

1. An Unidentified Species: Horror, The Body and Early Television Drama

Mark Jancovich

(1) As we saw in the introduction, horror and television are often seen as virtually incompatible with one another, and it has been claimed that 'there are few, if any, unacknowledged masterworks or cultural milestones to be found in the sprawling and often monotonous landscape of made for television horror' (Waller 1987: 147). However, Nigel Kneale's *The Quatermass Experiment* is not only an acknowledged classic of horror television but is often cited as one of the defining moments in the history of British television, a moment that is second only in importance to the televised Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Indeed, the serial was the British Broadcasting Corporation's response to its critics, and particularly those who had been campaigning for the establishment of a commercial competitor to the BBC, a campaign that in 1954 resulted in the passing of the Television Act that would lead to the introduction of a second channel in 1955. Faced with the threat of competition, it is often claimed that the BBC was shaken out of its complacency and, for the first time, established a Script Unit to produce original projects. As a result, Lez Cooke argues that the Quatermass serial 'may be seen to mark the moment at which television drama in Britain finally broke free from the shadows of cinema, radio and theatre to offer its first truly original production.' (Cooke 2003: 20)

(2) Institutionally, then, *The Quatermass Experiment* was pivotal in the attempt to develop works original to television, and it is highly significant that the first fruit of this new initiative was a science-fiction-horror story about an alien invasion, in which an astronaut mutates into a monstrous human-vegetable hybrid after his return from outer space. Furthermore, if the series was a milestone for the industry, it was also, as Charles Barr has argued, 'a landmark ... in intensity of audience response' (Barr(a) 1896: 215), accounts of which have become legendary, and probably exaggerated, with stories of pubs and streets streets being deserted as audiences stayed home to catch the next instalment. If exaggerated, the impact of the series was none the less exceptional and, as Catherine Johnson has shown, by the time of *Quatermass and the Pit* in 1958, 'the Quatermass programmes had become a cultural event with *Variety* reporting 'a motion at one local council that business shouldn't start until after the Quatermass transmission had ended', adding that 'cinema exhibs testify to the pull of the program by saying that they had one of the worst evening's biz in a long, long time' (Johnson 2005: 20).

(3) The following article will therefore look at *The Quatermass Experiment* as an example of television horror and, in the process, it will demonstrate that, far from being marginal to television history, horror was actually crucial to the development of British television drama, and particularly the serial format. As a result, the first section focuses on the ways in which horror and television were not seen as fundamentally opposed to one another by the BBC but, on the

contrary, as well suited to one another; and the ways in which horror's association with suspense was particularly useful to the development of the serial format through which the BBC sought to establish habits of audience viewing. The second section then moves on to examine *The Quatermass Experiment* itself and its specific narrative focus on a process of bodily transformation. In the process, it will be argued that, rather than shying away from graphic depictions of the body, early British horror television made the body central, a technique that did not challenge the aesthetics of the 'intimate drama' but both intensified and expanded this aesthetic. Finally, the article will turn to the later Quatermass serials of the 1950s to examine how the focus on the body developed in these later serials.

Horror, Suspense and the BBC

(4) Rather than being seen as inappropriate to television, the BBC clearly saw horror as a key material during the early years of British television programming. As Johnson points out, *The Quatermass Experiment* was used by Controller of Programmes, Cecil McGiven, 'as an illustration of the kinds of television drama that the BBC should be producing with the arrival of competition.' (Johnson 2005: 20) In other words, horror was seen as a form of popular story telling that could attract audiences at a time when the BBC knew it could no longer simply assume an audience. Soon to lose its monopoly as the sole provider of programming, the BBC realised that it would have to start building audience loyalty in preparation for the introduction of ITV, and then fight to keep that audience thereafter.

(5) However, horror also had a more specific appeal over other types of popular story telling. *The Quatermass Experiment* was not just an exercise in popular storytelling, but crucially used a serial format, a form that was central to industrial strategies to standardise viewing patterns. While one-off events such as the Coronation could deliver astonishing numbers of viewers, the serial format was used to ritualise viewing: it was used to encourage habits and loyalty in viewers (Jacobs 2003: 71). However, this standardisation of viewing was dependent on the ability of the serial to genuinely convince audiences to follow the narrative across a series of episodes and this depended, at least until the habits of television viewing had been established, on the ability of the series to generate narrative suspense between episodes. Horror was therefore particularly significant given the importance of suspense within the genre, an importance that has made it central to the emergence of a number of serial forms. For example, the Gothic novel was originally a serial form, to the extent that it was largely consumed through travelling libraries and was available to readers through a series of volumes rather than as one complete and bounded narrative. Furthermore, as David Punter has pointed out, it has been argued that 'we owe the entire apparatus of novelistic suspense' to the Gothic novel, prior to which fiction 'was substantially without plot' (Punter 1980: 16).

