

The “Thing Without a Name”

In addition to vampires and werewolves, King’s work features a host of other monsters. In *The Tommyknockers* (1987), *Dreamcatcher* (2001), and *Under the Dome* (2009), a monstrous alien presence threatens the humans who encounter it. In *Cujo* (1981), the real-life horror of a rabid Saint Bernard is compounded with the intertwining supernatural horrors of the bogeyman in Tad Trenton’s closet and the dark legacy of Frank Dodd, a serial rapist and murderer whose crimes terrified the community years before, a story which is told, in part, in *The Dead Zone* (1983). King’s *IT* (1986) is the monster story on an epic scale, with the horror that stalks Derry taking on myriad faces and disguises, from Pennywise the clown to a giant bird and popular culture staples like the werewolf and the Creature from the Black Lagoon. However, the monster is perhaps most terrifying of all when it has been brought to life by the hand of man, through human machination rather than supernatural or cosmic means.

The Gothic monster was brought to life with Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s classic novel *Frankenstein* (1818), the tale of Victor Frankenstein, his unrelenting obsession, and the Creature he creates and gives life. In this novel, Shelley establishes a theme that runs throughout representations of monstrosity in literature and popular culture to this day: the interconnection of man and monster, whether in creation, similarity, or both. Victor Frankenstein is a complex character and as Susan Tyler Hitchcock argues in *Frankenstein: A Cultural History*, Shelley’s novel remains so powerful because it combines two familiar myths: that of the intrepid hero who dares go where no man has gone before and its diametrically opposed counterpart, that of the man who is punished for doing so (4). As Hitchcock explains, “These two archetypal myths are essentially human—and essentially contradictory. One inspires a human being to cross over into unknown realms, and congratulates anyone who does so. The other limits human pursuit and experimentation, threatening punishment to anyone who dares” (5). Victor

begins his experiments in the full knowledge that he is endeavoring to reach beyond the bounds of human knowledge, confessing that “It was the secrets of heaven and earth that I desired to learn” (Shelley 33) and that “life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through” (Shelley 48). Victor succeeds in doing so, but is then horrified with the result, fleeing from his creation in revulsion, abandoning the Monster and leaving him ultimately free to wreak havoc as he will.

A central concern of *Frankenstein* and the living dead novels that follow it, including King’s, are the intersections of knowledge, technology, and humanity. Victor is so obsessed with whether or not he can attain the knowledge to achieve his macabre purpose that he never pauses to consider whether or not he should do so. He can, so he does. However, when it comes to Victor’s learning and knowledge, Claudia Rozas Gómez points out that this knowledge is of a very limited sort. In her article “Strangers and Orphans: Knowledge and Mutuality in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*,” Gómez explains that while Victor’s quest for knowledge is internal and secret, shutting him off from others and the community that surrounds him, the Monster’s learning is interactive, a true quest for knowledge without a fixed end goal, focused instead on continued growth and connection (363–366). Gómez writes that “From early on in the novel it is clear that for Victor knowledge is something that is private, ‘secret’ and waiting to be discovered” (364). As a result, his creation of the Monster is “conducted in the shadow of guilt and concealment” (Baldick 51). In his solitary and single-minded pursuit of that knowledge, Victor absents himself from interaction with others, and by extension from the responses and reactions that could well suggest that this reanimation is not a very good idea. Once he has succeeded, Victor finds himself incapable of understanding his creation, his power having escaped his control, with the impossibility of containment or even clear definition that is at the heart of the monstrous. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues in his introduction to *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, a key characteristic of the monster is that “the monster polices the borders of the possible . . . From its position at the limits of knowing, the monster stands as a warning against exploration of its uncertain demesnes” (12). The monster occupies a liminal position between the knowable and the unknowable, both portraying and policing those boundaries that should not be transgressed.

Just as Victor’s quest for knowledge quickly outstrips his common sense and self-restraint, technology creates opportunities for humans to delve into mysteries they may not be fully prepared to consider, a threat that is renewed with each new technological advancement. As Jonathan Crimmins writes, “*Frankenstein* was written at a moment when matter could no longer be easily dismissed as inert extension. Invisible and active across distances, the forces of

