

“Pleasurable Pain,” Premature Burial, and the Zombie Legend: A Brief Survey of Scare Tactics  
and Evolution of the Transatlantic Gothic

“We thrill... with the most intense of ‘pleasurable pain’” over stories “which are too entirely horrible for the purposes of legitimate fiction,” states Edgar Allan Poe, one of the greatest producers of such horrific fiction, in the ironic opening paragraph of his short story, “The Premature Burial,” which tells of many such events (Poe, par 1). Poe was a man who would write about anything, no matter how horrible, if it would sell, and sell it did. The Gothic genre has been popular since Horace Walpole wrote *The Castle of Otronto*, which broke “the decorous standards of the Enlightenment” by expressing “the new Romantic impulse” in readers “to reclaim the strange, the exotic, the savage, the improbable, the mysterious, and the supernatural as legitimate zones of artistic pleasure,” and reopening “corridors to a forbidden sublime” (Frank, 11). Once Walpole opened this door to the public’s imagination, there was no going back and no standing still. While *Otronto* by today’s standards is cliché and almost humorous, Poe, writing a hundred years later, still frightens fans with his much more terrifying imagery, and modern-day horror films are so much more gruesome that comparisons can hardly be made. While today’s scariest productions are not necessarily something Walpole would have been proud to be the ancestor of, the twentieth century has also produced Alfred Hitchcock and Steven King, who, in their elegance and decorum, offer much the father of the Gothic would be proud of. In this paper, I attempt to explain why people dedicate so much effort into terrifying themselves through examination and discussion of the continuing appeal of the Gothic and its

incantations. This understanding is crucial to a better appreciation and enjoyment of the horror genre today.

Before any discussion of specific subjects can be undertaken, a look must be first taken at the psychology of fear, and why people enjoy being scared. The notion that someone would actively seek out frightening images and ideas, runs contrary to the hedonic principle, a pillar in conventional psychology, which states that “our entire psychological activity is bent upon producing pleasure and avoiding pain” (Higgins, par 2). The immense success of the Gothic genre and descending literature – and the fact that its entire fan base is not a group of masochists - is an obvious counter-example to the hedonic principle. In fact, before the principle even existed as such, the philosopher Edmund Burke wrote about the ability for pleasure and pain to coexist. In his 1759 *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Burke even goes so far to suggest that pleasure can be derived by certain kinds of pain, giving the example that physical labor, although a producer of pain, is good for the body, with pleasure occurring as a direct result of this pain. While his specific discussion does not apply to more than an explanation of why people enjoy going to the gym, it can be expanded to explain the appeal of terror – pleasure can come from endurance of pain, but also the cessation of pain produces an emotion similar to pleasure. Burke specifically states that “pleasure does [not occur] from the ceasing... of... pain,” and that people “are very frequently wrong in the names they give [their feelings],” implying that while people enjoy the cessation of pain, they do not find its removal to be a source of pleasure (Burke, 44). Burke does not actually state what the emotion one feels once pain is removed, but modern-day studies into this matter have determined that the feeling is *relief*. Burke’s hypothesis, then, is that pain such as fear can be enjoyed because of the immense relief felt once pain ceases. Today, this is known as the “fear-then-

relief” phenomenon, which has been shown to increase compliance in interrogations during “Nazi occupation or Stalinist times,” because after fear comes a state of “relaxation or relief,” and has not been shown to produce positive moods, exactly as Burke theorized (Dolinski, 27, 47). However, once the pain stops, the relief felt offers a more, rather than less, enjoyable feeling. Thus, the hedonic pleasure-principle is not without exceptions; something positive can and does come from pain.

A theory on the actual appeal of the Gothic was proposed in 1773 by Anna Laetitia Aiken. In her essay entitled, “On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror,” Aiken hypothesized that readers of the Gothic felt “the pain of suspense, and the irresistible desire of satisfying curiosity” which “account[s] for our eagerness to go... through an adventure,” such as *The Castle of Otronto*, which was terrifying when it was written, “though we suffer actual pain during the whole course of it” (Aikin, 32). Similar to Burke’s belief that pleasure was not a side effect of pain, Aiken did not believe that people actually derived a sense of enjoyment from being scared, despite “the greediness with which the tales of ghosts and goblins... are devoured” (Aiken, 31). The pleasure people experience when they read or listen to scary stories, according to Aiken, comes from escaping the “strange and unexpected” “adventure” unscathed (Aiken, 32). Two hundred years later, Alfred Hitchcock wrote about the same phenomenon, explaining the appeal fear has on audiences and the public in general. In his 1949 article, “The Enjoyment of Fear,” Hitchcock states “that millions of people every day pay huge sums of money and go to great hardship to *enjoy* fear” (Hitchcock, *Enjoyment*, 117). He mentions speedboats, fox hunts, roller coasters, and mountain climbing as recreational activities that are loved *because* of the fear they instill in their participants, who allow themselves to participate in such frightening pastimes only when it is completely safe to do so. This seeking of fear extends into stories, books, and of