(6) If the pre-Gothic novel was 'a series of loosely linked episodes and events, connected only by their common bearing on a central moral

argument', it was the Gothic novel that established 'complexity of plotting' (Punter 1980: 16). If narrative suspense tied events together, it also enabled one of the key devices of the serial format, the cliff-hanger, through which breaks in the narrative between volumes were turned from problems, which threatened to lose audiences, into virtues, which created anticipation for the next instalment. Horror was also central to the late 19th century popular magazines which serialised stories such as *The Woman in White* (Collins 1860), a serial which created a sensation similar to that of the Quatermass stories with readers queuing up to buy the latest episodes and Gladstone cancelling public engagements so that he could finish reading them (Symons 1974).

(7) If horror's association with narrative suspense was crucial to the BBC's attempts to organise an audience of regular, habitual viewers, and to create strong identifications with the channel, many forms of horror television made this sense of control overt. Many audiences for horror actually discuss their investment in the genre precisely in terms of a loss of control, as an act of wilful surrender. For example, it is this sense that is conveyed by the frequent references to horror as similar to a fairground or rollercoaster ride. Similarly, while there are those who claim to like watching horror on video, because they can control their viewing by pausing the action when things get too much, many explicitly state a preference for the cinema, where there is both a sense of immersion within the experience and one is forced to surrender to the pace of the film (Jancovich and Faire with Stubbings 2003). As a result, even within the anthology format, the introductions to *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (1955-62) overtly presented its host as a malicious practical joker, who delighted in unsettling his audience through the stories presented, while Rod Serling's introduction to many *The Twilight Zone* (1959-64) episodes also suggested the show would exercise control over you. However, nowhere was this more emphatic than in the introduction to *The Outer Limits* (1963-65), the creation of the scriptwriter of *Psycho* (1960), Joseph Stefano:

There is nothing wrong with your television set. Do not attempt to adjust the picture. We are controlling transmission. If we wish to make it louder, we will bring up the volume. If we wish to make it softer, we will tune it to a whisper. We can reduce the focus to a soft blur, or sharpen it to crystal clarity. We will control the horizontal. We will control the vertical. For the next hour, sit quietly and we will control all that you see and hear. You are about to experience the awe and mystery that reaches from the inner mind to ... the Outer Limits.

In this ways, these shows celebrate the pleasures of surrender to television horror.

(8) Nor was *The Quatermass Experiment* the first time that the BBC had turned to horror materials. The serial format would later be attacked precisely because its standardisation of schedules and viewing was seen as 'more predictable and formulaic' (Jacobs 2003: 75) than the stand-alone single play (or even to the compromise between the single play and the serial, the anthology series). It is therefore significant that horror was not simply limited to the more

disreputable form of the serial and that, with the resumption of television broadcasting in the late 1940s, the BBC quickly turned to horror as the basis for many of its single plays. One of the explanations for this is that it 'echoed a similar trend in the cinema with the release of films like *Dead of Night* (1945), *Brighton Rock* (1947) and Hitchcock's American production of *Rope* (1948)' (Cooke 2003: 14), a trend that is itself explained by the end of the war which supposedly led to a 'spectacular shift from the public sphere to the private sphere, with a stress on vision and fantasy.' (Barr(b) 1986: 16-8) However, the trend was not simply a post war phenomenon but dated back to the early 1940s (see Note 1). The two plays that are often cited as key examples of what the BBC referred to as 'horror plays' were *Rope* (January 1947) and *The Two Mrs Carrolls* (February 1947), the second of which was released as a film starring Humphrey Bogart and Barbara Stanwyck in 1947 (although it had actually been filmed two years earlier in 1945), a film which was itself part of a cycle of Gothic horror films that was initiated by the success of *Rebecca* (1940) and included examples such as *Suspicion* (1941), *Jane Eyre* (1944) and *Gaslight* (1944). Furthermore, *Rebecca* and *Suspicion* were both directed by Hitchcock, for whom Selznick had also developed *Jane Eyre*, and Hitchcock was also to direct a film version of *Rope* in 1948. Indeed, *Rope* had originally been written for the stage by Patrick Hamilton, who had also written the theatrical hit, *Angel Street*, on which *Gaslight* had been based.

