

**Film Cycles, Industry and Audience: Hammer Films' 'Monster' Cycle and
American International Pictures' Poe Adaptations**

by

Anna L. Zuschlag, B. A. (Honours)

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements of
Master of Arts

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**Film Cycles, Industry and Audience: Hammer Films' 'Monster' Cycle and
American International Pictures' Poe Adaptations**

submitted by Anna L. Zuschlag, B.A. Hons.(Windsor)
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts.


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Abstract

The American and British film industries were in a state of flux after the Second World War. Small independent production companies took advantage of this transitional time to attempt direct competition with the major Hollywood studios by cornering the new teenage market and drive-in venue. This thesis will trace the development and decline of two such companies — Hammer Films and American International Pictures (AIP) — from the postwar period through to the seventies. I examine Hammer Films' 'monster' cycle and AIP's Poe adaptations as examples of film cycles in practice, focusing on how they marketed and distributed their films, and how they sought to develop an audience. I conclude by discussing the critical response to these film cycles.

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Introduction

The postwar period through to the mid-sixties was a time of transition for both American and British cinema. In America, the 1948 Paramount decree curtailed the monopoly trade practices of the five major studios and would bring an end to vertical integration, forcing the majors to divest themselves of their exhibition chains during the fifties. In Britain, the monopoly control of the Rank Organization and the Associated British Picture Company waned through the fifties following years of financial uncertainty that saw them increasingly turn their attention away from film production towards other leisure industries such as television and towards more profitable areas of investment. At a time of changing industry practices when the major film corporations were often dealing with financial losses, what was the state of the small independent film companies, particularly those specializing in the 'B' features that had helped supply the second features on double bills during the studio era? How did production change with the introduction of the so-called package-unit films where films were increasingly financed on a single film basis? In this period of transition, how did the double bill change as a result of innovations by independent production companies? Could these companies break into the first-feature market, and if so by what means? How were independent British film companies such as Hammer Films affected by the influx of American finance in the early sixties? How did small independents used to making films

in black and white deal with the increasing demand for colour features? How did distribution arrangements change for the independent producer? In what ways did the major studios continue to dominate the film industry in the United States despite the Paramount decree? What was the relationship between the major and minor studios and the independent producers in the areas of distribution and exhibition?

In order to explore these and other questions, this thesis will focus on two production companies: Hammer Films in Britain and American International Pictures (AIP) in the United States. The thesis will trace the development and decline of these companies from the postwar period through to the seventies. To what extent were these companies representative of most of the independent film production companies during the transitional postwar period in the American and British film industries? In many ways they were a microcosm of the problems, conditions, and circumstances faced by small independent producers. As such, these two companies are particularly interesting in their approach to the challenges presented to independent film companies in such areas as finance, distribution, and exhibition in the midst of the initial conglomerate control of the film industry that began in the late fifties and continued through into the seventies where we see the beginnings of the blockbuster era. But beyond that, these two companies were unique in the innovations and the initiative they demonstrated in marketing and promotion and in their attempts to meet audience demands, particularly from the mid-fifties through to the mid-sixties. As entrepreneurs as well as film producers, these two companies recognized the opportunities that arose as a result of new

exhibition practices and changing audience demographics. Hammer Films and AIP were often first to recognize and exploit trends that would develop during the fifties and sixties and their initiatives often set them apart from other small independent producers. In fact, part of their success lay in their ability in the midst of marked changes in industry practices, to initially capitalize on the demands, tastes, and interests that arose from a changing audience demographic and from social change. Changes in the laws dealing with censorship in Britain and the gradual breakdown of the Motion Picture Production Code in the United States resulted in a broadening of the limits in representation of sexuality and violence, although film producers were still subject to the demands of the more conservative social groups and institutions in the area of film censorship. In Britain and the United States during the mid to late fifties, the teenage audience emerges as a distinct group — both as a social entity and as an economic market that could be targeted. As we will see, both Hammer Films and AIP were in the forefront of capturing the emerging teenage market.

The issues to be dealt with in this thesis are inseparable from Hammer's and AIP's efforts to weather periods of industrial recession and transition and from how these companies developed markets for their films. Central to this line of development is these companies' attempts to find a film cycle that would give them a distinct identity in the marketplace. In fact, their individual development of film cycles would — with varying degrees of success — demonstrate their particular approaches to production strategies and to distributing and exhibiting their films. A film cycle, often referred to as a genre cycle,

is where a studio or company creates its own series of films or has exclusive or “proprietary” rights to that cycle or series.¹ Companies try to gain a competitive advantage over the other companies by producing distinctive films or readily identifiable films in a particular genre or genres. As Rick Altman has pointed out no company has exclusive rights to a popular genre. Genres are shared property.

Film Cycles or genre cycles are a way of producing a series of films where the name of the company comes to be identified with the cycle. If a company has had a successful film, the question is how to build on that success. How do you cultivate and develop that audience and possibly turn your initial success into a cycle of films? How do you secure the name of the cycle and establish the key actors in your cycle in the public consciousness? The goal of a film cycle, of course, is to increase that audience through each successive film in the series until the cycle has run its course. In order to establish and maintain a film cycle, a company needs some combination of three things. First, you need exclusive, or proprietary rights, over a distinctive property. Ideally, you need the legal rights to fictional properties. In many cases, the name of the property will establish the name of the cycle. Second, companies can establish what is called “proprietary characters” and establish the legal rights to those characters. Again, in theory, a company is in a more secure position if it has legal title to fictional characters whose names are readily identifiable to the audience. Third, ideally you need to have actors or the stars identified with a film cycle under exclusive contract. Failing to hold the legal rights to either the property or to the name of the cycle can result, at worst, in

legal difficulties from those who believe they have some form of legal claim to the property and at best to imitation from competitors who recognize the market possibilities and begin to produce “knock-offs” of your cycle. Failing to have the lead actor or star under contract can lead to excessive salary demands once the cycle becomes successful or may result in that actor being lured away by the competition.

Hammer Films and AIP found their greatest success in establishing film cycles within the horror genre. This thesis will argue that their business acumen and their innovations in marketing, their recognition of audience trends, and their ability to address the changes in exhibition practices that arose from the increasing teenage audience brought them initial success. However, while often on or near the cutting edge in these areas, Hammer Films and AIP came close to, but never fully succeeded in surpassing the major Hollywood studios because they did not have proprietary rights to the cycles they initiated. As a consequence, the seeds of failure were sown, and the competition and imitation of their cycles engendered from the larger, more powerful studios undercut their early success. Despite initially manipulating the cycles to their advantage, both Hammer Films and AIP were unable to sustain that advantage and the cycles became the root of their eventual decline. Hammer fell into repetition and was unable to modify its vision of horror to match that of its aging audience. AIP did not trust its audience, tampered with its successful cycle and saw it end in failure. Neither production company was able to overcome the changes in the film industry during the seventies brought about by a new film phenomenon — the blockbuster.

Chapter One will trace the early history of Hammer Films and AIP before their respective film cycles and will establish their initial production strategies and distribution arrangements. Of particular interest in this brief overview is their attention to audience research, their recognition of the emerging teenage market, their attempts to identify films that would sell to this audience, the consequences of changes in film censorship in Britain, and the problems of competition as a result of other companies and the majors imitating their pre-cycle films.

Chapter Two develops and expands the initial chapter with particular emphasis on how a postwar trade dispute between Britain and the United States over import duties on films illustrates the fundamental problem of film distribution between these countries. The Chapter discusses how Hammer and AIP financed their films, how Hammer sought distribution in American markets, how AIP took advantage of new venues for film exhibition such as the drive-in theatre, and how both companies used the double bill to market their films.

Chapter Three looks at the film cycles developed by each company: the 'monster' cycle produced by Hammer and the 'Poe adaptations' cycle produced by AIP and the decisions behind their creation. The Chapter covers only those films in the core of each companies' cycle. For Hammer, those film include: *The Curse of Frankenstein* (Terence Fisher, 1957), *Dracula* (Terence Fisher, 1958) and *The Curse of the Werewolf* (Terence Fisher, 1960). The Poe adaptations include: *House of Usher* (Roger Corman, 1960), *The Pit and the Pendulum* (Roger Corman, 1961) and *Masque of the Red Death* (Roger

Corman, 1964).

Chapter Four follows the decline of the ‘monster’ cycle and the Poe adaptations. It outlines the path Hammer and AIP followed that led to failure as a result of their inability to cope with changes in the horror genre and the emerging blockbuster era.

Chapter Five looks at the critical response to the Hammer and AIP cycles in both film trade publications such as *Variety* and non-industry periodicals such as the *New York Times*. This Chapter also discusses the film making methods, namely the addition of colour and gore, employed by the cycles’ primary directors — the ‘monster’ cycle’s Terence Fisher and the Poe adaptations’ Roger Corman — which were used to set their films apart from contemporary horror producers.

Endnotes

1. Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999), 42, 59-61, 139-140.

Chapter One: The Early Years

This chapter will look at the early history of Hammer Films and American International Pictures. Tracing the beginnings of the companies includes discussing how they were established, their distribution systems, their attempt to capture the emerging teenage market, and their business acumen and production strategies in the first years compared to the strategies in place after their respective cycles had begun. First, however, it is necessary to establish where both companies stood before the cycles had started: both were facing financial woes.

American International Pictures and Hammer Films flourished at a time when Hollywood's and Britain's major studios were on the decline in societies increasingly mesmerized by television. To accurately detail this landscape, a discussion of the social factors operating during American International Picture's and Hammer Films' early work is necessary. This discussion must address the era's social context in order to underscore the historical threads which speak to the companies' individual success. Paramount in this look at social factors is the emergence of the teenager as a social group, and perhaps, more importantly, the exploitation of this new market by those film studios willing to take a chance on these first-time consumers. Understanding the age demographic drawn to Hammer and AIP films adds insight into the companies' advertising tactics to be discussed at length in a later chapter.

Hammer Films was not a product of its successful horror cycle. Enrique Carreras established a chain of cinemas in and around London in 1913 which showed low budget

films and re-issues. Nicknamed the “Blue Halls” because of their interior décor, the cinemas flourished. To capitalize on his success, Carreras formed Exclusive Films in 1935 with his partner, sometime-actor and amateur variety show promoter, Will Hinds. Exclusive Films would be the distribution outlet for Carreras’ cinemas bypassing the middleman, providing immediate and more substantial profits. In 1947, Exclusive reorganized to move into production. Christened Hammer Films, after Hinds’ stage surname, the production company was managed by Carreras’ son, James, who joined Exclusive in 1949.¹

The company moved into production at a time when the British film industry was mired in recession, the seriousness of which was underscored by the two thousand studio technicians who were let go between September 1948 and March 1949. Hammer was the only studio to weather the difficult postwar years without running a large deficit by slashing costs and dealing with films as solely commercial ventures which would not be produced unless a profit could be guaranteed. James Carreras was determined to work in domestic B features, an area in which future profits could be clearly measured. He also insisted on tight financial controls in Hammer’s dealings with the National Film Finance Corporation. At this time, the only obstacle to Hammer’s continued survival was the dilemma of how to decrease production costs without producing films of questionable quality.²

A large percentage of the monies spent was on the rental of studio space. Carreras looked into buying a house, and found that the cost of a home was comparable to the prices asked by studios for rent. There were advantages for Hammer in purchasing

a home. With the proper story situations, the house could provide sets as well as the surrounding environs for exteriors. Having a country house near London meant the crew could return home at night. Hammer would not be responsible for personnel transportation or for their accommodation. Once implemented, the cost-cutting measures were a success. The purchase of Dial Close was Hammer's first 'home' studio. Four films were produced at Dial Close. The first, *Dr. Morelle: The Case of the Missing Heiress* (Godfrey Grayson, 1949), had a budget of £15, 000 and the second, *A Case for PC 49* (Francis Searle, 1950) was budgeted at £12, 000 much lower than the £75, 000 spent on *Blue Scar* (Jillie Craigie, 1950) by Outlook Films in the same year. When the interiors at Dial Close had been shot from every possible angle, Hammer relocated three more times until Carreras decided it would be prudent to purchase a building, transform it into a studio and settle down. To this end, Down Place, a country house, became Bray Studios and would be Hammer Films' main residence for seventeen years.³

Hammer did not find solid success until the late forties when its adaptations of radio programmes such as *Dick Barton – Special Agent* (Alfred Goulding, 1948) and *The Adventures of PC 49* (Godfrey Grayson, 1949) were guaranteed to find audiences and thus, turn a profit. From the beginning, Hammer played to audience expectations. Producing films based on already popular stories, whether the aforementioned radio programmes or myths and legends such as Robin Hood, ensured viewership. If characters were in vogue, Hammer had films on them in production. This trend in film making was in line with James Carreras' policy of producing films for a market that would continuously accept them and provide dividends for Hammer. Subject matter,

however redundant, was not a consideration unless profit could not be guaranteed.⁴

Amazingly, these years of turmoil were a time of growth for Hammer. Under the tutelage of Enrique Carreras and Will Hinds, Hammer built its reputation in the film industry. However, it was the skill of James Carreras as a salesman that put Hammer in its enviable position. Allen Eyles et al note that “had Hammer Films not inherited the services of Sir James Carreras, it would never have grown.”⁵ Carreras wanted access to the American market. Entering deals with American production companies afforded Hammer this opportunity. Hammer’s relationship with Lippert Pictures proved to be the most integral to the studio crossing the Atlantic. In 1951, the studio inked a deal with Robert Lippert. Lippert had owned a chain of sixty theatres in southern Oregon and California before he went into distribution in 1946 with partner John J. Jones. The two formed Screen Guild Pictures which evolved into Lippert Pictures. Eventually, Lippert moved into producing low budget films for release by Twentieth Century Fox. The deal with Hammer made it one of the first British studios to collaborate directly in productions with an American studio, and gave James Carreras a portal to his desired American market. The contract with Lippert came to an end in 1955 when Fox concluded that the financial advantages of the deal had faded. Hammer found itself in dire need of a pick up. The British film industry was again flagging.⁶

AIP’s development followed lines similar to Hammer. Profit was paramount; quality secondary. Jim Nicholson, a sales manager for Realart, a company that leased Universal’s film library and had theatrical rights to all its pre-1951 films, was interested in getting into distribution because he did not have the funds to produce films. At a time

when B studios such as Republic and Monogram were floundering, Nicholson and his partner, lawyer Samuel Z. Arkoff, started the American Releasing Company in 1954, renamed American International Pictures in 1956. With Nicholson as president and Arkoff as vice-president, AIP was a distributor for independently produced films which were sold to the company to be distributed or for films financed and then distributed by AIP. The search for films to distribute brought AIP into contact with Roger Corman, a producer in need of a distributor.⁷

In 1954, Roger Corman was looking for a distributor for *The Monster from the Ocean Floor* (Wyott Ordnung, 1954). He approached Jim Nicholson in the hopes of making a deal. Nicholson requested a thirty day option on the film which would allow him to show it to subdistributors he had made contacts with when at Realart. AIP's intention was to sell Corman's film as the hook for a three picture package. The film would only be available to those subdistributors willing to put up the money for the other pictures, thereby giving AIP advanced funds for two other pictures. Corman declined, wanting cash guaranteed and upfront. The producer turned to his brother Gene, an agent, who set up a deal for Corman at Lippert Pictures. Lippert bought the film, now titled *It Stalked the Ocean Floor*, and it turned a profit — although six months passed before Corman received payment. Corman knew that to make a profit on ultra-low budget films he would have to make at least five to six films a year. The return from the Lippert deal was only enough to finance one other picture in 1954. Upon completing his next film, *The Fast and Furious* (Edwards Sampson and John Ireland, 1954), Corman returned to AIP. Nicholson covered the film's \$66,000 budget by signing up states' rights with

independent distributors across the country and by setting up advances for two more films AIP hoped Corman would produce for them. *The Fast and the Furious* was the first movie to be distributed through American International Pictures. Roger Corman became AIP's sole provider of pictures when the company first started, making ten to twelve films per year. AIP and Corman became integrally linked, the success of one became the success of the other for the next fourteen years.⁸

Low budget semi-sensational features existed well before AIP was established. Growing alongside the major studios, early independent distributors supplied second features to the majors' theatre chains. The system had changed little since its inception and by the early fifties had become stagnant. To get started, independents began by employing independent subdistributors called "state righters."⁹ Working on commission, "state righters" coordinated distribution to their regional cinemas and dealt with several independent distributors at once. Ensuring their features received adequate attention from the subdistributor, independents paid subdistributors to be exclusive agents. AIP was able to develop a network of state righters. Discussing strategy in *Kings of the Bs* with Linda May Strawn, Samuel Arkoff spoke of the process: "The first couple of years we made only four or five pictures a year. So our franchise holders handled other pictures too. Then, gradually, they became more or less exclusive AIP distributors. They had to ask us and get our consent to take on some other producer's pictures. Finally we took them over."¹⁰ AIP was virtually alone in the independent distribution business, as most of the independents were bankrupt or swallowed by the majors. AIP avoided a similar fate by addressing the untapped market ignored by the majors and television:

teenagers.¹¹

The British film establishment mirrored the mainstream American film industry in shunning the emerging teen audience. This attitude had roots in the British societal reaction to this new age demographic. On the eve of the Second World War the idea of youth, those between thirteen and twenty, being grouped as a distinct social category, let alone a market vigorously sought after, was non-existent in British culture. The 'teenager' did not exist. Young adults were exactly that: the self-image of the adolescent should mirror that of the adult world. With the war's end came a tremendous boost in global birth rates. Britain saw its highest rate since 1880. By 1959 there were four million people between the ages of thirteen and twenty-five. This age group was termed 'teenagers'. Unlike the generations before them, increasing numbers of teens had money and the wherewithal to spend it according to their whims, relatively free from familial constraints and job responsibilities. The spending power of this segment became so intense that in 1958, \$900 million in purchases was attributed to teenage consumers.¹²

Seeing the limitless opportunities if one could tap into the teen market, advertisers sought to understand the phenomenon. The London Press Exchange, a large advertising agency, commissioned a market survey. Research resulted in a 1959 booklet, *The Teenage Consumer* compiled by Mark Abrams. Abrams found that "teenage spending is conditioned by working class taste and values. The aesthetic of the teenage market is essentially a working class aesthetic."¹³ The majority of teenage spending coming from the working class; middle class teens did not have the same amount of income to spend on consumer goods because they were still in school and the careers they entered had

meager starting salaries. However, regardless of the origin of the funds, conspicuous consumption for teens equaled autonomy and freedom from the stifling adult world.¹⁴

In the United States, it appeared as though no one had really given much thought to the growing number of teenagers until the mid-fifties when they were impossible to ignore. Those youth coming of age after the Second World War were the first generation of true American teens. Living in relative middle-class luxury (compared to the standard their parents grew up in and to the world at large), and enjoying a re-organized public education system with access for all, American teens —through their sheer numbers, profusion of capital, and self-awareness — were a real social force.¹⁵

As in Britain, cultural analysts were not amused by the new group, referring to them as “savage hordes.”¹⁶ However, economically, they were seen as a boon. *Newsweek* described them as “the dreamy teenage market” and *Sales Management* hailed the thirteen-to-nineteen-year old demographic as “the seven golden years”.¹⁷ In 1959, *Life* reported what many in the business community were already well aware of, that the teenager was a major consumer. Adding to their power was the fact that in 1959 alone, teens, individually and through their parents, had spent ten billion dollars, a billion more than General Motors’ total sales. While teenagers were big spenders, a study for the American Bureau of Research noted that the money spent was in many cases doled out arbitrarily, meaning the teen market was open to persuasion.¹⁸ Initially, however, Hollywood did not take note.

