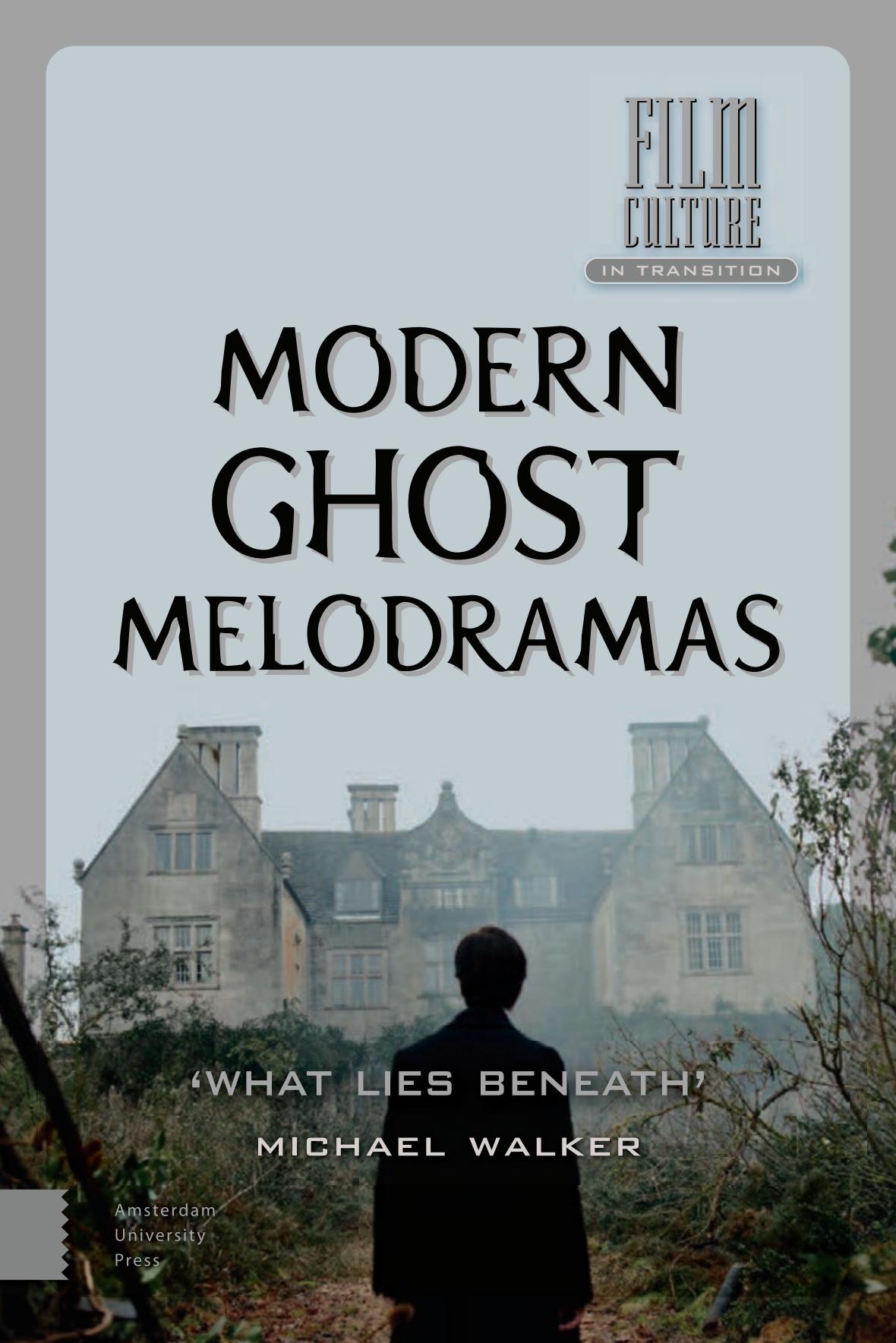
FILM CULTURE IN TRANSITION

MODERN GHOST MELODRAMAS



'WHAT LIES BENEATH'

MICHAEL WALKER

Amsterdam University Press

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1. Introduction

Since the late twentieth century, the scary ghost film has experienced a major revival, with films from a number of different countries collectively creating a rich international cycle of ghost movies. This book looks at the cycle generically, but within a different framework from that usually adopted towards such films. Traditionally, ghost movies have been placed within two broad categories, depending on the nature of the ghost. In one group are films featuring benevolent or comedy ghosts, e.g. Ghost (Jerry Zucker 1990) or High Spirits (Neil Jordan 1988); in the other, those with scary ghosts, e.g. The Changeling (Peter Medak 1979) and The Shining (Stanley Kubrick 1980). English-language films in the first category have already been discussed, in Katherine A. Fowkes's *Giving up the Ghost: Spirits, Ghosts, and Angels in Mainstream Comedy Films* (1998). This book concentrates on the second category, which is now the dominant form of the ghost movie. My argument is that within this category there are again different types of ghost, and different types of movie. I believe that the common tendency to place all scary ghost movies in the horror genre is misguided, and the contemporary cycle can be used to demonstrate this. Indeed, I would maintain that key works in the cycle – e.g. The Sixth Sense (M. Night Shyamalan 1999), The Others (Alejandro Amenábar 2001) and El orfanato/ The Orphanage (J.A. Bayona 2006) – are not really horror films at all. They are more productively viewed as ghost melodramas.

This is not to suggest that no recent ghost movies are horror films; Ringu (Hideo Nakata 1998), Ringu 2 (Nakata 1999) and their spin-offs fit readily into the horror genre. That is because Sadako, the ghost girl in these films, is in effect a monster, with a supernatural ability to kill, and a similar power is found in her successors. But this is not the case with the ghosts in most of the films discussed in this book. The ghosts may well be aggressive and demanding, and some indeed seek to kill, but they are rarely monstrous. The distinction between a ghost melodrama and a ghost horror film is nevertheless not clear-cut, and is perhaps best seen as a question of tendencies within a given work. As will be argued in detail in the chapters discussing these films, even in the horror strand, melodrama is still relevant to the structure of the films. For example, the film of Ringu has markedly more melodramatic elements than the novel on which it was based. Before elaborating on this, it would be useful to look briefly at the history of the scary ghost film in Japanese and Western cinema.

Scary or eerie ghost movies have long been popular in Japan. Few from the pre-World-War-II years have been shown in the West, but famous post-war examples include Ugetsu monogatari (Kenji Mizoguchi 1953), with its seductive ghost princess, The Ghost of Kasane Swamp (Nobuo Nakagawa 1957), The Mansion of the Ghost Cat (Nakagawa 1958), Kwaidan (Masaki Kobayashi 1964), Kuroneko (Kaneto Shindo 1968) and the numerous versions of The Ghost Story of Yotsuya, filmed around eight times between 1956 and 1981, the most well-known versions directed by Nakagawa in 1959 and Shiro Toyoda in 1965.

A number of these period films are considered in some detail by Colette Balmain in *Introduction to Japanese Horror Film* (2008). Adapted mostly from traditional ghost stories and kabuki plays, the films typically feature the ghosts of women who suffered at the hands of men returning to enact revenge. Although there are some male ghosts – in the 'Hoichi the Earless' episode of Kwaidan; in Empire of Passion (Nagisa Oshima 1976) – they are markedly less common and indeed less compelling than the female ghosts. In The Ghost Story of Yotsuya, the protagonist murders so many people it is not surprising that he is haunted by the ghost of a male victim as well as that of his wife, but it is the latter who makes the more dramatic appearances, befuddling and terrifying the protagonist to the extent that he mistakenly slaughters his second wife on their wedding night. In Kuroneko, a mother and daughter-in-law who were raped and murdered by samurai take revenge by appearing as ghosts and luring samurai to their deaths. Such ghosts may be seen ideologically as expressing male anxieties about the many injustices perpetuated on women.