(9) However, if these horror plays were developed in response to a trend that went back at least as far as the early 1940s, the BBC did not simply develop them in an attempt to copy cinema or radio. On the contrary, it was hoped that horror materials would establish a 'new aesthetic' for television drama that would both create a distinctive feel and exploit features seen as specific to the medium of television (Cooke 2003: 16). For example, Jacobs quotes a memo from Robert MacDermot, Head of BBC Television Drama, to Cecil McGiven, Head of Television, in which he suggests that ghost stories might be well suited to television, and could be used to 'create a very effective eerie atmosphere' (Quoted in Jacobs 2000: 97). Rather than a situation in which 'made-for-television horror would seem to be by definition impossible' (Waller 1987: 159), the BBC seemed to both hope and fear that the 'intimate' quality of television would make it particularly effective as a horror medium.

(10) As a result, while MacDermot favoured the horrific materials, Norman Collins, Controller of the Television Service, found horrific projects worrying:

It would be footling to say that we should never do any horror plays in television, but I think that, on the other hand, we have got to be careful not to overdo the terror and to recognise that what is seen on the screen in a person's home makes a very different impact from the impact made in the cinema when a stridently advertised horror film is being shown. Not only have we the initial responsibility that comes from knowing that our productions may be seen by children ... but we must remember that there will also be large numbers of unsuspecting persons

who, as in Sound radio, simply turn to their set during transmission to see what is on. (Quoted in Jacobs 2000: 98)

Whether or not the reference to 'Sound radio' is an allusion to the panic initiated by Orson Welles' notorious broadcast of *War of the Worlds*, there was a very real sense that it was precisely television's intimacy – its capacity to bring materials close to the audience and vice versa – that made many in the BBC believe that television was a particularly effective medium for horror: that such materials were useful to demonstrating the powers of the medium but consequently needed to be handled with great care.

(11) This mixture of enthusiasm for, and concern with, horror eventually led to a situation in which 'output by 1948 was such that one viewer felt compelled to write [a] protest at television's 'lurid' output' (Jacobs 2000: 99), and Collins was forced to call for drama to avoid materials that might result in the censorship of television drama. However, despite his concern, Collins did not condemn horror outright but simply called for restraint in the visual depiction of physical violence (Jacobs 2000: 100). If visualised violence was a problem for the BBC, Jacobs claims that the importance of the horror plays was that they helped early programme makers to develop the visual style of television. For example, plays such as *Rope* exploited newly developed techniques for cutting directly from one camera to another, without having to fade between the two, which created a greater sense of pace and energy. More significantly, Jacobs also argues that a detailed analysis of *Rope's* programme file suggests that the play was representative of a significant change in the camera's relationship to the action. Whereas early television drama had adopted a more 'theatrical' relationship to the performance in which the camera tended to remain outside the action, and the drama was staged as though the camera was in the position of an audience, the staging of *Rope* seems to have 'favoured frequent camera movement and reframing to follow actors and emphasize dialogue and reaction.' (Jacobs, 2000: 107) It was therefore more involved *within* the action and, while the average length of each shot was still quite long, the shots themselves were far more active in picking out, and emphasizing, details within the action. He even demonstrates that this feature was used to promote the play and he quotes the *Radio Times*:

There is an exciting revival in the programmes this week – Stephen Harrison's production of Patrick Hamilton's thriller Rope. Harrison produced the play three years ago and showed how effectively the close-up technique of television could be applied to a presentation of this kind in which the reaction of the characters is as important as their action and speech. His technique will be similar this time, and we should notice some subtle camera work. (*Radio Times*, 8 January 1950, quoted in Jacobs 2000: 104)

Rather than being effaced, the visual style was actively promoted as one of the key appeals of this drama.

Internal Investigations: Intimate Drama, Expansive Storytelling and Body-Horror in *The Quatermass Experiment*

(12) If critics have often accused television of being frightened to shock its audience and for its dependence on the ordinary, unobtrusive and everyday, these accusations were only partially true of early television drama, and it was the scope for experimentation that seems to have drawn Nigel Kneale to continue the tradition of the 'horror play' in his scripts for *The Quatermass Experiment*. The serial even opens with a statement that is clearly meant to comment on both the scientific experiment that concerns the narrative of the serial, and Kneale's own efforts in writing the script: 'an experiment ... is an operation designed to discover some unknown truth. It is also a risk' (Kneale(a) 1953). Indeed, critics often claim that Kneale and Rudolph Cartier, the producer of the series, found this sense of television as a "'cosy' medium' to be an 'anathema' to them (Jacobs 2000: 133), and Kneale in particular is often claimed to have seen the serial as an attempt to break from established practice:

I desperately wanted to do something different, something fast moving and adventurous. We wanted to get right away from the usually talky piece set in a couple of rooms in which people said things like 'put down that gun, it might be loaded' or 'let's not go to the police', and so on. (Quoted in Petley 1989: 91)

However, Kneale's dramas often overtly concerned the disruption of the everyday, rather than simply rejecting it. While he turned to horror and science fiction, he firmly located it within the contemporary Britain of his time, and firmly located the action within a recognisable everyday. In the opening episode of the serial, Quatermass's experimental rocket crashes into suburban London, and before authorities arrive on the scene, we are introduced to a series of local residents as they try to make sense of, and cope with, the phenomenon that has invaded their everyday existence, much as the story invaded the living rooms of its viewers.