The explosion in the number of teens would have deep repercussions for film industries in Britain and the U. S., both of which were already in economic distress. In

Britain, admissions to theatres dropped significantly, down sixty-six percent between 1948 and 1960. This was matched by the closing of many cinemas, thirty-four percent within the same twelve year period. The place of film in the social life of Britons was fluctuating with the advent of the television age. This shift was echoed in the changing demographic of the movie-going audience. In 1951, sixteen-to-twenty-four year olds attended the cinema three times for every one visit by someone over twenty-five. As Stuart Laing notes in *Representations of Working-Class Life, 1957-1964*, “Forty-four percent of sixteen-to-twenty-four year olds still went to the movies once a week; twenty-four percent at least once a month.”¹⁹ The days of entertainment designed specifically for family audiences were waning, especially with regard to audience numbers, film distribution, and exhibition practices in the cinemas remaining in operation.

Hollywood was not quick to react to the new teen audience because it was not prepared to do so. The postwar film audience boasted a large percentage of teens and certain sectors of the film industry had acknowledged their presence. While cheap serials, B westerns and science fiction shorts were made with the youth market in mind, there was no industry-wide consensus on how much attention this demographic would receive. In fact, it was not until the mid-fifties that the major studios were even aware of who their audience was. Statistical information was deemed to be useful only in recording daily box-office takes. This data could not be read in such a way as to elicit the age range of movie goers. In his 1957 article, “Who Goes to the Movies ... and Who Doesn’t,” *Motion Picture Herald* editor, Martin Quigley Jr., noted that the question of age was irrelevant during the “good old days” because the answer to the question of who

went to the movies was clear — “everyone” did.²⁰

However, this was no longer the case and the American film industry had been alerted to the ‘age’ dilemma as early as 1947. In his study “Audience Research in the Movie Field,” communication theorist Paul F. Lazarsfeld presented quantitative data showing how age affected movie attendance. Lazarsfeld found that increased age equaled a decline in movie attendance and, more importantly, that the adage of the young learning from the old was reversed when it came to film going. At this time, Hollywood was at the peak of its prestige as a business and the thought that its future rested on those under twenty-five was not well received. In fact, Lazarsfeld’s research appears to have been ignored.²¹

By 1956, exhibitors and producers were desperate to make pictures that would appeal to a teenage audience. In a survey done for the *Motion Picture Herald’s* Institute of Industrial Opinion, however, distributors ranked the need for youth pictures fifth, compared to being designated first in importance by exhibitors and producers.²² Writing in *Variety*, Hy Hollinger voiced similar sentiments when he made it clear that the demand for teenage films was growing. The call was coming from small town as well as big city cinema owners. Hollinger stated that “the cry to assuage [the] teenage market is so great that some observers are already expressing the fear that the only market for mature films will be the art house.”²³ Despite the dire predictions, top independent producer Sam Goldwyn still held to the opinion that he could continue “making pictures a man can take his whole family to see.”²⁴ This anachronistic statement encapsulated the feelings of those major studios unwilling to change with both the times and the audience.²⁵

There was a move to deal with the turmoil. An attempt to capitalize on this state of flux came from a Hollywood desperate to win back the audience it had lost to television. Audiences might be enticed into theatres with spectacle and controversy, but the confidence in the market and the consistency of constant production schedules, once the cornerstones of classic Hollywood, disappeared in the face of television, the breakdown of the studio system, and the new demographics. Therefore, the fifties became a time of the 'gimmick' with studios promising the viewer new cinematic experiences through such innovations as 3-D and Cinemascope, and an increased explicitness on a broader range of subjects.²⁶

Taking the new teen market well in its stride, AIP had it under their control by the late fifties. Ed Naha believes the company helped to create the teen audience in the United States. Being parents themselves, Nicholson and Arkoff saw their children as targets for AIP productions. Movies were escapes, hang outs and places to take dates far from the prying eyes of adults. AIP went after the teen audience almost by necessity because with teen genre films, the title was the main draw and AIP did not have the funds to lure stars to their productions. Therefore, the traditionally sought-after audience, adults, was beyond their reach. To gauge the likes of the teen audience, Arkoff would screen pre-distributed AIP films for his children's friends; from the reaction received, he would determine which films would sell.²⁷ Arkoff stated his reason for listening to teens in *Filmmakers Newsletter*: "No matter how good I think I am, after a certain age you don't react the same."²⁸

As the audience changed, the reins of censorship were loosened to a certain

degree, giving those film companies willing to flaunt the rules a distinct marketing edge. Acknowledging the decline in family-oriented entertainment, the British censor introduced the 'X' certificate in 1951 to indicate stronger than usual content of sex, violence and/ or horror. Only those over the age of sixteen could be admitted legally to 'X' certified films, an age restriction which remained until 1970 when it was raised to the age of eighteen. The fifties saw a more relaxed censorship board, though it was in no way as liberal-minded as it would be in the next decade; the new 'X' rating showed that it was not as restrictive as its predecessor in the thirties and during the Second World War. The most important changes in the censorship laws were inaugurated in the late fifties as an answer to events occurring early in the decade. British society between 1956 and 1958 was in a serious state of flux. Alexander Walker points out several challenges which seem to culminate in less stringent censorship controls: the Suez Crisis increased political disillusionment and an increasing mistrust of authority; advertisements saturated television screens causing a rise in consumer spending; opportunities for social mobility were afforded to the working class through government-funded educational programmes; and the release of the Wolfenden Report on homosexuality and prostitution stimulated public discussion of sexual matters.²⁹ These challenges were augmented by the teenage push for autonomy. British film now found its primary audience in the younger generation, a generation expecting a new explicitness in what could be displayed on screen. This was the first time in British film history that an avenue had been opened in terms of market potential paralleled by a relaxing of the standards by the censor board.³⁰

In the first years after its introduction, the 'X' Certificate was rarely used and

generally meant disaster at the box office for those films classified 'X'. This situation changed and by 1961 the number of 'X' Certificate films was on the rise according to John Trevelyan, secretary for the British Board of Film Censors. Trevelyan cited the English town of Warwick as an example of the methods theatre owners employed to get around the censor. Although all 'X' films were banned in Warwick, stealthy cinema owners moved their theatres just beyond the town boundary so that these censored films could be shown. The profits were immediate.³¹ Glasgow's senior magistrate, Bailie William Brown concurred with Trevelyan, believing this increase in 'X' films was due to the older citizens preferring to watch television than go to the pictures. Though cinemas were flouting the law and could be charged for admitting children under sixteen, Brown noted that producers had changed the type of film they were making in order to appeal to the teen market which he felt was, in the end, a much more commercial venture for the producers and therefore, the cinema owners.³²

Hammer Films was one of the first studios to use the 'X' Certificate to its advantage. The void left by relaxed censorship standards could easily be filled with horror films — a gap that Hammer happily stepped in to satisfy. By the mid-fifties, Hammer had hit a slump, as had many of the still surviving independent British studios. Production at Bray essentially ceased in 1955, with the studio putting out shorts and one B feature, *Women Without Men* (Elmo Williams, 1956). The closing of a large number of Britain's independent theatres made the market for second features, which had been Hammer's niche, much more restricted. The studio's survival hung on the box office receipts from the films it had produced, but not yet released, in 1954. One of these films

was *The Quatermass Xperiment*, directed by Val Guest. Adapted from an extremely popular 1953 British television series, *The Quatermass Experiment*, the film's title was changed to *Xperiment* to point up the British censor's adults only 'X' Certificate.³³

According to Jonathan Coe, *The Quatermass Xperiment* emphasizes Hammer's mindset in 1955. With the studio already using a proven formula in making adaptations from radio programmes and legends, none of the crew had to be brought up to speed in how *Quatermass* would be produced. This film embodies James Carreras' and Anthony Hinds' understanding of which subjects drew on the country's mood and taste for subjects that were not being addressed by other British film makers. The film opened on 26 August, 1955 to coincide with the publicity campaign surrounding the BBC's sequel to *The Quatermass Experiment*, *Quatermass II*, to be broadcast in October. In addition, Hammer's film was practically ensured an audience following Hollywood's release of *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (Jack Arnold, 1954), *Godzilla* (Terry Morse, 1954) and *Them!* (Gordon Douglas, 1954) which focused attention on science fiction films. This trend was set to continue with the distribution of *This Island Earth* (Joseph Newman, 1955) in the summer of 1955. Hammer was on track with what was selling in the international market.³⁴

The *Quatermass Xperiment* was a box office hit in Britain and the United States. United Artists acquired the film's American rights and distributed it under the title *The Creeping Unknown*. The film's success led Carreras to undertake his own type of market research; he surveyed theatre managers on what had made the film such a hit, asking whether it was the science fiction or the horror elements. The response was

overwhelmingly that *Quatermass*'s moments of horror (the main character was half-man, half-monster) were what caught the audiences' attention. With this information, Carreras set about producing the film's sequel, *X – The Unknown* (Leslie Norman, 1956). *X* did not prove to be as profitable as its predecessor and gave Hammer the impression that the science fiction craze was dying. Though the studio continued the *Quatermass* series with *Quatermass II* (Val Guest, 1957), it began to look for a project that would be pure horror.³⁵

Hammer's prominence apparent in its pre-horror days as a studio built on shrewd business sense helped to make the switch to horror quite fluid. The studio established itself as a producer of films dealing with subjects already recognizable to viewers through a different medium such as Nigel Kneale's television series, *The Quatermass Experiment*. Carreras' survey of theatre managers underscores how in tune Hammer was with market demands rather than flitting from one project to the next based solely on family entertainment. Not being firmly committed to one type of subject permitted Hammer to make quick adjustments when new trends emerged. When horror proved itself to be the hinge of *Quatermass*' success, Hammer was able to reorganize the shooting schedule to exploit its popularity. As of 1951, all production was being done at Bray. Everything and everyone was in one place. So when the call came to shift into horror, there was no time lost or substantial rearrangements made in the studio's infrastructure to accommodate the move.

Hammer did not share in the opinion of most British film makers that Hollywood was a threat, economically and culturally, to the domestic industry. Carreras worked

diligently to secure long-term American financing for Hammer's productions. In doing this, Carreras foresaw the influx of American money into British film in the sixties; and this pro-Hollywood position would later help the studio to gain access to international distribution systems. As Carreras noted in an interview with Colin Heard in *Films and Filming* (1969, p. 18), "If you're going to spend x on a film and your only market is your own and perhaps Australia and South Africa, we think it's better to make subjects that every country will buy."³⁶ With all these strategies in place, Hammer was able to step into the breach created by the significant change in British audiences, censorship, and exhibition practices.³⁷

AIP was also thriving in the mid-fifties as they filled the void opened by the majors' decline. AIP followed the success of *The Fast and the Furious* with two westerns, *Five Guns West* (Roger Corman, 1955) and *Apache Woman* (Roger Corman, 1955), which also proved to be quite popular. The company produced a string of westerns in 1955 and 1956, among which were *Flesh and the Spur* (Edward L. Cahn, 1956) and *Gunslinger* (Roger Corman, 1956). Westerns provided endless possibilities for action and violence, and could still draw an audience. Most importantly, the films could be made cheaply at Southern California locations.³⁸

Westerns wore out their welcome, however, and AIP searched for other film-worthy subjects. Taking a cue from B level competitor Sam Katzman, AIP put out a series of rock 'n' roll pictures. Though marketed as adult films, M-G-M's *Blackboard Jungle* (Richard Brooks, 1955) and Warner Bros.' *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955) found a youth audience. The films produced controversy and profits for their

respective studios. Katzman saw the possibility of exploiting the popularity of rebellious youth. Taking off from the background music in *Blackboard Jungle*, namely Bill Haley and the Comets' song, "Rock Around the Clock", Katzman produced *Rock Around the Clock* (Fred F. Sears, 1956) for Columbia. The film grossed four million dollars. Not wanting to be left out of a money-making venture, AIP quickly followed Katzman's lead with *Shake, Rattle and Rock* (Edward L. Cahn, 1956) and *Rock All Night* (Roger Corman, 1957). AIP also capitalized on *Rebel Without a Cause* with films featuring rebellious teens such as *High School Hellcats* (Edward Bernds, 1957) and *Reform School Girl* (Edward Bernds, 1957).³⁹

Continuing to look back to the majors for trends in A-features that could draw audiences to second features, AIP titled one of their pictures *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (Gene Fowler, Jr., 1957) as a take on titles such as *I Was a Communist for the FBI* (Gordon Douglas, 1951). AIP's film was released in the summer of 1957 and proved to be one of the company's biggest hit, making over two million dollars by the end of the year — a huge accomplishment given that the film was made in seven days for \$82,000.⁴⁰

By the late fifties, however, AIP fell into financial difficulties which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. As with Hammer, AIP films had not brought in the expected returns which left AIP in dire need of a new draw. The summer of 1958 had not brought in the revenue that had been anticipated in order to finance films throughout 1959. Other B level studios caught on to AIP's strategy and began to churn out 'AIP-knockoffs'. Even the majors had become imitators. With higher budgets and

aggressive marketing tactics, the big studios could push their exploitation films into more theatres where their returns were ensured. The market was flooded. Exhibitors were having a difficult time paying distributors, and AIP was no exception. AIP was on the verge of going under.⁴¹

By the late fifties, AIP and Hammer were in dire need of a new direction which would ensure them success in the new decade. Having carved a place for themselves in the teenage market, the film companies needed a way to maintain that niche. The development of their respective film cycles would solve that dilemma — for a time.

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Chapter Two: Financing and Distribution

This chapter will extend the discussion of Hammer Films and American International Pictures in the context of the postwar years through to the sixties amidst the breakdown of vertical integration in the American film industry. The major studios' loss of their once complete control over all aspects of film making from financing to exhibition, made it possible for Hammer and AIP to step into the void. It will be shown that Hammer and AIP were willing to take risks during this unstable time in the British and American film industries. By seeing the advantages in financing their films individually and taking advantage of new venues for film viewing, namely drive-ins, plus going after the teenage market — a burgeoning market largely ignored by the majors — these two companies were able to profit while the major studios were trying to regain their footing in the face of divestiture.

In the years before and after the Second World War, financing for Hammer involved dealing with a British film industry coping with the dominance of Hollywood, new government legislation to aid floundering domestic production, and the ongoing search for access to the American market. By the late forties, Hammer was an active participant in the British film industry and was therefore, affected by the British government's attempts at protecting national film interests. Hoping to stem the surge of British money into American film coffers, the government levied a seventy-five percent import tax on U. S. films in 1947. In return, a punitive export ban was placed on British films trying to find American audiences. This legislative loggerhead could not have

come at a worse time for the British film industry. A particularly harsh winter resulted in a scarcity of fuel which meant that domestic production had been reduced. British theatres were clamoring for films. Hammer took advantage of the situation and began producing low-budget second features initiated 'in-house'. Though the tax was repealed in March 1948, and replaced by the Anglo-American Agreement, theatres were still desperate for domestic second features. Having already begun the Dick Barton series with *Dick Barton – Special Agent* in 1948, James Carreras decided to supply the demand with more Barton films; *Dick Barton Strikes Back* (Godfrey Grayson, 1949) and *Dick Barton at Bay* (Godfrey Grayson, 1950) quickly followed *Special Agent's* success. This tactic of producing film after film of the same kind would become a mainstay in Carreras' business strategy, to Hammer's eventual detriment.¹

While Hammer responded to the instability in British film production, the studio also availed itself of the government's subsidy programmes for domestic production companies. In making a friend of James Lawrie, head of the new National Film Finance Company, Carreras was able to ensure funding for Hammer films. The first film to be backed completely by NFFC funds was *Dr. Morelle: The Case of the Missing Heiress* (Godfrey Grayson, 1949) with a loan of £14, 169. To keep Hammer's relationship with the NFFC on a sound footing, Carreras repaid the *Dr. Morelle* loan back quickly in full, and it became a strict policy to pay back all loans the same way to ensure future applications for funds would be looked upon kindly.²

Staying viable in unstable times meant tight controls on Hammer's production costs. Staff salaries were kept at minimum levels and those who would have been top

wage earners at other studios, namely directors and lead actors, deferred part of their salaries in exchange for a five percent profit participation bonus. Even Michael Carreras and Anthony Hinds, relatives of Hammer's founders, received yearly salaries although a larger amount was recorded on the budget as payment for their involvement in a film. The difference between the two men's salary and their 'payment' was put into Hammer's general account. The importance of maintaining a low-budget for each film meant that the studio survived from picture to picture without cutting production. James Carreras has been criticized for not sufficiently acknowledging those who contributed to Hammer's success and for not thinking beyond the film presently in production. Michael Carreras acknowledged that his father "wasn't the best deal maker."³ James Carreras' ability to make deals, however flawed, would nevertheless move Hammer forward in its search for an American outlet.

Though the British government had taken steps to help the domestic film industry, the situation was still dire. By the early fifties, Britain had close to five thousand film theatres. However, out of the country's thirty studios, only thirteen were actually producing films and the pool of possible technicians had fallen from eight thousand to five thousand. Under the Eady Plan, the government planned to take a percentage of ticket sales to further subsidize domestic film making. Carreras believed that Britain's film industry had "fallen on its face" in the years following the war and that he would ensure that Hammer did not meet the same end as so many of its contemporaries.⁴

Using the continuing discord between Britain and the U. S. stemming from

Britain's film quota system to his benefit, Carreras sought an American partner for co-productions and thus, an outlet for Hammer films to be screened as American second features. Hammer's first affiliation was with Alexander Paal, who had connections with United Artists through his acquaintance with *The Private Life of Henry the VIII's* (1933) director, Alexander Korda. This resulted in 1951's *Cloudburst* (Francis Searle, 1951). Hammer's deal with Paal was short-lived and was succeeded by a deal with Sol Lesser, who was backed by RKO.

As noted in the previous chapter, the most important deal was made with Robert Lippert of Lippert Pictures. He became Hammer's source for American films, largely cheap action flicks such as *FBI Girl* (William Berke, 1951) and *Savage Drums* (William Berke, 1951), through his distribution arm, Screen Guild Pictures. Through Lippert, Hammer gained access to Twentieth Century Fox. Lippert had a deal with Fox to provide them with low budget second features. Hammer filled this need. Lippert provided American actors and scripts, which would make the subsequent Hammer films compatible with an American audiences' tastes in return for the U. S. distribution rights.⁵ A series of low budget thrillers were produced with flagging Hollywood stars such as Paul Henreid and Lloyd Bridges in lead roles; the first was *The Last Page* (Terence Fisher, 1952). Fourteen more features followed over the next four years. The films were guaranteed distribution in the United States through Fox's networks. Also, as part of the deal, Hammer received distribution rights to Lippert-produced movies such as *Rocketship XM* (Kurt Neumann, 1950), *Lost Continent* (Sam Newfield, 1951) and *Robot Monster* (Phil Tucker, 1953).