course, movie theaters. Here, according to Hitchcock, people can enjoy watching others become brutally murdered because they know that “the price will not be paid... the saw [creeping towards the heroine] will never reach its intended target,” and even if something horrible were to happen, say a knife attack in the shower or freak bird attacks in a small town, no harm comes to the actors themselves (Hitchcock, *Enjoyment*, 117). Hitchcock’s argument is almost the same as Aiken’s – people will go through any adventure, no matter how dangerous or scary it is because it is exciting and they know they will emerge safely. Today this is known as sensation-seeking, and offers a more cohesive explanation to the enjoyment of fear than does the fear-then-relief phenomenon.

Sensation-seeking is one of the most accepted reasons why people enjoy scaring themselves. According to Stiff, Tamborini, and Zillman, this “personality variable” is “the desire to seek out environmental stimuli that produces ‘sensation’ and arousal,” and that “the appeal found in frightening films lies in the exhilarating feeling that results from the jolt that horror provides.” This “jolt” does not come from adventures that are not absolutely terrifying. Indiana Jones and James Bond films are exciting, but do not give the audience sweaty palms and beating hearts like *Silence of the Lambs* or *The Exorcist* do. This “increased arousal created by the fear that horror films induce” is a form of pleasure to many sensation-seekers (Stiff, Tamborini, and Zillman, 530). Three studies mentioned by this trio “suggest that sensation seeking is associated with the attraction to horror films,” providing mathematical evidence to support Hitchcock and Aiken’s reasoned explanations about the enjoyment of fear (Stiff, Tamborini, and Zillman, 531). Thus, it may be said for certain that people take pleasure in the sensations they find in scary stories, and actively seek them out. When curiosity is satisfied and the last horrible secret in such a story is uncovered, the need for the jolt of excitement has been

filled, and relief causes the reader to feel something akin to pleasure once the story has finished. A combination of enjoyment from sensation-seeking and the “fear-then-relief” phenomenon allow readers and audiences to enjoy scaring themselves with Gothic stories.

Before discussing any examples from the Gothic, a note on the construction of works in the genre is in order. There are two different ways of frightening an audience, and both are necessary to create an effective scary story. The first way is through terror, which is described by Hogle as holding “readers... in anxious suspense about threats to life, safety and sanity kept largely out of sight...” (Hogle, 3). For clarity of discussion, Hogle’s “terror Gothic” will be referred to as the elegant method of creating fear, or ‘elegant terror.’ The second way of scaring an audience is through horror, which Hogle says “confronts the principle characters with the gross violence of physical or psychological dissolution, explicitly shattering the assumed norms... of everyday life with wildly shocking, and even revolting, consequences” (Hogle, 3). This “horror Gothic” will be referenced as the crude method of creating fear, or ‘crude horror.’ Modern-day horror novelist Steven King, in his *Danse Macabre*, describes elegant terror as “that low sense of anxiety which we call ‘the creeps,’” citing *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* as a classic film that produces this effect (King, *Danse*, 19). King uses the scene “when Regan vomits in the priest’s face... in *The Exorcist*” as an example of crude horror, which he says is the “‘gross-out’ level” in a horror story (King, *Danse*, 17). Both elegant terror and crude horror are essential for a story in the horror genre to be successful, but the former must be present in much greater quantities than the latter. According to film director Alfred Hitchcock, films with too much of the crude method “exploit sadism, perversion, bestiality, and deformity,” and in general are not as effective at being scary as films that use the crude method as a light seasoning for stories that are driven by suspense (Hitchcock, *Thrillers* 111). Perhaps the best example of this

type of film is Hitchcock's *Psycho* – an elegantly constructed story with much suspense building up to the infamous shower scene, the only crude act of violence in the film's entirety. Every effective story in the horror genre utilizes the elegant and crude methods of instilling fear in its audience.