By contrast, until relatively recently, genuinely frightening ghosts were a rarity in Western cinema – at least in Hollywood and Britain. Classical Hollywood seems to have preferred comedy ghost films such as Topper (Norman Z. McLeod 1937) or The Ghost Breakers (George Marshall 1940) to more frightening ones such as The Uninvited (Lewis Allen 1944). Moreover, excellent though The Uninvited is, it ultimately mocks its scary ghost, as if uneasy about taking ghosts too seriously. It was much the same in Britain: the ghosts in The Halfway House (Basil Dearden 1944) are entirely amiable; the ghost woman in A Place of One's Own (Bernard Knowles 1945) *is* frightening, but the film limits her power to a possession which is rather too neatly remedied.

The first genuinely frightening English-language ghost movies were probably The Innocents (Jack Clayton, GB, 1961), adapted from Henry James's famous novella, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), and The Haunting (Robert Wise 1963), adapted from Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill*

House (1960). Although THE HAUNTING was a Hollywood production, both films were made in England. Another relevant film of this era was the US B-movie CARNIVAL OF SOULS (Heck Harvey 1962) which has a highly effective spooky atmosphere. But this little cluster was not followed by another cluster of scary ghost films until the late 1970s: THE FOG (John Carpenter 1979), THE CHANGELING, THE SHINING and GHOST STORY (John Irvin 1981). (For a more complete list, *see* Newman 2011: 224-230). THE AMITYVILLE HORROR (Stuart Rosenberg 1979), is a marginal example – it converts a haunted-house narrative into a story of possession.

The detailed discussion of individual films in the chapters that follow begins with this second cluster, but excludes THE FOG. This omission may be clarified by reference to horror theory. A useful working definition of horror, which builds on earlier definitions, has been provided by Philip J. Nickel: 'Horror has two central elements: (1) an appearance of the evil supernatural or of the monstrous (this includes the psychopath who kills monstrously); and (2) the intentional elicitation of dread, visceral disgust, fear or startlement in the spectator or reader' (2010: 15). I would modify this definition to exclude fear and (the neologism) startlement, which may well occur in any number of thrillers and disaster movies. As Noël Carroll has observed, the monster needs to be both threatening *and* impure – a threat 'merely' generates fear, whereas 'horror requires evaluation both in terms of threat and disgust' (1990: 28). Otherwise, Nickel's definition is a productive starting point.

The ghosts in THE FOG are of men drowned at sea by wreckers who sought their gold. This occurred a hundred years ago, and the ghosts are now returning to Antonio Bay, the California town where the wreckers lived, to enact revenge. But, embodying both the 'evil supernatural' and 'the monstrous', the ghosts are no more than supernatural killing machines. By contrast, in THE SHINING, although we might say that the hotel embodies the evil supernatural and Jack (Jack Nicholson) becomes a monster, the horror elements occur within the context of a family melodrama. Moreover, the ghosts encountered by Jack may also be seen as projections of his inner world. This is a radically different sort of ghost, and a more generically complex type of movie.

In 'Melodrama and the American Cinema' (Walker 1982a), I argue that melodrama may be seen as a structure that operates across the Hollywood genres. In *Beyond Genre*, Deborah Thomas makes a similar point, referring to melodrama as a mode (2000: 11). I go on to distinguish between two broad types of melodrama: male-centred action melodramas and 'melodramas of passion' (1982a: 16-18). It is the latter which are usually implied when

critics talk about film melodrama. Encompassing such genres as the family melodrama, the small-town melodrama, the woman's film and the romantic melodrama, in these films, 'the concern is not with the external dynamic of action but with internal traumas of passion (the emotions), audience involvement being held and articulated through [...] intense personal feelings and relationships' (17). As has been illustrated in numerous articles on film melodrama, beginning with Thomas Elsaesser's seminal 'Tales of Sound and Fury' (1972), a psychoanalytical approach to such films is particularly productive. It is likewise the approach I shall adopt to the films discussed in this book.

It will be apparent that many horror films are also melodramas. However, I am assuming that, in a given work, the 'melodrama' elements can be broadly distinguished from the 'horror' elements. Tom Gunning has argued that the modern horror film may be seen as an *extension* of melodrama, a development that began with the Grand Guignol plays of André de Lorde, with their focus on shock and sensational excess (Gunning 1994). I would prefer to keep the two forms, horror and melodrama, separate, even though both may well occur in the same film. As Robin Wood points out in 'Ideology, Genre, Auteur' (1977), genres are rarely discrete: there is a constant intermingling. This is particularly true of ghost stories, which have been inserted into a wide range of Hollywood genres.

A general distinction may nevertheless be drawn between two broad types of scary ghost movie, a distinction deriving from the nature of the ghost. It is only occasionally that the ghosts are monstrous, as in THE FOG, or like Sadako in the RINGU films. There are ghosts who kill, but most are seeking revenge, a familiar motivation in many genres. Others simply want justice. There are even some ghosts that are tragic rather than frightening, in that they wish no-one any harm, but bear testament to a loss, as in ROUGE (Stanley Kwan, Hong Kong, 1987). In other examples, such as in THE SHINING, the ghosts imply the dark side of the protagonist(s). In all the films where the ghosts are not monstrous, melodrama seems the appropriate generic mode.

A succinct definition of melodrama has been offered by Steve Neale: 'the eruption of (hetero)sexual desire into an already firmly established social order' (1980: 22). For ghost melodramas, this requires amendment. It is only occasionally in these films that sex figures as a disruptive force. More often, sex is replaced by a preoccupation with death. Many of the films are haunted by the death drive.

In his excellent monograph, *Dark places: the haunted house in film*, Barry Curtis has also noted a connection between ghost movies and melodrama:

'Such [haunted house] films are closely related to melodramas. They are often about tragic families and the influence of the past on the present' (2008: 16). Furthermore, '"Haunted" fictions often seek to restore to attention something – such as injustice, neglect, murder or slavery – that is absent from the record. In this respect these films are often on the side of the overlooked and demand that understanding and reparations are their due' (24). This alludes to a type of melodrama that may be traced through the films of D.W. Griffith back to nineteenth-century theatrical melodrama: stories about those who have been victimised and who seek justice.

What is meant by a ghost can vary from culture to culture, and so I would like to note some basic criteria. In general, ghosts are characters who have died and come back to life in a form similar to their appearance before death. I have included one film in which the equivalent figure has not, in fact, died (In Dreams, Neil Jordan 1998), but the film follows the pattern of a ghost melodrama, and so helps clarify key features of the cycle.

Equally, I have excluded certain horror films with monsters that have come back from the dead, such as A Nightmare on Elm Street (Wes Craven 1984) and its successors, and Candyman (Bernard Rose 1992) and its successor. Because Freddie Krueger (Robert Englund) and Candyman (Tony Todd), like the ghosts in The Fog, are essentially just monstrous killing machines, they are outside my concerns here.

There are further distinctions. In his seminal essay on the American horror film, Robin Wood characterises the monster as 'the return of the repressed', the repressed referring to sexual energies which 'civilisation' must disavow (Wood 1979: 15). Ghosts may likewise be seen as a manifestation of the return of the repressed, but within a different framework. For the monster, the context is the culture, and the return of the repressed that it embodies is primarily social. By contrast, a ghost usually embodies a *personal* return of the repressed. As in The Fog, A Nightmare on Elm Street and Candyman, monsters typically threaten the community; ghosts individuals or small groups. Hence the focus in these films on family relationships and small-scale communities. Here, too, Sadako is more like a monster – she threatens the world.

