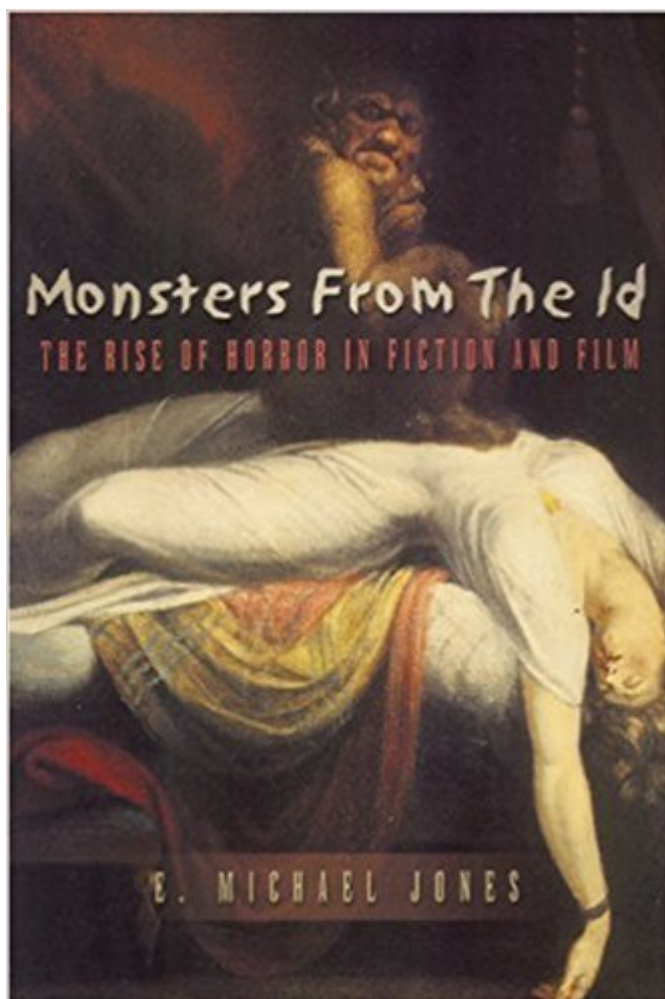


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# Monsters From The Id: The Rise Of Horror In Fiction And Film



## Synopsis

Tales of horror, so popular in modern literature and film, originated in the sexual decadence unleashed by the French Revolution. In a compelling new study of horror from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to modern Hollywood, one of America's most original critics shows that the moral order, when suppressed, reasserts itself as an avenging monster in the midst of the chaos and suffering of cultural revolution. As the Age of Reason gave way to the Terror, not only in Paris but in Mary Shelley's own life, the first monster of the modern imagination was born. Like much of the English literary class, Shelley's family—including her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, and her husband, Percy—had embraced the French Enlightenment, throwing off old restraints on sexuality. The result of their ruinous dissipation was *Frankenstein*, in which Shelley's monster rises in repudiation of the very rationalism that produced it. The next monster to appear as moral decay spread from revolutionary France was the vampire, *Frankenstein's* rationalist fascination with electricity giving way to the romantic myth of blood. Jones follows the progress of horror from Victorian England and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to Weimar Germany and Murnau's classic film *Nosferatu*. Bringing his account to the end of the twentieth century, he shows how the Western imagination has responded to the explosive force of the sexual revolution with horror of unprecedented intensity. In the *Alien* series and other contemporary horror films, the culture of abortion and pornography has unwittingly spawned a new and terrifying breed of avenging monster.

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## Customer Reviews

Viewing the horror genre through the lens of '90s style "family values," Jones, founder of Culture Wars magazine, believes that horror is an unconscious backlash against the Enlightenment and the evils of secular humanism. His argument involves a complicated causal chain with at least a few missing links: the Enlightenment subverted religion; without religion there can be no moral order; the absence of moral order has inevitably led to sexual liberation; and sexual liberation must lead to suffering and death. However, his proof for this unlikely progression remains unconvincing. Jones predicates much of his argument on the affair between Mary Godwin (future author of *Frankenstein*) and Romantic poet Percy Shelley. He states that their sexual immorality (i.e., free love and marriage) grew directly out of their Enlightenment philosophy and contributed to the suicides of Percy's first wife and Mary's half sister. Mary was "consumed by remorse" over their deaths, according to Jones, and dealt with her guilt by creating the now iconic monster, now known as *Frankenstein*. In this fashion, the Shelley family melodrama is projected onto an entire age. Jones is fond of shooting at little targets to make big points: he grandly concludes that the forgotten 1997 horror film *Mimic* represents "a complete repudiation of the Enlightenment." On occasion, Jones makes astute observations, as when he links Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to the 19th-century fear of syphilis, but more often he is crippled by his political agenda, which leads him to describe evolution as "pseudo-metaphysics" and LBJ's Great Society as "a front for pushing contraceptives as part of the eugenic final solution to our race problem." (Apr.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