gravity, magnetism, and electricity showed matter to be dynamic rather than inert" (564). Shelley explains in her introduction to the novel that *Frankenstein* was not wholly sprung from her imagination, but inspired by scientific and technological discoveries, specifically those being made by Dr. Erasmus Darwin, who "preserved a piece of vermicelli in a glass case till by some extraordinary means it began to move with voluntary motion" (Shelley 8). As she turned to her own tale, she reflected that "Perhaps a corpse would be reanimated; galvanism had given token of such things; perhaps the component parts of a creature might be manufactured, brought together, and endued with vital warmth" (*ibid.*). As Roseanne Montillo explains in *The Lady and Her Monsters: A Tale of Dissections, Real-Life Dr. Frankensteins, and the Creation of Mary Shelley's Masterpiece*, experiments with galvanism pioneered by Luigi Galvani and later, his nephew Giovanni Aldini, also challenged the boundaries between life and death. As Montillo writes, galvanism "presented an opportunity for restarting one of the body's main vital organs: the heart. If that were to happen, the dead could reawaken" (9). With these scientific inquiries before her, Shelley argues, the creation of Victor's Monster, while imaginative and horrific, was "not of impossible occurrence" (11).¹ This anxiety about the potentially destructive and dehumanizing power of technology is not unique to Shelley's time either; as Thomas Vargish argues in "Technology and Impotence in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," "It's our chief story, a myth comparable to that of the loss of paradise and the fall of man in Genesis. It is in fact our version of that myth, expressed as the fall of humanity from a projected technological paradise into an actual technological crisis" (325). With technological advances coming fast and furious in the twenty-first century, from increasingly complicated cell phones and gadgets to medical advances and genetic experimentation, it is no wonder that the story of Victor Frankenstein and his creation continue to resonate with contemporary readers. As David S. Hogsette argues,

[T]his novel grips our imaginations today precisely because the ultimate transgressive horrors of which it speaks pertain particularly to our scientifically advanced culture. Scientists now hold knowledge that may allow them to do much of what Mary Shelley only dreamed of through Victor's character. In other words, *Frankenstein* may no longer be merely a vicarious thrill; it has become, instead, a terrifying mirror reflecting a horrific reality we are unprepared to accept. (533)

What was once primarily speculative horror is now all too close to the reality being continually created by aggressive, boundary-pushing scientific exploration, making *Frankenstein* still timely nearly two hundred years after its first publication.

Given this powerful resonance, it is unsurprising that Shelley's *Frankenstein* has inspired countless film adaptations, reimaginings, and commercial products, from Halloween masks to breakfast cereal, and almost two centuries later, *Frankenstein's Monster* is culturally ubiquitous. As Hitchcock argues, "the monster's story says something important. Otherwise, we would not keep telling it" (10–11). Just as King has been inspired by the classic horrors of Stoker and Stevenson, he has also negotiated and reimagined the figure of the "Thing Without a Name," in the tradition of Shelley's *Frankenstein*. *Pet Sematary* and *Revival* have distinct echoes of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, while *Cell* plays with the popular cultural icon of the zombie, the living dead who arguably take their formative inspiration from *Frankenstein's Monster*, though they have spread their incarnations far afield in the intervening centuries, from George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) to the dystopic reality of AMC's *The Walking Dead* (2010–present), as well as more insidious explorations of the animated body deprived of the Self, such as Jack Finney's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and its film adaptations (1956; 1978).

Pet Sematary

Slavoj Žižek has referred to *Pet Sematary* as "perhaps the definitive novelization of 'the return of the living dead'" (25). In *Pet Sematary*, King provides readers with a modern-day Victor Frankenstein in the figure of Louis Creed, a doctor who objectively accepts death as "perfectly natural" (*Pet Sematary* 55) while simultaneously, as a husband and father, he cannot abide it when it strikes his own family. *Pet Sematary* begins with the Creed family transplanted from Chicago to Ludlow, Maine and their first encounters with their kindly neighbor Jud Crandall and the dangerous road that lies between their homes. Harried but ultimately happy, Louis, his wife Rachel, and their young children Ellie and Gage quickly get settled in their new home, routines, and relationships, including a hike into the woods behind their house where, led by Jud, they find the eponymous pet "sematary," a trip which introduces the theme of death in the novel and the multiple and overlapping anxieties surrounding it, from Rachel's refusal to speak about death to Ellie's fear that her cat, Church, will someday die.

Following an argument with Rachel after their walk to the pet sematary, Louis reflects that "as a doctor, he knew that death was, except perhaps for childbirth, the most natural thing in the world" (*Pet Sematary* 56), often messy and traumatic, but part of the regular order of things. This is a belief that he holds to steadfastly when Victor Pascow is brought into the university infirmary after being hit by a car while jogging: despite the chaos of the

waiting room and the gore of Pascow's injuries, Louis remains calm and professional.² Within moments of seeing Pascow's broken body, he knew "The young man was going to die" (*Pet Sematary* 71–72). Louis's views on the nature of death undergo dramatic revision, however, when death strikes his own family, first with his daughter's cat Church and later, young Gage. As Mary Ferguson Pharr explains in "A Dream of New Life: Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* as a Variant of *Frankenstein*," when it comes to death as natural, Louis "can accept this fact in theory; in reality, he finds it more difficult to take" (122). As Louis thinks, "*your family's supposed to be different . . . Church wasn't supposed to get killed because he was inside the magic circle of the family*" (*Pet Sematary* 121, emphasis original), a direct echo of Elizabeth Lavenza's comforting words to Victor Frankenstein that "our circle will be small, but bound close by the ties of affection" (Shelley 169). When Church is killed in the road, Jud leads Louis into the woods beyond the pet sematary, initiating him into the dark knowledge of the Micmac burial ground. When Church returns from his grave, profoundly changed but alive, Louis begins to realize that the boundaries between the living and the dead are not as solid or impassable as he has previously believed, a dark possibility that consumes him following the death of his son.