The contract with Lippert ended in 1954 after *Murder by Proxy* (*Blackout*, Terence Fisher, 1954). Fox concluded the deal was no longer worthwhile financially. However, having access to the American market through Lippert had proved to be very fortuitous for Hammer, allowing the studio to set up distribution networks with other companies. The success of *The Quatermass Xperiment* and Hammer's decision to turn to horror garnered attention from the majors. Executives from Warner Bros. were so impressed with a print of *The Curse of Frankenstein* (Terence Fisher, 1957) that a copy was sent the same day to Jack Warner in Hollywood. Warner Bros. decided to handle United States distribution for the film, and its huge box office showing in both Britain and the U. S. placed Hammer firmly in the international market. In addition to the Warner Bros.' arrangement, *Dracula* (*Horror of Dracula*, Terence Fisher, 1958) was to be made in conjunction with Universal; Columbia wanted three films a year from Hammer, later extended in 1959 to twenty-five over five years, and similar deals were signed with prominent film companies such as United Artists. This influx of American funds had an effect on the subject matter of Hammer's films. Comedies aimed at the domestic market such as *I Only Arsked* (Montgomery Tully, 1958), based on the British television series, *The Army Game*, were abandoned for more internationally-friendly fare.⁶

Doing business with Hammer at this time had clear advantages for American film companies. Several factors encouraged the majors to make arrangements with independent studios such as Hammer: first, with the studio system in the throes of disintegration, independent production was on the rise; second, moving production to

Europe became desirable because foreign tax laws could be quite fluid in their interpretation; third, American film production had been beset by rising union troubles; and fourth, the majors were hit by the most deleterious financial returns in Hollywood history that continued from the late fifties into the sixties. Columbia's vice-president of publicity and advertising, Paul Lazarus discussed the problem facing Hollywood and the allure of having a contract with Hammer: "Runaway production was the phrase that was being used in Hollywood. That's when companies like Hammer, who had proven track records, suddenly became desirable. Then if you put together experience in production, and a studio, and a source of continuing production — that's what we were looking for."⁷ Hammer's American distribution outlets were cemented and proved successful, so much so that Carreras prepared the staff at Bray studios to step up the pace of production and make the facilities ready for both film and television projects. Aiming for the highest possible overseas returns, while keeping production costs low, allowed Carreras to increase Hammer's international profits from forty-seven percent of the studio's earnings in 1965 to approximately eighty-two percent by 1967. In 1968, Hammer received the Queen's Award for Industry.⁸

As Hammer was making in-roads in the international market, AIP was making a name for itself as a purveyor of low budget exploitation pictures. Despite early financial struggles, AIP was able to capture the new teenage market. And because of difficulties accessing traditional exhibition venues, AIP was one of the first film companies to acknowledge how lucrative drive-ins could be. AIP's success was solid until imitators forced the company to change its strategy.

In the beginning, every film for AIP was a financial gamble and funding for each was scraped together from several sources. Arkoff and Nicholson put three thousand dollars of their own to start the distribution company, but this was not enough to fund a film. The two set up a system of deferments which would allow them to finance pictures. American International's staff took \$25, 000 in salary deferments. Subdistributors were able to advance \$35, 000. The film lab was approached and agreed to forward \$25, 000, plus deferred the cost of the lab work. Foreign distributors kicked in \$10, 000 in advances. AIP attracted private investors who put up cash with the guarantee of a percentage of the profits and film parts for friends and relatives. Arkoff made light of his private investors when he noted, "Of course, there were always Texans ... There were many enthusiastic local people with no picture business sense."⁹ Approximately one hundred films were made using this deferment system. It was used until films could be financed wholly from the profits of other AIP pictures.¹⁰

AIP's success in making low budget films was linked to the company's relationship with their staple product supplier, Roger Corman. AIP and Corman started in the film business at the same time. Corman's ultra-low budget pictures were easily worked into AIP's deferment system of payment. After an unpleasant experience with Lippert Pictures and *It Stalked the Ocean Floor*, Corman took his next film, *The Fast and Furious* (1954) to Columbia, Allied Artists and Republic, who offered to purchase the film, but were unable to ensure him the kind of money that would help him make pictures at a faster rate. Though Corman had rejected Nicholson's package deal involving his *It Stalked the Ocean Floor*, the producer returned to AIP to distribute *The Fast and*

Furious.¹¹

The first film Corman made specifically for AIP was *Five Guns West* (1955) which was also his directorial debut. The film was brought in on time, but slightly over budget. The deal agreed upon between the director and AIP was that when a film was delivered, Corman would receive a \$50,000 negative pick-up plus a \$15,000 advance on foreign sales. With this as an incentive to make cheap pictures, Corman worked to bring in films under \$65,000 to insure some sort of profit, however small. Arkoff kept a tight reign on AIP's spending, making sure every penny was accounted for. Not owning any production facilities saved the company countless dollars; location shooting and renting studio space as needed were the preferred method of film making.

AIP's success in the late fifties caught the attention of the majors. Their subsequent attempts at copying AIP fell flat for several reasons, one being stifling overhead costs which negated the very essence of making second features — low budgets.¹² Speaking years later, Arkoff discussed AIP's cost efficiency: "We are realistic and practical. We are cost conscious, but we are not penny pinchers. We spend where spending will increase revenue ... We have had profits every year of our existence."¹³ In the beginning, Corman had no real complaints working with American International Pictures. He said, "they [AIP] were an honest company. They always paid off their participants. Sometimes there was a little footdragging but no real problems."¹⁴

Corman made pictures and brought them to AIP to be distributed. Raising the money to make films often proved difficult for Corman. The \$50,000 required to make a film under his deal with AIP came from several parties. Franchise holders, foreign sales

and film labs put up the bulk of the funds needed, with the rest being deferred. By doing this, Corman was able to make sixteen features by the end of 1957. Corman's productions were the cheapest of the cheap. The budgets for these films were between \$18,000 and \$70,000. Profits may not have been substantial, but rarely did a Corman picture lose money. The director-producer stood as an example of the 'small-is-good' school of film making at a time when the major studios were reeling from indulging in colossal productions. It is important to note that Corman was not formally a member of the Nicholson-Arkoff partnership. Most of Corman's first films were for AIP, but he also had deals with Allied Artists, United Artists and Fox. Corman was an independent film maker. His contract with AIP was on a film-by-film basis. Though he was the company's primary supplier and was the early Poe adaptations' sole director, Roger Corman was not an 'AIP director'.¹⁵

In the mid-fifties, all AIP features were booked as second features which meant that the company received only a nominal flat rental fee, from one hundred to three hundred dollars per film. It did not matter what the theatres took in as profit, the rental fees for AIP films were not increased. At this time, AIP was enjoying success with a series of westerns. The films were popular, but AIP incurred losses. These losses took years to recover because the pictures were second features while the first feature got a percentage from ticket sales. Ever on the verge of bankruptcy, in part due to AIP's deferment method of film making, the company needed a percentage of ticket sales to stay viable. Arkoff and Nicholson decided to sell two second features on one bill for a

single percentage price, the same amount exhibitors were charged by the majors for one feature. This package deal was called the double bill.¹⁶

Double bills were not new to the film industry. The majors had released films in twos for years; however, their approach was to screen a higher budget 'A' feature at the top of the bill and to pair it with a second shorter, lower budgeted 'B' film. These studio pairings were usually from different genres and Arkoff believed that the studios thought varying the films' subjects would attract a wider range of movie goers.¹⁷ AIP's eyes were on the teen audience and Arkoff and Nicholson knew that catering to them would be a boon to the company. AIP was not the only independent studio to use the double bill to draw in teens, but it did alter the formula used by many of them. Generally, double bills featuring teen-orientated pictures had two films with comparable budgets and running times, but again were from different genres. A survey commissioned by the *Motion Picture Herald* in 1956 determined that teenagers preferred double bills; therefore, if an exhibitor was to book two 'teen' films from different genres, it could be assumed that the bill would reach a wider teen audience, that of both boys and girls.¹⁸ By linking pictures that would appeal to boys with films attractive to girls, the theatres played to the 'youth-on-a-date' market. Boys would sit through 'girly' films knowing that the next feature would appeal to them and vice versa. AIP put out several double bills with this in mind such as *Sorority Girl* (Roger Corman, 1957)/ *Motorcycle Gang* (Edward L. Cahn, 1957); however, taking a cue from Columbia and Universal's early genre packages, AIP felt the market would be better exploited by pairing two films with the same subject matter. Having similar films on the bill allowed for greater marketing

opportunities, meaning an evening at the movies could be sold as “a night of science fiction” or “a night of fast cars.”¹⁹

The first film made to be part of a double bill package was *The Day the World Ended* (Roger Corman, 1956). It was made to be profitable and its construction followed the pattern of the majority of AIP's films. Nicholson devised a title and drew up art for the ad campaign. This would be shown to exhibitors who accepted the film on the basis of its title and poster. To put it plainly, the project was sold before any footage had been shot. The script was written around the advertising campaign. *The Day the World Ended* had recognizable actors in it, Richard Denning and Lori Nelson, who had been in several Universal films, which meant that much of the budget went to their pay. AIP did not have enough to back the second film in the package, so *The Phantom from 10, 000 Leagues* was made independently by two film editors, Jack and Dan Milner, who wanted to get into production.²⁰

The combination had difficulty finding exhibitors. Not particularly happy with having to buy two films at once, exhibitors wanted to split the package, but AIP refused. AIP's first booking for the package was in Detroit in December 1956. A newspaper strike in the city left exhibitors desperate for films because the majors were not willing to release pictures without print ads to promote them. Scheduled to open in the Fox Theatre, a five thousand seat movie palace, AIP was worried about being able to fill the venue. To garner attention for the films, Arkoff and Nicholson, despite blizzard conditions, went up and down the city's streets in a “horror caravan”, a flat bed truck filled with people dressed in monster costumes re-enacting scenes from the films while

leaflets were passed out.²¹ These stunts received local television and radio coverage. The gimmicks worked. *The Day the World Ended* and *The Phantom from 10, 000 Leagues* combination was a success, and was booked into other big cities such Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago. However, more importantly, the package's success brought in enough money to keep AIP in business. For the next five years, all AIP films were part of double bills.²²

Having once held a firm grip on the distribution and exhibition system for the American film industry throughout the thirties and forties, the five majors were having difficulty sustaining their monopoly by the fifties. As a result of the verdict in the Paramount Case in 1948, the five majors, and those minors with theatre chains, were forced to separate their production and distribution interests from their exhibition activities. At the same time, city living was giving way to the suburbs. A moving populous meant a drain on the numbers going to the movies in urban centres. With the expanding suburbs came the advent of a new type of movie viewing — the drive-in. One survey noted that between 1948 and 1958, four thousand indoor theatres ceased to exist while an estimated three thousand drive-ins were established and thrived.²³

Despite the success of the drive-ins, distributors did not rush to do business with them. Instead, they held tightly to the traditional networks that had been formed with indoor theatres. This reluctance was connected to the majors' foot-dragging in following through with the decrees forcing a dismantling of vertical integration that had been signed after the Paramount decision. Several studios retained their theatres until 1956 through to 1958. This was further incentive for distributors to turn away from contracts

with drive-ins because their interests would, in their minds, be better served by selling only to studio-owned theatres. The disdain for drive-ins also had a cultural-economic component. Mainstream distributors felt that first-run films playing on the drive-in circuit would be debased and therefore, the profit potential for additional runs of the film would be significantly lowered.²⁴

While the bigger studios were dealing with declining prospects due to antitrust divestitures and the loss of spectators to television, smaller independents were more than happy to supply films to drive-ins. Drive-in owners catered to the audience which the majors intentionally forgot — teenagers. AIP was one of the independents to step into the void. Producing low budget double bills aimed at the teenage audience made AIP a success at the drive-in. With a proliferation of twelve-to-twenty-five year olds in attendance, the most prosperous screenings were matinees and drive-ins. According to Richard McKay, AIP's director of advertising and publicity in an address at the Texas Drive-In Theater Owners Association, "The average drive-in theater patron is of a little different species than those who frequent the hard-top theater, and our product is slanted toward this new type audience."²⁵ Teenagers frequented drive-ins to get away from the prying eyes of parents who attributed to the images on screen little or no importance. For that reason, Nicholson, Arkoff and Corman cultivated connections with drive-in theatre owners. A strong relationship was forged with Bert Pirosh, head of the Pacific Drive-In Theater chain in California. Gene Corman described the importance of having Pirosh as a contact:

If you couldn't play his drive-ins, you weren't playing Los Angeles. That's where all the money was. There were certain givens, of course. One, that you understood where the market was in terms of subject matter and, two, what audience you were aiming for. If you brought them together and you were spending in the area of fifty thousand, it was almost impossible not to make some money.²⁶

In *The Celluloid Empire*, Robert Stanley notes that between 1954 and 1960, every AIP release made money and Greg Merritt deems Roger Corman to be the "Drive-In Deity".²⁷ By flooding drive-ins with pictures produced with teenagers in mind, AIP outdid mainstream distributors still ignoring both drive-ins and teenagers. Speaking to *Variety* after the success of the *Girls in Prison* (Edward L. Cahn, 1956)/ *Hot Rod Girl* (Leslie Martinson, 1956) combination, Jim Nicholson noted the importance of the teen audience, "From an exhibitor's standpoint, the teenage audience hasn't been satisfied ... The kids are today's customers."²⁸ Interestingly, the tatty look of AIP's fifties films lent credence to the widely held belief that drive-ins were shabby exhibition arenas meant only for B level features.²⁹

Nevertheless, by the late fifties the combination packages were in decline and so was AIP's reign over the drive-ins. Eleven combinations (equaling twenty-two pictures) were distributed by AIP in 1958. In the third quarter of the year the company found it increasingly difficult to get the double bills into theatres. Other independent studios saw the success AIP was having with their low budget combinations and by 1959, the market was flooded with copy-cat packages. Made by such studios as Allied Artists, Clover Productions and Republic Pictures, these imitations were produced on lower budgets than

AIP's films and therefore, undercut AIP's business. Adding to this was the increasing audience awareness that more often than not, the glossy posters advertising double bills generally equaled two films of inferior quality. The company faced even more challenges when the 'AIP-knockoffs' were picked up for distribution by several majors who used their heft with exhibitors to push AIP out of theatres. Furthermore, a new trend for the majors had begun during the summer of 1958 — the big summer release. Finally acquiescing to the popularity of the drive-in, the majors recognized the ability of drive-in releases to earn \$50, 000 in returns per week, which was more than most theatres, as a reason to begin playing them. These big budget studio pictures were a boon to drive-in and theatre owners, but made it difficult for independent features such as AIP films to get bookings.³⁰

AIP's immediate solution to these problems was to import coloured Italian "sand and sword [*sic*]" pictures such as *Sign of the Gladiator* (Guido Brignone, 1959) and *Goliath and the Barbarians* (Carlo Campogalliani, 1960) which brought in \$1.8 million dollars and began a Goliath series. While these imports proved to be profitable, AIP still had to deal with the films it made 'in-house'. The challenges facing the company came to a head in 1959 and the decision was made to produce higher budget pictures that would be in colour. These films would be booked as part of a combination partnered with a pre-released AIP picture. This change in strategy resulted in the Poe adaptations. To deal with the increase in expenditure for the bigger budget Poe pictures, AIP re-released many of its combination packages in 1961 as four unit shows primarily intended for drive-ins. One such unit included *Blood of Dracula* (Herbert L. Strock, 1957), *It*

Conquered the World (Roger Corman, 1956), *Night of the Blood Beast* (Bernard Kowalski, 1958) and *The Headless Ghost* (Peter Scott, 1959).³¹

The marketing techniques used by Hammer and AIP were underscored by each company's drive for profit. At the core, the techniques were very similar and tied intrinsically to the advertising for AIP and Hammer's individual films. To develop interest in film ventures, James Carreras presented possible distributors with titles and posters, proffering highlight reels from films in production to keep them intrigued. As Hammer's reputation as a profitable film house grew, Carreras honed his skill at manipulating the situation to the company's advantage. Carreras began to put titles together in packages which ensured that those films having definite box office appeal would only be sold as part of a package with those lacking individual drawing power. An example of this were the deals made around *The Blood of Frankenstein (The Revenge of Frankenstein)*, Terence Fisher, 1958), a surefire hit, that Carreras would only sell the rights to if distributors purchased two other films with lesser profit potential, *The Snorkel* (Guy Green, 1958) and *The Camp on Blood Island* (Val Guest, 1958). By doing this, Hammer was in continuous production and able to work through the British film industry's 'recession' in the late fifties, taking the studio well into the 'monster' cycle.³²

The majority of Hammer's films were reviled by critics; this critical disrepute will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Five. However, at this point, it is important to note that critical disdain for the company became a factor in the methods used by the company to promote itself and its films to the masses. Coming under fire from the critics invariably connected Hammer's name to its product, horror films (namely the 'monster'

cycle), in the minds of the audience as was noted by journalist Robin Bean in 1964, who stated, “Rarely has a company become so closely identified with its product as has Hammer.”³³ Adding, and playing, to this name recognition was Carreras’ love of self-promotion. Quoted in a Hammer publicity handout in 1964, Carreras said, “Showmanship — and I’ll go on saying that ‘til I’m blue in the face — is still this industry’s lifeblood, a fact that is too often ignored by many. When I see producers who are reluctant to bang the drum about their product, it makes me wonder why they bother to make films at all.”³⁴ This self-aggrandizement did not go unnoticed, even by those under Hammer’s employ. One of the studio’s leading actors, Christopher Lee, was well aware of Hammer’s position in the film industry and how it maintained that role: “Hammer has never claimed to be here for anything other than to provide the general cinema-going public with the entertainment it wants. That, of course, is the job of a showman, and in the Carreras family we have had the best showmen in the British cinema for a very long time.”³⁵

An example of Carreras’ self-promotion was his ideas for the opening of *The Quatermass Xperiment* in Britain. Theatres were to have dummies chained to seats outside the box office with placards reading “What is the strange force that will keep you chained to your seat whilst seeing *The Quatermass Xperiment*?”³⁶ Along with ads in industry newspapers saying, “X is not an unknown quantity — make sure your public know about *The Quatermass Xperiment*,” Carreras also urged exhibitors to have midnight screenings, in conjunction with dummies in the lobby, he explained that “If properly exploited, this stunt could be of great value and cause much controversy.”³⁷