"Closely argued and erudite....Jones gives a stunning reading to Ridley Scott's 1980 film *Alien*." -- Insight  
Jones's thesis shouldn't be all that surprising. Scholars and critics have acknowledged that horror is an artistic representation of our fears and anxieties. Jones' contribution is to tell readers that we are afraid and anxious because we know that our morality not only doesn't work, it's also the source of evil and suffering. Since, like Mary Shelley, we can't or won't acknowledge that fact, the monster will be here to stay, and investigating strange noises will remain a bad idea. (Beliefnet, Aug. 2000) -- From Beliefnet

This book can be summarized from the back cover: "Horror stories, so popular in modern literature and film, originated in the sexual decadence unleashed by the French Revolution. ... Jones ... shows that the moral order, when suppressed, reasserts itself as an avenging monster. ... Bringing his account to the end of the twentieth century, he shows how the Western imagination has responded to the explosive force of the sexual revolution with horror of unprecedented intensity. In the 'Alien' series and other contemporary horror films, the culture of abortion and pornography has

unwittingly spawned a new and terrifying breed of avenging monsters." I think Jones is brilliant and rarely disagree with him. Even before I read this book, it was difficult not to recognize the formula of horror films: The monster dispatches his victims just before, during, or after an act of fornication. After the fornicators are mercilessly dispatched, the monster is left to chase the good girl/virgin, sometimes accompanied by the good guy. Sometimes they kill the monster and sometimes they merely escape him or her, setting up a sequel. I've seen a couple of horror films in which this was changed and the good girl was murdered. I find such endings dissatisfying. Christians are to be peaceful (with a right to self-defense), but still do horror film makers unwittingly witness to Scripture and the moral law?: "they know the just decree of God that all who practice such things deserve death (Romans 8:32)." Even if you aren't religious, or don't agree with either Jones' thesis or conclusions, you will get something out of this book, if, like me, you are a fan of horror films. Species, Halloween, Frankenstein, Dracula, The Fly, The Blob, the "Alien" movies, Mimic, Psycho, Interview With The Vampire, The Birds, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, Metropolis, Vampyr, The Hunger, and The Texas Chainsaw Massacre are among the many films discussed.

Everyone who is tempted is attracted and seduced by his own wrong desire. Then the desire conceives and gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown it too has a child, and the child is death. - James 1:14-5. Monsters from the Id: The Rise of Horror in Fiction and Film, published by Spence Publishing in 2000, by noted Catholic intellectual E. Michael Jones and founder of Culture Wars magazine offers a unique perspective on the horror genre in both fiction and film, seeing it as largely a conflict between Enlightenment "liberation" and the natural moral order (expressed in the form of the monster). Throughout this book, Jones will argue that we moderns do not understand horror because we are too immersed in the values of the Enlightenment and thus fail to appreciate the conflict between Enlightenment "liberation" and the natural moral order (as expressed in the Counter-Enlightenment). In particular, Jones will examine the case of sexual liberation (frequently championed by proponents of the Enlightenment), showing how remorse and guilt resulting from such liberation ends up taking on the form of the monster. Jones will argue that the reason why horror exists at all is because this conflict has not been adequately resolved in our society and that when the moral order is transgressed it comes biting back. Throughout the book, Jones traces the trajectory of horror along with the trajectory of the Enlightenment and sexual liberation, showing how bloodshed always results when the values of the Enlightenment are put into effect. In this way, the monster that appears in the horror story or film may be seen as the repressed natural moral order coming back to its rightful place. Jones begins with some comments on "A Legacy of Horror". Jones