Following in Victor's Frankenstein's footsteps, Louis finds it impossible to turn away from this forbidden knowledge. As Strenge argues, Victor and Louis are quite similar in their near-identical "refusal to take responsibility for one's actions and hubris, that is, false pride and defiance" (53). Just as Victor is horrified by his creation, Louis finds the reanimated Church repellant, with his flat stare, smell of the grave, and vicious killing and dismemberment of all manner of small animals, from mice and rats to a large crow (*Pet Sematary* 173, 190). The truth of Church's resurrection is that he "wasn't really a cat anymore at all . . . He *looked* like a cat, and he *acted* like a cat, but he was really only a poor imitation" (*Pet Sematary* 254, emphasis original). This dark reality, however, is not enough to deter Louis from taking Gage's body to the Micmac burial ground, where the power of the place draws him beyond even his most rational considerations. Louis's interactions with death throughout the novel are characterized as adversarial—with his repeated thoughts of "won one today, Louis" (*Pet Sematary* 185) when he bests death—and conceding defeat and losing Gage is more than Louis can bear. Pharr argues that Shelley's *Frankenstein* revolves around the truth that "uncontrolled science made man more demonic than deific" (115) and Louis follows this same path, and though the power of which he takes control is more supernatural than scientific, once he discovers he can challenge death, he finds it impossible to resist.

Just as Victor Frankenstein's quest for knowledge is carried out in secret, isolating him from those he loves and his larger society, Louis's

experiments with the burial ground are covert. As Winter explains, *Pet Sematary* revolves around secrets (135) and the biggest secret of all is death itself, a mystery unsolvable except by those who have themselves died. King echoes this theme of secrecy in an epigraph to the novel, where he writes that “*Death is a mystery, and burial is a secret*” (*Pet Sematary* 9, emphasis original). Just as Victor Frankenstein keeps his monstrous creation from his family through enclosing himself in his rooms, lying both openly and by omission, and fleeing into the wilderness to confront his creation, after discovering the dark power of the burial ground, Louis’s life is circumscribed by these secrets. He sends his wife and daughter away to Chicago and reflects that if Gage’s resurrection is successful, they will have to live new, covert lives on the run, separating themselves completely from family and friends, and closing a door on their former lives which could never be reopened (*Pet Sematary* 311). While the secrecy of his knowledge isolates Victor from his friends and family, casting him outside of the domestic sphere which he has held so dear, for Louis the secrecy threatens to become his life, to reimagine and remake himself and his family, defined by the secret of the living dead Gage.

Despite this secrecy, there is an irresistible urge to share the secret with another. As he nears death, Victor Frankenstein feels a desperate need for someone to know what he has done, to recognize his achievements even as Victor himself declaims them, as he confides in Captain Walton. Similarly, Jud Crandall is far from innocent in Louis’s spiral into madness and Sears refers to Jud as “a demonic father-figure” (202). It is Jud who first leads Louis into the woods beyond the pet sematary, not telling him where they are going or why, taking him blindly into the darkness and the unknown, over the deadfall, through the swamp, and up the stone stairway. However, just as Victor Frankenstein repeatedly refers to destiny as pushing him ever onward, Jud’s decision to take Louis to the burial ground may not be entirely his own. As he tells Louis while they walk through the woods with Church’s body, “I hope to God I’m doing right. I think I am, but I can’t be sure” (*Pet Sematary* 127). Even in the midst of this rationalization, Jud knows the destructive nature into which he and Louis are about to tap and considering the older man the next day, Louis thinks that “the medicine available at the Micmac burying ground was not perhaps such good medicine, and Louis now saw something in Jud’s eyes that told him the old man knew it” (*Pet Sematary* 161). The burial ground exerts its power over Jud and works him to its will, just as it will soon come to exert that same power over Louis. When Jud later tries to interfere and stop Louis from burying Gage in the woods, it exerts a different kind of power over him, putting him to sleep. Once Jud has passed on his secret and inducted another into the dark mysteries of the burial ground, he becomes expendable, and the