The gimmicks continued into the ‘monster’ cycle. For *The Curse of Frankenstein*, the lobby of the Warner Bros.’ Theatre (the company was the film’s distributor), in London’s West End, was made to look like Frankenstein’s laboratory. The film opened in May 1957 to huge crowds that can be seen in the advertisements from the *Kinematograph Weekly*, in which the huge play bills appear under the superimposed words, “Congratulations! and Thanks for Frankenstein!” in the first ad and “Monster Business!” in the second, with the interior of a monster cut-out showing the line ups in front of the theatre (Appendix, Figure 1).³⁸ For the film’s American release in June, cinema managers were pressed to do their utmost to promote it. With *Variety* ads reading, “Full week’s business in 2 days!”, the press booklet suggested “Around-the-clock horror-a-thon shows, ambulances outside, smelling salt displays, money-back-if-you faint tickets and nurses in attendance.”³⁹ With a budget of only £65, 000, *The Curse of Frankenstein* was an enormous success in the United States and eventually brought in £2 million worldwide. For *Dracula* (1958), Universal spent £200 to develop a method of pumping blood to a model’s neck so that it dripped realistically, the first such device, which was quickly copied, as noted by a studio representative.⁴⁰

Promotions also involved ‘give-aways.’ To promote *Dracula: Prince of Darkness* (Terence Fisher, 1965) and *Plague of the Zombies* (John Gilling, 1966) which played on the same bill under the tagline “Double Thrills and Chills with the Eeriest Fright Show in Town,” Twentieth Century Fox used “Dracula fangs” and “Zombie eyes.” In a December 1965 letter, Fox’s advertising director discusses whether or not these promotional items would work well in conjunction with the films’ publicity campaign in

England. The poster for the two films features the give-aways at the top and addresses the teenage audience in its description: “Boys! Fight Back ... Bite Back with Dracula Fangs! Girls! Defend Yourself with Zombie Eyes! Get Yours Now! Both Free as You Enter the Theatre!”⁴¹ (Appendix, Figure 2)

On occasion, ‘going all out’ for a film’s promotion was too much. An article in *Variety* details the publicity stunts Universal wanted to employ for *Brides of Dracula* (Terence Fisher, 1960) and the response of the publicist in Minneapolis who was not keen about putting the studio’s ideas into action. Universal wanted Morrie Steinman, a freelancer, to “pull something ‘monumentally horrible’ in the way of stunts.”⁴² Universal hoped Steinman would arrange two events. First, the studio wanted newlyweds to spend their wedding night in one of the city’s cemeteries; and second, he was to persuade Minneapolis’ mayor to be photographed next to a cardboard cut out of Dracula so that a contest could be organized around who could best make the mayor’s face resemble Dracula’s using doodles. Naturally, the studio wanted to draw attention to the film, but Steinman refused to go along with either of Universal’s suggestions. The publicist came up with his own ideas. Through a column in the city’s *Morning Tribune*, Steinman offered young women the opportunity to come to a screening of the film dressed as a ‘bride’ of Dracula. Those who came in costumes were given free admission and prizes were awarded to the best dressed. *Variety* noted that Steinman’s gimmicks garnered quite a bit of attention, just what Universal wanted.⁴³

Hammer reveled in the formulaic nature of their productions. It appears exhibitors were happy to see titles connected to films that had already proved profitable,

and similar campaigns made it easier to promote films. The power of Hammer's name was pointed up with a poster campaign: for a time, trade ads mentioning upcoming projects had distributors and exhibitors eager to become involved in Hammer films based solely on prospective titles. In an August 1957 *Variety* ad thanking Warner Bros. for their highly successful handling of *The Curse of Frankenstein*, James Carreras, his son, Michael, and Anthony Hinds announced the productions of *Dracula* and *Blood of Frankenstein*, the production of which was scheduled to begin several months later. When Columbia Pictures announced its association with Hammer in a *Kinematograph Weekly* advertisement, the ad included a list of the films set for release in 1957: *The Curse of Frankenstein* is described as "in production"; *The Abominable Snowman* (Val Guest, 1957) is "in preparation"; and *The Phoenix (Ten Seconds to Hell)*, Robert Aldrich, 1959) and *The Camp on Blood Island* (Val Guest, 1958) are offered only as titles with no explanation about content or production schedule.⁴⁴

AIP's handling of their films was similar to that of Hammer's. The most important aspect to be determined before a potential AIP project was put into production was whether or not the film would bring returns. In an article for *Daily Variety*, Nicholson wrote that the query put to any story idea, even before it was purchased or written, was "will it sell?"⁴⁵ The fact that most AIP films began as titles first passed by exhibitors to rate their profit potential underscores the priority the company placed on a film's commercial viability and its ability to be publicized successfully. Talking to *Cosmopolitan* in 1958 about AIP's "creative process" involving its horror pictures, Arkoff noted that once a title had been okayed by exhibitors, and was deemed "gory

enough,” only then did it go on to a screen writer; however, even more imperative was the development of publicity campaigns, as stated by Arkoff when he said that after receiving a script, “then we get on to more important things, like the promotion campaign and television trailers.”⁴⁶ This idea is further emphasized in what appears to be the company’s cardinal rule, “If a property doesn’t lend itself to first class exploitation by theater and television trailers, we won’t film it.”⁴⁷

Promotion campaigns were the backbone of AIP’s business. In a speech to the Ninth Annual Publicists Guild Awards Luncheon in 1972, Arkoff spoke of the importance of publicity. Saying that no film can ever be so good that it sells itself, Arkoff stressed the role publicists played in AIP’s success: “American International Pictures couldn’t live without you. The very soul of our existence from the beginning has been emphasis on publicity, promotion and advertising.”⁴⁸ AIP insisted that publicists be involved in a film’s development from its very inception as an idea to its release in theatres, putting the film together like a puzzle in which each piece, such as storyline and stars, fits the audience’s taste. Promotion was so important that the company chose to distribute films whose publicity had begun even before the first frame had been shot.⁴⁹

Though the films early in their respective cycles were in competition at the box office, eventually AIP and Hammer did business with each other. With the phenomenal success of its early ‘monster’ films, mainly those making up the ‘core’, Hammer had property that everyone was interested in. Many of the majors acted as distributors for Hammer’s films. In the *Kinematograph Weekly* advertisement announcing its three

picture deal with Hammer, Columbia said they were “happy to announce their association with ‘Jim’ Carreras, Michael Carreras and Anthony Hinds.”⁵⁰ The majors’ excitement in Hammer projects, as indicated by the ‘titles-only’ poster campaign, began to wane, however, with the production of *The Two Faces of Dr. Jekyll* (Terence Fisher, 1960). Hammer had problems with the British Board of Film Censors over the film’s graphic sexual violence. John Trevelyan, the secretary of the BBFC since 1958, strove to develop a good relationship with artists and the board’s decisions under Trevelyan acknowledged the social changes with reference to sex and violence in films. However, the BBFC remained true to its former president, Sir Sidney Harris’, firm stance on sexualized violence, especially rape. *Two Faces* received an ‘X’ rating. Furthermore, Columbia, *Two Faces* American distributor, was disturbed by the profanity which peppered the script and ordered that the offending words be deleted. This forced Michael Carreras to have the film redubbed. When the film was finally released in the United States in March 1961, it was slapped with a ‘B’ for morally objectionable material. Columbia ordered more cuts to meet the needs of its pre-teen market. *The Two Faces of Dr. Jekyll* was a mess and upon its release made virtually no money. Hammer was desperate for another distributor and had to take what they could get for the picture. AIP bought it. Ever mindful of a film’s title, Nicholson changed the title to *Jekyll’s Inferno* and then it became *House of Fright*. The reviewers at *Variety* did not seem to be aware of the switch and reviewed the film twice. Under *Jekyll’s Inferno*, it was a decent film; however, *House of Fright* was deemed to be dull. AIP went on to distribute such Hammer films as *The Vampire Lovers* (Roy Ward Baker, 1970), *Blood from the*

Mummy's Tomb (Seth Holt and Michael Carreras, 1971) and *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde* (Roy Ward Baker, 1971).⁵¹

In the end, making movies for Hammer and AIP was about the bottom line — money. Both companies used titles to entice investment and exhibitor interest in their product. James Carreras held firm to the idea that a proficient horror film required careful production which pointed up the quality behind Hammer's cameras and talented actors. Carreras appeared to have taken pride in Hammer raising the stakes in the horror market through increased production values, and had only disdain for American exploitation film makers who hastened to follow in Hammer's footsteps with pictures belying their rushed shoots and ultra-low budgets.⁵²

However, promotion was of the utmost importance as can be seen in the lurid advertisement tag lines, suggestive posters and gimmicks used to promote Hammer's films. Quality and top stars were not always pivotal in AIP's approach to film making, though once it was clear that double bills were losing favour in the marketplace with exhibitors and audiences, the company recognized the need for a new direction in its films and the Poe adaptations were the result. For Hammer and AIP, films were commodities. As Arkoff said:

I look upon my movies as being merchandise, just as Woolworth's has a line of merchandise. The fact that many of my acquaintances wouldn't buy Woolworth's merchandise doesn't keep it from being perfectly good merchandise. Many people in this business feel that merchandise not aimed at them must be shoddy. They wouldn't feel that way about overshoes.⁵³

For an always commercially-minded Carreras, it was all about the sell. Horror was what

brought in the money for Hammer, so the studio continued to produce films in the genre, although Carreras felt no allegiance to it. In a 1958 *Variety* article entitled “Horror Remains a Money Commodity; And James Carreras Oughta Know,” he said, “I’m prepared to make Strauss waltzes tomorrow if they’ll make money.”⁵⁴

Stepping in to fill the void left by the major studios distracted by the dissolution of vertical integration, Hammer and AIP found success in taking risks and pursuing the new teenage audience demographic. Their early tactics in financing and distribution garnered them success, but also invited imitation from other independent film companies and the majors. The need to regain their initial success led Hammer and AIP to initiate their individual film cycles.

Endnotes

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5. Meikle, 13-14; Maxford, 18; Robert Murphy, *Sixties British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1992), 108.
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27. Stanley, 243; Merritt, 124.
28. "Birth of an Action-Pic Nation, *Variety*, 17 October 1956, p. 3, quoted in Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, 38.
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32. Meikle, 12; Porter, 198.
33. Winston Dixon, *Charming Evil*, 261.
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Chapter Three: The 'Monster' Cycle and the Poe Adaptations

This chapter will discuss the cycles themselves. Only those films forming the core of each cycle will be discussed. Both Hammer Films and AID had reasons for starting their individual cycles. After the success of several science fiction films, Hammer was willing to steer towards producing horror films. AID was in crisis after the decline of their double bills in the face of increased competition from other independent film companies and the majors, themselves in a downturn with the increasing popularity of television.

The success of *The Quatermass Xperiment* (1954) prompted James Carreras to do some market research of his own. His poll of theatre owners found that the film's moments of horror had captured the audiences' attention. Carreras' penchant for choosing successful projects was based on his genius in reading market trends. Always commercially-minded, Carreras focused on the elements which had made *Quatermass* so appealing to audiences: not philosophizing about science, but the gore of make-up artist Les Bowie. In an interview with Colin Heard in *Films and Filming*, Carreras discussed how the decision was made to take Hammer into horror films, "We suddenly realized that nobody had made a classic horror film — by which I mean the Frankensteins and the Draculas — for many, many years."¹ Indeed, the horror genre had been lagging since Universal's *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (Charles Barton, 1948). The new formula for Hammer would be "quasi-literary adaptations of horror classics" with vividly realistic detail.²

Initially, *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) was seen by Hammer as little more than a film to exploit the popularity of *The Quatermass Xperiment*. Scheduled to be shot in black and white over a three week period, there was some discussion about having the film in colour, but financially it did not make sense. Len Harris, a camera operator, recalled in an interview with Al Taylor et al for *Little Shoppe of Horrors* that in a conversation he had with the film's producer, Anthony Hinds, Hinds spoke of the reason behind filming *The Curse of Frankenstein* in black and white: "we don't want it distributed in colour. We'll get our money back over here [Britain] in black-and-white."³ As a test, however, the shoot began with Eastmancolor and the dailies made such an impression on Hinds that the schedule was pushed back a week, and then another. *The Curse of Frankenstein* was completed in five weeks, in colour. Harris' assistant, Harry Oakes, described the importance of colour in the film to interviewer Richard Klemenson: "This was one of our first colour films, and we tended to wrap everything in colour. If you had someone rowing a boat, they had to wear a red jacket ... we wanted to get our money's worth."⁴ Speaking in 1969, James Carreras commented on the commercial incentive behind Hammer's switch to colour: "I think that our horror films *have* [Carreras' emphasis] to be in colour. Blood doesn't look like anything unless it's good and red. In any case, today you've got to make films in colour because a tremendous amount of your money comes back from American television and they don't want black-and-white."⁵ *The Curse of Frankenstein* was the first colour version of Mary Shelley's novel and the first British colour horror film.⁶

Not everyone wished Hammer success on their newest endeavor. Universal was

not eager to see a new competitor in the horror field, especially one that would be using ‘their’ monster to get a cut of the “horror movie trade.” Even with a change in title, from *Frankenstein and the Monster* to *The Curse of Frankenstein*, which was a clearer indication of an original adaptation, the Hollywood studio attempted to stop production on Hammer’s film. In a 21 November, 1956 letter to the Associative Artists Production Limited of America, with whom Hammer was working on the project, James Carreras addressed the problems with Universal:

Universal International have objected to the registration of the title *Curse of Frankenstein*. Fight this with everything you have because we are advised here that being in the public domain anybody can call a film *Frankenstein* and *Curse of* is an original addition of our own. We have registered the picture here with the British Film Producers Association and no objection has of course been taken ...⁷

Universal made Hammer’s production process quite difficult at times. The film’s original script, by Milton Subotsky, was too close to the story in Universal’s *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931), and had to be completely rewritten. Jimmy Sangster was commissioned to write a second version which stayed away from any reference that might be linked to Whale’s film. ‘The Monster’ became ‘the Creature,’ and the story was driven by Victor Frankenstein’s exploits rather than the Creature’s.⁸

One of the biggest challenges facing Hammer in producing *The Curse of Frankenstein* had to do with the presentation of the Creature. Jack Pierce’s make up for the Universal *Frankenstein* cycle was under copyright and Hammer’s make up artist, Philip Leakey, had to find an alternative. Universal placed safeguards on all aspects of the monster’s appearance, “even down to his walk.” In no way could Hammer’s Creature

resemble Universal's. In the pressbook for *The Curse of Frankenstein* the limitations placed on Hammer were spelled out quite plainly: there was to be "no nuts and bolts protruding from the neck. No ungainly, shuffling walk." Hammer took Universal's disapproval seriously, going so far as to take out an indemnity policy in case a lawsuit should ensue. Universal was adamant about the protection of their monster's image, but eventually dropped their opposition to the film's title and gave Hammer no further trouble over *The Curse of Frankenstein*.⁹

After a print of *The Curse of Frankenstein* was screened for Warner Bros.' CEO, Jack Warner, the studio agreed to distribute the film in the United States. The film opened on 2 May, 1957 in London's West End and became a box office smash. It made more than *The Quatermass Xperiment* and *X – The Unknown*. *The Curse of Frankenstein* grossed £300, 000 in Britain, £500, 000 in Japan, and £1 million in the United States, where it played on more screens than any previous British release. The film also broke records wherever it played in the U. S., in some cases playing twenty-four hours a day. With *The Curse of Frankenstein*'s success, Warner Bros. encouraged Hammer to make more films along the same lines to meet the demands of American exhibitors. Closer to Shelley's vision of the monster, *The Curse of Frankenstein* pushed the boundary of on-screen violence to new levels with colour heightening the effect of the Creature's gruesome visage. Thus, the name 'Hammer' was placed solidly in the public's mind, and the style of films to be produced at Bray Studios was set for years to come.¹⁰

While Hammer virtually stepped from the success of the *Quatermass* series into

the 'monster' cycle, AIP was struggling with competition. Looking for alternative sources of revenue, the company made a deal with Fox to distribute ten features in Mexico; among them were *Motorcycle Gang* (Edward L. Cahn, 1957), *Sorority Girl* (Roger Corman, 1957) and *Blood of Dracula* (Herbert L. Strock, 1957), but the deal was merely a stop-gap measure. The summer of 1958 had not brought in the revenue that had been counted on to finance films throughout 1959. Other B level studios caught on to AIP's strategy and began to churn out 'AIP-knockoffs'. Even the majors had become imitators. With aggressive marketing tactics and their clout with theatre owners, the big studios could push their exploitation films in to more cinemas, and their returns were ensured. The market was flooded. Exhibitors were having difficulty paying distributors and AIP was no exception. Speaking to Mark Thomas McGee, Arkoff noted, "we were gasping by early 1959. The pictures had done okay but not what they had done before. But we couldn't even collect the money ... we could see too that we could no longer go the combination [double bills] route. That was the end of our combinations ... So we stood back and said, 'Well, where do we go from here?'"¹¹ AIP was on the verge of going under.