(13) As a result, while many claim that *The Quatermass Experiment* 'challenged the intimate drama directly' (Jacobs 2000: 130), its relationship to the 'intimate' was actually more complex. For Jacobs, Cartier in particular was working to create an 'expansive' television style that 'attempted to *expand space*, using long shots, large sets and close ups' (Jacobs 2000: 135), In this attempt to create a 'wider canvas', he used filmed inserts to 'increase mobility and overcome spatial limitations', and in so doing worked 'to push the 'limits of the medium' outwards rather than towards the intimate drama' (Jacobs 2000: 131).

(14) Certainly, this expansive vision is one aspect of Cartier's contribution to television and one notable aspect of aesthetic style in *The Quatermass Experiment*. The final confrontation between Quatermass and the monster in Westminster Abbey clearly works in this way. The setting creates a sense of scale, as does the description of the encounter which suggests that both Quatermass and Westminster Abbey are dwarfed by the alien threat:

QUATERMASS has moved further in. Memorial tablets to poets, on the wall behind, are partly obscured by sections of the Thing. Little tendrils lick around the pier adjoining. QUATERMASS's face glistens with sweat. His eyes go quickly, fearfully, from point to point, as if expecting an attack at any moment. (Kneale(f) 1953: 33)

It is not simply that the action takes place on a large scale here, but that the very choice of Westminster Abbey as a location moves the story from one of intimate personal drama and associates it with the international event of the Coronation, which had not only taken place there the same year but had been a major television event.

(15) However, if the location provides the sense of scale that is associated with Cartier's expanded style, the reference to Quatermass's moving eyes also suggests an intimate element to the drama. Although it seems from the camera script that this encounter was told in one shot, the very drama of this encounter is dependent on the contrast between the enormity of the alien menace and the intimate drama of Quatermass's reactions, which are themselves signalled though tiny details, such as the ways in which his 'face glistens with sweat' and 'his eyes go quickly, fearfully, from point to point'. Nor is Quatermass's resolution of the threat achieved through physical action. On the contrary, Quatermass eventually saves the day by addressing the intimate feelings of humans that have been assimilated by the alien being: 'I am not to be killed ... that must not be done. Charles Greene ... Ludwig Reichenheim ... Victor Carroon ... I am speaking to you now. There is ... something else here ... but I am appealing to you. I want you to remember.' (Kneale(f) 1953: 36) In asking them to remember their prior existence, Quatermass also asks them to resist the Thing that has assimilated them and to experience the feelings of empathy and altruism necessary to make the ultimate sacrifice:

You will overcome this evil. Without you it cannot exist upon the Earth ... it can only know by means of your knowledge ... understands through your understanding. It can only exist through your submission. Victor Carroon Ludwig Reichman Charles Greene you are resisting this thing. Now go further ... go further! ... With all your power ... and mine joined to yours ... you must dis sever from it, send it out of earthly existence ... To save our world I call on you're my friends to go from it! Now. (Kneale(f) 1953: 41-2)

Indeed, the intimate nature of the drama is grounded in its narrative structure, which not only follows Quatermass on his investigation of the alien threat but also features a 'body-horror' storyline in which, much like Seth Brundle in David Cronenberg's 1985 remake of *The Fly*, the one surviving astronaut, Victor Carroon, is forced to witness his own transformation into a monster.

(16) This second storyline is all the more remarkable given the period in which the film was made. Body-horror is largely associated with the late 1970s and early 1980s, during which, it is claimed, there was both a postmodern crisis in the distinction between self and other and the

development of new special effects techniques and changing censorship practices, the combination of which enabled graphic representations of the bodily transformation and trauma which Waller sees as crucially absent in television horror (see for example, Waller 1987). Indeed, only two years before *The Quatermass Experiment*, Howard Hawks' Winchester Pictures had been forced to abandon the body-horror aspects of John W. Campbell Jr.'s 'Who Goes There?', when it decided to adapt the story into *The Thing from Another World*, a film which would be remade in 1982 as one of the classics of body-horror, John Carpenter's *The Thing*. While Hollywood felt that its special effects were simply not up to the job of telling a story of bodily transformation, Kneale placed bodily transformation at the centre of his story, even though the BBC didn't even have a department that handled visual special effects, and Kneale was forced to produce the visual effects for the Thing himself.