The most prevalent fear that plagued the western world during the time Walpole and Poe were creating the Gothic genre was the fear of being buried alive. Everyone knew a story about a cousin or neighbor who had met someone who had a relative who had been mistakenly buried and then had suffered before dying in their coffin. These stories would go something like this:

A woman drank something that caused her to fall into a deep sleep, so deep that it was decided she would not wake up again, so she was buried immediately. A few days later, noises were heard coming from the new grave, and an investigation was made, but not in time. Once the body was finally raised and the coffin opened, the woman was found in a different position than she was placed, with bloody fingers from clawing the coffin. Her face was a mask of terror from the realization of her horrific fate.

There is almost no elegant terror here, and just a little bit of crude horror, making this story and others like it not very effective in their intent to scare an audience. However, the style of these tales was not important. The mere idea that anyone could find his or her self in this position, coupled with the sheer number of these alleged premature burials, was enough to frighten society. These tales spread like wildfire, mainly because people enjoyed the chill of fright as they relayed and listened to them. Protective action *had* to be taken against this rapidly growing threat, so in 1896, the London Association for the Prevention of Premature Burial was formed. This association allowed people to take action and feel like they were protecting themselves

against the threat of being buried alive. While the Association probably helped to spread these fears, publishing a newsletter that told stories of “premature burials or lucky escapes” taken “from newspapers all over the world,” it operated almost as a philanthropist organization, raising awareness of the dangers and working to stop accidental practices of it (Bondeson, 198).

Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, in *The Structural Study of Myth*, wrote that “a myth... consist[s] of all its versions” (Levi-Strauss, 106). While this was written specifically about classical mythology, the same concept –*everything relating to the story becomes part of it* – can be applied here: people, by becoming members of the Association, were able to participate in the adventure, despite its morbidity. Along this same theme, people continued in this game by inventing and purchasing security coffins, devices that can be compared to home-made bomb shelters in the 1950s. These were elaborately constructed, with strings placed in the presumably deceased’s hand, so upon waking they would pull the string and ring a bell attached to their gravestone, or with tubes to pass food and water through while the grave was dug up. Bondeson describes dozens of variations on the security coffin in Germany, and at least “twenty-two [American] patents” that were “applied for between 1868 and 1925” (Bondeson, 127). He does not mention if security coffins were useful, or even if they saved any lives, but does point out that many would kill their victim within an hour, due to a lack of a permanent air supply, making them about as useful as duct tape and Plexiglas against an anthrax attack. Despite the effectiveness of security coffins or the London Association for Prevention of Premature Burial, people enjoyed this game partially because they were doing something they felt would protect them, but primarily because they enjoyed the thinking about the morbid subject their game dealt with.

Art imitates reality, and so it is natural that literature would be created after this fashion. Poe's story, "The Premature Burial," mentioned previously in this paper, played to society's fear of early burial by describing what a first-hand account must have been like for a sufferer of the gruesome fate. In the story, Poe frightens his audience by incorporating both the elegant and crude methods of horror. His use of foreshadowing, the quintessential elegant method of building suspense, is important in the creation of the story's mood. "The Premature Burial" begins by devoting the first third of the plot to retelling stories that resemble today's urban legends – a clear indication of where the story is going (if the title weren't enough to give that away). These stories are not necessarily devoid of truth, but are of the sort that one may hear multiple times, just with the names and places changed. The usage of urban legends foreshadows both the events of the story and the emotional response of the audience. Having digested the first third of the story and being prone to sensation-seeking, the reader has not received the expected jolt of sheer fright, but the appetite for fear has been whetted, so he or she begins to expect bigger scares in the remainder of the story. The plot is simple: a man, prone to fainting, fears that his deep fits will cause him to be buried alive. He man wakes up in a dark, moist, and confining space, believes himself to be dead, and panics – when he realizes that he was merely on a hiking expedition with a friend, and they had spent the night on a ship. Despite the simple, and rather short, storyline, when this story's language and content is examined, it becomes a deeper and more impressive work of art. Once the narrator is introduced and his ailment explained, Poe has built up what the climax of his story *must* be – it is inconceivable that this story could have a differing ending – so well that elegant terror cannot be utilized to give the final jolt. This last burst comes not from surprise, but from crude, disgusting descriptions of what it must feel like to be buried alive: in the grave, "it was dark-all dark-the intense and utter

ray of the Night that endureth for evermore,” and “no voice issued from the cavernous lungs, which oppressed as if by the weight of some incumbent mountain, gasped and palpitated, with the heart, and every elaborate and struggling inspiration” (Poe, par 32). Poe’s use of crude horror is limited to just one tiny section of his entire story, but it is just enough – the perfect amount of crude horror – to give his sensation-seeking readers what they wanted – a quick fright to wake their imagination and make their hearts beat faster, but mild enough to allow them to quickly return to their daily lives. “The Premature Burial” shows not only how a piece of fiction frightens its audience, but also perfectly illuminates exactly what it was about being buried alive that frightened all of Europe nearly three centuries ago.