For AIP to continue, its product would have to go through a fundamental change. Survival rested on making better pictures. This did not mean that the budgets would necessarily increase, but the quality of the films was an issue. The pictures could not 'look' cheap and this was especially important when advertising was taken in to consideration, meaning the film had to be what the poster alluded to. Roger Corman recognized that the horror double features he was making for AIP, including films such

as *The Undead* (Roger Corman, 1957) and *A Bucket of Blood* (Roger Corman, 1959) were taking in less at the box office. If he was to continue making horror for AIP, Corman had to take the genre in a new direction. Arkoff and Nicholson realized that the production company could bring in more revenue if it could produce a leading film instead of its usual second features. A leading film would garner AIP a percentage of the returns rather than the flat rental fee attached to supporting pictures.¹²

It was decided that financing usually put towards two pictures would be used for one large picture. The hope was that a \$300,000 film would give AIP the edge it required to get a percentage. Wanting to make 'bigger' pictures anyway, Corman proposed moving away from AIP's black-and-white format and making the film in colour, a nod to the power of colour television. He offered *House of Usher* (Roger Corman, 1960) as a possibility. Arkoff had to be talked into producing the film, a change of pace for AIP and Corman. Hesitant to commit because there was no monster in the picture, Corman, not wanting to lose the project, reassured Arkoff by telling him that "the house is the monster." Everything AIP had went into the making of *House of Usher*.¹³

While Hammer faced legal difficulties during their quest to bring *The Curse of Frankenstein* to the screen, AIP did not with the Poe adaptation. However, AIP had run into trouble with Universal over *Blood of Dracula* (1957). Declaring that all rights to the Dracula name and characters were wholly Universal's domain, the studio threatened AIP with legal action. Arkoff countered with the claim that Universal only held sway over those details that it had added to Bram Stoker's novel, which was in the public domain. Universal backed off and *Blood of Dracula* was released without incident. One of the

selling points of making a Poe adaptation for AIP was that the author's works were in the public domain and therefore, the rights did not have to be secured or money spent on them. M-G-M producer David Selznick was not impressed with AIP's new venture because he had registered all of Poe's titles with the Motion Picture Title Registration Bureau and made noises about a possible lawsuit. AIP had never filed titles with the Bureau because Arkoff saw it as an instrument used by the majors to shuffle titles amongst themselves to the exclusion of others. In the end, Arkoff called Selznick's bluff; no legal action ensued and AIP went forward with bringing Edgar Allan Poe to the screen.¹⁴

House of Usher was not the first Edgar Allan Poe film adaptation. There had been several previous attempts to bring the author to the screen beginning with *La Chute de la maison Usher* (*The Fall of the House of Usher*, Jean Epstein, 1928) and *The Fall of the House of Usher* (James Sibbey Watson and Melville Webber, 1928). Two later films, *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (Robert Florey, 1932) and its 3-D remake, *Phantom of the Rue Morgue* (Roy del Ruth, 1954) were both disasters. Corman produced and directed *House of Usher* with a fifteen day schedule which to that point marked the longest shoot for a Corman or AIP production. The picture was filmed in Pathécolor and CinemaScope. One-third of the film's budget went to AIP's first name actor, Vincent Price, who was paid a deferred \$50,000 and who also asked for a percentage of the box office. Price praised *House of Usher's* script adapted from the Poe novel, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, by Richard Matheson known for his novel, *I Am Legend*. In a 1992 interview with David Del Valle in *Video Watchdog*, Price said, "I believed that the works

of Edgar Allan Poe had never really been properly done on the screen. I thought that Richard Matheson ... had captured the *essence* [Price's emphasis] of Poe."¹⁵ Price would go on to win the *Herald Tribune's* best performance of the year for his role as Roderick Usher. The film was a success. In some cities it was screened on a double bill with *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960). It made a million dollars in seven months of solid bookings, a departure from AIP's usual tactic of 'hit-and-run' distribution.¹⁶

Looking for a way out of an economic slump, AIP was not trying to begin a cycle. With the success of *House of Usher*, Nicholson and Arkoff were happy to exploit the film's popularity with 'sequels'. *House of Usher* marked the beginning of a new era for AIP and Roger Corman. Low budget black and white genre product such as *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957) and *Machine-Gun Kelly* (Roger Corman, 1958) was supplanted by more ambitious films given higher budgets, longer shooting schedules and colour. AIP's troop of actors, such as Jonathan Haze and Dick Miller, the stars of *The Little Shop of Horrors* (Roger Corman, 1960), were shunted to background roles in favour of the company's 'new' name actor, Vincent Price, who was soon joined by Basil Rathbone (*The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, Alfred Werker, 1939), Peter Lorre (*Casablanca*, Michael Curtiz, 1942) and Boris Karloff (*Frankenstein*, James Whale, 1931). Heralding *House of Usher* as a sign of "the rise of the House of AIP," *Variety* underscored the importance of the film to the production company. *House of Usher* became the model for not only the rest of the Poe adaptations, but also for the way that AIP approached their films.¹⁷

After the release of *The Curse of Frankenstein*, Hammer made amends with

Universal and signed a deal to produce a remake of *Dracula* (Tod Browning, 1931). Hammer's *Dracula* (1958) was budgeted at £83,000 with a twenty-five day shooting schedule on a newly constructed sound stage at Bray Studios. Michael Carreras believed the film's highlighting of the Count's sexual appeal and the vivid colour separated Hammer's version of *Dracula* from its predecessors. He noted, "There was no real horror in it, the women were eager to be nipped by Dracula and I think that gave it a fresh look. The other thing, of course, that worked for us was that they were the first Gothic horror films to be in colour."¹⁸ *Dracula* opened 20 May, 1958 surpassing the box office of *The Curse of Frankenstein*. The film's popularity prompted Universal to sell the remake rights to their whole library of horror films to Hammer. Now firmly in the international market, Hammer came to the attention of the majors. There was a three-picture deal with Columbia and other contracts with studios such as United Artists covering pre-production financing and marketing in America, something for which Carreras had worked long and hard.¹⁹

The release of *Dracula* was followed three months later by *The Revenge of Frankenstein* (1958). In 1959, Hammer produced *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Terence Fisher, 1959) which breathed new life into the character of Sherlock Holmes, moribund since Basil Rathbone's turn as the detective in *Dressed to Kill* (*Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Code*, Roy William Neill, 1946). Next came the £100,000 film *The Mummy*, a remake of Universal's *The Mummy's Hand* (Christy Cabanne, 1940), which had used flashback sequences from the original *The Mummy* (Karl Freund, 1932), but was not its sequel. The 'monster' cycle was well under way.²⁰

James Carreras was quite open in his discussion of Hammer's position atop the horror genre and the 'to-that-time' infallible formula for putting out hit films which rested on their realism:

We've found a formula for spine chillers that never misses. All the other boys in the horror business are beating their brains out trying to think of new monstrosities to frighten their customers ... The more horrible they make them, the more the fans yawn. That sort of thing doesn't make them shudder any longer. I try to make the films as believable as possible. None of those silly monster insects — you can always see the wires working. My *Draculas* and things are real. They have quality. That's why *The Curse of Frankenstein* did better business in the States than probably any other British film has ever done. Quality — that's what counts!²¹

Despite his belief in the quality of Hammer's films, Carreras was given the moniker, "the King of Nausea" by the British media.²²

By the time *The Two Faces of Dr. Jekyll* (1960) was released, however, the Hammer routine was beginning to wear thin. Michael Carreras, the film's producer, wanted to change the Robert Louis Stevenson novel so that Dr. Jekyll was the unattractive half of the duo and Mr. Hyde still evil, but suave. In order to do this, Carreras needed a top-notch script. He approached Wolf Mankowitz, an author and playwright who had received the 1959 Best British Stage Musical Award for *Make Me An Offer*. Jimmy Sangster, Hammer's usual scriptwriter, remarked upon Michael Carreras' style of movie making: "He would always try to get better writers, better actors, better budgets." Mankowitz was paid twice the regular fee for writing *Two Faces*' script.²³

The Two Faces of Dr. Jekyll was plagued with problems. Mankowitz and the film's director, Hammer stalwart Terence Fisher, had a tumultuous relationship. Complaining about Fisher's approach to his script, Mankowitz said, "He hadn't even read the book. He thought it was just another Hammer horror story." The budget shot up to £146,000 and the shoot ran several weeks over schedule. Though *Two Faces* was given an 'X' certificate by the British censors and released without significant cuts, the American release date was pushed back for over a year because of a disapproving American Legion of Decency which had rated it 'B' for morally objectionable material. Hammer was forced to make further cuts on top of those demanded by the Legion in order to secure the teen audience Columbia wanted. Despite James Carreras' prediction to *Variety* that *The Two Faces of Dr. Jekyll* would be "one of Columbia's biggest winners in years," the film after the cuts was a disjointed mess which was received very poorly in the United States and Britain. *The Two Faces of Dr. Jekyll* was sold to American International Pictures where it became a double feature under the title *House of Fright* paired with *Terror in the Haunted House (My World Dies Screaming)*, Harold Daniels, 1958).²⁴

The disaster surrounding Hammer's adaptation of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* did not sound the studio's death knell, but more care had to be taken with the projects following it. Envisioned as a sequel to *Dracula*, *The Brides of Dracula* (1960) was a purely commercial venture, yet also encapsulated Hammer at its best. The film's style, content, plot, actors and production values work together to create a smooth mechanism through which the Hammer formula is spun. With *The Brides of Dracula*, Hammer was

on the verge of breaking past Universal's archetypes and creating replacements for them. Though the film's £125, 000 budget had whittled away at Hammer's lean profit margin, *The Brides of Dracula* was a success. It was released on a bill with Universal's *The Leech Woman* (Edward Dein, 1960), a film quite loathsome in comparison. This pairing confirmed Britain's mastery of the horror genre; however, this supremacy would not last long. In addition, Jimmy Sangster, the studio's primary screenwriter whose creativity was a key element in Hammer's success, chose to pursue other areas of interest leaving Hammer horror in the lurch.²⁵

With *The Curse of the Werewolf* (Terence Fisher, 1960), it became clear that other studios saw the success of Hammer's monster movies as a cycle that could be copied for their financial gain, and this would lead to a saturation of the market and a detraction from Hammer's original work. Hammer had begun work on *The Rape of Sabena (The Inquisitor)*, a film set during the Spanish Inquisition. Despite having completed sets for the film, the entire project was jettisoned when the Catholic church protested its subject matter and proclaimed that the Church's censorship branch, the Catholic Legion of Decency, would denounce the film loudly and publically if its production continued. Not wanting to court the Church's ire or face box office poison, Hammer decided to make a werewolf picture.²⁶

The Curse of the Werewolf was not a remake of Universal's *The Wolf Man* (George Waggner, 1941) script, but an attempt to adapt Guy Endore's 1935 novel, *The Werewolf of Paris* to the derelict Spanish-style sets. The film began production in September 1960. Having spent most of the £100, 000 budget on securing the rights to the

novel, there was not enough money left to commission a script. Producer Anthony Hinds decided to try his hand at screen writing under the name John Elder, writing free of charge. *The Curse of the Werewolf's* release was delayed until July 1961. The typical Hammer process of a deliberately slow production pace, however, could no longer hold up in the face of other independent studios capable of putting out films within months, if not weeks. When the film was finally distributed, it was up against American International's first Poe adaptation, *House of Usher*. Presented as a cerebral horror film, *House of Usher's* audience swelled through word of mouth and the market indicated that people would not go to two shockers in one week. Hammer's film lacked the appeal of Roger Corman's "Eastmancolor madness." The truth was that the once lush gothic style Hammer held to so tightly was beginning to show its age. *The Curse of the Werewolf* was a dated film, in style and story.²⁷

Corman's triumph with *House of Usher* gave AIP a cycle of their own. Hammer's ranking as the leading purveyors of horror was no longer a tenable position. The studio was being eclipsed by others capitalizing on the trademarks Hammer had spent years perfecting. The Poe adaptations continued, and soon other studios such as Amicus were producing films similar to Hammer's style. *The Curse of the Werewolf* was a certified failure. The studio's hold on horror had been created by surpassing the originals it chose to rework. While not a remake, comparisons to Universal's *The Wolf Man* were inevitable. The film not only failed to match its predecessors in the werewolf sub-genre, *The Curse of the Werewolf* also fell below Hammer's standards. The film marked a transition, although few at the studio recognized it. With such poor reception at

the box office (it took in one tenth of what *The Curse of Frankenstein* and *Dracula* did), *The Curse of the Werewolf* ensured that no other werewolf film would be made at Hammer. Fisher's directorial skill was cemented in the critic's minds as prosaic and tending towards staginess. Hammer Films was languishing. As Michael Carreras remarked, "It was a depressing period. I think they had lost their spirit — all of them — by that time."²⁸

The Phantom of the Opera (Terence Fisher, 1962) would be the final film making up the core of Hammer's monster movie cycle. The studio's version of the *Phantom* proved to be a major misstep. The script was written with actor Cary Grant, star of *North By Northwest* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959), in mind. The major Hollywood player had expressed interest in starring in a Hammer film while in Britain filming *The Grass is Greener* (Stanley Donen, 1960). After seeing the script, which was deemed not "lighthearted" enough, Grant declined, but the studio had already committed to the production and signed Herbert Lom as its star. Universal had made the film twice, the legendary 1925 version with Lon Chaney and the Technicolor remake in 1943; therefore, adding colour to the story was not something new, so Hammer had to find something that was. Though he had attempted to be faithful to Gaston Leroux's novel, Hinds' script failed to find the power in it because he had to whittle down the novel to include the previous films's most spectacular sequences — the falling of the chandelier and the Phantom's unmasking — leaving a piecemeal story. The audience responded in kind. *The Phantom of the Opera* had been Hammer's biggest budget gothic film to that date at £400, 000 (though Hinds later said that number was inflated) and its poor showing was

blamed on director Terence Fisher. Fisher was banished for one year and he returned to a position of reduced importance. *House of Hammer* author, Andrew Mangravite, believes that the problems that befell Hammer's *Phantom* were caused by executive decisions to lessen the violence while emphasizing the pomp in order to court the critics and the audience the studio most desired in the United States, adults who were drawn to AIP's Poe adaptations. Speaking years later, Michael Carreras recalled Hammer's decline which was becoming more apparent by the end of 1962, "Even before *The Phantom of the Opera* was to end Hammer's hold on affections of the faithful, *The Curse of the Werewolf* had started the ball rolling imperceptibly away."²⁹

With *House of Usher*'s success, Corman decided to produce a Poe picture of his own. AIP could not claim ownership over Poe because the author was in the public domain, precisely the reason AIP had okayed *House of Usher*'s production. Interested in adapting Poe's short story, "Masque of the Red Death," Corman struck a deal with Alfred Wagg Pictures in Britain and hoped to begin shooting in the fall of 1961 in Greece. The director wanted a mix of *Great Expectations* (David Lean, 1946), *Psycho* and *The Seventh Seal* (Ingmar Bergman, 1957) in his Poe film. The treatment was written by John Carter. Corman showed it to screenwriter Charles Beaumont, who was not impressed, and said that he could do a much better script, one that was "worthy of Bergman's best." Corman did not accept Beaumont's offer until Wagg complained about Carter's treatment. Carter was paid off and Beaumont took on the task of adapting the story. Eventually, the script was turned over to Robert Towne. Towne was infamous for his sloth-like approach to script writing. On occasion producers gave up on him and his

scripts were never produced. Corman was well acquainted with Towne. The writer was hired to work on a script based on a treatment Corman had sold to a European production company. It was never finished. Previously, Towne had taken more than a year to complete a script for *Fraternity Row*. When it was done, Corman had lost interest in making the film. Time appeared to be running out and Corman was concerned that the Poe phenomenon would run its course before he could get *Masque of the Red Death* into production.³⁰

While Corman was trying to get *Masque of the Red Death* in to production, Nicholson and Arkoff wanted to continue their success with a follow-up to *House of Usher*. AIP approached Corman and he agreed to do *The Pit and the Pendulum* (Roger Corman, 1961). Vincent Price was asked to return as lead actor. A shrewd businessman, Price again asked for a percentage of the profits and increased his price to \$125,000. Richard Matheson returned as screenwriter. The director said that Poe's tales worked well because of their vivid climaxes which were easily turned into graphic images. The bulk of Poe's work were short stories which could be cut and pasted together to produce a ninety minute feature. *The Pit and the Pendulum*'s story became the basis for the film's final act, while Matheson created the first two acts in a style 'reminiscent' of Poe. *The Pit and the Pendulum* was an even bigger smash than *House of Usher*, and turned out to be extremely profitable.³¹

With the Poe cycle making money for both parties, AIP and Corman wanted to continue making the films. Corman was still eager to produce a Poe of his own and, with *Masque of the Red Death* still in its infancy, he looked for another story to adapt.

Corman signed a contract with Pathé, a colour film processing company wanting to expand into distribution. AIP was one of Pathé's major clients and in reaction to the Corman contract, AIP threatened to take its business elsewhere. To pre-empt Corman's adaptation of Poe, AIP bought the production from Pathé, bringing the director back under AIP's control. Corman was not bothered by the buy-out because AIP had to maintain his original agreement with Pathé, a \$500, 000 budget plus \$50, 000 for his half-interest in the project. *The Premature Burial* (Roger Corman, 1961) was not a direct adaptation of a Poe story. Charles Beaumont's script was merely 'inspired' by an essay written by Poe extolling the general undesirability of being buried alive. With Vincent Price out of reach because of an agreement made with AIP not to star in Poe movies for other companies, *The Premature Burial* starred Ray Milland, a name actor in his own right who would go on to do "X" – *The Man with X-Ray Eyes* (Roger Corman, 1963) for AIP, but Milland could not live up to Price's performance. The film was a success, but is not considered part of the core Poe adaptations. It marks the beginning of 'Poe inspired' films that capitalized on the popularity of the true Poe adaptations.³²

Eddie Small, a producer at United Artists, wanted in on the revenue AIP was making from the Poe adaptations. Small sensed that Price was the drawing point for audiences not Poe. Despite the actor's strict 'no-Poe' contract with AIP, there was nothing in the contract that stipulated Price could not make costume horrors. With Gene Corman as producer, Small as bankroller and Corman as director, the three made a Poe-influenced black-and-white feature based on William Shakespeare's *Richard III*, *The Tower of London* (1962), starring Price. After a strong opening, the film floundered once

distributors realized it was in black-and-white. Bookings decreased and the picture vanished. Undeterred, a second picture was attempted. *Twice Told Tales* (Sidney Salkow, 1962), based on three Nathaniel Hawthorne stories, was made without Corman's participation, in colour and with Price in the lead. *Twice Told Tales* worked off the success of Corman, and AIP's, third Poe adaptation, *Tales of Terror* (Roger Corman, 1962).³³

AIP was not above making these 'inspired' films. The trend was wholly dominated by the company, as seen in Nicholson and Arkoff's dealings with Pathé, and was virtually theirs to exploit. The title of *The Haunted Village*, based on H. P. Lovecraft's short story "The Resurrection" was changed to *The Haunted Palace* (Roger Corman, 1963), the same as a Poe poem. While it is true that most of the Poe adaptations used the author as a point of entry for a script, they were still adapted from an actual Poe work. *The Haunted Palace*, however, had no connection to Poe other than its title. AIP believed that with Price in the lead, the audience would not know the difference.³⁴

Tales of Terror was another success for AIP, and boasted the company's biggest-name cast with Price, Peter Lorre and Basil Rathbone. Spun around three Poe stories, "Morella," "The Black Cat," and "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," the middle story proved to be the most popular because of its departure from straight horror into comedy. Yet despite the film's impressive showing at the box office, the formula established in *House of Usher* was becoming threadbare.³⁵

Tired of making "stock Poe pictures," *The Raven* (Roger Corman, 1963) was produced as a respite from straight horror for Corman and Matheson. As Corman's fifth

Poe adaptation (including the ‘inspired’ pictures) and Matheson’s fourth, both felt a comedy was the solution to avoiding burnout. Corman had experimented with horror comedies in *Bucket of Blood* (1959) and in “The Black Cat” episode of *Tales of Terror*. With a reteaming of Price and Lorre, plus the addition of Boris Karloff, the film boasted another name cast. Peter Lorre’s improvisation greatly added to *The Raven*’s comedic tone. The film was made in twelve days on the biggest sets for a Poe adaptation. Each Poe picture’s set grew because Corman insisted on salvaging units from other pictures, repainting them and making larger interiors. *The Raven* was a critical success and brought in more revenue than all of its predecessors. However, the film’s accomplishment forced Corman to think about the potential for the cycle’s failure at the box office. Universal’s Frankenstein cycle was immensely popular in the thirties and forties. *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* had been unbelievably popular, but had somehow jinxed the cycle and was the last Frankenstein film made until Hammer revived the character in *The Curse of Frankenstein*. Corman recognized that the same pattern might occur with Edgar Allan Poe and his dream project, *Masque of the Red Death*.³⁶

Unable to wait for Towne to finish *Masque of the Red Death*’s script, Corman turned it over to Barboura Morris, Corman’s one-time girlfriend and bit player in his films. Morris’ draft was given to Charles Beaumont whose script was then rewritten by Bobby Campbell. In the end, *Masque of the Red Death* was based on two Poe stories, “Masque of the Red Death” and “Hop Toad.” On 19 November 1963, *Masque of the Red Death* (Roger Corman, 1964) was ready to start principal photography in England. The film was the first Poe adaptation to be shot outside of the United States. Production on

the Poe adaptations was moved to England because Arkoff saw the advantages of a low pound which meant that the films could be shot for less using British crews and classically trained actors. Going one step further, making the pictures American-British co-productions allowed AIP to qualify for film subsidies under the Eady Plan.³⁷

Masque of the Red Death had a six week schedule, the longest of any AIP production to date. Corman had access to the sets of Paramount's *Becket* (Peter Glenville, 1964), a multi-million dollar film. The move to England prevented Corman's regular crew from participating on the film. An English cast and crew, whom Corman grumbled were too slow, pointed up how formulaic the cycle had become: a completely different production unit could reproduce the 'Poe' look. The change in location and crew was undetectable.³⁸

The production ran into legal problems, however, when a former AIP producer, Alex Gordon, attempted to stop *Masque of the Red Death*'s release claiming he had a script for the film before AIP had begun making Poe adaptations. Written by Gordon and his wife Mildred in 1959, the script was based on "Masque of the Red Death," and Price had allegedly signed on to star as Prince Prospero. Gordon had approached several other production companies with his script before he was hired by AIP. Having left AIP on less than pleasant terms, Gordon accused Nicholson and Arkoff of stealing the script. The case went to court where the judge involved tossed out Gordon's petition saying that the similarities between the two scripts, Gordon's and Bobby Campbell's, were merely coincidental. Gordon pursued his case using the sixty-eight points of likeness he found in the scripts as his evidence. Charles Beaumont died before he could be deposed.