In addition, the repressed in scary ghost films is only rarely to do with sexuality. Just as Steve Neale's formulation for melodrama requires amendment for these films, so does Robin Wood's formulation for horror – again the anxieties registered are predominantly to do with death. Nevertheless, there is one type of sexuality which is important to a number of the films: lesbianism. In an article published some years before the cycle, Patricia White writes:

> What have been considered the very best of 'serious' Hollywood ghost movies – Curse of the Cat People (1944), The Uninvited (1944), The Innocents (1961) and [...] The Haunting (1963) [...] are also, by some uncanny coincidence, films with eerie lesbian overtones. Masquerading as family romance, these films unleash an excess of female sexuality which cannot be contained without recourse to the supernatural. (1991: 142)

Although it may be stretching a point to include Curse of the Cat People and especially The Innocents (which is of course British, not Hollywood) in this argument, I agree with White about the other two films, and she analyses The Haunting perceptively from a lesbian point of view. As will be noted in the individual discussions, lesbianism is indeed an issue in some of the films, particularly the South Korean girls' high school films. Here Steve Neale's formulation does indeed apply – but in a homosexual sense.

I also distinguish between ghosts and revenants. Both are ghosts, but revenants appear in a more substantial form: the ghost princess in Ugetsu monogatari and the avenging female ghosts in Kuroneko are really revenants. In an interview with director Jacques Rivette on the British DVD of Histoire de Marie et Julien, he insists that there are no ghosts in the film, only revenants. He defines them as 'people who, for one reason or another, haven't managed to cross the [...] boundary between the world we live in [...] and the world of the dead' (Rivette 2004). In *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, Mike Ashley gives a more traditional definition. He emphasises that revenants are ghosts who have a more material form, but also says that they usually reappear close to the place of death and 'they retain an identity and purpose – possibly vengeance' (1997: 810). However, the crucial point about a revenant is that it is quite possible to mistake him or her for a normal human being – which is indeed the case in Histoire de Marie et Julien.

Despite the cluster of scary ghost movies between 1979 and 1981, it was some time before English-language ghost melodramas really took off. During what I term the fallow years, occasional examples were made, but they were essentially 'one-offs'. Up to 1998, the most typical ghost movies were those discussed by Fowkes (1998). As well as Ghost and High Spirits, these include Kiss Me Goodbye (Robert Mulligan 1982), Always (Steven Spielberg 1989), Truly, Madly, Deeply (Anthony Minghella, UK, 1990), and Heart and Souls (Ron Underwood 1993). Although these are not all comedies, they are nevertheless connected in that the ghosts in them are not frightening (indeed, many are romantic) and are almost all male. This draws attention to a crucial point about scary ghosts: as in the Japanese

films, they are overwhelmingly female. Gender considerations are thus also pertinent to the discussions of the films.

The main focus of this book is the cycle of films that was prompted by the renaissance of the ghost movie at the end of the last century. I will look at possible reasons for the emergence of such a cycle at this point in the Conclusion. For now, I would just like to note its provenance. I would trace it to the combined impact of (a) the enormous international box-office success of The Sixth Sense and (b) the equivalent cult success of Ringu and its successors. Collectively, these films transformed the ghost movie market. Relatively high-profile scary ghost movies were now made in a number of different countries, and the 'genre' has probably never been so internationally popular as over the last seventeen years or so.

In fact, The Sixth Sense was only one of several scary Hollywood ghost movies released in 1999, and most of the other examples show that there were less rewarding directions in which the cycle could have developed. The Haunting (Jan de Bont), another version of Shirley Jackson's novel, is not unpromising for its first hour or so, but then the atmosphere and power of Wise's original are destroyed by a barrage of CGI and other special effects. In House on Haunted Hill (William Malone), a remake of a silly William Castle movie of 1958, bloody dismemberment proliferates as in a third-rate splatter movie. Sleepy Hollow (Tim Burton) is a Gothic period film with a mad headless horseman ghost played by Christopher Walken. All these films resort to ramping up the scary ghost elements to excess of one kind or another, and all were commercially successful. Only Stir of Echoes (David Koepp) – which integrates ghostly manifestations into a narrative of psychological trauma within a family and the local community – has something of the nuanced, intense ambience of The Sixth Sense.

Although primarily a horror film, Ringu, in its restraint and seriousness, is really closer to The Sixth Sense and Stir of Echoes than to these gory, overwrought ghost movies. This distinction has been discussed by Daniel Martin in the context of a consideration of the British critical reception of Ringu. Martin distinguishes between graphic and suggestive/restrained horror, placing Ringu in the second category:

> Critics who privilege restrained horror clearly present it as psychological and present the thrills of graphic horror as largely concerned with shock and revulsion: the thrill of explicit horror is supposedly visceral, addressing physical, bodily reflexes. Restrained horror is seen as engaging the mind, and activating the imagination (which does much of the work of producing fear), while graphic horror is clearly seen as below conscious

> thought, merely a matter of automatic bodily reflexes. These claimed modes of appreciation run parallel to wider debates about the values of high art and popular culture. (2009: 39)

Martin also includes The Sixth Sense as a horror film, albeit in the restrained category, which I dispute. Nevertheless, the crucial point here is that it was the suggestive rather than the graphic ghost films which provided a template for the international ghost melodrama cycle.

However, although The Sixth Sense was by far the most popular of the 1999 US ghost films, Hollywood did not follow it up in the way one might have imagined. Most of the mainstream ghost movies made immediately in its wake are generic hybrids of one kind or another. Thus What Lies Beneath (Robert Zemeckis 2000) is a blend of Hitchcockian thriller and ghost story; The Gift (Sam Raimi 2000) inserts a ghost story into a Southern Gothic small-town melodrama. It seems as though Hollywood likes to hedge its bets with ghost stories, preferring to position them within more commercially established generic or narrative forms. Of the immediate English-language successors to The Sixth Sense, only The Others is a 'pure' ghost melodrama, and that was made in Spain on a relatively low budget, i.e. outside the Hollywood mainstream.

One predictable response from Hollywood has been to remake the most successful Japanese ghost movies. In fact, most of these remakes – The Ring (Gore Verbinski 2002), The Grudge (Takashi Shimizu 2004), The Ring Two (Hideo Nakata 2005), One Missed Call (Eric Valette 2007) – belong to the more overtly commercial horror sub-group of the cycle, and it will be seen that, in two cases, the Japanese director of the original version was brought in to direct the remake. Dark Water (Walter Salles 2005) is the one Hollywood remake of a Japanese ghost film – Dark Water (Hideo Nakata 2002) – that I would place outside the horror group. One assumes that, in this case, the presence of a spooky ghost girl with long black hair was sufficient to commend the project to Touchstone Pictures.

These remakes illustrate another crucial point about the cycle. Although the 1960s' cluster of scary ghost movies possess female protagonists, almost all those from The Changeling to The Sixth Sense and Stir of Echoes have adult male protagonists. The only exceptions are two films which focus on children: The Watcher in the Woods (John Hough 1981) – mentioned in Chapter 2 – and Lady in White (Frank LaLoggia 1988). But after the success of Ringu, most scary ghost films have adult female protagonists – as in these remakes. This introduces a different dynamic between the protagonist and the ghost(s). Frightening ghosts arise mainly from, and thus in a sense speak

for, two historically marginalised groups: women and children. Heroines tend to be more sympathetic and/or sensitive to the desires of such ghosts, especially where the latter are victims of male brutality and/or child abuse. The presence of female protagonists also suggests why melodrama should be the dominant generic mode of the films.

