

JAWS AND THE NATURE OF EVIL:
AN EXAMINATION OF PETER BENCHLEY'S JAWS
AS A WORK OF GOTHIC FICTION.

by

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Despite its popular success, Peter Benchley's best-selling novel, Jaws, was regarded by critics as a rather mundane thriller which was both a pathetic attempt to modernize Moby Dick and devoid of any careful craftsmanship or artistic merit. However, when the novel is read from the perspective of the genre of Gothic fiction, as it was characterized in the eighteenth century by Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis, then it becomes apparent that not only has Benchley put a great deal of care into the construction of his novel, but he has also endowed it with a great deal of underlying meaning. As a novel of Gothic fiction, Jaws examines the nature of evil from a modern perspective, redefining what evil is, where it lies, and how ordinary people can fight it in their everyday lives.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO JAWS AND THE GOTHIC GENRE

"Even for a fish story, 'Jaws' may be a mite malodorous. The shark is as disconcertingly omnipresent as the town is defenslessly flaccid before its peril. 'No mortal man is going to catch that fish' intones Minnie the postmistress, and the way these mortals handle it, she doesn't have to hedge her bets. Briney connections, occasional florid or sentimental lapses, stark manipulations impair the narrative. Passages of hollow portentousness creep in, as do clattering allusions-- perhaps inevitable-- to the Great American fish felon, Moby Dick."

("New York Times Book Review," 1974)

When Peter Benchley, son of writer Nathaniel Benchley, and grandson of the beloved wit Robert Benchley, published his first novel, Jaws, the reception was overwhelming: readers loved it and made it a best seller while the critics despised it. Donald Newlove, in the *Village Voice*, complained that Jaws is "bewitched by banality." A critic writing for *The Rolling Stone* bemoaned the "distinctly contrived subplot" that pairs an out-of-town ichthyologist and the police chief's wife in an affair. *Time* magazine's John Skow compared Jaws to "a bathtub version of Moby Dick."

Although it may be inevitable that a novel which includes a large aquatic animal would be compared with Melville's Moby Dick, the critics might have done better to look beyond the nautical trappings and examine the book for its own merit. Had they gone to such an effort, they might have abandoned their inadequate comparisons to Melville's classic and more appropriately compared Jaws to such classic novels as Dracula and The Monk. Like these novels, Benchley's creation is a work of Gothic fiction which explores the nature of evil and how it affects the world in which we live.

In 1791, a quarter of a century after Horace Walpole invented the genre

of the Gothic romance, Ann Radcliffe revitalized the Gothic movement with the publication of her novel The Romance of the Forest. And a year after Radcliffe published her most successful novel, The Mysteries of Udolpho, Matthew Lewis radically revised the structure of the Gothic novel with his dark and pessimistic creation, The Monk. For the next thirty years Gothic romances were the most popular form of fiction in England, exciting the imaginations of such writers as John Polidori, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and his wife Mary Shelley. By the time the novelty of the Gothic genre wore off, it had left an indelible mark on the pages of literary history and has continued to influence many canonical novelists such as the Brontës, Dickens, and Poe in the nineteenth century as well as Faulkner, Fowles, and Toni Morrison in the twentieth. As the prolific writings of such authors as Anne Rice and Stephen King attest, the Gothic genre is no less popular today than it was two hundred years ago.

As the Gothic has passed through the centuries, it has been repeatedly modified to suit the changing purposes of authors and the expectations of their audiences, but many underlying themes remain unaltered. Because this genre's popularity is so dependent on the emotions it inspires in its readers, it is instructive to note the ways in which the modern Gothic is different from the Gothic romances of the past. And it is equally compelling to examine the ways in which the Gothic has not changed at all, because such an examination indicates that some fears, and the desire to face those fears, transcend the passage of time and are perhaps inseparable from human nature.

Although Stephen King or Anne Rice are more obviously recognizable as writers in the genre of modern Gothic, popular novelist Peter Benchley exhibits in equal degree the qualities which make Gothic fiction the compelling category that it is. Rice and King are immediately associated with Gothic fiction

because their most famous works tend to focus upon the presence of supernatural beings. In their cases, what was once a mere tool used to illustrate meaning in the Gothic has now become a central device in the genre. We have become so fascinated by the alien world which is peopled with these monsters that we forget to be afraid of them, and they lose their terrifying impact. This emphasis on the supernatural in the Gothic is unfortunate because it draws our attention away from elements that are potentially far more meaningful than the mere presence of the fantastic. In Benchley's novel it is possible to appreciate more complex aspects of Gothic fiction, in particular, his study of evil both within and beyond society.

