977: 277), so that “Whenever I get to a point where I know I’m happy and contented, that’s where I’d like to stop. So I can just keep on being happy forever”. (Bloch 1977: 277) The seasoned reader of Horror will at this point predict some sort of twist in the tale leading to an untimely end for Martin. At first, given the promise of the ability to prolong indefinitely a moment of future happiness, Martin puts great effort into ascending the class structure, moving from a hobo, to a panhandler, to a contractor, to an office worker, to then working in the front office. All the time Martin is tempted to push the button on his stopwatch but on each occasion he is convinced that something better is imminent. Indeed it is not until private detectives, working for his soon to be ex-wife, break down his hotel door to arrest him



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that Martin realises that his search for ever greater material wealth has been spiritually pointless: “He made his pile, eventually ... [though] there wasn’t much chance to have fun along the way” (Bloch 1977: 283). Ironically, Martin’s pursuit of riches, and the contentment he believes they will bring, has led him to push everyone he’s known away while the pressures of his job, his family and his mistress, have left him a lonely and ill man. Martin’s abject failure; his realisation that “somewhere along the line he’d outsmarted himself. And now it was too late” (Bloch 1977: 285), point to a broader critique of the aspirational tenets of the American dream. “That Hell-Bound Train” becomes a kind of extended metaphor for the ‘rat-race’ ideology espoused and encouraged by U.S. post-war society. Martin is tricked into believing he is getting ahead when actually he is never able to find any meaningful sense of self-fulfilment and actualisation; “looking ahead to find that perfect happiness. Waiting for the moment that never comes” (Bloch 1977: 286). Interestingly, and in what might be seen as an indication of where Bloch’s sympathies lie, Martin has the last laugh of the story rather than the conductor. For, upon encountering the Hell-Bound train for one final time, Martin discovers a sense of true kinship with the other travelers, and chooses to press the button on his stopwatch. This action, which effectively damns the conductor to work forever, both empowers the ordinary working stiff (in both senses of the word) while also reinforcing the story’s somewhat didactic message that a belief in material accoutrements and wealth is futile.

By far Bloch’s most famous work, the novel *Psycho* (1959), tells the story of Norman Bates and his irrepressible mother. Known to most people through Hitchcock’s towering film adaptation, what is perhaps often forgotten are just how much the initiating events of the novel revolve around the issues of impoverishment, class and capital. Indeed, if a reader were only to look at the opening few chapters of the book they might easily perceive the novel a kind of hard-boiled treatise on the motivations for crime amongst the working classes. As Kendall R. Phillips notes “it is the pursuit of money that starts the seemingly inevitable chain of unfortunate events” (2005: 73). However, this is not the whole story. As both the novel and the film make clear, there are two interrelated factors that motivate Mary to commit the crime. Of primary importance is the simple fact that Mary longs to escape her boring secretarial job and marry her beloved Sam Loomis. Being a proud and reputable man, Sam is clear that he wants to give Mary the marriage, and the life, she deserves. At present he is living just above the poverty line having inherited his father’s business, but also his father’s large debts: “Sam inherited the business, all right, plus about twenty thousand in debts. The building was mortgaged, the inventory was mortgaged, and even the insurance had been mortgaged” (16). He works hard but struggles to make ends meet; he sleeps and eats in the shop when it is not open: “That’s right. Rigged up a place for myself in the back room. I’m living on baked beans most of the time” (17). Consequently, Sam suggests to Mary that “we’ll have to wait. It may take two-three years before everything is paid off” (17) but Mary cannot bear her current situation for that long. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, Mary gets the chance to steal from the property investor Tommy Cassidy. An obnoxious but rich man who is shameless in letting others know of his wealth (and who we learn has previously offered money to Mary to sleep with her). We are then presented with a pair of sympathetic characters who are poor and a rich character (or plot device) who is hugely unsympathetic in action and behaviour. Marion’s desire to attain the societal ‘norms’ of marriage and romantic love are directly impeded by the unfair and exploitive arrangement of that self-same society in what might be seen as a sly textual critique of post-war American inequality; as Mary suggests “when you come right down to it, some people don’t seem to get *any* opportunities at all” (14) We learn, for instance, that Mary has always been victim to