power of the place uses Gage's reanimated body to murder the old man. It is a constantly regenerating cycle, passed from one man to another and one generation to the next: Jud had learned the way from Stanny B. when Jud's dog Spot died and Jud teaches it to Louis with the death of Ellie's cat. In his turn, Louis attempts to do the same to Steve Masterson, who spies Louis carrying Rachel's dead body into the woods. Louis's invitation and warnings to Steve echo Jud's to himself almost verbatim, as he tells Steve that "You may hear sounds . . . Sounds like voices. But they are just the loons, down south toward Prospect" (*Pet Sematary* 408–409). Steve teeters on the edge of following Louis into the woods but turns away at the last moment, fleeing in terror and essentially erasing their conversation from his mind. However, just because Louis doesn't succeed in finding an initiate for the burial ground doesn't mean that its influence has waned. After all, the questions of life and death, of love and loss, are basic human concerns, existential questions of a shared humanity. As Louis walks out the door to face the monstrosities of his reanimated cat and son, King casts a speculative eye toward the future, remaining for a moment within the empty Creed house, which has seen so much love and horror. As King writes, "the house stood empty in the May sunshine, as it had stood empty on that August day the year before, waiting for the new people to arrive . . . as it would wait for other new people to arrive at some future date . . . And perhaps they would have a dog" (*Pet Sematary* 396). While the power of the burial ground may destroy those it bends to its will through the monstrosity of their own desires, its influence is indestructible.

Both Victor Frankenstein and Louis Creed also fail to learn from their mistakes. As Pharr writes of Victor and his Monster, "The dream made flesh, then, is inevitably a nightmare, taking the dreamer not to divinity but to infamy, even insanity. And the darkest part of this nightmare is that Victor never really gives up on his original vision" (119). Even on his deathbed, Victor reflects that while "I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed" (Shelley 192), recounting a cautionary tale to Captain Walton while simultaneously unable to truly repent of his actions. Louis demonstrates a similar hubris and performs all sorts of mental gymnastics to justify returning to the Micmac burial ground. Despite his awareness of Church's changed return and that "If Gage came back changed in such a way, that would be an obscenity" (*Pet Sematary* 255), Louis takes Gage to the burial ground anyway, refusing the horrific possibilities and justifying his actions anew at every step along the way. Then, when Gage returns as a cannibalistic monster, killing both Jud and Rachel, Louis refuses this dark knowledge once more, rationalizing his choice to bury his wife there: "I waited too long with Gage . . . Something got into him because I waited too long. But it will be different with Rachel"

(*Pet Sematary* 408). Both Victor and Louis have come face to face with their creations and have paid for their mistakes with the lives of their loved ones, but neither can stop themselves from plunging ever onward and claiming power that they know, from their own tragic experience, to be destructive and better left alone. As Tony Magistrale argues in “The Shape Evil Takes: Hawthorne’s Woods Revisited,” “Creed’s compulsion to deliver the bodies of his son and wife to the cemetery is not adequately explained as a consequence of his guilt and grief. Rather, he is more interested in continuing his misguided experiment under the irrational premise that eventually he will discover a way to dominate death” (82). Both Victor’s and Louis’s stories remain, in a sense, unfinished. As Pharr argues, they “can have no conclusion. Dreams never do. Victor dreams of successful creation almost to his last breath, and yet he dies. Louis dreams of joyous resurrection in the very face of demonic possession, and still the carnage continues” (124). Once caught within this web of power, it becomes impossible for either man to turn from it and much like a drug addict, both Victor and Louis keep grasping for reasons and justifying their actions as they continue to lay siege to the liminal space that separates the living and the dead.

Revival

Much like Victor Frankenstein and Louis Creed, *Revival*’s Charles Jacobs has his faith tested by tragic loss and his desire to transcend the boundaries between the living and dead quickly become an all-consuming obsession. In *Frankenstein* and *Pet Sematary*, religion was largely an absent presence, hovering around the edges of Victor and Louis’s meditations on death, which are largely scientifically engaged; however, in *Revival*, Jacobs first enters the novel as a man of God, the reverend of the Methodist church the Morton family attends, introducing the question of faith into the familiar theme of men coping with loss in these novels. When tested by the loss of his beloved wife and son in a car accident, Jacobs’s faith fails him and rather than finding comfort in a Christian conception of the afterlife, he mounts the pulpit one last time to give what young Jamie Morton and other parishioners refer to as the “Terrible Sermon” (*Revival* 66). As Jacobs tells his horrified congregation, “There’s no proof of these after-life destinations; no backbone of science; there is only the bald assurance, coupled with our powerful need to believe *that it all makes sense*” (*Revival* 73, emphasis original). This revelation marks the end of Jacobs’s tenure at the First Methodist Church of Harlow and though he later presides over a traveling tent revival as a healer, his faith has been not just tested but broken. In the place of the Almighty, Jacobs begins dedicating himself to the miracles of

electricity. As he concludes his Terrible Sermon, outlining an obsession that will both guide and consume him, "Maybe there's something there, but I'm betting it's not God as any church understands him . . . If you want truth, a power greater than yourselves, look to the lightning—a billion volts in each strike, and a hundred thousand amperes of current, and temperatures of *fifty thousand degrees Fahrenheit*. There's a higher power in that, I grant you" (*Revival* 74, emphasis original). Like Victor and Louis, Charles Jacobs seizes the opportunity to use science to interrogate the secrets of the afterlife and attempt to wrest power from death itself.