These deeper Gothic issues can be clearly seen in Jaws. Benchley takes traditional Gothic forms and modifies them to create a modern Gothic genre for a modern audience. In general terms, Benchley uses and transforms the conventions which were established first by Ann Radcliffe's novels and then by Matthew G. Lewis. And yet, amazingly, this novelist is rarely recognized as being a contributor to the Gothic genre. Often he is simply classified under general fiction or in some cases the nautical fiction category, which suggests to me that, because he chooses to omit elements which are blatantly supernatural, his work is perceived as addressing and impressing a wider audience than is generally associated with Gothic fiction today. But it is precisely this absence of the supernatural which illuminates the Gothic nature of his novels, because without the crutch of the fantastic, Benchley must rely on more sophisticated techniques, such as suspense and the grotesque, used by the great Gothic novelists of the past.

The evidence of Benchley's success with the Gothic form is that he is a highly popular writer. His novel Jaws was so successful that in 1975, just a year

after its publication, it was made into a wildly popular movie which spawned three sequels. This venture worked so well that five years later the people who had produced "Jaws" produced a film version of Benchley's newest publication, The Island, starring Michael Caine. Benchley wrote the screenplays for both films. Furthermore, just recently a made-for-television movie was released based on his book, The Beast. Not only are his stories popular, but they are popular in different mediums of entertainment.

This wide-spread popularity is one of the trade marks of Gothic fiction. Unlike other forms of critically important literature, well-crafted Gothic fiction's popularity is not confined to the aesthetic tastes of the educated elite. On the contrary, Gothic appeals to such a wide spread of the general populace, it is frequently sneered at by formal institutions of literary studies which believe that a novel which can be appreciated by readers who are ignorant of certain aesthetic forms must not have any remarkable craftsmanship. But Gothic is an unusual genre in that what are recognized as the greatest novels of the form have also been the most widely accepted. Robert Reno asserts that Gothic Romance was the most popular form of fiction in England between 1790 and 1820. Furthermore, Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis, "as the undisputed masters of the Gothic Romance... were the most popular British novelists of the Eighteenth century" (Reno 2-3). Gothic has always had an undeniable appeal to the general public because of the intense emotions it inspires. Gothic authors at their best evoke powerful emotions to engage the reader and to make their social commentary. And the greatest authors of Gothic novels are those who can tease emotions out of readers and sustain them throughout the story. Because readers are drawn to the excitement they can experience through the novel, they purchase the books which are the most engaging and

provide the most powerful thrills. And in this way it turns out that the most popular Gothic novelists are indeed the true artists of their craft.

One of the most important defining characteristics of the Gothic genre is the high level of emotion which it inspires in the reader. The author of a Gothic novel deliberately maintains and continually manipulates tension and emotionally charged situations to keep the reader's interest while simultaneously addressing important issues which are highlighted by the content of the scene. In Gothic fiction suspense is used in liberal doses to keep the reader entertained, and is punctuated by shocks which accompany an unexpected turn in events or a terrifying discovery which places the story's heroine in increasingly grave danger. The author will often offer up a mystery and then proceed to tantalize the reader with the heroine's questions, theories, and terrified suspicions before finally offering up an explanation which will satisfy her (and the reader's) curiosity. This can be seen in such novels as Otranto, Udolpho, The Monk, and Dracula. Since the heroine is young and inexperienced, more often than not her imagination creates an explanation far more terrifying than the truth behind the secrets, which allows the author to draw the reader into suspense over nothing, and conversely to surprise the reader when the terrible truth is far worse than the heroine ever expected. Occasionally a Gothic author will create suspense with the opposite approach by informing the reader of a villainous plot of which the heroine is as yet unaware. While watching helplessly as she walks farther and farther into the trap, the reader wonders with tense and terrified expectation, "will she find out in time?"