While premature burial seems to be a rather peculiar fear that plagued society in the 1800s, it was a legitimate concern that doctors also worried about and debated heavily. As previously mentioned, many stories of people being buried alive in circulation were hearsay and no better than urban legends, but they were based on fact: people were being buried while they were still alive, and they were able to resuscitate themselves. This fact was of special concern to doctors, who at this time were still attempting to define such basic medical terms as what it meant to be “alive” or “dead.” If people were pronounced dead who were not really dead, what bodily observations must physicians make to ensure that only the “absolute” dead were buried and that the “apparent” dead were not (Quinlan, 27)? Part of the problem was with the physicians themselves – until 1740, when James Benigne-Winslow published that said ‘people are really being buried alive,’ “the medical community... had somehow failed to notice the dangers of apparent death and premature burial” (Quinlan, 30). The realization that people were going through this horror because of carelessness led to specific inquiries into tests to see if a body was dead or still alive. After this oversight had been taken care of, and doctors had

researched and developed universal means to distinguish between the absolute and apparent dead – tests such as skin color, temperature, and simply waiting a few days to see if the person woke up – most cases of “premature burial or a mis-diagnosis of death occurred precisely when physicians were not present,” showing the importance of having educated doctors, instead of self-trained midwives examine the dead (Quinlan, 38). There was disagreement among doctors as to the specific cause of death, with many believing that death had more to do with the soul than the body. According to Quinlan, the debates ended with Xavier Bichart’s 1800 publication, *Recherches physiologiques sur la vie et la mort* (“Physiological Researches on Life and Death”), and his declaration that death is the result of organ failure in the body. Bichart did not have the final word on this subject – “between 1805 and 1838, no less than seventeen Parisian [thesis’s on medicine] were produced on the ambiguity and signs of death,” and the Romantic writers such as Mary Shelly and Edgar Allan Poe had just begun to pick up on the sellable nature and mass appeal of premature burial (Quinlan, 45). However, Quinlan believes that the medical aspect of the subject was resolved. While the general public remained terrified of being buried alive, doctors stopped being the cause of this untimely death, and were able to work with the public against it. Premature burial would still be campaigned against for another hundred years, almost until the First World War, but once science and medicine were fully able to understand death, this battle became a much smaller issue than it previously had been.

Uncertainty about medicine’s capacity to fully understand the human body has not disappeared: even today, people have great distrust for the medical profession because everything about the human body is not known. Because of the increased security that better technology and research has brought, being one of the “apparent dead” is an arguably scarier thought than it once was, because it must be incredibly rare. Who better to reincarnate this fear

than popular horror novelist, Steven King? In “Autopsy Room Four,” King follows in the tradition of premature death by showing what might happen if the procedures for establishing death were not carried out to the tiniest detail – if carelessness allowed a man to almost be killed by those sworn to protect life. This idea is absolutely terrifying for today’s readers, who have to believe for sanity’s sake that doctors know all, and that modern medicine can differentiate between the living and the dead. Trust *has* to be put into today’s doctors, who are so much more advanced than the doctors who unknowingly literally sent people to their graves. In King’s story, the narrator, Howard Cottrell, is pronounced dead by a very old doctor on a golf course – not an ideal place to be declared dead, especially considering that Howard is alive. King shows how Howard’s body is disrespected by the doctors – one makes his face move as if singing, and later two of them make jokes about his clothes, including his undergarments. The doctors even put on loud Rolling Stones music while they prepare for the autopsy, an awful distraction from their job. Twice the younger, more inexperienced, doctor makes the comment that “this guy really *could* still be alive,” first about Howard’s body temperature, and then about the appearance of his skin – two things to check that physicians in the seventeenth century decided could help determine if a body were absolutely or only apparently dead (King, “Autopsy,” 26). Both signs are explained away by the more experienced doctor, and Howard’s breathing, pulse, and reaction of his eyes to light are not checked. The incompetence of the two doctors about to perform the autopsy on Howard is disgusting, and it is even more frightening to consider the possibility that their behavior is not an anomaly. Poe frightened his audience with a much discussed subject in “The Premature Burial,” but King’s modern audience rarely considers the possibility that twentieth-century doctors could be so wrong. The fear of being considered dead when one is

alive still has the ability to scare a modern audience, despite advances in medicine and better care and examination of the supposed dead.