Outside Hollywood, individual countries contributed their own distinctive brands of ghost melodrama. Japan and South Korea were the earliest and, together with the US, the most prolific contributors to the cycle. Chronologically I begin the cycle with the Japanese KOKKURI (Takahisa Zeze 1997), RINGU and the South Korean YEOGO GOEDAM girls' high-school ghost movies, which date from 1998, the same year as RINGU. I have also included KOKKURI and the South Korean MEMENTO MORI (Kim Tae-yong and Min Kyu-dong 1999) as seminal, in the sense that, like RINGU and THE SIXTH SENSE, they had a major influence on subsequent works.

KOKKURI and MEMENTO MORI also introduced a further feature of the East Asian ghost films: the focus on teenage girls. THE WATCHER IN THE WOODS possesses a teenage heroine, but it did not set a trend; it was the East Asian films that discovered this market. Recommending RINGU and its successors to the readers of *Film Comment*, Alvin Lu noted that the modern Japanese ghost movie 'is largely a teenage girl-based phenomenon' (2002: 38). Likewise the South Korean ghost movies. Teenage girls were identified as a significant target audience for these films, another reason for the shift into melodrama and away from horror. The films may be scary, but they are rarely horrific. In addition, those films that, like KOKKURI and MEMENTO MORI, specifically focus on teenage girls, also include the theme of lesbianism.

The structure of the book will be evident from the contents page. Fifty-six films are listed, including one television film and two TV miniseries. Thirty-seven of these works are discussed in some textual detail. The readings are structured by notions of genre and informed by theory but, following the arguments put forward by John Gibbs and Douglas Pye (2005) in the Introduction to their anthology *Style and Meaning*, I focus on *interpretations* of the individual works. The rationale for such an approach is that this is an unexplored generic area, and close readings are appropriate to tease out the specificities and complexities.

However, I have only commented on visual style when it is important to an understanding of the film within the generic framework that I am establishing. And so, although there are quite a few references to montage sequences, which do form a major thread within the films, there are less to mise en scène. Although mise en scène would indeed be pertinent to a full consideration of each of these films, across the cycle as a whole it is used

primarily to create tension and atmosphere. There are of course recurring stylistic elements and tropes: blue filters for scenes of ghostly activity; claustrophobic interiors; dark, watery depths; half-hidden, shadowy or fleeting figures; bizarre electrical disturbances. But only occasionally are these of sufficient interest to merit discussion in the individual analyses. For example, although I do discuss the colour red in THE SIXTH SENSE because it enables me to make a point about melodrama, I say relatively little about the deployment of colour in the other films. Equally, I have not really commented on the stylistic differences between the films from the different countries. These have been discussed elsewhere, and I am more concerned in seeking out similarities between the films than noting differences.

A genre builds by selective appropriation: some elements are found to have particular resonances and are readily recycled, modulated and elaborated upon. At the time of the British video release of his comedy-horror ghost film THE FRIGHTENERS (New Zealand/ US, 1996), Peter Jackson was quoted as saying: 'With ghost movies there are no rules. You don't have to stick to cinematic conventions like you do with vampires or werewolves. You can do anything you want with ghosts because no-one really knows what they are or how they operate' (Braund 1997: 130). The statement indicates why THE FRIGHTENERS is such a mess. To direct a genre film and assume you can make up the rules as you go along is simply foolish. Certainly the rules of ghost movies are less well-known than those for vampire movies, but some have long been established in Japanese ghost stories at least, and filmmakers with a feeling for the genre have regularly gravitated to the same sets of elements.

These elements include: (1) Narrative structures, which often follow the pattern of a detective story, with the mystery of the ghost equivalent to the 'whodunnit'. The enigmas posed in ghost movies encompass a range of issues: questions about the source and nature of the haunting; about what the ghost wants; about the back story that gave rise to the ghost; about the relationship of the protagonist to the ghost. But ghosts almost invariably express their concerns obliquely, and the protagonists usually have to spend some time cracking the code. (2) What the ghost wants. In *Looking Awry*, Slavoj Žižek suggests two reasons why the dead return: 'because they were not properly buried' or 'as collectors of some unpaid symbolic debt' (1992: 23). There are of course others: some ghosts seek revenge, others justice, some a companion in death: a lover, a mother, someone else in the house (THE HAUNTING 1963; THE SHINING). But their ruthlessness in pursuing their goals and their supernatural powers frequently place the living at a considerable disadvantage. (3) Tropes, such as the nature of the supernatural

events associated with the ghost(s) and the rhetoric they bring into play. It is here that the films are often very inventive. As the ghosts manipulate both space and time to communicate their messages, a whole range of eerie effects can come into play. (4) Motifs. Like any developed genre, the ghost melodrama has rapidly built up its own iconography, which includes elements such as music boxes, thunderstorms, baths and mirrors, all of which are used in a variety of ways.

In the individual analyses, twists and surprise endings will invariably be revealed; it is not possible to discuss the films properly without doing so. To analyse the films whilst preserving their secrets until the narrative reveals them would require much more discussion; in effect, the films only really make sense when read in the light of usually late revelations, and the analyses take this into account. At the same time, it is appreciated that not every reader will have seen every film, and so, within the discussions, track is kept of the essential narrative developments.

Only fourteen of the 56 films are based on either a novel or a short story, and three of these fourteen are remakes, so that there are only eleven original novels/stories. This is predominantly a cinematic genre. Moreover, almost all the source narratives have been significantly modified, a modification that typically builds up the ghost elements and reduces the horror – a shift to melodramatic representation. Nevertheless, the films overall also draw upon both Western literary and Japanese theatrical ghost traditions. In fact, there is a clear overlap of motifs here. Both the kabuki theatre and the ghost stories of M.R. James include such motifs as watery ghosts, long black hair and dank wells. This has led Roger Clarke to conclude that RINGU has taken such motifs from M.R. James, whereas they are common to both traditions (*see* Clarke 2012: 123).

Most of the films are also set at the time they were made. Although a few are set earlier in the twentieth century, none go back to the more distant pasts of, say, UGETSU MONOGATARI or KURONEKO. This helps focus the area under consideration: these are mainly contemporary ghosts. And, even when the ghosts come from a number of years in the past, they are, with the exception of the ghosts in THE HAUNTING (1999) and the eponymous ghost in THE WOMAN IN BLACK (James Watkins 2011), still twentieth-century ghosts.

The Gothic Tradition

Because the vast majority of films discussed are *not* period films, the question arises as to how much they are nevertheless influenced by the Gothic

tradition. Ghosts are one element in the founding texts of Gothic literature, which are usually identified as the eighteenth-century novels of Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis, but which Nick Groom traces back further – to include Shakespeare, for example (Groom 2012). However, whereas the Gothic tradition has persisted to this day quite strongly in other generic areas – e.g. the vampire film – it has perhaps become rather more attenuated in most modern ghost movies.