notes the role of Mary Shelley's work *Frankenstein*, arguing that the interpretation of this book has become confused, and then makes some comments on the film *Mimic* which includes the triumph of religion (and in particular of Roman Catholicism in the form of a rosary) over the Enlightenment. The first part of this book is entitled "The Monster Travels From France to England". Jones begins by considering why the French revolution failed. Jones notes the bloodshed of the French revolution and the role of such disturbed individuals as La Mettrie and de Sade in bringing it about, quoting extensively from the works of Erik von Kuehnelt-Liddehn. In particular, Jones examines the role of William Godwin and his arguments for Enlightenment rationalism and sexual liberation. Jones notes the relationship between Godwin and the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, as well as his marriage to noted feminist Mary Wollstonecraft. Jones also notes the role of such individuals as the Duc D'Orleans in bringing about the regicide during the French revolution as well as the role of Adam Weishaupt and his Illuminati as mentioned by the Abbe Barruel in his *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism*. For Mary Wollstonecraft (as for her daughter who became Mary Shelley) the results of sexual liberation were devastating. Following this, Jones notes the role of electricity as a liberating force (mentioning Benjamin Franklin's famous experiments for example) and in the life of the poet Shelley. Jones notes how Mary Shelley came to arrive at an arrangement with the poet and how together with Lord Byron they engaged in the writing of ghost stories. Jones notes the influence of Barruel on the Shelleys. Further, Jones explains how Mary Shelley, who was equally devastated by the consequences of sexual revolution, came to write her novel *Frankenstein*, in which the monster came to take on the features of remorse (perhaps owing to the fact that the poet Shelley's first wife Harriet had committed suicide). Jones also notes the role of the depraved individual the Marquis de Sade on Mary Shelley and the use of his novel *Justine* by her. The second part of this book is entitled "The Monster Travels From England to Germany". Here, Jones notes the role of Dracula, mentioning the role of prostitution and syphilis (the "white worm" - i.e. the treponema) in Bram Stoker's novels (who himself was to die of syphilis). Jones further shows how a homosexual subculture developed in Germany in the Weimar republic, mentioning such figures as Christopher Isherwood and Magnus Hirschfeld (as well as the concept of "Kulturbolschewismus"). To further demonstrate this point, Jones shows how Darwinism came to play such a central role and how this related to the blood (the hereditary means by which genetic material is passed on). Jones notes the influence of this culture on Adolf Hitler (mentioning his fear of syphilis as well as the widespread fear of the "heredo" in France). Jones shows how this ultimately resulted in the Nazi tyranny. The third part of this book is entitled "The Monster Travels from Germany to America". Here, Jones notes the role of the American revolution and contrasts the America at the time of

Toqueville to that of later eras. Jones explains how propaganda came to play a central role in advertising, mentioning Bernays. Jones also mentions the films of Hitchcock (including *Psycho* and *Lifeboat*, showing the role of the Nazi) and the film *The Forbidden Planet* (wherein the phrase "monsters from the Id" occurs). Following this, Jones turns to a discussion of the Reece Committee which set out to investigate tax exempt foundations. Jones notes the role of Rockefeller for example in providing funding to such notorious hucksters and cultural bolsheviks as Kinsey. Jones then mentions the film *The Body Snatchers*, noting the prominent role that divorce played in this film. Following this, Jones discusses Hollywood and death. Jones notes the role of pornography (mentioning such perversions as *Deep Throat*) and demonstrating the manner in which Hollywood pushed aside the production codes. Jones also notes the role of nudity in films, demonstrating how the monster always appears at the time in which the moral order is desecrated. Jones mentions the harmful effects of pornography and shows the results of the Meese Commission. Following this, Jones turns to a discussion of the *Alien* movies, which some may see as a sort of feminist fantasy. Jones maintains that these movies have much to say about contraception and abortion, in which the fetus comes to play the role of the "alien". Jones ends with a discussion of the misreading of horror. Jones argues against various feminist, Freudian, and Marxist interpretations of horror. Jones also shows how many have come to see in horror a "puritanical" and "conservative" mindset which they view as harmful. However, Jones effectively shows that such an understanding rests contrary to the nature of horror itself, in which the natural moral order (as represented by the Counter-Enlightenment) re-asserts itself against the Enlightenment and the horror that brings. This book offers a fascinating study of horror in both fiction and film. Jones offers a unique interpretation of horror, showing how "monsters from the Id" manifest themselves at the time when the natural moral order is desecrated. In particular, Jones focuses on the consequences of sexual liberation and the collective guilt that ensues by allowing for such things as abortion. This results in the creation of horror which shows the natural consequence of what happens when the moral order is repressed. Thus, in effect we witness the consequences of the Enlightenment unfold in the horror genre.

Up to about 1970, most folks outside Catholicism accused Catholic priests of obsessing about sex, and preaching only about that (and money). Since then, the culture has so cowed priests that sex is the one thing they never preach about. Jones, who I admit is a friend of mine, has done a fine job of distilling the theories he developed in *LIBIDO DOMINANDI* to about one-third the length of that book, and focusing his attention quite well on the horror genre, both in book and film. Mary Shelley,

Bram Stoker and the modern producers of horror films, according to Jones, are all actors in a long-running play about the Enlightenment's misreading and misuse of sex. Repress the moral and it comes back as a monster. You'll particularly get involved in what he has to say about Dracula and Alien. Inexplicably, he omits his more recent research about the much-ignored film Mimic. Then, again, this book was first announced about four years ago.

This guy is a genius who is able to explain why I love a good monster movie. And, why liberals always act like they're afraid of a monster under their bed...because there IS a monster under their bed!

I'm glad that this book didn't turn out to be just another survey of horror books and films; if I'd wanted one of those, I'm sure I could have found one on the discount rack at my local megastore. Jones' interest in horror stems from the way he thinks it reflects vital facts about the culture within which it is produced. Some of his interpretations seem like a bit of a stretch, but no more so than those by modernist critics. I am neither a Catholic nor a conspiracy theorist, but I think that, despite its flaws, Jones' analysis of some of the negative consequences of the Enlightenment is valuable. He is a skilled writer, and this book is a quick read.

thanx

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