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a system that, rather than help those with aspirations, seems instead to be unjustly balanced against those at the bottom of the socio-economic scale:

The opportunity to go to college had vanished, at seventeen, when Daddy was hit by a car. Mary went to business school for a year, instead, and then settled down to support Mom and her kid sister, Lila.

The opportunity to marry disappeared at twenty-two, when Dale Belter was called up to serve his hitch in the army. Pretty soon he was stationed in Hawaii, and before long he began mentioning this girl in his letters, and then the letters stopped coming. When she finally got the wedding announcement she didn't care any more.

Besides, Mom was pretty sick by then. It took her three years to die, while Lila was off at school. Mary had insisted she get to college, come what may, but that left her carrying the whole load. Between holding down a job at the Lowery Agency all day and sitting up with Mum half the night, there wasn't time for anything else. (14-15)

Furthermore, the novel emphasises that the America we see is one in which capitalism exerts an oppressive hold. *Psycho* depicts characters that are more than ready to exploit others for material gain. Mary works for a Mr Lowery of whom we learn "Lowery would half kill himself to make an extra dollar, and he'd be perfectly willing to kill any of his employees for another fifty cents" (14). In fact, Mary notes that Lowery's entire business (and that of others like him) is built upon greed and a willingness to take advantage of other people:

She watched him buy up shaky mortgages and foreclose, watched him make quick, cunning, cutthroat cash offers to desperate sellers and then turn around and take a fat profit on a fast, easy resale ... All Lowery did was stand in the middle, extracting a percentage from both parties ... He performed no other real service to justify his existence. And yet he was rich. (19)

In providing more exposition and background detail than the film was able to, in the novel we learn that it is not only the working class Mary and Sam's problems which are caused by economic factors. Norman's own troubles have been caused, at least in part, by his family's declining financial status. Norman's mother had originally owned "quite a bit of farm property", which brought in a good income, meaning that "she was well off" (178). However, her lover, Joe Conside, had convinced her to sell this property and purchase a motel business along the old highway where "there was a lot of business to be had" (178). At the start of the novel Norman is arguing with his mother over her prior decision not to sell their current business and move elsewhere when they had learnt of the plans to build a new highway that would redirect traffic away from their family run motel:

"But it isn't likely anybody would be coming this way. Everyone takes the new highway." Norman heard the bitterness creeping into his voice, felt it welling up into his throat until he could taste it, and tried to hold it back. But too late now; he had to vomit it out. "I told you how it would be at the time, when we got that advance tip that they were moving the highway. You could have sold the motel then, before there was a public announcement about the new road coming through. We could have bought all kinds of land over there for a song, closer to Fairvale, too. We'd have had a new motel, a new house, made some money. But you wouldn't listen. You never listen to me. (Bloch 2013: 6)

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As a rejoinder Norman's mother mocks Norman for his inability to become independent, both personally and financially: "Never had the gumption to leave home. Never had the gumption to go out and get yourself a job." (Bloch 2013: 7) Indeed, much as Norman seems to be judged against a proscriptive model of masculinity based upon economic factors such as employment and the accruing of material wealth, so Sam's refusal to get married in poverty stands as an indictment of capitalism's creation of restrictive bourgeois gender roles. However, Norman internalises this oppression, acting out fantasies of control by wearing the clothes of his dead mother. Norman's proclivity for taxidermy might be read as marking an interest in the literal objectification of living beings, often for material gain.