Jamie Morton, who was a young boy when Jacobs and his family came to Harlow, finds his life inextricably intertwined with that of Charles Jacobs, as the two men continue to stumble upon each other over the next fifty years in what the *Library Journal's* Barbara Hoffert calls "a relationship that turns positively Faustian" (64). The first time Jamie rediscovers Charles Jacobs, Jamie is a heroin-addicted rhythm guitarist and Jacobs is a carnival huckster, taking "Portraits in Lightning" as Dan Jacobs, though his powers also extend far beyond this entertainment, as Jacobs proves when he administers his electrical treatment to free Jamie from his addiction. Their paths diverge again, though not before Jacobs sets Jamie on a new path with a job at a Colorado recording studio. Though Jamie is cured of his addiction, he has lingering aftereffects. As Brian Truitt explains in his review of *Revival*, "Charlie's healing methods aren't without consequences . . . and Jamie faces demons—both metaphorical and sometimes literal—while learning he's not the only one affected by Charlie's strange ministry." Not long after Jacobs's treatment, Jamie wakes up in his backyard, poking his arm with a fork and repeating the same words that he found himself speaking immediately after the treatment: "Something happened" (*Revival* 171). However, as Jamie discovers, he is not Jacobs's only success story, nor are his side effects the worst of the lot. The supplicants Jacobs has healed at his tent revival—unknowing human guinea pigs for his electrical experimentation—have had a host of troubling aftereffects, including institutionalization, self-harm, compulsive behaviors such as walking and eating dirt, and suicide (*Revival* 242). While Victor and Louis strove to bring the dead back to life, Jacobs's goals are even more ambitious: he wants to see what waits beyond the border, to find out what happened to his wife and son. The culmination of Jacobs's research and experimentation—and one he coerces Jamie to serve as assistant in performing—is the revival of a dead person, in the hopes that she will be able to come back and tell him what she has seen, what lies beyond the veil between life and death. For this experiment, Jacobs chooses Mary Fay,³ a woman dying of mad cow disease, one of the few diseases that are impervious to being cured by Jacobs's special electricity.

King's dedication page at the beginning of *Revival* includes "a laundry list of horror-genre influences" (Staskiewicz 74), including Bram Stoker, Fritz Leiber, Shirley Jackson, Robert Bloch, and Peter Straub, though the strongest inspirations explored in *Revival* are Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan*, and the cosmic horror of H. P. Lovecraft. Like Shelley's Victor Frankenstein, Jacobs is shaken by tragic loss, and the refusal to accept this loss, grieve, and move on with his life pushes Jacobs to dangerous obsession, including *Frankenstein's* theme of the disastrous consequences of "interfering with life and death" (Spanberg). Like Victor and Louis's rejection of the natural order of death when it strikes those they love, Jacobs longs to strip death of its mystery and power. As he tells Jamie as they prepare to revive Mary Fay, "Sometimes death is natural, a mercy that puts an end to suffering. But all too often it comes as an assassin, full of senseless cruelty and lacking any vestige of compassion. My wife and son, taken in a stupid and pointless accident, are perfect examples. Your sister is another. They are three of millions" (*Revival* 366). Jamie has nightmares of his dead and reanimated loved ones, including his parents, his brother Andy, and his sister Claire, murdered by her abusive ex-husband; his terror at their decomposed and monstrous appearance draw a clear line between living and dead for Jamie. He knows, as Jud Crandall cautioned Louis in *Pet Sematary*, that "sometimes dead is better" (166). However, this is a truth that Jacobs either refuses or simply cannot comprehend. Like Louis Creed, while Jacobs has counseled countless grieving family members on the everlasting peace awaiting their loved ones, when it comes to his own dearly departed, this holds no comfort. Echoing the life-giving lightning of countless *Frankenstein* film adaptations—an added element not present in Shelley's novel⁴—Jacobs works to harness the almost unfathomable power of electricity to break those bonds. When the lightning strikes, Mary Fay is indeed returned to a kind of horrifying undead animation.