(17) Furthermore, Kneale not only told his story in visual terms, but also in terms that were intensely intimate. On the one hand, the serial focused attention on the physical nature of Carroon's transformation by making him virtually speechless on his return to earth. Also Duncan Lamont, who played Carroon was a profoundly physical presence. In the film version, Richard Wordsworth plays Carroon, and his thin and almost emaciated frame suggests that the transformation involves something akin to a dematerialisation of the body and visually echoes horrific images of concentration camp victims. In contrast, Lamont is a powerful and thickset figure, whose physicality is further emphasized by his role on the mission. Unlike the other astronauts, who are high-level scientists, Carroon is merely described as an 'engineer', 'radio operator' and responsible for 'general gadgets' (Kneale(b) 1953). He is therefore only one step away from a manual labourer.

(18) However, on the other hand, while the serial details Carroon's physical transformation, Johnson also draws attention to a crucial moment after Carroon's return to earth, in which Kneale and Cartier tried to overcome the problem of the studio cameras that 'were not very mobile and had fixed lenses which made zooming or fast tracking impossible.' Rather than dispense with an intimate close up of Carroon's anguish and confusion,

Cartier overcomes this technical difficulty by keeping the camera still and moving the actor. After the careful build-up to the expected return of the heroic astronauts, the sudden and rapid close-up of Carroon's terrified face is a particularly shocking and potent device. Carroon falls into the camera, literally invading and occupying the entire space of the screen in the corner of the living room. (Johnson 2005: 26)

This then is only the first of a series of sequences in which Carroon's personal reaction to his predicament is juxtaposed with Quatermass's scientific investigation of it.

(19) We not only witness his initial reactions to earth and to Quatermass's early investigations, but also his reactions to the first signs of the alien presence, as he is drawn towards a cactus that he will eventually assimilate into himself. While his human side is clearly

carried through a focus on his eyes, his encounter with the cactus suggests that the alien side perceives through his hands. For example, before his assimilation of the cactus, the script notes that 'CARROON's hand is reaching, but waveringly, towards the cactus', a detail which is not only emphasised through a cut to Carroon and the cactus but by another character who draws attention to the strange 'way he's moving his hands'. Indeed, yet another character clearly reads these movements as demonstrating that Carroon is searching for something, and asks 'What does he want?' (Kneale(c) 1953: 35) However, the focus on the eyes and hands is clearest a short while later, after the cactus has been moved away from Carroon and into another room, under the mistaken assumption that its presence is alarming him. Driven by urges that he doesn't seem to understand, Carroon finds himself drawn to search out the cactus, and begins 'rising from bed, his movements very slow like a sleepwalker's.' Although his eyes are open, he acts like one who is asleep, until he finally 'gains his foot', at which point he has 'his hands outstretched before him, opening and shutting'. In other words, his hands are used to convey his alien urges, and seem to be sensing their environment as his alien side searches for the cactus (Kneale(c) 1953: 36). As a whole, then, the encounter with the cactus demonstrates the conflict between the human and the alien within his body and, as his human self is gradually overwhelmed, his internal human reactions are conveyed through a focus on his eyes.

(20) Later, in the series, in an episode entitled, 'Believed to be Suffering', Carroon is lost, both literally and metaphorically, and he wanders London while trying to evade contact with the authorities. However, in one brief sequence, the script presents us with a fleeting moment at which Carroon seems to have found peace as he lies in a bombed house 'slumped up against the wall of [the] cellar. His eyes open, expressionless.' This moment of repose is then interrupted by the arrival of a young boy who is 'perplexed by the man's silence and stillness.' (Kneale(d) 1953: 27) Again the inner drama is not simply conveyed through the 'silence and stillness' of the body, but through a particular emphasis on the eyes and, just before Carroon is finally engulfed by the alien, it is once again his eyes that give a last intimate glimpse of his plight:

FADE UP CAM 1 The Island ... Lapping of water. Occasional Duck Quacks.

(Close shot of bush - a mass of small leaves, interspersed with a moss-like variety - the whole undergoing a gentle swaying motion.)

Track slowly to Close-up of eyes ...

(Very, very slowly two eyes open among the leaves, as if someone is looking through. They move forward - and the mossy foliage comes forward with them. The effect is not unlike the 'Green Man' of mythology. It moves slowly out of shot.)

