Putting the Supernatural in Its Place

Folklore, the Hypermodern, and the Ethereal

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The Lalaurie Haunted House, Ghosts, *and* Slavery

New Orleans, Louisiana

FRANK DE CARO

The mansion located at 1140 Royal Street in New Orleans has long been associated with stories of haunting ghosts who appear to those who enter or even pass by the house. In particular, the ghost of a small African American child plunges from the roof, and that of an adult African American male comes down the interior staircase in chains. Both of these ghosts promptly disappear, but others are said to be in the house as well. These ghosts of legend have been widely interpreted to be slaves who were tortured by the white mistress of the house, Madame Delphine Lalaurie, in the nineteenth century; her own ghost may, according to oral tradition, also be in residence. The whole story of Delphine Lalaurie, how her evil deeds were discovered, and how ghosts have been associated with the house has long been recounted in both oral and written accounts.

The building at 1140 Royal is a nineteenth-century structure of stuccoed-over brick. Built in 1831 and having undergone major renovations later in the nineteenth century, such that the current structure looks little like the original, it looms as a very grand mansion. Unlike many others in the French Quarter, it has not been converted to condominiums or a hotel, although it has served several commercial and institutional purposes and has at times contained rental apartments. Recently owned by actor Nicolas

FIGURE 1.5. Slave children, New Orleans, 1863. (Albumen print carte-de-viste by M. H. Campbell)

in which he was held, most likely across the street from the St. Charles. Here he witnessed the "mournful scene" of a slave mother being forced to part from her children, and he notes slaves being kicked and threatened by whips cracking near them (see Northup [1853] 1991, 51–60).

In his earlier slave narrative, Henry Bibb ([1849] 2005) writes of being confined in a slave trader's "yard" in New Orleans "on the corner of St. Joseph Street," and of how the slaves being sold were beaten if they failed to present themselves in a manner that would contribute to their saleability; he also writes of his wife being taken away for a beating (61–62). Although the Lalauries may have been accused of mistreating their slaves, it was perfectly acceptable to punish slaves in various ways, including whipping them; indeed, slaves could be sent to the local jail by a master or mistress to be whipped, for a fee. Cable (1889) points out that the slaves

FIGURE 2.14. Witches outside of a shop on the Salem mall. (Photo by Jeannie Banks Thomas)

one. If a tourist or local thinks that the only witch Salem should focus on is the tragic witch of 1692, then the varied guises of the witch that bombard those who walk the streets of Salem could easily cause dissonance. Some might find themselves offended by the *Bewitched* statue or the Halloween or neo-pagan witch who struts his or her stuff on the streets and in the town's shops. Conflict over how the witch is presented to the public and which witch should be presented is understandable. Sometimes tensions arise from perceptions of poor taste in the selling of the Salem witches. For

I began this chapter by evoking the explicit question asked in *Cockneys vs. Zombies*: how do we know how to kill a zombie? Like any popular culture matrix, the zombie's appearance in locales that include video games, books, television series, and—of course—mainstream and vernacular cinemas suggests that we share a good deal of knowledge about these monsters of fantasy. We know zombies are resurrected dead bodies. We know they eat people. We know they particularly like to eat brains. And we are familiar with the groaning noises they sometimes make. We know all these things simply because of the proliferation of these ideas throughout popular culture, regardless of whether one engages with these movies or not. Those who do not like gory zombie movies may still have the game *Plants vs. Zombies* on their iPhones, or they may hear about these motifs through conversations with their friends (the oral tradition). Thus, zombie popular culture motifs proliferate, much like the zombie horde itself.

APPENDIX A: LISTS OF FILMS BY COUNTRY OF PRODUCTION

The following breakdown illustrates the various countries that have produced, or contributed to the production of, zombie movies over the years. This is a small sample and should not be read as exhaustive.

Australia (AU)
Resident Evil: Extinction (US/GB/FR/DE/AU, Russell Mulcahy, 2007)

Canada (CA)
Diary of the Dead (US/CA, George A. Romero, 2007)
Land of the Dead (US/CA/FR, George A. Romero, 2005)
Resident Evil: Afterlife (DE/FR/US/CA, Paul W. S. Anderson, 2010)
Resident Evil: Apocalypse (US/GB/FR/DE/CA, Alexander Witt, 2004)
Resident Evil: Retribution (DE/FR/US/CA, Paul W. S. Anderson, 2012)
Survival of the Dead (US/CA, George A. Romero, 2009)

Cuba (CU)
Juan of the Dead (CU, Alejandro Brugues, 2011)

France (FR)
La Horde (FR, Yannick Dahan and Benjamin Rocher, 2009)

FIGURE 7.1. Lafcadio Hearn, ca. 1896, after he had accepted Japanese citizenship and taken the name Yakumo Koizumi, with his Japanese wife, Setsu Koizumi. (Wikimedia Commons, from the Mary Louise Vincent Lafcadio Hearn Collection, Hiram College, Hiram, Ohio)