King implements the classical elements of this genre, elegant terror and crude horror, to make his story enjoyable for his reader. Unlike Poe who builds his story with foreshadowing, King creates suspense by making the reader wonder: ‘will the intended autopsy happen, or will Howard find some means of convincing the doctors that he is, in fact, alive?’ The crude horror King uses is so much more disturbing than that which Poe uses that it only needs to be suggested to make the reader cringe in fear – if the autopsy begins, with the first snip of scissors into his chest, “[Howard’s] ribs [would] be lying against [his] upper harms, [his] heart pulsing frantically away under the fluorescents in its blood-glossy sac...” (King, “Autopsy,” 13). Of course, the story would not be exciting if the scissors were to actually make the intended cut; it would be gross and vulgar, and only sadists would enjoy it. King understood this when he wrote “Autopsy Room Four,” and made the most exciting part of the story right when the cut was about to take place – the moment that the messenger bursts in, shouting, “*Don’t cut im [sic] up, there was a snake in his golf-bag and it bit [someone else]!*” – so that the incision does not happen (King, “Autopsy,” 31). Much, but not all, of the enjoyment of this story comes from the relief that the building suspense finally ends; the rest comes from the enjoyment of the growing suspense. Sensation-seekers enjoy both of these, and the looked-for jolt arrives at the very moment when relief is reached. A classical fear, and traditional elements of creating terror and horror intertwine in this story, producing a modern-day version of the almost cliché premature burial story.

The theme of being buried alive can be traced in many historical and literary directions. The most fun, infamous, and lasting line with zombies. However, the origins of the word have

little to do with their modern appearance in dozens of films. Before the instance of zombies in popular culture can be examined, the origin of the legend must be explained. According to Marman Ellis, “zombie” had several definitions when it was first coined in the early nineteenth century: the devil-king of “maroon rebels, a ghost or revenant, or a demon-lover in the shape of an impossibly seductive young woman” (Ellis, 218). These images come from first-hand accounts of Europeans and Americans in the West Indies and Haiti, who would use “representations of obeah,” a term that refers mainly to a form of ‘black magic’ that mixes religious beliefs of various African cultures, including the tradition of voodoo, “to exemplify the barbarity and savagery of slave society, and as such, to justify the habitual violence of slavery as an institution” (Ellis, 211). The single most terrifying thing owners of slaves could imagine – other than premature burial, of course – was a slave rebellion, so they used any means necessary to suppress even hints of uprising. Slave owners would explore the religion of their slaves, obeah and voodoo, which “played a crucial part in the early stages of the [Haitian] revolution and remained a central pillar of black resistance and independence,” not only to search for signs of revolution on other islands, but also to explore native superstitions of the unknown (Ellis, 214). Educated men, especially doctors, would research the “archive of gothic customs and beliefs concerning ghosts, zombies, and revenants,” and retell these stories to friends at home (Ellis, 215). The modern conception of a zombie has directly evolved from the one most picked up by the public from these first-hand witnesses – the image of the living dead, a walking corpse who rises from the grave to haunt loved ones. Thus, the zombie-monster we know today emerged from this mixture of slavery, African religions, and a form of natural selection of which anecdotes to repeat and which to not. The ‘standard’ definition of a zombie that arose from all of this can be described as, “a person from whom a sorcerer has extracted the soul and whom he has