Corman was never directly involved in the disagreement because Gordon did not believe that he had ever seen his original script. In the end, AIP settled out of court and *Masque of the Red Death* was released.³⁹

The film did not bring in the revenues expected. While audiences may not have been receptive to *Masque of the Red Death*'s art cinema overtones, especially its parallels to Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* which Corman admitted having "plagiarized," critics received the film warmly. Critical praise was not enough to satisfy Arkoff who believed that Corman's 'artsy' approach caused the dip in ticket sales. However, a turn to art cinema was not the only issue besetting the cycle; the question became whether or not the Poe adaptations had run their course.⁴⁰

AIP decided to do one more Poe adaptation with *The Tomb of Ligeia* (Roger Corman, 1964). To Arkoff's displeasure, Corman planned to take the film even further from the original nature of the cycle by making *The Tomb of Ligeia* into a love story. Writing a script for a younger actor, Robert Towne was dismayed that AIP insisted Price play the lead. Towne's script was exceedingly complex. Cast and crew had trouble keeping track of when actress Elizabeth Sheppard was possessed by the spirit of Ligeia and when she was the 'normal' Rowena. Corman spoke of the difficulties: "I sat down with the script and I worked out a chart of myself, saying from page ... eighty to eighty-two it is Rowena. From page eighty-two to eighty-five it is Ligeia. So I had the chart so I wouldn't become confused myself."⁴¹

The Tomb of Ligeia brought in even less at the box office than *Masque of the Red Death*. Corman felt that he was beginning to repeat himself, and *The Tomb of Ligeia*

proved to be his last Poe adaptation: "I just didn't want to do anymore ... Although everyone of the Poe pictures was commercially successful and, so far as I know, got very good reviews, I just stopped, because I didn't want to do anymore." After almost a dozen gothic horrors, including the Poe cycle and those films 'inspired' by it, Corman was relieved when AIP approached him about doing a more contemporary picture.⁴²

By the mid-sixties, both Hammer's 'monster' cycle and AIP's Poe pictures had seen their box office returns dwindle. With their respective cycles at a crossroad, Hammer and AIP had to decide whether to continue their cycles or bring them to an end. Changes in the film industry and the horror genre would, to a degree, make the decision for the producers.

Endnotes

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28. Meikle, 149-150, 161; Maxford, 57.
29. Mangravite, 50; Meikle, 150, 160-162, 170.
30. McGee, *Corman*, 49-51.
31. McGee, *Corman*, 47-49; Fischer, 227-228; Di Franco, 30; Arkoff, 115.
32. McGee, *Faster*, 196-197; Naha, 158; Fischer, 228.
33. McGee, *Corman*, 51.
34. McGee, *Corman*, 51; Fischer, 236.
35. McGee, *Faster*, 198-199.
36. Morris, 116; Naha, 36; Di Franco, 34; McGee, *Corman*, 51, 143; Winston Dixon, "In Defense," 11.

37. McGee, *Corman*, 51; Fischer, 236; Charles Flynn and Todd McCarthy, "Interview with Roger Corman," in *Kings of the Bs: Working Within the Hollywood System*, ed. Todd McCarthy and Charles Flynn (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1975), 307; Tom Weaver, *Science Fiction Stars and Horror Heroes: Interviews with Actors, Directors, Producers and Writers of the 1940s through 1960s* (London: McFarland, 1991), 144; Arkoff, 125.
38. Fischer, 237; McGee, *Corman*, 51.
39. McGee, *Corman*, 51-53.
40. McGee, *Corman*, 53; Morris, 127.
41. McGee, *Corman*, 53-54.
42. Di Franco, 34-35; McGee, *Corman*, 54.

Chapter Four: Decline and Dissolution

Important to the discussion of Hammer Films and American International Pictures is an examination of how the production companies managed the waning popularity of their individual cycles. In outlining the decisions Hammer and AIP made towards the end of their cycles, one is able to observe how these production companies operated within a Hollywood that was again in a state of flux during the late sixties. Though the final film forming the core of Hammer's monster cycle is *The Phantom of the Opera* (1962), the studio continued producing gothic horrors. Despite the addition of graphic violence and increasing sexual content, the audience, once so enamoured with Hammer, was in decline and the studio was unable to keep up with the changes underway in both the marketplace and the horror genre. With Roger Corman wanting to move on to more contemporary films, AIP created other cycles before resuscitating the Poe adaptations, a calculated move designed to exploit the previous cycle's cachet with the audience and the draw of the first cycle's staple star, Vincent Price. The differences between the two companies in handling their cycles highlights both the cycle theory and the position of these independent production companies during the transition to the New Hollywood of the seventies.

After the back-to-back failure of *The Curse of the Werewolf* (1960) and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1962) Hammer's deterioration became more apparent. The studio tried to be innovative in their next film, *Kiss of the Vampire* (Don Sharp, 1963), by setting it in the Art Nouveau period of the early twentieth century and by associating

vampirism with Satanism. Despite its edgy subject matter, *Kiss of the Vampire* appeared “old fashioned” and its horror modest. Without recognizing it, Hammer had ceded its position as one of the top horror studios to directors such as Roger Corman. Looking at the broader genre at the time, the levels of violence coming out of studios from such countries as the United States and Italy were far beyond anything Hammer could, or would dare, depict. *The Gorgon* (Terence Fisher, 1964) was the last of the gothics not wholly based in self-repetition. The studio would never again break new ground in horror.¹

Hammer’s output of gothic horror films climaxed in 1965 with *Dracula: Prince of Darkness* (1965), *Rasputin — The Mad Monk* (Don Sharp, 1965), *The Plague of the Zombies* (John Gilling, 1965) and *The Reptile* (John Gilling, 1965). However, these films highlighted how far from the edge Hammer had travelled. In the fifties, British audiences clamouring for thrills and colour films in a stuffy, traditionalist society packed theatres playing Hammer films. By the mid-sixties, cinema had changed with the French and British New Waves and the influence of the youth revolution. Issues and images once deemed too graphic for screens were now treated straightforwardly. Films such as *Alfie* (Lewis Gilbert, 1966) and *Blowup* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966) pushed the censors, making the gothic environs of Hammer’s films appear mild in comparison. *Sixties British Cinema* author, Robert Murphy cites the close ups of a throat slitting and staking of a vampire in *Dracula: Prince of Darkness* as an attempt by the studio to adjust to these changes.²

Revenue from features released in the United States fell between 1966 and 1967.

Most of Hammer's 1967 films failed to turn a profit. This trend continued into 1969 when films such as *The Devil Rides Out* (*The Devil's Bride*, Terence Fisher, 1968) made some money domestically, but did not even register on American screens. The pace of social change quickened in the late sixties. Hammer was very slow to realize this and their films suffered for it. One critic commented on the rigor mortis that appeared to have taken hold of the studio with its continuous rehashing of overboiled plots and characters — as in 1967's *Frankenstein Created Woman* (Terence Fisher, 1967) and *The Mummy's Shroud* (John Gilling, 1967): “Time has stopped at Bray Studios and they're still making 'B' pictures for a market that was willing to queue in the rain for Stewart Granger and Patricia Roc.”³ As an answer to critics saying the studio was outdated, to the increasing sexual explicitness in film, and to the problem of diminishing returns from international markets, James Carreras hastily greenlighted another Dracula project, *Dracula Has Risen From the Grave* (Freddie Francis, 1968) which was imbued with graphic violence and nudity. Marketed in the U. S. with risqué tag lines such as “You can't keep a good man down,” *Dracula Has Risen From the Grave* became one of Hammer's highest grossing pictures.⁴

Hammer films took on more sexual overtones with Frankenstein and Dracula pictures giving way to sexual vampire romps culminating in the “Carmilla”-inspired ‘Karnstein’ trilogy : *The Vampire Lovers* (1970), *Lust for a Vampire* (Jimmy Sangster, 1970) and *Twins of Evil* (John Hough, 1971). With *The Vampire Lovers*, Hammer brought nudity and lesbianism to their formula for horror. Made in collaboration with AIP, the film had a £170, 000 budget and a shooting schedule of six weeks. Though it

was a success at the box office, AIP producer, Louis M. Heyward noted that Hammer seemed to be struggling as a studio and had just muddled through the film's production. *Lust for a Vampire* was begun only two days after *The Vampire Lovers* went into production. It did not recreate its predecessor's profits.⁵

Horror, Hammer's stock in trade, had given way to lesbianism and exploitation. Hammer was forced to transgress in order to compete. These sexually-themed films were not of Hammer's invention, but followed a trend begun with films such as *Le Viol du Vampire (The Rape of the Vampire)*, Jean Rollins, 1967) and *La Vampire Nue (The Naked Vampire)*, Jean Rollins, 1969). Hammer's attempts at eroticising the genre were comical when compared to the models they were imitating and to the power behind the studio's early Frankensteins and Draculas. In 1971, Michael Carreras remarked on Hammer's turn toward exploitation and the real problem behind the studio's move away from true Gothic horror:

It's not my particular cup of tea — I would have had Countess Dracula looking for young bucks. But what worries me is not the sex, but that Countess Dracula is nothing like as popular as Count Dracula. The people involved in Hammer [now] are not the people involved in the earlier ones, and do not have the same respect for the subject. They lost the Gothic flavour, which is perhaps the major ingredient. At the same time, they seemed to have lost all suspense. They felt it was enough that you had a fairly pedantic plot and every now and then you put in a bucket of blood and moved on.⁶

None of these more explicit films was directed by Terence Fisher. He had been assigned to fewer films since *The Phantom of the Opera* and younger, less experienced directors were brought in to helm pictures. Their inexperience was hard to hide. The last Hammer

Dracula set during the Victorian era was *Scars of Dracula* (Roy Ward Baker, 1970). It did not do well at the box office and was not released in the U. S. until 1974. To boost box office appeal, Dracula was moved into more modern settings, such as 'swinging' London in *Dracula A. D. 1972* (*Dracula Chelsea '72*, Alan Gibson, 1972), and folkloric remedies were set aside for new ways to dispose of the Count, namely lightning and hawthorn bushes. Terence Fisher's most productive period for Hammer paralleled the studio's success in overseas markets and their partnerships with American companies. His skill was in being able to integrate the essentially Victorian themes of the films with the commercial thirst for horror. When Hammer's economic viability began to slip, this reconciliation became more difficult. The need to follow trends, namely exploitation, came from a decrease in American financial backing because of President Lyndon B. Johnson's cut back on tax benefits for American overseas investment to finance the Vietnam War.⁷

This withdrawal of American money, combined with a decrease in admissions, adversely affected Hammer's production quality. The number of films being produced fell from six in 1967 to two in 1968. Only three films were made in 1969. With its decline in popularity in North America, the survival of Hammer's home studio, Bray, was in doubt. Though still the leading horror purveyors in Britain, Hammer had lost its high ranking within the genre. James Carreras looked for backing from domestic companies such as EMI. To keep Hammer in business, Carreras entered into a nine picture deal with EMI's Bernard Delfont. As part of the partnership, EMI insisted that in order for Hammer to continue receiving distribution outlets in the U. S., the studio would

have to shoot all films at Elstree, EMI's studio. Four of the six films produced in 1964 had been shot at Elstree including *The Curse of the Mummy's Tomb* (Michael Carreras, 1964). The last film shot at Bray was *The Mummy's Shroud* in 1966. Hammer left Bray in 1968 and sold it in 1970. The loss of Bray was an important factor in Hammer's downturn. Bray enabled Hammer to make inexpensive, yet quality, films. Moving to Elstree saw a marked decline in the quality of Hammer films and the absence of its signature style.⁸

Facing a decline in interest in their films and an increasingly erratic performance in the U. S., Hammer lowered budgets and increased nudity. In order to keep in line with the relaxation of domestic censorship laws and the increasingly explicit foreign films flooding the horror market, nudity and violence became Hammer's crutch in dealing with these new challenges. Adding adult material to their films worked against Hammer. The average American audience was under eighteen and graphic scenes were being excised by censors. After being cut, most films were left disjointed messes. Becoming known for such explicit fare, Hammer films were flagged as troublesome by American distributors who were increasingly less willing to deal with a studio in decline. Warner Bros. believed that the production at Hammer was now bordering on sub-standard. The films had become "draggy, boring and completely unprofessional." As questions of the studio's viability continued to arise in Britain and the United States, James Carreras came to understand that it was time to leave the business. In 1973, Carreras handed control of Hammer Films to his son, Michael.⁹

The landscape of the horror genre was changing with films such as *The Exorcist*

(William Friedkin, 1973) and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974), and Hammer's desperation to find an audience had them replaying old themes. *Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell* (Terence Fisher, 1974), the final Hammer *Frankenstein*, was Michael Carreras's attempt to achieve a Hammer renaissance and win back some of the studio's fleeting popularity. As a throwback to the stylistics of *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) with Terence Fisher as its director, Carreras's film was doomed from the beginning. Fisher's pedestrian handling of the material had become as passé as the Universal monster he was reworking for the seventh time. *Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell* brought together the Hammer production team that had made the early films in the cycle such a success for one last try. Although a valiant effort, it was an abysmal failure marketed to an audience that was no longer there nor cared about a British horror film.¹⁰

The same can be said for *The Satanic Rites of Dracula* (Alan Gibson, 1973), the last Hammer *Dracula*. Warner Bros. took the film as part of its deal with Hammer, but the film was not released until months later when it played briefly in American theatres under the title *Count Dracula and His Vampire Bride*. The film's release in Britain came a year after its production had been completed, and for the first time the name Hammer was not used in its advertising campaign. Audiences were no longer drawn to a *Hammer* film. The studio looked for new partners to keep them in production. Hoping to pick up on the martial arts film trend started by Bruce Lee and *Enter the Dragon* (Robert Clouse, 1973), Hammer signed a two picture deal with Hong Kong's Shaw Studios, known for their Kung Fu films and the largest film production company in Southeast Asia. Out of

this alliance came *The Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires (Seven Brothers Meet Dracula*, Roy Ward Baker, 1974), the last Hammer film that made any effort towards being a 'gothic' horror. The second picture in the deal, *Shatter (Call Him Mr. Shatter*, Michael Carreras, 1974), did not receive theatrical release.¹¹

Hammer's last film, *The Lady Vanishes* (Anthony Page, 1979), completed its undoing. The film was to be a remake of Alfred Hitchcock's 1938 film of the same name. Samuel Z. Arkoff was to produce the film, but his desire to 'Americanize' the picture for greater audience appeal was denied by the Rank Organization which owned the rights to all of Hitchcock's films. Production continued after Arkoff left, but the film was a failure despite its name stars, Elliot Gould and Cybill Sheperd. Hammer was in financial ruin. Michael Carreras resigned as the director of Hammer Films on 30, April 1979. Purchased for £100, 000 by Roy Skeggs, Hammer's former production supervisor and accountant, the studio's name was saved from fading away along with its films. Hammer Films was no more.¹²

American International Pictures ended their initial Poe adaptation cycle with critically praised, but financially problematic films, *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964) and *The Tomb of Ligeia* (1965). It appeared that the Poe films' appeal had dampened, and so AIP moved on. In the mid-sixties, motorcycle gangs had captured the American imagination. *Life* featured the Hell's Angels on its cover which caught Arkoff's attention. He and several AIP executives thought a motorcycle picture would be immensely popular. Roger Corman directed the *The Wild Angels* (1966) from a Peter Bogdanovich script and starring Peter Fonda. A new cycle of biker films was developed

which included another Corman production, *Devil's Angels* (1967). At this time, the relationship between AIP and Corman began to deteriorate. Corman had doubts about the merit of the films being produced and whether the increased budgets, which remained at approximately \$250,000, the level of the Poe adaptations, had much effect on quality. He was also disheartened by AIP's interference in the editing of his films. After fourteen years of working as an independent filmmaker with AIP, Corman was unable to look past the tampering and felt the company was limiting him. He returned to free lance work.¹³

Corman's departure from AIP did not hamper the production company's business. In fact, after AIP's experience making *The Masque of the Red Death* and *The Tomb of Ligeia* in Britain, the company increased its production in Europe with Louis M. Heyward as the head of its European contingent. Heyward produced *The Witchfinder General* (Michael Reeves, 1968), a fictionalized account of the life of witch-hunter, Matthew Hopkins. Nicholson felt that if the film could be marketed as a Poe adaptation (Vincent Price was the lead actor) then the profits could be greater. Price recited several lines from Poe's poem "The Conqueror Worm" over the film's opening and closing credits and the film was released in the United States under the title *The Conqueror Worm*. It proved to be a huge success and started a second Poe cycle, albeit one constructed mostly of Poe 'rip-offs'.¹⁴

The second film of the cycle, *Spirits of the Dead* (1968), was a trilogy of Poe short stories directed by Roger Vadim, Louis Malle and Frederico Fellini (replacing Orson Welles) and starring Jane Fonda, Bridget Bardot and Terence Stamp. Screened at the Cannes Film Festival under its original title, *Histoires Extraordinaires* (*Tales of*

Mystery and Imagination), Arkoff saw the film and offered its producers \$200,000 for the North American distribution rights. AIP was sold the rights, but the deal was cancelled when Arkoff pressed for editing a scene in Fellini's segment, an insult to the director. After a year of searching for another company to purchase the distribution rights, the film's producers accepted Arkoff's proposition. *Histoires Extradordinaires* was retitled with narration by Price added for its American release. *Spirits of the Dead* was a critical and box office debacle. Referring to Corman's Poe adaptations, namely *Tales of Terror*, the Los Angeles *Times* critic wrote, "The only real accomplishment of this shoddy trilogy ... is to make Roger Corman's Poe pictures look awfully good in comparison."¹⁵

Undeterred, AIP continued with *The Oblong Box* (Gordon Hessler, 1969). The film was initially to be filmed in Ireland under the direction of Michael Reeves, who had helmed the cycle's first picture, also starring Price. Reeves refused to participate, feeling that the script was below his standards. He was replaced by Gordon Hessler and production was moved to Britain's Shepperton Studios. The picture was released to no great fanfare. *Cry of the Banshee* (Gordon Hessler, 1970), the penultimate bogus Poe, did better at the box office because it was a summer release.¹⁶

Bringing the second cycle to an end was AIP's last Poe adaptation, *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (Gordon Hessler, 1970). Shot on location in Spain, the film was made without Price, who was in a contract dispute with Arkoff and tired of doing sub-par projects. Jason Robards, star of *Once Upon a Time in the West* (Sergio Leone, 1968), was brought in as Price's replacement. But without AIP's staple actor and with a

ludicrous script, the film was a complete disaster. The second cycle ended in utter failure.¹⁷

AIP went public in 1969. Shortly after, a rift formed between Arkoff and Nicholson. Nicholson resented Arkoff's increasing role as the company's mouthpiece. Nicholson left AIP for a deal at Fox and died in 1972. By 1978, AIP's revenues had fallen twelve percent. Arkoff merged AIP with Filmways in 1979, telling the press that "Today is the producer's era. We must woo the producer. When AIP was formed, independent producers were rare. Today, with license fees, ancillary rights, merchandising, tax shelters, foreign government subsidies, their numbers have increased." With the merger, Arkoff found himself out of the loop. Resigning, Arkoff felt he was leaving on a high note with *Love at First Bite* (Stan Dragoti, 1979) and *The Amityville Horror* (Stuart Rosenberg, 1979). Arkoff was bought out by Norman Lear and Bud Yorkin for \$4.3 million dollars. He started Arkoff International Pictures in 1981.¹⁸

AIP going public was the beginning of the end. The move was designed to give AIP room to expand, but it resulted in a loss of total control, something that Nicholson and Arkoff had cherished. As the company grew, it needed more money to stay solvent and was forced to go where the profits were — into mainstream film. There was no way that AIP could compete in the mainstream market after being in B movies for almost twenty years. When the merger was finalized, Filmways did not want to make AIP-type features. The company lasted for two years after Arkoff's resignation. It hovered on the edge of bankruptcy until it was taken over by Orion Pictures, a future victim of insolvency.¹⁹

For separate reasons, Hammer and AIP continued their cycles despite signs from the market that their films' popularity had waned. While both had success with several of the films made after the core of the monster cycle and Poe adaptations had been produced, and despite meek attempts at changing formulas, Hammer and AIP were swept away by a film industry making room for the blockbuster.