The introduction of the sublime is a technique for evoking emotions within the reader which is used almost exclusively in Gothic fiction. The author

gives descriptions of scenes which are too vast to be taken in at once and uses these scenes to overwhelm the reader and elicit a purely emotional response (Beckson and Ganz, 244). Since there are very few man-made structures which a human mind cannot encompass (the only recurring example that does evoke a sense of the sublime seems to be a ruined castle), sublimity usually comes in the form of a scene in nature, such as seeing the Alps for the first time, staring down several miles into a deep canyon, or witnessing the roaring surge of a waterfall. The sublime can be either terrifying (a dark and decaying medieval fortress silhouetted against the full moon), or illuminating (a rainbow gleaming across a mountain top), but it is always meant to bypass the reader's rational mind and elicit a deep and primal response. The emotions evoked by the sublime in Terror Gothic serve as a balance to the rational approach taken to examine evil (Beckson and Ganz, 245). The sublime reminds us that there are some aspects to life which are beyond human comprehension or control.

The other side to the spiritual sublime is the grotesque, which is equally prevalent in the Gothic genre (MacAndrew, 125). Here the author combines incongruous details, employs distortions, and introduces the bizarre to inspire revulsion and disgust in the reader. Most frequently the grotesque combines aspects of sex and death whereby erotic distortions that are as compelling as they are disturbing are achieved. In contrast to the sublime, the grotesque never transports readers with the power of inspiration, but rather transfixes them with the conflict between the curiosity of a voyeur and the fear and loathing of a victim. This technique, then, can be used to reveal the horrifying and perverse nature of evil.

And yet, intense emotions and fantastical supernatural creations are merely tools which the author uses to illustrate the central theme of any Gothic

novel: the exploration of evil. Every work of Gothic fiction turns around the author's vision of the nature, origin, and attraction of evil. And Benchley's novels are no exception. Every element which he uses to evoke an emotional response also serves the purpose of depicting Benchley's vision of evil.

Since Ann Radcliffe and Matthew G. Lewis are generally recognized as both the creators and the masters of Gothic romance, I will be using their novels to define my terms. The Radcliffean model can be defined as a novel of Gothic Terror. This is a novel of escape, which is centered on the trials of a young heroine who is captured and persecuted by a villain who is older, wiser, devious, and ruthless in his attempts to get what he wants. The heroine triumphs over the villain and eventually secures her freedom and her happiness with the virtuous weapons of patience, endurance, and forbearance. Evil lies wholly within the human being; the only "supernatural" elements in this type of novel are the results of either trickery or the heroine's overly sensitive imagination. The purpose of these elements is two-fold: the first, as discussed previously, is to keep the reader emotionally involved with constant excitement and suspense; the second is to grant the heroine the opportunity to mature. The heroine gains maturity by exploring and explaining away all irrationalities until she arrives at the rational truth (Reno, 7). This new-found insight coupled with the ability to stand firm and challenge irrational elements is meant to carry her through her difficulties with irrational people who wish her harm. This journey into thoughtful maturity is also meant to instruct readers in the virtues of rational thinking, which provides a nice balance to the high levels of emotions inspired by the novel's terrifying thrills and sustained suspense.

Radcliffe's Gothic is a modification of the genre of the sentimental novel and retains a number of its core elements. Indeed, Fred Botting argues that

Udolpho follows the moralistic pattern of eighteenth-century works like Richardson's Clarissa, one of the most popular novels of the sentimental genre (Botting,70). And Elizabeth MacAndrews explains that, in the Age of Reason, the sentimental movement replaced "the traditional faith in Reason as the foundation stone of morality with the concept of feeling (Sentiment) as man's moral arbiter" (MacAndrews, 23). The purpose of the sentimental novel was to cultivate the sensibilities of the reader properly in order to keep him or her sensitive to the innate Moral Sense which allows a person to distinguish right from wrong (23-24). The reader is educated by experiencing proper sentiment through the figure of the hero and/or heroine of the novel, and by recognizing the unattractiveness of unsentimental people who tend to act as either villains or unwitting facilitators of villainy. Obvious examples of these principles appear in Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho in the overly passionate sensibilities of the heroine, Emily, and Valancourt, her lover, as well as her father, Monsieur St. Aubert, and in the ugly lack of refined feeling in both Emily's foolish aunt, Madame Cheron, and the villainous Montoni. The sentimental novel inspires pity for the afflicted characters. In the novel of Terror, the heroine's trials inspire not only pity, but also the sensation of terror. Botting explains that "terror activates the mind and the imagination, allowing it to overcome, transcend even, its fears and doubts, enabling the subject to move from a state of passivity to activity" (Botting, 74). Terror combines the sentimental values of sensitivity and feeling with the more rational concepts of curiosity and intellect. And it is this combination which allows the heroine in a novel of Terror to escape her tormentor, instead of dying pathetically in his power like her sentimental predecessors. Terror Gothic demonstrates the need for balance between the opposite poles of passion and reason.