Groom suggests that the Gothic novel can be characterised in the first instance by 'seven types of obscurity'. Under a series of headings, he then lists over 70 features found in the novels. I will quote selectively from these, omitting elements – mostly those pertaining to the Christian church – which have no place in the ghost films discussed in this book. Groom's categories and the more relevant elements are:

> meteorological (mists, clouds, wind, rain [...]); topographical (impenetrable forests, [...] the boundless ocean); architectural (towers, prisons, castles covered in gargoyles and crenellations, [...] tombs, [...] ruins, graveyards, mazes, secret passages, locked doors); material ([...] veils, disguises, billowing curtains [...]); textual (riddles, rumours, folklore, unreadable manuscripts and inscriptions, ellipses, broken texts, [...] obscure dialect, inserted narratives [...]); spiritual ([...] allegory and symbolism, [...] mysticism, [...] magic and the occult, [...] summonings [...]); and psychological (dreams, visions, hallucinations, drugs, sleep-walking, madness, split personalities, mistaken identities, doubles, derangement, ghostly presences, forgetfulness, death, hauntings). (2012: 77-78)

But these features 'merely' view the early Gothic texts through the prism of 'obscurity'; other features are equally important. In *The Literature of Terror*, David Punter adds fear, paranoia, the barbaric, the taboo (incest is a Gothic theme) and sexual violence (1980: 402-411). In a summary of the Gothic that includes a Freudian perspective, Reynold Humphries includes, 'repressed sexuality finding pathological outlets in a combination of terror, pleasure and the death drive' (2002: 9). Commenting on the ways in which the Gothic was taken up in the cinema, Groom, too, notes the importance of Freud:

> Freud helped to lay the groundwork for the mass-intellectualisation of cinema by [...] alerting directors and audiences to the psychological possibilities of the medium – and film certainly proved a flexible way of dramatising the spectrum of mental states in visualising dreams and generally living out fantasies. In this context, the Gothic in particular

> appeared to provide access to the dreamworld mapped out by the new science of psychoanalysis: it was the stuff of nightmare, the fantastic, trauma, repression, and perversion. (2012: 132)

In a similar vein, Michelle A. Marré has argued that Freud's dream theories as outlined in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) were, 'tailor-made [...] for the Gothic, that literary celebration of the dream state. The veils, spectres, dreams, hidden passages and imperfectly understood but foreboding messages that punctuate the text seemed fraught, like actual dreams, with an unknown significance' (2000: 232).

To explore the relevance of the Gothic tradition to scary ghost movies, I would like to look first at The Innocents and The Haunting (1963). These two films are closer to the tradition than most of the later films, yet at the same time they are also crucial predecessors to the ghost melodrama cycle. Indeed, they could be seen as mediating the Gothic tradition for the ghost melodramas to come.

The films include one standard shift from historical Gothic: they are set in large isolated country mansions rather than castles. The only castle I have encountered in a modern ghost movie is in High Spirits, where the comedy plot highlights its anachronism. Nevertheless, the mansion in The Haunting is impressively Gothic in style, and the buildings in both films carry familiar Gothic connotations concerning the sinister weight of the past.

Set, like James's novella, in the mid-Victorian era (Frayling 2013: 48), and following the novella quite closely, The Innocents is a period film. Miss Giddens (Deborah Kerr) is hired as a governess to two preadolescent children, Miles (Martin Stephens) and Flora (Pamela Franklin), who live in a mansion under the care of the housekeeper Mrs Grose (Megs Jenkins). Shortly after her arrival, Miss Giddens begins to see the ghosts of the valet Quint and the previous governess Miss Jessel, who had been involved, according to Mrs Grose, in a sadomasochistic relationship. Both died about a year ago. Miss Giddens becomes convinced that these ghosts are not just haunting the children, but are possessing them in order to exercise their diabolical wills over them. She determines to 'exorcise' these figures from the children.

In James's novella, it is strongly intimated that the 'ghosts' are hallucinations, the product of the unnamed governess's repressed: 'it is the governess herself who haunts the children' (Edel 1969: 205). In The Innocents, matters are more ambiguous, and it is possible that the ghosts really are present, even though the children and Mrs Grose cannot see them. We are

now familiar with the idea that someone can be psychic and see ghosts invisible to others. Nevertheless, Miss Giddens's overwrought reaction to the ghosts is just as damaging for the children, and results in Miles's death. The Innocents is a highly effective ghost movie, in which the sinister and uncanny ghostly manifestations fuel the feverish fantasies of the governess.

The period setting; the nature and architecture of the house, which includes a tower with crenellations on which Miss Giddens 'sees' Quint; the uncertainty over the status of the ghosts; the sexual pathology of the governess; the sense of creeping dread; the movement towards death – all these suggest the Gothic. And The Innocents in turn influenced a number of subsequent ghost films: Haunted (Lewis Gilbert, 1995), The Others, The Woman in Black (2011) and The Secret of Crickley Hall (Joe Ahearne, 2012). I will look at the links with Haunted in the discussion of that film; the other three films show the influence of The Innocents in that they all concern children, and anxieties around what might happen to them as a consequence of ghostly activities in and around a large Gothic mansion.

The Haunting is not a period film, but the mansion in which the hauntings occur has a formidable array of Gothic trappings: a history of violent deaths; labyrinthine corridors in which it is quite possible to get lost; doors that open and close on their own; a sinister nursery in which there seems to be a malevolent presence, to say nothing of the hauntings themselves, which take the form of terrifying supernatural disturbances involving thumps, murmuring voices and powerful forces bending doors. Four people enter the house, initially as part of an investigation into the paranormal, but the house itself rapidly takes control. In particular, it addresses itself to Eleanor (Julie Harris): the message 'Help Eleanor come home' appears on a wall; the history of the house includes an incident that parallels Eleanor's own recent behaviour – and attendant guilt – concerning the death of her mother. This is an early example of a character entering a haunted house after a bereavement: it is as though the house 'knows' Eleanor, and eventually she succumbs to its power – in effect, surrendering to the death drive. Described as 'an evil house from the beginning', as 'watch[ing] every movement we make', the house is characterised as a sentient malevolent presence, an anticipation in particular of the hotel in The Shining. There, too, the building seems to 'know' the protagonist and ultimately claims him. These two films and the novels from which they were derived have in fact already been considered within the Gothic tradition by Charlene Bunnell (1984: 79-100).

The influence of The Haunting may also been seen in other haunted-house movies, such as The Changeling, where again the character moving in is recently bereaved, and the ghost haunting the house has such power it

causes a whole range of supernatural disturbances. I will explore the links further in the discussion of that film. However, in the 1999 remake of The Haunting, the Gothic aspects and rhetoric are intensified, as carvings and statues become animated, chains rattle, curtains billow to such an extent that ghost children use them to travel along their fabric, bloody footprints appear, the heroine's pregnant double is shown in a mirror, and the whole house undergoes a comprehensive architectural upheaval.

Such heightening of the Gothic elements in fact diminishes the effectiveness of the film: it seems overwrought. This helps clarify the role of the Gothic in the modern ghost melodrama. Gothic elements persist, but only rarely do they dominate. Such a shift was in fact noted by Julia Briggs in the ghost stories of M.R. James, published between 1904 and 1925:

> James's view that the element of the supernatural should erupt within the familiar marks [a] significant point of difference from the Gothic, which more often follows romance in locating its events in exotic or bizarre settings, whereas the ghost story often takes place in a very mundane and often urban context. (2000: 127)

The shift was then enhanced in the modern cycle of ghost melodramas, as concerns about contemporary mores and modern technology took over. Nevertheless, Gothic elements remain in the fabric of the films. Indeed, spooky ghosts could perhaps be seen as an inherently Gothic motif, and the two Ringu films contain an intriguing number of Groom's more esoteric motifs, such as the boundless ocean, riddles, folklore, an unreadable inscription and an obscure dialect. As in the Gothic, these films' initiating curse also comes from the 'backwoods'.

In addition, some of Groom's motifs turn up in a significant number of the ghost melodramas. Rain and doubles will be discussed shortly, but the most significant is dreams. Groom places a particular emphasis on dreams:

> Dreams were supernatural, sublime and dangerous. By using dreams Walpole was able to give voice and shape to the barely acknowledged suppression of history that hung behind the Gothic myth like a nightmare. The Gothic, far from being an antiquarian knot of history and politics, culture and society, could instead be a metaphor for the less tangible anxieties and traumas of the human condition. (2012: 72)

The vast majority of the modern ghost melodramas have dream sequences, many of which are ghost-induced. And as these dreams trace the anxieties

of the characters and the resentments of the ghosts, so a pattern emerges in which the ghosts seem to be speaking repeatedly for the disadvantaged and the abused in society.