Endnotes

1. Mangravite, 53; Meikle, 168-169.
2. Murphy, 171.
3. Meikle, 207.
4. Meikle, 214, 217-218.
5. Maxford, 108, 110.
6. Brosnan, 118.
7. Coe, 11; Weaver, 176; Conrich, 231; Maxford, 105; Pirie, *Heritage*, 161; Porter, 202.
8. Hutchings, 159-160; Pirie, *Heritage*, 48; Porter, 203.
9. Meikle, 263, 268; Hutchings, 160.
10. Coe, 10; Maxford, 125, 127; Meikle, 270-271.
11. Maxford, 124, 127, 129; ; Brosnan, 123; Meikle, 274-276.
12. Meikle, 288-289, 291; Maxford, 133.
13. McGee, *Corman*, 55-57, 60, 73; Flynn and McCarthy, "Interview," 308.
14. McGee, *Faster*, 274.
15. McGee, *Faster*, 276.
16. McGee, *Faster*, 278, 280-281.
17. McGee, *Faster*, 280.
18. McGee, *Faster*, 286-287, 293-294.
19. McGee, *Faster*, 294.

Chapter Five: Critical Response and Style

This chapter will discuss the critical and industrial responses to the films in Hammer Films' 'monster' cycle and American International's Poe adaptations. It will also discuss the style of the individual cycle's directors, Terence Fisher and Roger Corman. As independent film companies working hard to compete with the major studios, Hammer and AIP needed a way to separate themselves from other independent production companies, especially those producing horror films, and gain exposure in the press. Hammer led the way by introducing colour to the genre with their gothic monster films while AIP followed Hammer by making colour a symbolic effect in the Poe adaptations.

Hammer's monster cycle was hugely influential in reviving the popularity of the horror genre. *The Quatermass Xperiment* (1954) begins the turn toward horror for Hammer. It is reviewed favourable in several British newspapers, in which the film's horror aspects are highlighted. The *Monthly Film Bulletin* put *The Quatermass Xperiment* above most of the science fiction at the time, saying that the monster is "acceptably alarming;" the *Sunday Times* notes that the film is "exciting but distinctly nauseating." Paul Dehn of the *News Chronicle* writes that the film is "the best and nastiest horror film" he has seen since the Second World War.¹ These accolades do not continue.

Hammer's films provoked discussion about the upsurgeance in horror film production. The bias, not only against Hammer but also against the horror genre, is

exemplified in a 1958 *Sight and Sound* article “The Face of Horror.” The article’s author, Derek Hill, brands Hammer as the harbinger of social decline. It uses the rise in horror film production linked to Hammer’s success with *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) and other production companies wanting to share in Hammer’s financial rewards to crucify the studio. Hill believes the new breed of horror inaugurated by *The Curse of Frankenstein* sweeps aside the best devices employed by directors of classic horror films, such as James Whale, director of *Frankenstein* (1931) and *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1936). The power of suggestion and the importance of constructing mood and atmosphere gives way to what Hill sees as a contemporary trend in horror, a dependence on the extended close up which emphasizes the injuries inflicted on the monster’s victims. Hill places the responsibility for these changes with Hammer. He writes, “Instead of attempting mood, tension or shock, the new Frankenstein productions rely almost entirely on a percentage of shots of repugnant clinical detail. There is little to frighten in *The Curse of Frankenstein* or *Revenge of Frankenstein* (1958), but plenty to disgust.”² In a 1969 interview, James Carreras responds to the studio’s detractors:

It really doesn’t concern us at all. We’re a purely commercial company, we turn out films we think are fairy tales in a way and we don’t think they offend anybody. We’ve never known anyone rush out after seeing a Dracula and help himself to a pint of blood, or rush off to do a transplant because they’ve seen Professor Frankenstein doing one.³

Hammer had no problem with its bad reputation with critics and blithely vaunted itself through its highly planned advertising campaigns capitalizing on the shock value the films indulged in. The studio held to its position as a producer of B movies and

thrived on bad reviews. Speaking in 1974, Michael Carreras speaks of a seeming change in critical reaction to Hammer films: “I read many reviews of our films with total amazement. I really do. For instance, when the National Film Theatre in 1971 gave us a two-week season I was horrified. I thought if they made us respectable it would ruin our whole image.”⁴ While Michael Carreras bemoans the studio’s new-found favour with the critics, reviewers appeared to be waxing nostalgic for the golden days of horror, a time when Hammer had been in its prime, as a response to the shift in the genre with films such as *The Exorcist* (1972). Reviewing the Hammer double bill of *Frankenstein and the Monster From Hell* (1974) and *Captain Kronos: Vampire Hunter* (Brian Clemens, 1974), Vincent Canby, critic for the *New York Times*, mentions that the films come from the “Hammer horror-film factory” and that they could very easily be overlooked by moviegoers, but that those with “a fondness for horror films, especially the expensive looking, mostly deadpan Hammer kind” should see them. Canby notes that *Frankenstein and the Monster From Hell* is “chock full of the old horror film values we don’t see much of any more.”⁵

Hammer rarely receives raves. Early in the cycle, there appears to be some appreciation for what Hammer is doing for the genre. Though the reviewer of *Horror of Dracula* (*Dracula*, 1958) states the film’s plot is “anaemic,” he lauds the studio’s use of colour because it makes the undead appear more cadaverous. Though *The Curse of Frankenstein* is a groundbreaking horror film in its use of colour and graphic detail, critics compare the film to its Universal predecessors. Bosley Crowther, a reviewer for the *New York Times*, writes that those old enough to remember Boris Karloff will not be

impressed, but that Hammer's version "may titillate blissful youngsters," just the demographic Hammer hoped it would draw to theatres. Despite his conclusion that *The Phantom of the Opera* (1962) is unsatisfying, Howard Thompson of the *New York Times* comments that what really makes the film disappointing is that it comes from Hammer, a production company known for its spot-on atmosphere, music and lush colour.

Similarly, Thompson praises *The Curse of the Werewolf's* (1960) plush period set design and its use of colour; he writes that it is "different from run-of-the-mill horrors," but concludes the film does not go far enough in distinguishing itself from others of its ilk.⁶

Some critics express disappointment at Hammer's inability to sustain a script's momentum from one reel to another. Howard Thompson, in his critique of the *Horror of Frankenstein* (Jimmy Sangster, 1970) and *Scars of Dracula* (1970) double bill, warns potential audience members away from the "garish, gory junk" of *Scars*. However, he praises *Frankenstein* for being "painless and fun" in the first hour with a clever script, but states the film fails once the monster emerges. Thompson declares "it was good fun while it lasted. Hammer almost had something special." Thompson is even less kind in reviewing *Dracula Has Risen From the Grave* (1968). His opinion of the film is quite succinct and he does not mention Hammer when he writes, "*Dracula Has Risen From the Grave*. Yes, again. And judging by this junky British film in color — asplatter with catchup [*sic*] or paint or whatever, to simulate the Count's favorite color — he can descend again." The review of *Taste the Blood of Dracula* (Peter Sasdy, 1970) encapsulates the attitude of critics toward Hammer in the early seventies and highlights how far the studio had deteriorated since its success of the early sixties. Calling attention

to the decline of B pictures playing in the second slot on double bills, A. H. Weiler of the *New York Times* remarks on the film's inferior plot and half-hearted attempts at gore. Commenting on the film's ability to turn the audience on to the joys of plumbing, Weiler says that *Taste the Blood of Dracula* is neither frightening nor entertaining.⁷

While Hammer films fail to impress critics outside the film industry, those reviewing films for industry papers view the cycle from a different angle. *Variety*'s review of *The Brides of Dracula* (1960) sees it as a feature that will appeal to the horror trade, produced by a studio distinctive in its production of "goose pimple diversions." Acknowledging that true horror fans will find the film lacking in chills and that Hammer's use of colour is a distraction rather than an asset, the reviewer says that *The Brides of Dracula* is a technically well-made film. Noting that Universal has a strong advertising campaign in place for the film, the *Variety* reviewer believes that it will do well in bringing in thrill-seekers. In *The Bride of Dracula*'s *New York Times* review, Bosley Crowther writes that the film merely echoes the vampire films that came before it, offering nothing new to the tale of a "vampire bugaboo who likes to sink his oversized dentures into the necks of pretty girls."⁸ The *New York Times*' Eugene Archer has little to say about *House of Fright* (1961), AIP's release of Hammer's attempt at bringing *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* to the screen, other than it was lurid and a "color orgy." *Variety* reviews the film in its first incarnation as *The Two Faces of Dr. Jekyll* (1960), released by Columbia a year before *House of Fright*. The paper notes that there is sufficient horror in the film to prove a solid performer at the box office, but proffers a warning to perspective exhibitors that *The Two Faces of Dr. Jekyll* requires clever marketing in

order to reach its profit potential.⁹

As the years go by and Hammer films appear to be released one after the other, film reviews become shorter. A kind of shorthand is developed based on the name, Hammer. In his extensive research on reviews done on Hammer films, *Hammer and Beyond* author, Peter Hutchings notes only two reviews of *The Curse of Frankenstein* mention Hammer. Reviews of *Dracula* one year later have few references to the studio. By 1959s *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, the studio is referred to as the “horror boys of Hammer films” (Nina Hibbin, *The Daily Worker*, 28 March, 1959). By the late sixties, it has become “Hammer horror” (Nina Hibbin, *The Morning Star*, 8 June 1968) or “not much to say about *The Devil Rides Out* except it’s the latest Hammer horror release” (*The Guardian*, 7 June 1968). Hammer’s name comes to represent a descriptive category that implies a certain type of horror film that audiences could expect and to which critics could give a quick response.¹⁰

American International Pictures faces the same differences in opinion between industry and non-industry publications. Reviewing *House of Usher* (1960) in the *New York Times*, Eugene Archer recognizes Roger Corman’s good intentions but states the film passes over Edgar Allan Poe’s literary style to go for the thrill, trying the audiences’ patience in the process. Paul V. Bleckley of the *New York Herald Tribune* disagrees with Archer’s assessment, writing that the film is keenly aware of its literary trappings and is acutely cognizant of Poe’s style. Bleckley states that *House of Usher* is a boon to horror buffs, “a heartening move in the right direction, a restoration of finesse and craftsmanship to the genre of dread.” *Variety* sees the makings of a cycle in its critique

of *House of Usher*, deeming Poe's work to be "extremely commercial." Agreeing with Archer in its assessment that the production takes great license with its source material, which may inflame students of literature, *Variety* notes that the changes remain true to Poe in their romantic intent. Though the production is at times "flashy" and the set design "flamboyant," *House of Usher* is a rare film in that it would appeal to adult tastes as well as those looking for a scare and could be a "rewarding attraction for children." In reviewing *The Raven* (1963), AIP's foray with Poe into comedy, Bosley Crowther's opinion of the film is summed up in one succinct sentence. He writes that the film is "strictly a picture for the kiddies and the bird-brained, quote the critic." Calling *The Raven* a "prospective highgrossing comedy horror," but acknowledging its adaptation from Poe's poem, "The Raven," is absurd, *Variety* states that audiences would be satisfied with the balance between laughter and horror in this "corn-pop of considerable comedic dimensions." The review also observes that with good marketing and the box office performance of AIP's previous Poe adaptations, *The Raven* should bring in impressive revenue.¹¹

AIP receives praise from reviewers for *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1961) and *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964). Howard Thompson places *The Pit and the Pendulum* above other Poe adaptations, which he calls "rock-bottom shock shows." Thompson writes that the film is "an old fashioned fright" and credits the film's creative gothic design. The merging of lush colour, opulent sets and an unearthly score, makes *The Pit and the Pendulum*, in Thompson's opinion, the strongest 'B' horror to come out of Hollywood. Calling the colour "stunning," Thompson congratulates director Roger

Corman on eliciting a truly horrific atmosphere. The critic from *Time* magazine writes that *The Pit and the Pendulum* is a “literary hair-raiser that is cleverly, if self-consciously, Edgar Allan poetic.”¹²

The Masque of the Red Death, according to Eugene Archer, finds Roger Corman at his peak as a director. He states that the film is at times raw, and at others, unaffected, but is nonetheless entertaining. Despite complaints that the use of colour is occasionally garish, Archer writes, “on its level, it [the film] is astonishingly good.” Writing for the *New York Herald Tribune*, critic Robert Salmaggi praises *Masque*’s grand costumes, lush set design, while the reviewer for the *New York Daily News* states that “Corman may yet out-horror all the horror filmmakers.”¹³

With the creation of the second Poe cycle in the late sixties, the critics are not as quick to praise AIP’s continuing ‘adaptations’. A. H. Weiler wastes little space in reviewing *The Oblong Box* (1969). He writes that “*The Oblong Box* (the coffin in this cheerless charade) might have been better left interred.” Though *The Spirits of the Dead* (1969) is directed by three renowned directors, Federico Fellini, Louis Malle and Roger Vadim, the film did not impress Vincent Canby. While the critic praises Fellini’s segment, he finds Vadim’s “as over-decorated and shrill as a drag ball, but still quite fun;” and Malle’s is simply tiresome. The *New York Times* ventures into discussing box office appeal in its review of *Cry of the Banshee* (1970) saying that the film is halfhearted, neither thrill-inducing nor weighty enough to fill theatres and therefore, too light to make an impact on the holiday movie attendance (the film was released in mid-December). With the conjunction of its historical setting and inadvertent comic tone, *Cry*

of the Banshee is unable to rise above its substandard sixteenth century moorings and is thus a tepid distraction that is “scarcely a tribute to ... ritual murder.”¹⁴

While many people contributed to the success of these studios, the contributions of Hammer’s Terence Fisher and AIP’s Roger Corman must be acknowledged. Fisher brought new looks to many of the horror genre’s most indelible characters, chief among them Frankenstein, Dracula, the Mummy, and Mr. Hyde. The films directed by Fisher between 1957 and 1962 are not only the best of Hammer’s ‘monster’ cycle, but also the best of Fisher’s career. Harry Ringel, author of “Terence Fisher: The Human Side,” puts Hammer’s Golden Age between the years of 1957 and 1962 and connects the studio’s identity to Fisher. With his films came the changing of the horror genre itself. Fisher’s films have a sense of the importance of realism in horror. Moving away from the supernatural melodramas coming out of Hollywood, Hammer, through Fisher, produced horror constructed from characters in peril and from graphic gruesome detail, all imbued with realism. Yet, in spite of his breakthroughs in horror, Terence Fisher has not received his due respect, especially from British critics. In *Sixties British Cinema*, Robert Murphy writes that Fisher has endured, more so than any other British director, the “short-sighted dilettantism of British film culture.” Although lauded in France for his directorial skills and comprehensive resuscitation of old horror traditions, Fisher was lambasted for being a “vulgar desecrator of the Universal classics” and for jettisoning mood and refinement in favour of bloodletting. Murphy comes to Fisher’s defence by stating that his methods are “almost pedantically disciplined.” In *A Heritage of Horror: The English Gothic Cinema, 1946 - 1972*, David Pirie echoes Robert Murphy’s

description of Fisher's style as "pedantic" when he states that Fisher's technique is similar to that of a "nineteenth century storyteller," and comments that anything more flamboyant is wrong for the films' subject matter.¹⁵

One must look to Fisher's film education to understand his technique. Beginning as an editor and co-director at Gainsborough Studios in the thirties, Fisher honed his skills in the cutting room. Fisher, himself, notes that being part of the editing process makes one more aware of "the pattern of the film, the overall rhythm. This dramatic rhythm is the basis of technique, of style." He goes on to speak of his handling of the 'monster' in his films: "I've always involved the monster in the frame, placed him in the decor. I've never used the conventional style, where you keep harping on reaction shots and cutting away from him. I believe in building things up naturally, but I've never *isolated* the monster from the world around, or tried to avoid showing him [Fisher's emphasis]."¹⁶

At the core of Hammer's early success was the studio's assemblage of a crew of technicians, headed by Terence Fisher, who took the 'monster' cycle's at times crude material and gave it a distinctive quality. This quality came to be identified exclusively with Hammer, and separated the company from the competition. Central to this was the crew's ability to produce a polished film without belying its budgetary restrictions. The crew which set the standard of quality at Bray was those involved in the production of the early monster films: Terence Fisher, producer Anthony Hinds, scriptwriters Jimmy Sangster and John Elder (Anthony Hinds' pseudonym), cameraman Jack Asher, art director Bernard Robinson, and make-up artist Roy Ashton.¹⁷