But the evolution of Gothic did not remain restricted to the confines of the novel of Terror. As Paul Zweig states, after "years of tearful impotence, the spectacle of innocence betrayed began to pale. Fascination with helpless captives and obedient victims underwent a subtle change, best illustrated by Matthew Lewis's masterpiece, The Monk" (Zweig, 179). Matthew Lewis is the creator of the novel of Horror, which revolutionized the concept of Gothic fiction with his one novel. Most novels which we recognize today as belonging to Gothic fiction exhibit traits which were introduced to the Gothic genre by Lewis. Gothic Horror is traditionally centered not on the helpless heroine, but on the hero-villain, a man who is held in high esteem but slowly and inexorably descends into sin and finally damnation. In this type of novel, evil is a powerful, living entity which can exist independently from human beings. The supernatural is very real and dangerous in this novel. Any character who dismisses the supernatural in preference for a rational explanation invites disaster upon him or herself. Indeed, often the disbelief in otherworldly forces leads a character to make the mistake of inviting in an evil power because he is ignorant of the danger and arrogantly presumes that he can exert control over any situation no matter how extreme.

The sensation of terror in Gothic novels ostensibly has the purpose of exciting the mind to assert control over unfamiliar situations, but the horror which Lewis introduces into the Gothic seems to have the opposite effect. Instead of inciting characters to action, it renders them both passive and helpless in the face of a power too great to be overcome by mere thought (Botting 75). This particular form of Gothic embraces the concepts of *Sturm und Drang* (storm and stress), which were the precepts of such popular German authors as Schiller and Goethe. Matthew Lewis, in fact, expressed his

enthusiasm for these ideas by translating several German folk tales and dramas into English (Botting, 76). The German influence is long-lasting in this Gothic sub-genre. Its style of excessive emotionalism with shocks and horrors challenges the optimistic structure of Gothic Terror, and seems almost to mock the virtuous sentimentality of the English. There are no happy endings assured for the victims in these stories. In fact, the only thing of which the reader may be assured is that once the terrible journey begins no one will arrive unscathed at the end. With these alterations Lewis challenges the precepts that evil can be overcome with no more than a rational mind and a virtuous heart. In Gothic Horror evil is characterized by the fact that it cannot be contained. The supernatural nature of evil allows it to exist beyond the rational world, and therefore it cannot be thwarted with a rational mind. And the virtuous are as unprotected as the logical in the novel of Horror: a character's innocence is his or her weakness, and serves as a fertile bed in which corruption may breed. The fairy-tale's happy ending has been replaced by the unblinking belief that when man is faced with the all-powerful forces of darkness, the darkness will inevitably triumph.

Benchley takes this concept of uncontrollable evil one step further. In his novel, evil is not only inescapable within the confines of a book, but also extends out of the pages into the real world. Not content to frighten his readers with supernatural monsters which lie solely in the imagination, Benchley utilizes superhuman terrors from the natural world to strike fear in the reader's heart. Benchley's audience cannot escape the monsters Benchley describes simply by putting away his books, because those monsters are as alive in reality as they are in fiction.