Arthur Machen's 1890 novella *The Great God Pan* also features a scientist bent on experimentation, in this case on the human brain. As Dr. Raymond explains to his friend Clarke, who has come to witness his great test, "There *is* a real world, but it is beyond this glamour and this vision . . . beyond them all as beyond a veil" (Machen 10, emphasis original), one which he intends to lift with his experiments on a young woman—again—named Mary. As he explains to Clarke, Raymond is but one in a long line of men who have attempted to plumb these depths, as "the ancients knew what lifting the veil means. They called it seeing the god Pan" (Machen 11). Raymond anesthetizes Mary and cuts into her brain, and following this procedure, Mary has indeed looked into the world beyond their own and come back fundamentally changed. As Raymond and Clarke look on, "her eyes opened . . . They shone with an awful light,

looking far away, and a great wonder fell upon her face, and her hands stretched out as if to touch what was invisible; but in an instant the wonder faded, and gave place to the most awful terror" (Machen 19). The rest of Machen's novella consists of a series of stories told between men who have seen troubling and terrible things, including suspicious deaths and suicides that revolve around a woman who goes by a series of pseudonyms, including Helen Vaughan, Mrs. Herbert, and Mrs. Beaumont, a woman who "was at once the most beautiful and the most repulsive they had ever set eyes on" (Machen 40). This diabolical and dangerous woman is found to be much more: the daughter of Dr. Raymond's test subject Mary, who he discovered to be pregnant not long after her peek beyond the veil, a woman who is not wholly human. As Lovecraft explains in his *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, Helen "is the daughter of hideous Pan himself" (83). While she herself is destroyed, there still remains "the horror which we can but hint at, which we can only name under a figure" (Lovecraft 82). As Raymond reflects, "I forgot that no human eyes could look on such a vision with impunity. And I forgot, as I have just said, that when the house of life is thus thrown open, there may enter in that for which we have no name, and human flesh may become the veil of a horror one dare not express" (86). Helen Vaughan is destroyed, but the horrifying reality that lays so close to the real world is impossible to contain or deny. This eerie tale of cosmic horror's influence has extended far into the intervening century's culture of horror and weird tales, impacting both Lovecraft and King. As Lovecraft argues of *The Great God Pan*, "the charm of the tale is in the telling . . . And the sensitive reader reaches the end with only an appreciative shudder and a tendency to repeat the words of one of the characters: 'It is too incredible, too monstrous; such things can never be in this quiet world . . . Why, man, if such a case were possible, our earth would be a nightmare'" (83). King credits Machen's novella on the dedication page at the start of *Revival*, capping off his list of horror influences with *The Great God Pan*, which King says "has haunted me all my life." The impact of *The Great God Pan* resonates throughout the whole of *Revival*, with Jacobs echoing Dr. Raymond's obsession with peering beyond the veil and his callous approach to the subjects on whom he experiments, considering one life—or dozens, as it ultimately turns out to be—well worth the cost of his single-minded pursuit of this dark and secret knowledge.

While Mary Fay's reanimation echoes Victor's creation of his Monster in *Frankenstein* and the impulse to cross these boundaries echoes *The Great God Pan*, the truths Mary reveals are straight out of Lovecraft's canon of cosmic horror, a dark reality separated from our own by the thinnest of boundaries, and which spells destruction and madness for mankind. As Daniel Kraus writes, "*Frankenstein* is a touchstone here, but more so is

Lovecraft,⁵ as King edges ever closer to the madness of the unknowable and eventually, to his courageous credit, stares directly at it” (36). As King explained in an interview with *Goodreads*’ Catherine Elsworth, he “wanted to use Lovecraft’s Cthulhu mythos, but in a new fashion, if I could, stripping away Lovecraft’s high-flown language.” Many of Lovecraft’s doomed protagonists find themselves initiated into dark knowledge through reading forbidden manuscripts or books, and Jacobs follows in their footsteps, looking to a mystical tome called *De Vermis Mysteriis* as part of his research and experimentation (*Revival* 336). Jacobs plunges into both conventional and unconventional knowledge and tapping into this darkness, succeeds in opening the door between the two worlds. As Jamie looks into Mary Fay’s now monstrous, inhuman eyes, he sees not just the bedroom in which he stands with Jacobs, but “The *true* world behind it” (*Revival* 379, emphasis original). Struck with horror, Jamie looks upon “a barren landscape. Barren, yes, but not empty. A wide and seemingly endless column of naked human beings trudged through it, heads down, feet stumbling. The nightmare parade stretched all the way to the distant horizon. Driving the humans were antlike creatures, most black, some the dark red of venous blood” (*Revival* 379). This conclusion makes *Revival* “one of King’s most harrowing, most fatalistic works” (Kraus 36), with Jacobs and Jamie denied any small comfort they took from hoping their loved ones had found peace in the afterlife and for their own ultimate ends. As Jamie reflects of his murdered sister, “Somewhere in it was Claire—who deserved heaven and had gotten this instead . . . *This horror was the afterlife, and it was waiting not just for the evil ones among us but for us all*” (*Revival* 380–381, emphasis original). As a result of Jacobs’s experimentation, the line between this world and our own has become perforated, with the side effects of those he has experimented upon tying these worlds together, opening the door between the two.