The Gothic tradition can thus be seen to survive in just a few elements of the modern cycle of ghost melodramas, but all these elements are crucial, and frequently they occur in the films with great intensity. In addition, as the ghosts erupt into the present speaking of the injustices of the past, they continue the Gothic concern of bringing to light those areas which 'civilisation' has repressed and disavowed.

Freud and Motifs

The standard theoretical text invoked in discussions of ghosts and ghost narratives is Freud's 1919 essay '*Das Unheimlich*'. Although *Unheimlich* literally means unhomely, in this essay it has been translated as Uncanny. (Freud [1919] 1985: 336-376). Encountering a ghost is usually frightening and always eerie, and Freud's essay is an attempt to explain the nature and source of these feelings. Freud begins by noting that the uncanny, 'is undoubtedly related to what is frightening – to what arouses dread and horror' but also, 'it tends to coincide with what excites fear in general' (339). He then refines the term through a discussion of various manifestations of the notion of the uncanny, including ghosts, before concluding: 'an uncanny experience occurs either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed' (372).

In *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, Rosemary Jackson glosses Freud's ideas:

> [Freud reads] the uncanny as the effect of projecting unconscious desires and fears into the environment and on to other people. Frightening scenes of uncanny literature are produced by hidden anxieties concealed within the subject, who then interprets the world in terms of his or her apprehensions. (1981: 64-65)

The experience of the uncanny applies not just to the reader (or viewer) but also to 'the subject' within the narrative. It is when there is also some sort of connection between the ghost and the person who sees it that the narratives are particularly compelling.

In *The Pleasures of Horror*, Matt Hills devotes a chapter to unpacking Freud's concept of the uncanny in the context of horror movies (2005: 46-59). Hills draws a distinction between models which gravitate to the first part of Freud's formulation and use repression as the governing principle, e.g. the theories of Robin Wood, and those which gravitate to the second part, the 'reconfirmation of surmounted beliefs', e.g. the writings of Steven J. Schneider. I have already indicated my modification of Robin Wood's model for ghost melodramas, but with that adopted by Schneider (elaborated, for example, in Schneider 2000), there is really no need. Because a belief in ghosts was once commonplace but is now dismissed by science, ghosts invite interpretation in terms of this sense of the uncanny. Moreover, the idea that the dead can return in some form necessarily brings with it anxieties: ghosts carry with them the charge of having come from the world of the dead.

There is, however, a further point that Hills makes about Freud and the uncanny in relation to horror that I would like to reformulate for ghost melodramas. He notes:

> [B]oth Carol J. Clover (1992: 48) and Barbara Creed (1993: 53-4) [...] quote the same section from Freud's essay on 'The Uncanny' when discussing horror texts' diegetically dark, damp, dank, terrible places as symbolically 'intra-uterine'. Fear of such bad places is, for each critic, a type of womb fantasy. (2005: 47)

I would argue that there is an important distinction to be drawn between the way such a fantasy functions in horror movies and in ghost melodramas. For Clover: 'Decidedly "intrauterine" is the Terrible Place, dark and often damp, in which the killer lives or lurks and whence he stages his most terrifying attacks' (1992: 48). Creed makes a similar point, but also adds: 'In other horror films the monstrous womb belongs to a woman or female creature who is usually about to give birth to an alien being or terrifying creatures' (1993: 53). Now, in horror movies the monstrous killer, or indeed the monstrous mother – Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock 1960); Carrie (Brian De Palma 1976); Aliens (James Cameron 1986) – may well lurk in such a terrible place, but with ghosts, it is different. In examples from The Changeling to both versions of Dark Water, there is an equivalent place, but here it is dark and watery, and it is not so much terrible as *unheimlich* (both unhomely *and* uncanny). Moreover, it has become so in the *absence* of the mother. Examples such as the well in the Ringu and Ring films (*see* Fig. 27), the bath in Kokkuri (*see* Fig. 16), and the cistern in The Devil's Backbone (Guillermo del Toro, 2001) (*see* Fig. 23) – all of which are sites from which

the ghost emerges – also suggest *negative* symbolisations of the womb: man-made, degraded, decaying. This furthers the sense of the *unheimlich* (unhomely). A different fantasy is thus in play. In particular, the absence of the mother means that, either implicitly or explicitly, the ghost is of an abandoned child. Although this can be subverted by malevolence, as in Ringu, the appeal is usually more poignant.

These examples also point to the major recurring motif of ghost melodramas: water. Those who return as ghosts in these movies were very often either drowned, or killed and their bodies dumped in water. Indeed, the association of ghosts and water occurs collectively in Carnival of Souls, where the dead emerge at night from the lagoon to cavort in the deserted pavilion. Roger Clarke has written:

> The first time we see the dead governess in The Innocents and the ghost in The Woman in Black they seem to be creatures of the marshes and the lake. This is her natural home. These beings emerge from wells, water-tanks, cisterns, baths, lakes [...] She's the witch from the water – seen in Ghost Story, What Lies Beneath and most recently Mama [Andy Muschietti 2013]. She's the old lady in the bath in Room 237 in The Shining. In Asian cinema we find her in Dark Water (2002) and Ringu, though M.R. James had at least two ghost stories with entities that live down wells. (2013: 92)

In particular, there are a remarkable number of bath scenes. The early examples of ghosts appearing in a bath in The Changeling and The Shining are repeated in a whole range of different contexts: almost half of the films have bath or bathroom ghost scenes. Three films from 2005 will serve to summarise the range. In Dark Water (2005) and The Ring Two, the bath becomes a battleground, and the heroine is overwhelmed by the ghost's powers with water (*see* Fig. 28). By contrast, in The Dark (John Fawcett 2005), the ghost girl, a revenant, is shown apparently sleeping in a bath, like a vampire in its coffin. This suggests that water is for ghosts the equivalent of earth for vampires – the element from which they derive psychic sustenance.

In Freudian dream symbolism, water has two dominant associations: emerging from water is birth imagery; depths of water suggest the unconscious. Both associations are relevant to these ghosts. A ghost's return from water into the world of the living is a form of rebirth: an *uncanny* rebirth. But I would also like to suggest that the world of the dead from which the scary ghosts come is *like* the unconscious, and that this is reflected in their behaviour.

In his 1915 essay 'The Unconscious', Freud summarises the characteristics of the concept (1984: 190-191); a number of these characteristics find a parallel in ghosts and the ghost world. First, like the unconscious, ghosts do not sleep and are 'timeless' – they do not age. (Revenants, however, *may* sleep – as in THE DARK.) Second, ghosts function rather like drives: implacable, unrelenting, indifferent to the 'reality principle', i.e. the outside world. Slavoj Žižek makes a similar point about the ghost of Hamlet's father (1992: 22). Ghosts can seem to have tunnel vision, seeing matters from an extremely narrow point of view. By contrast, they can also seem omniscient: like the unconscious, they 'know'. The combination of these two features is shown vividly with the ghost woman in SAKEBI (Kiyoshi Kurosawa 2006), who somehow knows which people saw her from the ferry fifteen years ago, but whose assumptions about what they should have done about this does indeed suggest a tunnel-vision view of the world.

Third, ghosts can be cunning. Stephen Frosch quotes Ernst Gellner as characterising the unconscious 'as a cunning adversary, something which is always disruptive and always interfering with evidence' (2002: 12). This could serve as an excellent summary of the behaviour of many of these ghosts, as they ruthlessly manipulate their victims to their own ends. Finally, again like the unconscious, a ghost experiences no sense of contradiction: it is monolithic, unwavering. The relentless, pitiless drive of the ghosts in these movies is revealed in a protest which echoes through a fair number of them, from THE CHANGELING through THE RING to NO-DO (Elio Quiroga 2009): the protagonist, driven to despair by the ghost's activities, crying out, 'What do you want from me?' This both personalises the activities of the ghost – it is an individual who is being subjected to their insistent attentions – and highlights the sense of paranoia that runs so insistently through most of the films.