As I have suggested, the common thread that links these two types of

novel-- and indeed, most well-crafted Gothic works-- is the examination of evil: what is it, where does its power lie, and how do we resist it? In the novel of Gothic Terror, evil lies within the human being. Every wicked act, no matter how incomprehensible it may seem, can be traced back to a person who is responsible for all its terrible consequences. And since humanity is the well-spring of evil actions, wickedness is expressed through the terrifying extremes of human nature. The expression of human depravity is usually embodied by the Gothic villain in a Terror novel. The villain is a man who has a wealth of immoral knowledge from his lifetime of wrongful deeds, and uses his experience to prey upon the naive heroine who unwittingly falls under his power. His behavior swings between a ruthless dispassion which is devoid of any hint of sympathy or pity for the heroine's plight, and wild, violent outbursts of uncontrollable rage. The villain either engages in excessive emotionalism or in cold, impenetrable logic, effectively perverting by turns the sympathetic connection achieved through sensibility or the problem-solving strength of reason.

Since evil is represented by the extremes of humanity, virtue arises from moderation. Evil triumphs whenever an innocent or ignorant mind allows difficult situations to overwhelm the capacity for reason or sympathy. And the heroine must learn to exercise both sense and sensibility in order to protect herself from the various difficulties which threaten her sanity, her life, and her happiness. The Gothic Terror novel follows the heroine through various plights in which she must either apply reason to explain or escape, or alternately must trust her intuitive sensibility to guide her. With each trial, she gains experience which helps her decide when she must use her head and when she must follow her heart, and by the end of the novel, she has gained the necessary maturity

that allows her to free herself from any trap in her path toward happiness, regardless of whether it has been laid by a scheming villain or a well-meaning friend. Education of the mind and enlightenment of the heart, both kept in careful balance, are the key to evading evil in Gothic Terror.

But intellect and sympathy are not enough to protect the characters in Gothic Horror, which overtly challenges the premise that good will always triumph over evil, and demonstrates how evil can not only destroy the innocent, but also enter and corrupt the very institutions designed to combat it. There is a jarringly noticeable difference between the optimistic approach of Terror and the underlying pessimism in the novel of Horror. In Gothic Horror, human beings are no longer the source of evil. Instead evil is an external force which exists separately from humanity and uses the flawed members of humanity as a breeding ground by which it may increase its malignant presence. And those who are weak provide evil with an opportunity to feed. It hovers an arm's length away from innocence and watches for a weakness by which it may enter and flourish. And since the source of evil lies outside of human beings, evil itself is often beyond human comprehension, which makes it all the more dangerous. The hero or heroine in a Gothic novel cannot predict how evil will manifest itself, where it will strike, or who will be corrupted by its power. Likewise, it is impossible for the innocent to defend themselves from the malicious forces aligned against them.

In Terror fiction, then, evil lies within the passions and cruelties of humanity, and a virtuous heroine need only school herself to eschew both extremes to protect herself from danger. But this is not so in the novel of Horror. Here, even an educated heroine who is aware of danger and is prepared to fight it with every virtuous sentiment in her soul can fall prey to the machinations

of wickedness, because evil is not confined to the corruptions of the heart and mind. In Gothic Horror, ordinary human beings are pitted against creatures of inhuman power. In many cases, good people cannot overcome evil because they are too weak and flawed, and they are either corrupted or destroyed by the monstrous power they try to fight. Unlike Gothic Terror, which implies that a pure heart can stave off evil with a forbearing nature and a watchful mind, Gothic Horror promotes the idea that in many cases evil is inevitable no matter how pure or how watchful the victim may be.

In Benchley's vision of Gothic, evil is as complex and incomprehensible as nature, whether it is human nature or the natural world. And it is as difficult to fight evil as it is to fight the elements, but in some cases a hero may succeed in protecting himself from the wild and violent forces of evil, even if he cannot control them. The only possibility for salvation is persistence in the battle against evil, but sometimes even the staunchest of heroes fail to outlast the powers aligned against him.

CHAPTER II

JAWS AS GOTHIC FICTION

In Jaws, the titular villain has the central role in the novel. The sheer scope of the shark's destructive power casts it as the main villain. In the tradition of Gothic Horror, it is the physical embodiment of an evil external to human beings which hovers just beyond Amity's reach, waiting to strike. It kills its victims in a matter of a few horrific seconds, and then disappears into the deeper waters where it cannot be hunted. It is powerful enough to jerk a man sitting in a bolted-down deck chair into the water with the harpoon line which had been sunk into its back. And the shark's presence threatens the economic survival of the entire population of Amity who will not survive the winter without a large tourist population during the summer months. But what is equally revealing about the Great White, and also echoes evil in Gothic Horror, is that the misery the shark brings has a disturbing tendency to spread. The presence of the shark seems to draw different forms of evil into Amity.