thus reduced to slavery,” incorporating both the religion and condition of the original practitioners of voodoo and obeah (Ellis, 2006). Such a monster, the living dead, “really” exists – in the early 1980s, Wade Davis researched into the occurrence of zombies (in the sense of the living dead) in Haiti, and found a man who stated “that his brother had made him a zombie” (Ellis, 2007). Davis’s research led him to find “a material cause for zombification... a ‘zombie powder’ that drugged humans and turned them into zombies” (Ellis, 2007). If ingested, this powder would induce a coma so deep, that the poor body was declared dead, having a pulse too slow and weak to detect, and a lower body temperature, and might even be buried. The effects of these drugs on a person, combined with the shock being buried and then dug up again would make anyone act as a zombie is believed to act – dimwitted, confused, and walking with no sense of direction whatsoever. Ellis does not say if such a drug was used in the nineteenth century when English and Frenchmen were first “discovering” zombie-like monsters, but if these men were to witness or hear about the use of such a drug, it would explain much about how the zombie legend came to be. While the origins of the zombie as depicted in modern films are far from what one would expect, given their stardom in many movies, the roots of the legend add far more depth and power to the monster, making them a vital and fascinating part of the Gothic genre, worthy of further study.

The zombie film is an essential element in modern horror flicks. The sheer number of B-rated zombie movies is almost disgusting show of what people pay to create, and others pay to view. The first of these, *White Zombie* starring Bela Lugosi, is a piece of art that adequately displays the origins of zombie legends, while at the same time hinting at signs of what is to come in subsequent zombie movies. The film is about a man who wants to possess the beautiful newlywed, Madeline, and has her turned into one of the living dead for this purpose. Bela, as

Murder Legendre, is the zombie master – the man who kills his enemies, including his former teacher, a witch doctor, and turns them into his personal slaves, and also owns a mill where he uses zombies as a labor force that will never demand higher wages. This is an obvious reference to slavery, given that slaves were seen as beneath humans and only good for their work. It does not matter when one zombie loses his balance to fall into the mill; another can take its place. Other references to obeah and voodoo are made in the film – a body is buried in the middle of the road so it will not be stolen, garlic is used as a protection against evil spirits, wax dolls are used to represent real people, and the well-educated doctor mentions strange occurrences he has viewed over his years in Haiti. Madeline is even turned into a zombie by some secret formula similar to Wade Davis’s ‘zombie powder.’ All these are “authentic” aspects of the zombie legend. *White Zombie* also depicts zombies as they are later depicted in film – as mindless beings who could only be used for brute force. Murder Legendre does not go far without them, because they are at once able to protect him, and are also useful tools, so that he does not have to do any of his dirty deeds, such as drive a carriage or attack intruders to his palace, himself. These zombies, like “real” zombies, must follow Murder Legendre’s orders and cannot think for themselves. Madeline as a zombie would have killed her fiancé, had the doctor not interfered, and the zombie servants could not save themselves from walking off the cliff like lemmings at the end of the film. *White Zombie* also shows examples of elegant terror and crude horror. It has foreshadowing and suspense, coupled with a general creepy feeling when Murder Legendre is on screen. The zombies are also very effective creeping out the audience with their vacant expressions, especially with their frightening eyes. This film is one of the few well-made zombie films, due to its reliance on the “true” zombie legend, and does a wonderful job of introducing this monster to Hollywood’s repertoire.

The Gothic genre has evolved significantly since Horace Walpole wrote *The Castle of Otronto* in the eighteenth century, and it continues to grow and change in the twenty-first century. People still enjoy being scared by Gothic works, because in these stories they are promised excitement and adventures that cannot be found in day-to-day life. They are also free to experience whatever brutality or suspense is found in what they read or view, because it is safe: none of it has really happened, or ever will. Gothic writers scare their audiences through much elegant terror such as suspense and foreshadowing seasoned with a little bit of crude horror to disgust the reader at the same time as giving them the anticipated jolt of excitement. Many Gothic stories written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries concern themselves with the notion of premature burial, something real and terrifying to the general public at that time. While this was a disgusting and morbid subject to make a profit out of, what writers such as Edgar Allan Poe created was rapidly consumed by the thrill-seeking masses. These masses viewed this threat as something real, despite the infrequency of a body being mistaken for dead, and created a crusade to raise awareness and end premature burial, while subconsciously enjoying this game-turned battle. Zombies were a form of premature burial and return of the dead that plagued parts of the world such as Haiti and the West Indies that were not as “civilized” as Europe and the United States. The origins of fears centered on zombies relate more to social issues than merely being buried alive, but this fear in literature and film has evolved as much, if not more than the Gothic genre itself, into a subgenre to itself that masks concerns of slave rebellions and occult religions. Despite new medical knowledge preventing people from the gruesome fate for nearly two hundred years, fear of the mysteries of the grave – that one might enter it while still alive, or might return from it after one is dead – is still in us, and likely will always be there.

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