The role that money plays in the character's life is evident again in the means of Norman's capture. For it is the investigator the Milton Arbogast, a man employed by Parity Mutual to try and find out, not what happened to their missing employee Mary Crane, but rather the stolen \$40,000, that initially tracks Norman down. As Arbogast himself reveals to Norman in a conversation they have, it is the amount of money that Mary stole that is of most significance to his case, and which will ultimately lead to Norman being arrested: "This girl stole forty thousand dollars in cash from a real estate firm ... That's right. Skipped town with the money, You can see it's a serious business. That's why everything I can find out is important." (107-8). In the world of the novel, it is quite clear then that money has superseded the individual employee as the most important factor in success, as Norman suggests "Everybody was interested in forty thousand dollars" (114). Perhaps the greatest irony comes in the events that follow Norman's capture and the exposing of his crimes. For, the novel suggests that the sensational nature of Norman's actions give birth to a renewed tourist interest in the Bates' motel: "there was no end to the morbid curiosity-lovers who sought it out. Quite conceivably, a goodly percentage would have been eager to rent rooms" (175-6). Though Norman may have been beyond any interest in saving his family's business at this point, the vagaries of capitalism, it would seem, have the last laugh.

In its depiction of Mary, Sam and, to a large extent, even Norman, as victims of larger –socio-economic factors, *Psycho* exemplifies the post-war change in depicting poverty and the poor in Horror. Though Norman is undoubtedly a monstrous character, his story (like Mary's) is one of oppression and ill-fated, downward mobility. Packard notes that "it is becoming more and more difficult to start at the bottom and reach the top" (16) Indeed, Lilla, Mary's sister claims that she feels empathy: "He must have suffered more than any of us. In a way I can almost understand" (183). In a society that defines self-actualisation in capitalist terms such as competitive control and domination how is Norman to define himself except by killing others? Perhaps the novel's most terrifying aspect then is its interrogation of U.S. inequality and its depiction of bourgeois spaces (the family home, the motel) and institutions (marriage) as complicit in this continuing inequity.

As Bernice M Murphy has rightly suggested, while "[Shirley] Jackson rarely dealt *directly* with contemporary social issues" (18) her work, nevertheless, repeatedly explores the "the pervasive anxieties and sociological fixations of post-Second World War American society." (18). Published in the same year as *Psycho*, Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), like *Psycho*, explores the often dire consequences of social inequality. Though we are told only snippets of information about the novel's

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central character, Eleanor Vance, and her background (for a number of years she has cared for her ill, now dead, mother; she owns half a car) a picture of deprivation is constructed around the character. Eleanor is noticeably different to the other members of the experiment; one significant disparity is her lower class background. While Dr Montague, Theodora, Luke (and later, Mrs Montague and her friend Arthur) are coded as members of the bourgeoisie, Eleanor is depicted as working class; as she proposes ““I am a kind of stray cat” (*House*: 209). We learn that she has not inherited a great deal as a result of her mother’s passing: “My sister and I each took whatever we wanted ... small things; there was really nothing much ... not at all that much money” (*House*: 87). Indeed Eleanor’s suggestion, to Theodora, that she has “a little place of my own ... An apartment, like yours, only I live alone. Smaller than yours, I’m sure” (*House*: 88) turns out to be a lie. Instead, following her temporary ‘possession’ by the house, when Dr Montague is trying to get Eleanor to leave, she reveals that: “I made it up. I sleep on a cot at my sister’s, in the baby’s room. I haven’t any home, no place at all. And I can’t go back to my sister’s because I stole her car” (*House*: 239).