(Kneale(e) 1953: 17)

In this way, the serial involved an intimate investigation of Carroon and his invaded body, but it is not just Carroon who is under investigation.

(21) For Johnson, Quatermass operates much like a detective figure, who follows clues and displays 'his skills by piecing them together to solve the mystery.' He is able 'to explain events' and 'bring about narrative resolution.' (Johnson 2005: 29-30) However, Quatermass's function within the narrative is less certain than this suggests. As we have already seen, Quatermass doesn't actually resolve matters but actually appeals to the humans that have been assimilated by the Thing to destroy themselves and the alien along with it. He is therefore, in a very real sense, a powerless hero, who is more a commentator upon events than the actual subject of the narrative who is able to effect action himself. One reason for this situation is that Quatermass cannot offer the solution given that, throughout the narrative, he is presented as the cause of the problem, and is consequently consumed with guilt over his responsibility for bringing the alien to earth. As he puts it near the end: 'There is no question of credit now – only guilt. I have – brought upon the earth what appears to be the most frightful thing ever known.' (Kneale(f) 1953:18) In a very real sense, then, the narrative is an investigation into Quatermass's own science and, just as Carroon finds himself forced to examine himself and make sense of his gradual transformation, Quatermass is required to turn his investigating gaze upon himself and his own actions.

(22) However, while Carroon is doomed to watch himself be engulfed by the alien, Quatermass is saved from becoming a monster. While his science is problematic, Quatermass is finally presented as a positive, if tainted, figure, and this is due to his ability to acknowledge guilt. Quatermass worries that, through his science, he is in danger of playing God but, the serial suggests, this recognition itself is a rejection of hubris. He is therefore opposed to another scientist, Patterson, who questions Quatermass's judgement. While Quatermass has the humility to recognise that there is risk in every action, and that one cannot control events, Patterson seems to reject the possibility of unforeseen events and adopts a position that is presented as arrogance. He believes that if they had been more careful, they could have avoided risk, and is clearly seen as having totalitarian tendencies when he tells a journalist: 'My – my point is that the individuals aren't important – only the fate of the project itself' (Kneale(c) 1953: 16. See Note 2). Indeed, the desire for certainty is ridiculed elsewhere by Fullalove, a journalist, who describes science as 'mankind trying to sound certain of himself, Jacko. Because he knows that just beyond the air there's a new wilderness. Pitch dark both day and night, empty and ... cold.' (Kneale(b) 1953) Quatermass has the potential to be a monster but it is precisely his lack of certainty about himself, and his willingness to admit his own limitations that distances him from the figure of the totalitarian scientist.

Invaded Bodies: Bodies, Selves and the Problem of Rationality in *Quatermass II* and *Quatermass and the Pit*

(23) In this way, the serial involves an interrogation of Quatermass, even if the primary object of investigation is Carroon's invaded body. As we have seen, much of the story concerns a close examination of

Carroon's intimate experience of his physical transformation, but this concern is taken in a new direction in the second Quatermass serial. In *Quatermass II*, Kneale claims that he wrote the story in such a way that 'the pattern would be reversed' so that 'Quatermass himself would be the lone figure', even while it still remained centred on an intimate examination of the alien other (Kneale(a) 1979: 6). If Carroon's face, and particularly his eyes, were used to convey the suffering of the invaded body, the face of the invaded bodies in *Quatermass II* represented the monstrosity of the alien threat precisely through their emphatic lack of affect. Not only are the invaded humans referred to as 'zombies' but also this sense of them as bodies without souls is further emphasized through the figure of the guards within the film. They wear uniforms so that the face is the only way in which one can be distinguished from another and, even then, these faces that are often hidden behind gas-masks. However, even when the masks are not being worn, these faces remain blank and impersonal.