Cell

A popular contemporary development of the figure of the reanimated corpse is that of the zombie. As Kyle William Bishop explains in *American Zombie Gothic: The Rise and Fall (and Rise) of the Walking Dead in Popular Culture*, the zombie film has been a horror staple for more than seventy years and this subgenre has “become even more relevant to a contemporary and post-9/11 audience” (19). Rather than the conscious, if misguided, choices made by Victor Frankenstein, Louis Creed, and Charles Jacobs, the reanimated dead of the zombie comes from without and en masse, an environmental rather than individually created monster. King taps into this rich cultural vein with *Cell*, where a cell phone transmission turns all users

into rampaging, violent monsters in a single chaotic moment, as "Everyone who does own a mobile and answers it on the morning of 1 October is transformed into a neck-chomping zombie or a self-harming psycho by something called The Pulse, a mysterious noise or vibration that spreads, virus-like, through the mobile networks" (O'Neill 54). King's negotiation of the zombie narrative works a bit differently than his other novels, which draw on Gothic literary precedents, because unlike the figures of the vampire, werewolf, ghost, and reanimated dead in the tradition of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the zombie narrative was born in film rather than literature. As Bishop argues, the figure of the zombie is unique in its lack of literary foundation:

The zombie is the only supernatural foe to have almost entirely skipped an initial literary manifestation . . . Almost every vampire movie owes something of its mythology to Bram Stoker, and the reanimated dead have clear ties to Mary Shelley, especially when the creatures share more in common with the living than they do with the dead. The zombie, however, has no germinal Gothic novel from which it stems, no primal narrative that established and codified its qualities and behaviors. (12–13)

The cinematic zombie has long been characterized by its walking dead status—biologically dead, though mobile—along with inarticulate moaning and an endless, cannibalistic quest for brains. However, the characteristics of the zombie have been dynamically negotiated over the course of its history, such as the fast moving zombies of Danny Boyle's 2002 film *28 Days Later* and an increasing emphasis on bioterrorism and narratives of infection alongside similar reality-based fears and anxieties. Stephanie Boluk and Wylie Lenz explain that "The latest mutation of the zombie in popular culture has led to contestations over what, precisely, constitutes a zombie. While lumbering, Romero-style zombies effectively tapped into mid-twentieth-century contagion paranoia, the apocalyptic terror of the living dead was replaced in films such as *28 Days Later* and the *Resident Evil* series with a more explicitly biological model of viral infection" (6). While the modus operandi might change, however, the terror evoked by the zombie itself remains consistent and "the viral zombie does not replace the older style of zombie as much as find a way to reconfigure it in the light of emerging scientific discourses that tap into deeply felt post-AIDS, SARS, bird flu, and H1N1 anxieties. The zombie has been rationalized and assigned a pathology" (ibid.). King's cell phone zombies or "phone-crazies" similarly negotiate the zombie figure. In the immediate aftermath of The Pulse, the affected humans suddenly and violently turn upon one another, as protagonist Clay Riddell witnesses a man biting off a dog's ear (*Cell* 8) and an adolescent girl ripping out a woman's throat with her teeth (*Cell* 10).

The transformation is widespread and almost instantaneous; as *Fantasy & Science Fiction's* Charles de Lint explains, "since so many people carry cell phones, when they see the carnage and chaos created by the first wave of the afflicted, it's only natural for them to use those cells to phone their loved ones, or 911, and so become similarly afflicted" (34). While *Cell* explores the biological infection pattern of transformation, King also taps into the fear of unknown and nearly boundless technological advancement, with bioterrorism spread through the ubiquitous cell phone signal. As Brendan O'Neill argues, "If Romero's zombie flicks captured cold-war America's fears of the red threat from without, King's *Cell* captures the contemporary dread of new technology, of what we might be doing to ourselves by pushing the boundaries of science and invention" (54). From the supernatural to biological and technological, the zombie continues to evolve with changing times, the threat of contagion and infection, the disintegration of the boundaries between the living and the dead, between the body and the rest of the world.