Of all the guests it is Eleanor who appears the most susceptible to the ‘luxuries’ of Hill House; as she claims: “I am too used already to the comforts of Hill House” (*House*: 244). While the others criticise the house and its contents for being un-homely and oppressive, Eleanor grows to feel “its good here” (230), when Theodora bemoans the cook’s abilities and the House’s facilities Eleanor disagrees, stating “it’s a nice kitchen” (111) better to the one in her mother’s house, which “was dark and narrow” (*House*: 111). Dr Montague suggests of Hill House that it attracts “lost abandoned soul[s]” (*House*: 217) and here, significantly, Eleanor’s lower class background and her newly ‘homeless’ status seem to make her particularly vulnerable to the House. For, as we learn, the House continues to be a class bound institution which operates along clearly defined class lines: “the Dudleys have taken care of Hill House ever since anyone can remember; certainly the Sandersons were happy enough to keep them on” (*House*: 65). In this environment, Eleanor is gradually seduced by the “warm, drowsily, luxuriously warm” (*House*: 228) advances of Hill House, until she is ensnared; as she confesses: “I could go wandering and homeless, errant, and I would always come back here” (*House*: 239). Eleanor’s attraction for the House seems based on her desire for recognition, which she believes can be achieved only through a close association with it:

Climbing, looking down, she thought of the soft green grass outside and the rolling hills and the rich trees. Looking up, she thought of the tower of Hill House rising triumphantly between the trees, tall over the road which wound through Hillsdale and past a white house set in flowers and past the magic oleanders and past the stone lions and on, far, far, away, to a little lady who was going to pray for her. Time is ended now, she thought, all *that* is gone and left behind (*House*: 232)

Tragically, this love affair eventually grows to the point where Eleanor is unable to see the true horror of the House, instead she perceives the Doctor’s decision to send her away as the result of a selfish desire to deprive her of the House’s luxuries: “Eleanor, we don’t want you any more, not in *our* Hill House, go away,” (*House*: 245). The novel’s end, with Eleanor seemingly killing herself by driving her car into a tree in the driveway, implies that she is finally unable to separate herself from the House. Like Sutpen in *Absalom! Absalom!*, Eleanor’s eventual fate seems to foreground the perverting influence of striving for wealth and property.

Jackson’s last novel *We Have Always Lived in The Castle* (1962) also melds the author’s interest in class with the Gothic . Darly Hattenhauer has written of the novel as being one of Jackson’s “most class

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conscious" (Hattenhauer, 189), and "a case study in the neo-aristocratic haute bourgeois exploitation of the petit bourgeois and the lower class" (Hattenhauer, 187). Whereas *Hill House* gives us a member of the petit bourgeois or working class to identify, and perhaps, sympathise, with, Jackson's later novel shifts the reader's perspective to Mary Katherine 'Merricat' Blackwood, one of only three members of the landed Blackwood dynasty to survive "the most sensational poisoning case of the century" (*Castle*: 32). Merricat lives in near isolation with her older sister Constance and their Uncle Julian. Following the court case which saw Constance acquitted of the murders of her family the Blackwoods have shut themselves away from the community with only Merricat twice weekly venturing into the nearby village to get supplies. Right from the start of the novel it is clear that Merricat's actions are fuelled by an elitist view regarding class. It is clear from her descriptions of the "ugliness of the villagers" (*Castle*: 6) that Merricat does not like them. She claims that the "blight on the village" contrary to popular hearsay and gossip "never came from the Blackwoods; the villagers belonged here and the village was the only proper place for them" (*Castle*: 6). Part of this class snobbishness may be the result of Merricat's parents who tell her that the villagers are "trash" (10) and who quickly set about enclosing the Blackwood house and land so that no-one but them can enjoy it:

Our Mother disliked the sight of anyone who wanted to walking past our front door, and when our Father brought her to live in the Blackwood house, one of the first things he had to do was close off the path and fence in the entire Blackwood property ... There was another gate at the other end of the path ... that gate too had a padlock and a sign saying PRIVATE NO TRESPASSING. "The Highways built for common people, "our Mother said "and my front door is private". (*Castle*: 18)