As the crew's leader, Terence Fisher co-ordinated the technicians and worked with a tight budget and short shooting schedules. In the beginning the mise-en-scène was what put Hammer above their competition and impacted audiences. This mise-en-scène would, nevertheless, eventually be described as repetitive, laying bare the cycle's formulaic nature. With sets of manor houses, castles and cemeteries that added an air of gloom, Hammer's films have a realism that is not present in their contemporaries. The obscuring camera angles and shadows that prevail in traditional horror films, under the influence of German Expressionism, are not present in Hammer's monster pictures. These omissions speak to Fisher's solemn style. Jack Asher's camera work is subdued, allowing the mise-en-scène's muted realism to come forward. This subtlety merges with the use of colour. While colour does highlight the spectacle of human viscera, a factor in drawing moviegoers, it does not add anything surreal to the films. Colour is used subtly to add effect. In *The Curse of Frankenstein*, the doctor's lab is full of brilliant blues, yellows and greens as bubbling, frothy fluids swirl in beakers and tubes. When Dr. Frankenstein (Peter Cushing) extracts a brain from a cadaver, the organ is a bright pink suspended in murky brown liquid. A further example of colour usage rounds out the film. At the film's conclusion, the shackled doctor walks toward the camera down a muted brown hallway. He stops and looks up to his left through a window before moving on with his guards. The camera cuts to a guillotine outlined against a lilac sky, but the colour is restrained, making the immediacy of the doctor's execution more prominent.¹⁸

Perhaps nowhere else is Hammer's use of colour more important than in its early

vampire films. As the first studio to produce vampire films in colour, Hammer heightened the sense of realism within their cinematic world with the notion that Dracula and his followers could have existed, something that could not have been successfully achieved in Universal's black-and-white expressionistic films. An example of this can be found in the introduction of the Count in *Dracula*. Dracula (Christopher Lee) appears at the top of a large set of stairs in long shot. His body and visage are obscured in darkness; the only light in the frame comes from the hallway behind Dracula, emphasizing his height. He then strides down the stairs at a natural pace, no gliding, and there is nothing about the colour of his face or surroundings to suggest his undead origins. The Count greets Jonathan Harker (John Van Eyssen), as any host would, with concern for his guest's comfort.¹⁹

This is not to say that colour cannot have the opposite effect, working to erase realism at certain points in a film. In *Dracula*, the Count's female victims appear to swoon under his evil gaze. The use of colour in these 'seduction' sequences gives them a sexual edge, an otherworldly aura. Though Dracula does not appear on screen during this particular sequence, Lucy's (Carol Marsh) preparations for his arrival set the scene for her impending death. Her dark bedroom is bathed in ethereal blue moonlight from an open door. The vivid reds of the room's drapery and pale blue of Lucy's flowing nightgown underscore the scene's transgressive sensuality. While black-and-white traditional horrors tended to translate nightmarish states through set design, camera placement and lighting (to great effect), the use of colour forces the audience to view the nightmare image as inevitable and viscerally proximate. Alain Silver and James Ursini

comment in *The Vampire Film: From Nosferatu to Bram Stoker's Dracula* on Hammer's style, saying it evolved over the years of its monster films, and what made it so ripe for imitation, was the studio's ability to draw in audiences by playing on their deep-rooted penchant for horror, stressing "psychological realism," highlighting "eroticism" and achieving realistic set design and acting.²⁰

Both Gary Morris, in *Roger Corman*, and Andrew Tudor, in *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie*, agree that Roger Corman took elements of Hammer's gothic style, expanded it, removed the realism and melded it with his own perspective to create the Poe adaptations' look.²¹ For Corman, the director of the core Poe adaptations, the main concern in their production was keeping within the budget without revealing their inexpensiveness. Speaking of dealing with limited budgets and how it shaped his style, he stated: "Very often when you're handicapped by a small budget or a small stage, your only way out of it is to try to get a very stylized, very unusual look going with camera angles. It's a good way of avoiding that giveaway master shot."²² With the beginning of the Poe cycle, Corman's style changed. Moving away from the simplistic intercutting and Spartan sets which characterize his films in the fifties, Corman expanded his repertoire, when shooting schedules and budget permitted, to include lengthy tracking sequences, shock edits, and colour effects. The director credits his cinematographer, Floyd Crosby, whose career dated back to films such as F. W. Murnau's *Tabu* (1931), for aiding in the evolution of his style. Crosby was responsible for the Poe adaptations' mood enhancing lighting, namely their heavy use of atmosphere-producing shadows and swirling mists.²³

Art director, Daniel Haller created the cavernous castle sets to allow for Crosby's highly-mobile camera. Corman felt that Poe's works dwelled in the unconscious mind and therefore, that world would be portrayed more successfully if it was assembled on a soundstage. Speaking of *House of Usher*, the director said, "I didn't want to use location shots. I didn't want the film to be shot realistically." Built on small soundstages, the Poe adaptations' sets were meant to appear massive. The sets included several rooms that were connected via a series of archways or wide staircases, so that the camera could follow the action without impediment. This enabled the lengthy tracking shots. Along with the open rooms came weighty props such as oversized dining tables, canopied beds and larger-than-life portraits on the walls, all meant to purvey a sense of massiveness that purposely engulfed the actors. The construction of the dungeon for *The Pit and the Pendulum* is an example of how far the crew went to create the illusion of immense space. The pendulum filled an entire soundstage from floor to ceiling. The pendulum itself was double printed to give the torture device an overwhelming solidity. With matte additions to make the set look even more cavernous, a camera, outfitted with a 40 mm Panavision wide-angle lens, was placed at the opposite end of the stage. This permitted Crosby to place the image within the frame while leaving space at the top, bottom and sides. These 'spaces' were filled in during the printing process with extensions of the set, thereby doubling the dungeon's size.²⁴

The majority of the Poe films involve psychologically-tortured protagonists losing control of their haunted lives. Best described as anti-heroes, these characters were ripe for Corman's exploitation. His use of symbolic colour and rapid camera movements

is representative of the heroes' unstable mental state. *House of Usher* and *The Pit and the Pendulum* feature extended montage sequences presented to the viewer as dreams and flashbacks. Making use of lab opticals to provide colour, a flashback in *House of Usher* displaying the past beauty of the Usher family lands has a blue mist blowing over images of flowering trees. The hue is also blue in Philip's (Mark Damon) nightmare sequence in which light blue smoke rolls across the bottom third of the entirely blue frame. An excellent example of Corman's "rich colour symbolism" occurs during Katherine's (Luana Anders) recollection of her uncle's and mother's deaths as witnessed by her brother, Nicholas (Vincent Price). The flashback is narrated by Katherine though we watch most of the action from her brother's point of view. Beginning in blue, a young Nicholas (Larry Turner) enters the dungeon. When the perspective shifts to Nicholas' position, the frame takes on a rosy colour as the boy watches his mother, Isabella (Mary Menzies), uncle, Bartolome (Charles Victor), and father (Vincent Price) enter the chamber. Nicholas' father accuses the two of adultery, proceeds to murder his brother and walls up his chained wife. As soon as the violence commences, the colour changes to bright yellows and reds. The image is stretched, distorted within the frame to increase the nightmarish quality of the sequence. Blue returns to the frame when Nicholas sees his father walling up his mother.²⁵

Another camera trick Corman uses is the zip pan. When a character has an epiphany or when a new, jarring image is introduced, Corman often employs a zip pan to register the character's reaction. The last scene in *The Pit and the Pendulum* has the camera swinging sharply from a low angle shot of Catherine atop the dungeon stairs. As

the door closes heavily behind her, she states that “no one will ever enter this room again.” The camera whips down and around to a medium close up of her adulterous sister-in-law, Elizabeth (Barbara Steele), trapped in an Iron Maiden, placed there by Nicholas. The iris closes on Elizabeth’s eyes behind the bars; the image flickers, the frame changes to a pink colour, her eyes widen and the frame freezes.²⁶

The tactics Corman used to build atmosphere and imply terror, however, quickly became stock features. As a mood builder, the director frequently used an insert shot of waves crashing over craggy rocks. This shot was placed over a matte of a castle on a cliffside. Many of the Poe films such as *The Pit and the Pendulum* and *Tales of Terror*, begin with this shot. Corman’s reasoning behind the shot’s regular use was that the painting had been paid for, so it needed to be used at every chance. Financial rational aside, the insert shots quickly became routine and repetitive. This repetition was further underscored when production of the Poes moved to England with *Masque of the Red Death*. Corman’s crew could not join him. Floyd Crosby was replaced by Nicholas Roeg. Roeg’s camera movements harken back to Crosby’s work in *The Haunted Palace* (1963), *House of Usher* and *The Pit and the Pendulum* and speak to the ease of anyone being able to copy the Poe look.²⁷

In an attempt to set themselves apart from other independent production companies, Hammer and AIP came up with innovations in their own cycles. The shift to colour from black and white and a deliberate emphasis on bodily details garnered Hammer profits and audiences. The Poe adaptations use of colour effects to embody psychological torment drew similar attention. However, these methods could not sustain

the cycles indefinitely as indicated by the increasingly negative response from critics.

Endnotes

1. Brosnan, 100.
2. Murphy, 162; Hill, "Face," 8-9.
3. Porter, 197.
4. Brosnan, 118.
5. Vincent Canby, review of *Frankenstein and the Monster From Hell* and *Captain Kronos: Vampire Hunter* (Hammer movie), *New York Times*, 31 October 1974, 48:1.
6. Bosley Crowther, review of *The Curse of Frankenstein* (Hammer movie), *New York Times*, 8 August 1957, 15:5; A. H. Weiler, review of *Horror of Dracula* (Hammer movie), *New York Times*, 29 May 1958, 24:4; Howard Thompson, review of *The Phantom of the Opera* (Hammer movie), *New York Times*, 23 August 1962, 25:2; Howard Thompson, review of *The Curse of the Werewolf*, *New York Times*, 8 June 1961, 40:2.
7. Howard Thompson, review of *Horror of Frankenstein* and *Scars of Dracula* (Hammer movie), *New York Times*, 18 June 1971, 29:1; Howard Thompson, "'Dracula' Returns," review of *Dracula Has Risen From the Grave*, *New York Times*, 27 March 1969, 54:4; A. H. Weiler, review of *Taste the Blood of Dracula* (Hammer movie), *New York Times*, 29 October 1970, 58:1.
8. Review of *The Brides of Dracula* (Hammer movie), *Variety*, 18 May 1960, p. 6; Bosley Crowther, review of *The Brides of Dracula* (Hammer movie), *New York Times*, 6 September 1960, 41:4.
9. Eugene Archer, review of *House of Fright* (Hammer movie), *New York Times*, 24 August 1961, 25:4; Review of *The Two Faces of Dr. Jekyll* (Hammer movie), *Variety*, 19 October 1960, p. 6.
10. Hutchings, 5.
11. Eugene Archer, review of *The House of Usher* (AIP movie), *New York Times*, 15 September 1960, 45:4; Naha, 149; Review of *House of Usher* (AIP movie), *Variety*, 29 June 1960, p. 8. Bosley Crowther, review of *The Raven* (AIP movie), *New York Times*, 26 January 1963, 5:1; Review of *The Raven* (AIP movie), *Variety*, 6 February 1963, p. 6.
12. Howard Thompson, review of *The Pit and the Pendulum* (AIP movie), *New York*

Times, 24 August 1961, 25:3; Naha, 155.

13. Eugene Archer, review of *The Masque of the Red Death* (AIP movie), *New York Times*, 17 September 1964, 52:6; Naha, 180.

14. A. H. Weiler, review of *The Oblong Box* (AIP movie), *New York Times*, 24 July 1969, 25:1; Vincent Canby, review of *Spirits of the Dead* (Les Films Marceau-Cocinor movie), *New York Times*, 4 September 1969, 51:1; A. H. Weiler, review of *Cry of the Banshee* (AIP movie), *New York Times*, 17 December 1970, 60:5.

15. Robert C. Cumbow, "Pictures on the Walls of the House of Hammer," *Film Comment* 28 (May - June 1992): 51; Harry Ringel, "Terence Fisher: The Human Side," *Cinémafantastique* 4:3 (fall 1975): 9; Murphy, 37, 164, 311; Pirie, *Heritage*, 50-51.

16. Murphy, 164.

17. Porter, 200.

18. Porter, 200-201, Murphy, 164.

19. Alain Silver and James Ursini, *The Vampire Film: From Nosferatu to Bram Stoker's Dracula* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1993), 124-125.

20. Silver and Ursini, 124-125.

21. Morris, 2; Andrew Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 54.

22. Naha, 16-17.

23. Door, 76; Naha, 31; Murphy, 164; Tony Rayns, "Roger Corman," in *Cinema: A Critical Dictionary*, vol. 1, ed. Richard Roud (New York: Viking Press, 1980), 232.

24. Herb A. Lightman, "A Study in Horror Film Photography," *American Cinematography* (October 1961): 612-613, quoted in Morris, 93, 108.

25. Rayns, 232.

26. Door, 78; Morris, 93.

27. Fischer, 229; Morris, 120-121.

Conclusion

The objective of this thesis has been to present a case study of two independent production companies working in film industries in states of transition after the Second World War. While Hammer Films and American International Pictures encapsulate the problems, conditions and circumstances faced by small independent producers during these years of flux, the companies have a deeper connection than just being one another's competition. This link is highlighted through the idea of a film cycle. I have traced the development of each company's cycle in order to underscore certain key relationships between Hammer Films and AIP. The 'monster' cycle and the Poe adaptations are two cycles in the horror genre with similar themes and style which emerge within a few years of each other and whose 'parent' companies come to do business with each other. By following the threads of these cycles through the lives of Hammer Films and AIP, the role of the independent producer in the fifties and sixties comes to the fore as does the importance of sound business acumen.

The Paramount decree, which forced the dissolution of monopolies held by major studios, presented an opportunity to small, independent film companies struggling to find an outlet for their films. Already the suppliers of features for the bottom half of double bills, these independents used the major studios' instability to raise their status in the film industry.

American International Pictures never presented itself as anything more than a commercially motivated distribution company supplying mass entertainment. Samuel Z.

Arkoff and Jim Nicholson started AIP in the mid-fifties, a time in which the teenager, with money to spend, was feeling ignored and drive-ins were desperate for features. AIP eagerly stepped in to solve these problems. Producing ultra-low budget films put together in combination packages, the company catered directly to teenagers with films such as *Hot Rod Girl* (1956) and *The Phantom from 10,000 Leagues* (1956) that were supplied almost wholly to drive-ins. With success came increased competition, but more importantly imitation. Looking for a way to ease their financial distress, the majors began to make films similar to AIP's. Wielding their influence and their connections with exhibitors, the majors were able to push AIP almost completely out of the market.

Knowing that something new was needed to bolster business and regain their position in the market, AIP embarked on their big-budget colour cycle, the Poe adaptations. The cycle was created as a solution to financial trouble, a source of much needed revenue for the company. To AIP, it was nothing more than a business risk that paid dividends. When the Poe adaptations primary director, Roger Corman, expressed a desire to move on to more contemporary subject matter, AIP created a biker film cycle. Wanting to revive the success of the Poe pictures, AIP produced several more films in a second cycle. Always open to manipulating the audience, AIP stumbled when it did not trust moviegoers. The second installment of Poe films concluded when it was clear their popularity had been severely affected and the cycle's box office take was quite dismal. Falling into financial distress, AIP made several unsound business decisions. Attempts at going mainstream resulted only in more failure.

Established in the thirties, Hammer Films was one of few independent British

studios to survive the economic hardships the film industry faced during the Second World War and the postwar period. By being frugal with budgets, by keeping to shooting schedules, and by supplying the market with pictures based on characters already having public cachet, Hammer came through the difficulties in the British film industry to come out on top in the fifties. Facing another decline and possible bankruptcy, Hammer took a chance with *The Quatermass Xperiment* (1954) and subsequently found their niche — horror. With evidence from a marketing survey, James Carreras changed Hammer's direction for the next twenty years. Adding colour and highlighting gross physical detail were the hallmarks of the early 'monster' cycle. In the beginning, Hammer had a formula that persuaded the film industry and audiences that they were the vanguard in horror films. *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957), *Dracula* (1958) and *The Brides of Dracula* (1960) proved the formula worked. American distributors showcased Hammer films in North America, and the cycle was highly profitable. For Hammer, there was never any attempt to abandon the cycle they created for financial reasons or because of the formulaic nature of their products — even when the scripts became hackneyed and dated. Despite adding graphic violence and sexual content to their films, Hammer was unable to truly, or successfully, incorporate changes in the horror genre into their films. But by holding steadfastly to their cycle, the studio became a financial pariah from which American investors distanced themselves. By the seventies, productions aimed at domestic British audiences struggled to maintain viability with a market flooded with Hollywood competition. The fight for a share of the British film industry came to a virtual halt when several of the domestic mainstays such as the

Carry On films, but mainly Hammer films, ceased production.¹ The once edgy gothics from Britain became what Universal's horrors had symbolized to Hammer in the late fifties — something to be surpassed, something that spoke only to the past, something to be left behind.

As small independent film companies, Hammer Films and American International Pictures took advantage of the opportunities afforded to them with the waning of the Rank Organization and during the years following the Paramount decree, respectively. Recognizing the emerging teenage market in the mid-fifties brought initial success. The social changes through the sixties combined with Hammer and AIP's ability to recognize trends and current tastes enabled them to meet the interests of this new audience. The studios' early concern with market surveys — even surveying their own teenage children — indicated an attention to changing market and exhibition practices. Their innovations in the double bill and the marketing of their films helped to consolidate their reputations. The development of distinctive film cycles, combined with their use of colour, made their films unique. Yet film cycles invariably bring imitation and repetition, and invariably come to an end. The very things that brought the studios' initial success and led to their respective film cycles — attention to audience, recognizing current trends, innovations in marketing, taking advantage of social change — appear to have been abandoned and in turn led to the studios' decline. In the end, both Hammer and AIP failed to develop and change with their audience and with the times.


Endnotes

1. Mangravite, 53; John Hill, "British Cinema as National Cinema Production, Audience and Representation," in *The British Cinema Book*, ed. Robert Murphy (London: BFI, 1997), 246.

Appendix

MONSTER BUSINESS!

ALL-TIME HIGH FOR A SATURDAY AND A SUNDAY TAKE AT THE WARNER!
SECOND WEEK-END BEATS RECORD OPENING WEEK-END!
ALSO AT THE RITZ, LEICESTER SQUARE, FROM TODAY!



THE CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN PETER CUSHING HAZEL COURT VERA-ORLANDINI
CHRISTOPHER LEE (AS THE CREATURE)

Figure 1

BOYS!
FIGHT BACK... BITE BACK WITH DRACULA FANGS!

GIRLS!
DEFEND YOURSELF WITH ZOMBIE EYES!

GET YOURS NOW!
BOTH FREE AS YOU ENTER THE THEATRE!

Bloodthirsty Vampire Lives Again!

DRACULA
PRINCE OF DARKNESS

DOUBLE THRILLS AND CHILLS WITH THE EERIEST FRIGHT SHOW IN TOWN!

Only The Lord Of The Dead Could Unleash Them!

PLAGUE OF THE ZOMBIES

DRACULA, PRINCE OF DARKNESS Starring
CHRISTOPHER LEE · BARBARA SHELLEY · ANDREW KEIR

PLAGUE OF THE ZOMBIES Starring
ANDRE MORELL · DIANE CLARE · JOHN CARSON

Produced by DELUXE. Distributed by DELUXE. Color by DELUXE. © 1968 by DELUXE. All Rights Reserved. Color by DELUXE.

Figure 2

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