Dreams also fit in with the rhetoric of ghost communications: they, too, come from the unconscious and are highly coded; they, too, may be read in Freudian terms. And dreams are a crucial mechanism whereby ghosts make their presence felt and their desires known.

As Colette Balmain points out, however, water in horror movies may well be polluted, and this applies, too, to ghost movies. In Japanese horror, polluted water is stressed as early as GOJIRA/GODZILLA (Ishiro Honda 1954), where the fish are annihilated and poisoned by a nuclear explosion. Anxieties in Japan about such pollution were also exacerbated by the notorious real-life industrial pollution of Minamata Bay (Balmain 2008: 39). In the ghost movies, the water from which the ghost emerges is nearly always dirty, in some cases polluted by the corpse itself, as in RINGU, THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE and DARK WATER (both versions). This adds unhealthiness to

the connotations of the ghosts. A recurring motif which draws attention to the pollution in the Japanese films is the appearance, in the water, of the black hair of the corpse: 'Hair as a source of pollution and fear is a constant trope in Japanese horror' (Balmain 2008: 67). The trope is also found in the South Korean films PHONE (Ahn Byung-ki 2002) and RYEONG (Kim Tae-kyoung 2004). In three of the East Asian films, the black hair emerges in the drinking water of a dwelling, where it is a disturbing sign of both the proximity and the threat of the ghost.

As in Alfred Hitchcock's films (*see* Walker 2005a: 388-400), rain in ghost melodramas introduces a quite distinct set of associations from water on the ground or in containers such as baths. They are, in effect, two separate motifs. In the ghost movies, rain and thunderstorms are a standard signifier of (imminent) ghostly activity, and on occasions may be more specifically associated with the tempestuousness of female ghosts. As early as A PLACE OF ONE'S OWN, the ghost woman makes her displeasure felt by conjuring up a thunderstorm. The storm during the climax of THE DISCARNATES (Nobuhiko Obayashi 1988) seems produced by the ghost woman's emotional frenzy (*see* Fig. 7). Of course, a thunderstorm is a standard way of heightening the 'melodramatic impact' of a scene. However, rain accompanies these ghosts everywhere, and opens up a range of symbolic associations. Specific inflections of the rain and thunderstorm motif are looked at in the discussions of the individual films, notably KOKKURI, PHONE and DARK WATER (2002).

A familiar horror movie motif that the ghost melodrama largely eschews is blood. Indeed, I would maintain that where a ghost melodrama does stress blood, this is a horror motif within the movie. For example, in THE SHINING, the recurring image of the hotel corridor flooding with blood is an expressionist motif that may be integrated with other horror elements in the film.

Mirrors are another ghost movie motif. The belief that spirits, including ghosts, may be glimpsed in a mirror was so much a part of Japanese culture that one finds mirrors in Japanese films made or set in the past are often covered when not being used. This is, of course, the opposite of the folkloric belief about the vampire, which becomes invisible when viewed in a mirror. But occasionally a film will go further and suggest that the mirror space can actually be the place where ghosts come from – like the Princess (Maria Casares) coming through the mirror from the underworld in ORPHÉE (Jean Cocteau, France, 1950). A good example is INTO THE MIRROR (Kim Sung-ho 2003).

A mirror may also serve to reveal the truth beneath the surface appearance. For example, that in THE SHINING Jack is not embracing a beautiful

naked young woman but an old hag whose flesh is rotting (*see* Fig. 2); that the hero in The Discarnates is mysteriously ageing. At the climax of Chakushin ari/One Missed Call (Takashi Miike 2004), the hero is both baffled and horrified when, as he embraces the heroine, she stabs him. He then sees her mirror reflection, which reveals that she is possessed by the malevolent ghost girl (*see* Fig. 31).

The mirror leads in turn to the notion of the double or doppelgänger, so that the ghost seems like a dark double of the protagonist, enacting 'repressed' impulses. This is a common feature of a number of the films, and it may be intimated with (e.g. Gothika, Mathieu Kassovitz 2003) or without (e.g. Kokkuri; What Lies Beneath) the use of mirrors.

The presence of a ghost necessarily signals the existence of a past trauma. I refer to the death that produced the ghost as the *primary* traumatic event. This is to distinguish it from a wider feature of melodrama, the *past* traumatic event, which is usually personal, relating to an individual. A past traumatic event affecting the protagonist – usually bereavement, but occasionally other types of psychological trauma involving loss – is particularly relevant in these films because it tends to make the protagonist vulnerable to the activities of a ghost. It's as though a side of him/her has been 'opened up' by the trauma, which allows the ghost to get a purchase. For example, Dark Water (2005) puts more emphasis than the original on the heroine Dahlia's abandonment by her mother when she was a little girl, thus making her vulnerable to the demands of the ghost girl. The film reinforces this by casting the same actress as the young Dahlia and the ghost girl.

A trope of the ghost melodramas is to show or allude to one or the other of these traumas in an opening sequence, typically either pre-credits or during the credits. The Changeling and Haunted, for example, open with the protagonist's personal traumatic event. Beginnings referring to the primary traumatic event go back to The Haunting (1963), which has a striking opening sequence detailing the history of Hill House and the deaths of the four women who now seemingly haunt the house. None of the modern ghost melodramas, however, has such a detailed exposition. Here any opening/credits sequence that refers to the primary traumatic event does so elliptically, thereby setting up an enigma that hangs over the narrative, as in The Devil's Backbone, Ju-on (Takashi Shimizu 2002) and Into the Mirror. The pre-credits sequence of Ghost Story offers another variation. The old men of the Chowder Society are suffering from nightmares, nightmares which we later realise relate to the primary traumatic event. In this case, the men witnessed the death that produced the ghost, so that the primary

traumatic event and their own collective past traumatic event coincided. Anxieties concerning the event are now returning in their dreams.

Rosemary Jackson also refers to the ideas of Hélène Cixous on the uncanny:

> Cixous presents [the] unfamiliarity [of the uncanny] not merely as displaced sexual anxiety but as a rehearsal of an encounter with death [...] This is materialised as a ghost: 'the immediate figure of strangeness is the ghost. The ghost is the fiction of our relation to death made concrete'. (1981: 68)

Ghosts in these movies are often harbingers of death: from Ghost Story to The Woman in Black (2011), many of those who encounter a scary ghost die. Also relevant here is the master narrative for fiction that Peter Brooks develops in *Reading for the Plot* (1984). I have already discussed Brooks' model in relation to Hitchcock's films (Walker 2006-07); ghost melodramas offer another inflection.

Brooks develops his model from Freud's 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920), which he describes as, 'Freud's own masterplot, the essay where he lays out most fully a total scheme of how life proceeds from beginning to end' (1984: 96). The basic structural opposition in Freud's 'masterplot' is between the life and death instincts, Eros and Thanatos. For Brooks, 'Narratives both tell of desire [...] and make use of desire as a dynamic of signification. Desire in this view is like Freud's notion of Eros, a force including sexual desire but larger and more polymorphous' (37). Furthermore, 'Desire is always there at the start of a narrative, often in a state of initial arousal, often having reached a state of intensity such that movement must be created, action undertaken, change begun' (38).

In ghost melodramas, there are two initiating desires: that of the protagonist and that of the ghost. But it is the latter which is usually primary: this is the desire that generates and shapes the narrative. And the desire of the ghost – which is, as noted, very like a drive – is almost always charged with intimations of death. The types of revenge ghosts seek, or their attempts to lure the living into their own worlds, typically involve death. There are some ghosts who merely want a proper burial, and there are a few benevolent ghosts, but they are significantly outnumbered by the ghosts who seek to do harm.