However, in case the reader thinks that Jackson is simply anti-bourgeois, later in the novel we are provided with a frightening scene of proletarian uprising when the villagers decide to try and finish the demolition of Blackwood house that was begun by an accidental fire: "Above it all, most horrible, was the laughter. I saw one of the Dresden figurines thrown and break against the porch rail, and the other fell unbroken and rolled along the grass ... I heard the sound of dishes smashing and at that minute realised that we stood outside the tall windows of the dining room and they were coming very close" (*Castle*: 106). Here, in line with Constance's own views, it is the raucous villagers that Jackson wants us to despise, along with their repeated refrain to "let it burn" (*Castle*: 105). Hattenhauer suggests that what fuels the villagers' anger in the novel is the sense of the "unearned privilege of the rich paid for by the commoners" (188) and much like Hawthorne and Faulkner before her, Jackson gives us an example of the warping tendencies of material wealth and property.

In the novel we learn that Merricat believes she must keep up a series of arcane practises, including burying items, in order to stop calamity befalling the remaining Blackwoods: "All of our land was enriched with my treasures buried in it ... my marbles, my teeth and my colored stones, all perhaps turned to jewels by now, held together under the ground in a powerful taut web which never loosened, but held fast to guard us" (*Castle*: 41). Merricat's actions point to a misguided belief in the protective power of material wealth. Indeed, it is not long before Merricat's cousin Charles Blackwood turns up at the Blackwood estate. Though Merricat immediately dislikes Charles, believing him to be "a ghost" (*Castle*: 61) Constance disagrees suggesting he "is *not* a bad man" (*Castle*: 69) while Uncle Julian calls him "chivalrous" (*Castle*: 64). Yet it is not long before Charles appears to be plotting against Merricat, he disagrees with her use of her father's items, exclaiming when she nails a gold pocket watch to a tree: "I could have worn it; what a hell of a way to treat a valuable thing. We could have sold it" (*Castle*: 77). What emerges then is a battle for possession of the Blackwood family's wealth. It is not long before

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Merricat notes that Charles has “father’s watch was in his pocket. I thought that tomorrow he would be wearing our father’s signet ring, and I wondered if he could make Constance put on our mother’s pearls” (*Castle*: 80). Charles’ motives are made explicit when the Blackwood house sets on fire and he is heard to exclaim “Get the safe in the study,” ... a thousand times (*Castle*: 102). Ultimately, Charles’ attempts to possess the Blackwood wealth prove futile and following the fire, Constance and Merricat are left alone. While Merricat seems to see this outcome as a happy one, it is notable that it relies upon them losing almost everything they own:

“Merricat, oh, Merricat.” Constance dropped the tablecloth she was holding and put her arms around me. “What have I done to my baby Merricat?” she said. “No house. No food. And dressed in a tablecloth; what have I *done*?”

“Constance,” I said, “I love you, Constance.”

“Dressed in a tablecloth like a rag doll.”

“Constance. We are going to be very happy, Constance.”

“Oh Merricat,” she said, holding me.

“Listen to me, Constance. We are going to be very happy.” (*Castle*: 136)

In her insightful afterword to the Penguin edition of Jackson’s novel, Joyce Carol Oates writing on the recurrent fetishisation of food in Jackson’s fiction: “ironic then, that the Blackwood family should be poisoned by one of their own, out of a family heirloom sugar bowl” (Oates, 154). Yet, given Jackson’s interest in class it is not surprising that *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* should locate the blame for its tale of degeneracy within the restrictive confines of the quasi-aristocracy, and use the act of poisoning by a family member to symbolise the self-destructive properties of the class system. Similarly, the ending of the novel sees the remaining Blackwood’s both freed from their aristocratic responsibilities – Merricat and Constance can now live how they wish to - while also continuing to occupy the top position of a feudal like system of hierarchy based upon class as the villagers bring “bacon, home cured, or fruit, or their preserves ... roasted chicken; sometimes a cake or a pie” (*Castle*: 139) to their doorstep in order to atone for their revolt: “Once or twice there was a note in the basket: “This is for the dishes, “ or “We apologize about the curtains,” or “Sorry about the harp.” (*Castle*: 139).