The zombies themselves continue to develop and change over the course of *Cell*, with the impacts of The Pulse resembling a mutating virus rather than a more simplistic before-and-after difference. Shortly after the initial Pulse, the phone-crazies begin to travel in organized packs, and as 15-year-old Alice observes, "They're getting smarter. Not on their own, but because they're thinking together" (*Cell* 158), with the survivors concluding that the phone-crazies' bird-like "flocking" is the result of "telepathic group-think" (*Cell* 159). The phone-crazies move around during the day and group together in a comatose sleep-state at night, telepathically connecting with one another and a series of stereos and boom-boxes to transmit an easy-listening soundtrack of lullabies. Their powers continue to grow, with the phone-crazies able to infiltrate the dreams of the survivors, take over their bodies to speak and control their actions, and organize to seek vengeance following the destruction of a sleeping flock, developing into a "hive mind born out of pure rage" (*Cell* 385). Young computer whiz Jordan comes to the conclusion that The Pulse is basically a software corruption, enacted on the biological circuits of the brain, reducing humans to their most basic imperative. As Jordan argues of the phone-crazies, "Those things're rebooting, all right. They might as well have SOFTWARE INSTALLATION, PLEASE STAND BY blinking on their foreheads" (*Cell* 204). But as his headmaster Charles Ar dai explains, "At bottom, you see, we are not *Homo sapiens* at all. Our core is madness. The prime directive is murder . . . [T]hat is what the Pulse exposed five days ago" (*Cell* 206). Though this is a fatalistic, nihilistic view of humanity, King also offers hope for the future. In the couple of weeks following The Pulse, this programming begins to break down, as Clay witnesses two phone-crazies beginning to reassert their desires and ability to speak, if not quite

their humanity itself (348–352). Even as Clay knows that the phone-crazies must be destroyed, he can't help but see their potential humanity: "maybe in the long run, the phoners would have been better. Yes, they had been born in violence and in horror, but birth was usually difficult, often violent, and sometimes horrible. Once they had begun flocking and mind-melding, the violence had subsided. So far as he knew, they *hadn't* actually made war on the normies, unless one considered forcible conversion an act of war" (*Cell* 439, emphasis original). From this perspective, in the fight for survival, the phone-crazies and the "normies" are more similar than different. Just as King negotiates the characteristics of the zombie figure in *Cell*, this cause also creates the possibility for a way back, deviating from the usually irreversible zombie state: if the human brain can be effectively rebooted, forced to revert to its last workable, pre-Pulse configuration, humanity can potentially be restored, a hope that Clay clings to after finding his transformed son, Johnny.

At the heart of the zombie narrative are powerful cultural anxieties about infection, terrorism, and the apocalypse. As Boluk and Lenz explain, "Plague, zombies, and apocalypse are deeply entangled with each other" (7). While the vampire, werewolf, and ghost tend to be isolated occurrences with a relatively limited scope of influence, the rise of the zombie signals the end of the world as we know it, a direct challenge to humanity as a whole. As Bishop explains, "Apocalyptic narratives . . . particularly those featuring zombie invasions, offer a worst-case scenario for the collapse of all American social and governmental structures" (23). There is no one to turn to for salvation, rescue is far from guaranteed, and each individual must fight for themselves, either alone or communally, side-by-side with other survivors. The way things have always been or "should" be is inconsequential, for with the apocalypse and the arrival of zombies, there is a new world order to which the survivors must adapt or die. While we have not yet reached the point of a full-on apocalypse, the twenty-first century has seen a range of horrific and world-changing events, both natural and unnatural. *Cell* taps into myriad national and global anxieties, a supernatural exploration of reality-based terror. Finally, Bishop notes that "the primary metaphor in the post-9/11 zombie world is of course terrorism itself" (29). In *Cell*, the source of The Pulse remains undefined, loosely attributed to global terrorism, though given the impact and the constant fight for survival, the specifics of this terrorism are presented as largely inconsequential, with the true horror coming from the uncertain and dangerous times in which we live. As the *New York Times*' Janet Maslin argues, "Stephen King's *Cell* invokes the events of Sept. 11, 2001, the kind of disaster in which 'clothes floated out of the sky like big snow.' It echoes the upheaval caused by [the 2004] monstrous tsunami and Hurricane Katrina. It reflects the violent anarchy to be found in Iraq. It shivers at the threat of bioterrorism and the menace

of computer technology.” In a world full of these very realistic threats and fears, the supernatural representation of the zombie allows readers to face these horrors one step removed rather than head on, claiming some vestige of control and resolution in a time when they often achieve little of either in the grand scheme of national and international turmoil.

The zombie—like the vampire, werewolf, and ghost—is a supernatural figure, though one that, like its counterparts, effectively represents real-life horrors, symbolically conveying the fears and anxieties of its cultural moment. Each of these traditional horror figures has been continually revised and reinvented for a new audience, and the figure of the zombie resonates particularly powerfully in the early twenty-first century. As Bishop argues of the timeliness and real-life correlation of the zombie film, “Because the aftereffects of war, terrorism, and natural disasters so closely resemble the scenarios depicted by zombie cinema, such images of death and destruction have all the more power to shock and terrify a population that has become otherwise jaded to more traditional horror films” (11–12). With novels from *Salem’s Lot* and *Christine* to *The Shining* and *Revival*, King returns to traditional horror figures, resituating them in our contemporary time and familiar places, highlighting the lasting terror to be found there and exploring the ways in which through these monsters, we find what it means to be human.