(24) This comes to a head about half way through the serial, when a family make the mistake of ignoring signs to keep out of a restricted area that is policed by the guards. In previous years, before the arrival of the aliens, the family have used the area for a traditional day at the seaside, but rather than a relaxing day at the beach, the family is disturbed by the sudden appearance of two guards who object to their presence. When the father retorts that they 'come here every summer', he is surprised by the suddenness with which the guards turn to physical intimidation. 'Stop shoving us around,' he warns, 'or I'll go to the papers.' However, the guards remain impervious to him and quickly threaten the wife with their rifles. Throughout the scene, the guards remain emotionally cold and lacking in empathy, a coldness and brutality that is later emphasized when we see the family car being towed through the main gate of the industrial plant, which the guards are protecting. The family itself is no longer present but their fate is made clear by a limp, bare arm that is hanging out of the car window, and by Quatermass's claim that the car explains the recent sound of gunfire. However, the inhumanity of the guards is further emphasized through a shot of the beach, on which the family's picnic things have been broken and scattered; the table cloth lies torn; and the young boy's flippers lie discarded. Most disturbingly of all, his swimming mask lies beside the flippers, its glass eyepiece shattered (Kneale 1955). In this way, the serial, which has a plot that is remarkably similar to Robert Heinlein's *The Puppetmasters* (1951) and Jack Finney's *The Body Snatchers* (1955) in which humans are 'taken over' by alien beings who then masquerade as human, raises a number of concerns about bureaucracy prevalent within the period (see Heinlein 1951; and Finney 1955). At one point an old man expresses his distrust of doctors: with the advent of the new Welfare State, he suggests, doctors are now part of a government conspiracy.

(25) However, the story is not an attack on the Welfare State itself, but rather the product of a more general concern with the situation of the individual within modern society. At other points, the story clearly criticises the erosion of civil liberties during the Cold War, and even expresses anxieties about the situation of the affluent working class, over whom there was a major debate within the period (See for Laing

1986 for a coverage of these debates). In this context, the serial expresses clear concerns that working class radicalism was being undermined by high wages, in return for which workers were being required to unquestioningly defer to authority. Indeed, these various themes are probably best encapsulated by the figure of Leo Pugh, Quatermass's second in command, whom Quatermass is forced to confront in the final conflict of the serial.

(26) Although he is eventually taken over by the alien menace, Pugh claims that scientists have become too reliant on machines: 'Too many machines, that's what we've got.' Furthermore, he suggests that human intelligence should involve more than mere mechanical operations, 'They spoil one from grasping a clear concept. I joined your father as a mathematical genius but these machines, they beat me. I press buttons.' Rather than a mere button-pusher, he also claims that he was originally 'looking for some kind of beauty, I suppose: the mathematical kind. The idea of making roads in space for rockets to travel, four dimensional roads, curved with relativity, metallised with the best quality continuum.' (Kneale 1955) Furthermore, when Kneale rewrote this dialogue for publication, he changed Pugh's dialogue slightly to emphasize the point: 'Without concepts, you are no better than this damned tin thing - you've come down to its level! An adding machine. The concept ... *gestalt* ... that's all the kind of beauty I've ever looked for, you know. What brought me here.' (Kneale(a) 1979: 73) Here he invokes 'gestalt psychology' which proposes a theory of the human mind that sees it as more than a series of mechanical processes, but as a complex, holistic process in which perception involves more than the simple identification of specific elements but the ability to identify whole forms or patterns.

(27) Instead of simply calculating numbers, Pugh champions the ability to identify mathematical concepts within these calculations. However, he also acknowledges that when he was young he was 'a calculating boy' and that his teacher would 'set me enormous sums to do: she loved to astonish herself but I always got them right.' (Kneale 1955) Pugh is open to invasion because, as a child, he was trained to be little more than a machine.

(28) Finally, in the last Quatermass serial of the 1950s, *Quatermass and the Pit*, the human body is presented as an invaded body from its very beginnings. The story concerns a five million year old space ship, which is discovered in London during routine building. Its presence soon reveals that Martians had visited the earth in our prehistory and that it was through their intervention that humanity itself was created. In an attempt to colonise the world by proxy, the Martians had instilled our biological ancestors both with intelligence and with their own racial intolerance, a hereditary condition that is presented as necessarily evil.

(29) In the process, the story explicitly attacks the racial antagonisms that faced West Indian Immigrants to the United Kingdom in the 1950s (see Note 3), the McCarthyite Witch-hunt in the United States, and the Cold War politics of the post war period, conflicts that are all linked to Nazism and the Holocaust. As Quatermass declares at the end:

But we also have knowledge of ourselves ... of the ancient destructive urges in us that grow more deadly as our populations increase and approach in size and complexity those of ancient Mars. Every war crisis, witch-hunt, race riot, and purge is a reminder and a warning ... We are the Martians. If we cannot control the inheritance within us, this will be their second dead planet. (Kneale(b) 1959)

The story even involves Quatermass's attempts to resist the Government in its attempt to militarize his civilian rocket group for use in a nuclear 'Dead Man's Deterrent', a military policy that is remarkably similar to that of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), which claimed that the stockpiling of nuclear weapons would deter aggression because any nuclear war would result in the destruction of both sides (see Note 4). Furthermore, he finds that in this cold war context, there is a clear polarisation of positions and a consequent lack of political alternatives. For example, when he comes before the Government committee that is responsible for deciding the fate of his rocket group, Quatermass tries to persuade it to act against the philosophy of the Dead Man's Deterrent and pleads, 'We must express our views. We're men, not mechanical computers.' (Kneale 1958) However, the Minister in charge of the committee dismisses the notion that there is any possibility of an alternative to the 'Dead Man's Deterrent' and claims to be 'disturbed' to 'hear such naïve views still put forward.' (Kneale 1958) It is significant that the series was shown in late 1958, the same year that the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was formed.