In contrast to more tumultuous upbringing of writers such as Leiber and Bloch, Jackson came from a decidedly more comfortable background. Perhaps as a result of this Jackson had an easier experience when publishing her work; her short stories appeared in many of the slick magazines, including the *New Yorker* and *Harpers*, as well as mass market publications such as *Good Housekeeping*. Consequently, her writing was “among[st] the most lucrative of her time” (Hattenhauer, 19). Yet as Hattenhauer also notes, the early part of Jackson’s intellectual life was decidedly Marxist, with Jackson’s husband, Stanley Edgar Hyman radicalising this “suburban Anglo daughter of a Republican businessperson” (15), to the point where she joined the Young Communist league and co-edited a Marxist literary journal alongside Hyman.

This concern with social inequality manifests itself in a number of Jackson’s non-genre works such as “Like Mother used to Make” in Jackson reverses the stereotypically proscribed gender roles of the two

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central characters to expose class as the deciding factor in the subjugation of the individual. Similarly, "Come Dance with Me in Ireland" (reminiscent of Beaumont's "The Murderers") tells the story of three women who, in attempting to prove themselves selfless actually reveal their ingrained class prejudices, with the denouement revealing that the subject of their pity, actually views them derisively. Of more interest to this study is the way in which Jackson "uses the supernatural in her fiction to depict the interpellation of unstable subjects into the dominant culture's myths and ideologies – particularly about class and gender" (Hattenhauer, 10)). Such an utilisation of the Gothic is evident in Jackson's most well-known piece of short fiction, "The Lottery", which has been convincingly read as embodying a Marxist standpoint by Peter Kosenko in his 1985 essay. Kosenko makes a persuasive case that the story embodies a Marxist critique of the organisation of neoliberal, capitalist America:

First, the lottery's rules of participation reflect and codify a rigid social hierarchy based upon an inequitable social division of labor. Second, the fact that everyone participates in the lottery and understands *consciously* that its outcome is pure chance give it a certain "democratic" aura that obscures its first codifying function. Third, the villagers believe *unconsciously* that their commitment to a work ethic will grant them some magical immunity from selection. Fourth, this work ethic prevents them from understanding that the lottery's actual function is not to encourage work *per se* but to reinforce an inequitable social *division* of labor. (Kosenko, 28)

The heated response to "The Lottery"'s publication in *The New Yorker* has been well charted, not least by Jackson herself who claimed of the hate mail she received: "it had simply never occurred to me that these millions and millions of people might be so far from being uplifted that they would sit down and write me letters I was downright scared to open." (qtd in Hall, 127). While Jackson professed to be genuinely surprised by the reaction to her story, it is very likely that what many readers of the upmarket *The New Yorker* found most disturbing was "The Lottery"'s skewering of the basic ideological tenets that so many of them lived by. Indeed, one of the strengths of Jackson's writing is the manner in which the story can be read as collapsing the usual fictional boundaries between the fantastic and very mundane, exposing the deep seated problems with the midcentury U.S. capitalist agenda; as Kosenko suggests:

[Jackson intended to] shock her complacent reader with an exaggerated image of the ideological *modus operandi* of capitalism: accusing those whom it cannot or will not employ of being lazy, promoting "the family" as the essential social unit in order to discourage broader associations and identifications, offering men power over their wives as a consolation for their powerlessness in the labor market, and pitting workers against each other and against the unemployed. (Kosenko, 32)

Jackson's adroit use of a mainstream publication as an effective platform for her ideological critique, and her successful blurring of the established distinctions between realist and non-realist formats both epitomises the work on many of the genre authors discussed in this chapter and points forward to the direction genre writers such as Ira Levin, William Peter Blatty and Stephen King would take in the Horror 'boom' of the 1970s and 1980s.

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