In developing his model, Brooks focuses in particular on repetition, which – in the form of the 'compulsion to repeat' – was what first prompted Freud to elaborate his theory of the death instincts/death drive. Moreover, Brooks notes that this is in particular a feature of the 'literature of the uncanny':

'The compulsion to repeat [...] can indeed suggest pursuit by a demonic power. We know from Freud's essay "The Uncanny" (1919) that this feeling of the demonic, arising from involuntary repetition, is a particular attribute of the literature of the uncanny, of texts of compulsive recurrence' (99). Here, Brooks, too, stresses the sense of paranoia that drives these texts. He then generalises:

> [Narrative] must make use of specific, perceptible repetitions in order to create plot, that is, to show us a significant interconnection of events. An event gains meaning by its repetition, which is both the recall of an earlier moment and a variation of it [...] Repetition creates a *return* in the text, a doubling back. We cannot say whether this is a return *to* or a return *of*: for instance, a return to origins or a return of the repressed. (1984: 99-100)

If we take the 'return to origins' as referring in ghost melodramas to the primary traumatic event – the origin of the ghost – then the ambiguity Brooks notes features rather differently. In these films (elements of) this event may well echo, like the return of the repressed, throughout the narrative. In other words, here we often have both a return to *and* a return of. Finally, '[w]hat operates through the text is the death instinct, the drive towards the end. Beyond and under the domination of the pleasure principle is this baseline of plot, its basic "pulsation", sensible or audible through the repetitions that take us back in the text' (102).

In fact, for many narratives, Brooks employs the notion of the death instinct purely metaphorically, as is shown in his phrase, 'the terminal quiescence at the end [of the story]' (103). But there are certain narratives which fit his model more closely, in that they seem haunted by the death drive. I have argued that this may be said of a substantial number of Hitchcock's films; I believe it may equally be said of certain genres, such as film noir, the horror movie and ghost melodramas. In the latter two genres especially, the compulsion to repeat – the horror events; the ghost's interventions – is extremely insistent, and the narratives frequently depict a drive towards death.

Some of the ghosts can also be seen to embody the return of a character's own repressed death drive. It is Norman O. Brown's contention in *Life Against Death* that, in the struggle between the life and death instincts, man typically represses the latter, thereby generating neurosis. But again, what is repressed will always strive to return ([1959] 1968: 102). In a number of the films, the protagonist has suffered a trauma which has released – consciously or otherwise – suicidal impulses. But s/he represses such

impulses (this is quite explicit in What Lies Beneath); the ghost can then be seen to represent the return of the repressed impulses. Since a ghost is by definition dead, that it should be the vehicle for this 'return' is peculiarly apt.

I have also used the ideas of Carl Jung in some of the discussions. Ghosts may be seen as mobilising archetypal material around death and rebirth in particular, and seductive revenants, as in Ghost Story and Haunted, can be excellent illustrations of the *anima*. In 'The *anima* in film', John Beebe enumerates nine characteristics of this figure. Three in particular are relevant here: that an *anima* figure lives for connection; that she comes from 'another world' and that she has an unusual capacity for life. It is no accident that the men who become victims of these figures tend to be repressed, or in denial, so that the *anima* enchants and seduces because she represents 'the status of the man's *unconscious* eros' (2001: 210).

Furthermore, in his memoirs, Jung connects the *anima*, the unconscious, and 'the land of the dead': 'the soul, the anima, establishes the relationship to the unconscious. In a certain sense this is also a relationship to the collectivity of the dead; for the unconscious corresponds to the mythic land of the dead, the land of the ancestors' (Jung [1963] 1977: 216). Here, too, ghosts are linked conceptually to the unconscious.

Aside from the special case of revenants, ghosts appear in a variety of forms. Only a few are transparent; some are fleetingly glimpsed spooky apparitions; others make more substantial appearances. They may be confined to a certain area, and although within that area they may seem able to make themselves visible at will, they also often seem elusive. They are frequently only visible to specific figures, such as children, psychics or the dying, but even when they can be seen by others, they tend to be very selective in whom they appear to – again emphasising the personal nature of the appearances. Only rarely do they speak, and then, as in Sakebi, what they say is usually cryptic. All, however, will signal their spookiness in some way eventually.

In general, the ghosts in these films refer to what is wrong in an individual, a marriage, a group, or even a community: a hidden crime, family tensions, ideological fault lines. They tend, however, to refer to the problem obliquely, and melodramatic incidents ensue partly because the character subjected to the ghost's attentions becomes fraught with frustration at what is going on. Hitherto sensible figures may indeed find themselves behaving so irrationally that they have to be restrained by their colleagues: a male doctor in Dragonfly (Tom Shadyac 2002); a female psychiatrist in Gothika. Ghosts use a different language from the rest of us. Because most do not speak, in a displacement typical of melodrama, they use signs, actions, technology,

to do their talking for them. The language of the unconscious emerges in unexpected ways.

A note about phraseology. I have tried to be consistent in the use of the terms 'ghost zone' and 'ghost world'. A ghost zone is an area in the real world where the ghosts particularly manifest themselves; in houses, ghost zones are typically the attic and the basement. A ghost world, by contrast, refers to the *other* worlds that ghosts either frequent or can conjure up. In these worlds, different rules pertain as to the nature of space and time. A powerful sinister example is Annwyn, the land of the dead, in THE DARK. A benevolent example is the apartment in THE DISCARNATES where the hero finds the ghosts of his parents living in modern-day Tokyo (*see* Fig. 6). Sometimes, however, films depict ghost worlds in a rather different sense: they seem to be set in the real world, but we discover that they are not, as in THE SIXTH SENSE. In these cases, the differences between the ghost world and the real world may be quite subtle.

I occasionally use the term 'spirit'. I am aware that the term is used to refer to all sorts of disembodied entity, but I use it purely to indicate that the entity being referenced is *not* a ghost. Thus in KOKKURI, Kokkuri-san is an ancient spirit, a spirit, moreover, of indeterminate gender. In RINGU 2, when the boy Yoichi uses his psychic ability to project himself in a spectral form which the heroine, who is also psychic, can see, I call his manifestation a spirit. Yoichi is not dead, and so is not a ghost.

When I refer to the acts of a film, I am using the model proposed by Kristin Thompson in *Storytelling in the New Hollywood* (1999). Thompson challenges the traditional view that films typically have three acts, divided in a 1:2:1 ratio. She argues, rather, that most Hollywood features may be divided into acts of roughly equal length, and that the number – usually between three and five – depends on the length of the film. There may also be a prologue and an epilogue, but otherwise, 'throughout the history of the Hollywood feature, large-scale portions [the acts] have remained roughly constant, averaging between 20 and 30 minutes in length' (1999: 36). The model may also be applied to many non-Hollywood genre films.

In discussing a film's ending, I may make a distinction between the resolution and the epilogue. In most genre films, the resolution sorts out the problems the film has set up; the epilogue shows the final stability that has then been achieved. The modern horror film usually makes a point of undermining this stability, by suggesting that the nightmare is not over, or the monster will return. Although ghost films tend to be more flexible in their endings, most nevertheless have an epilogue. A famous example is

the track in to the photograph at the end of The Shining. In this case the epilogue sets up an enigma, which reflects back on the film.

For films other than the fifty-six listed in the Contents, countries as well as directors are noted when the film is first mentioned in the text. If no country is specified, the country is the US. The Filmography lists all the ghost films, including those with ghost elements, mentioned in the book.

The illustrations. The 48 images are all frames from the films. They are designed to illustrate ghost melodrama motifs and themes across the films – altogether they cover some 28 motifs, including a few themes, such as lesbianism. They add an additional thread to the book.