(30) As a result, the story concerns a threat that could not be more intimate, being an element of our very genetic make-up, but one that is also profoundly expansive in that it threatens to destroy the planet. Furthermore, the solution is self-examination. However, despite this concern with discipline and control, the serial does not privilege intellect over emotion, but rather it complicates their relationship. The most unemotional and disciplined figure within the story is the military officer, Breen, who is seen as representative of the fascistic intolerance of the alien menace, and is described by Kneale as being 'a few years younger than Quatermass, alert and cold in manner, his uniform immaculate.' (Kneale(c) 1979: 22) He is also contrasted with Dr Roney, who is described in terms of his emotions: 'His personality is warm, unscientifically impulsive – even rash in the view of his colleagues.' (Kneale(c) 1979: 15) Furthermore, Quatermass is placed somewhere between them, but not as a resolution between extremes. On the contrary, like Breen, his association with intellect rather than emotion means that he is unable to effectively resist the threat and, as a result, both he and Breen are possessed by the alien menace. It is only Roney who seems to have evolved beyond alien rationality and intolerance. Intellect seems to be associated with the alien, while emotion is presented as human.

(31) In the process, the story complicates the notion of the primitive and the advanced to suggest that the rational is primitive, barbaric and linked to intolerance, and that the emotional is actually an advance away from the alien past. In this way, the scientifically

advanced aliens become primitives, as do all those who believe themselves to be superior to others, and seek to impose discipline, order and rationality over them. As a result, it is significant that the threat is not defeated through reason alone but by also by drawing on superstition. At one point, Breen even claims that Quatermass's conjectures have no scientific basis and that his imagination is simply 'running wild' to which Quatermass responds, 'Isn't yours?' (Kneale(a) 1959) Not only is 'wild' imagination the only proper response to the situation, but it also saves the day.

Conclusion

(32) As a result, while many critics have claimed that television is an inhospitable environment for horror, early television institutions often saw them as well suited to one another. Not only were horror stories able to provide television serials with the narrative suspense necessary to command audience loyalty, and so regularise and routinize viewing habits, but horror was also seen as perfectly suited to the supposedly intimate character of television.

(33) It is therefore hardly surprising that the BBC chose a horror story for its first original production, and that this story should take the intimate drama one stage further and focus on a process of bodily mutation. Furthermore, despite the global nature of the threat, which threatens to engulf the world, *The Quatermass Experiment* is still told through the intimate dramas of two men – the mutating astronaut and the guilt-ridden scientist – and, in both cases, the internal character of the drama is stressed through a pointed focus on their eyes as a medium of expression.

(34) The invasion of the body is also central to the two following Quatermass stories, although the invasion takes place on a massive scale in *Quatermass II*, while *Quatermass and the Pit* presents the human body as itself the *product* of an alien invasion: its very 'nature' is the product of biological engineering and carries a dangerous inheritance.

(34) As we have seen, then, horror and television have a long history and one that is intimately bound up with the graphic representation of the body.

Note 1: Indeed, many of the 1940s cinematic horror films were themselves a response to the huge popularity of radio horror, and it is therefore unsurprising that many of the popular radio series were also converted for television. (For a discussion of American radio horror, see Hand 2006).

Note 2: Kneale even rewrote this exchange for the publication of the scripts so that the journalist accuses him of having made a 'totalitarian statement'. (Kneale(a) 1979: 82).

Note 3: The production even explicitly identifies the builders at the start of the series as an inter-racial workforce in which specific workers are identified as black. Although the camera script makes no

specific reference to the racial composition of the workforce (unlike the later version of the script that Kneale published later), Cartier demonstrated the importance of this casting by requesting a private dressing room for the black actor playing one of the workman. Although this illustrates that he was still racially segregated from the rest of the cast, it also clearly establishes how important this casting was for Cartier: only a handful of the cast had their own dressing rooms.

Note 4: The term was actually coined by Robert McNamara in the 1960s and some debate exists over whether it was American foreign policy during the 1950s. None the less, it is often used to sum up a series of justifications for the stockpiling of nuclear weapons during the whole of the cold war period.

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