Evil, as Benchley implicitly defines it, is a visitation of suffering. Benchley casts away traditional moral definitions of evil behavior and posits an alternative view: if something threatens our well-being or causes us pain, don't we instinctively recognize it as evil regardless of morality or intention? The shark is a perfect example of this definition of evil because it is destructive, threatening, and completely beyond any moral or rational laws which human beings follow. Because it embodies Benchley's vision of evil, the shark also serves as a metaphor for every actor who causes evil in Amity. As evil extends through the coastal town, people begin to take on characteristics similar to those of the

predator lurking in Amity's waters.

The first problem the shark brings to Amity is Matt Hooper, the ichthyologist who is attracted by the rare prospect of viewing a Great White. Although his purpose is ostensibly to help Brody rid Amity of the deadly fish, he is generally ineffectual in stopping the fish from preying on the tourists in Amity. In fact, during his stay Hooper does nothing to help Amity or anyone in it because he is more interested in studying the shark than stopping it from causing more deaths. In a strange way, Hooper seems to be in league with the shark. He is by far the most insidious character in this novel because not only is he useless in regard to killing the shark, he also introduces another form of evil into Amity by having an affair with Brody's wife. Hooper betrays the trust of people who look to him for help and does a great deal of harm by preying on the insecurities of Brody and his wife.

Although the reader is not aware of it until later, the Mafia is also attracted to Amity because of the shark's terrifying attacks. Through Mayor Vaughan, the Mafia buys real estate in Amity at a depressed price as a result of the reduced number of tourists. The Mafia's movements are subtle and cautious, but as fiercely predatorial as the shark itself. Before anyone in Amity is aware of its presence, the Mafia has a claim on much of the town's prime property. The Mafia has a vested interest in seeing Amity's beaches reopened in order to insure a rise in property value and later a profit. They threaten Brody by killing his cat and traumatizing his child in order to get what they want. The Mafia is not concerned by the fact that people could die if the beaches are opened; it only cares about making a profit.

The shark also affects individuals on a lesser scale in Amity. In a brief scene we catch a glimpse of a young man discussing the loss of his job with his

girlfriend. The lack of tourists has forced his manager to fire him and a number of other employees. The young man concludes that since he has no honest way left to him to make money, he'll have to find another way to get the money which will pay for his college tuition. He considers becoming a drug dealer despite the risk which his girlfriend points out to him (p. 150).

"Can't he [the boy's father] call them? He must know somebody there. I mean, if he says you really need the money for college..."

"He wouldn't do it. That'd be begging." The boy finished his beer. "There's only one thing I can do. Deal."

"Oh, Michael, don't do that. It's too dangerous. You could go to jail."

"That's quite a choice, isn't it?" the boy said acidly. "College or jail."

And here is an important distinction: he is hesitant to deal because of the *risk*, but not because it is unconscionable to foster and then prey upon the weakness of addiction. He is too involved in his own need to get out of Amity and go to college to consider the impact his actions could have on others. As the desperation of the town grows, the inhabitants are shown become increasingly susceptible to evil tendencies.

Later on the shark begins to draw a rather unpleasant crowd of tourists. These people are hoping to catch a glimpse of the shark and are disappointed when it doesn't appear. They even go so far as to dare each other to go swimming, actually hoping to see the shark come up and try to eat someone. They treat the shark and the danger it poses as if it were a game, completely oblivious to the misery it has already inflicted upon Amity, its victims, and their families. The tourists circle around the town like vultures, waiting to see if death will provide them with entertainment.

All of these lesser evils are a direct result of the shark preying on Amity. Just as the central villains in The Monk and Bram Stoker's Dracula do, the shark spreads the infection of evil to everything it touches. But it is important to note

that the shark itself is shown to be completely devoid of any malevolent intent. Benchley wants the reader to see the shark as a real fish, and allows the reader to experience the situation from the shark's perspective in order to reveal the fish as a creature of instinct, not of malice. The first paragraph in the novel is told from the perspective of the fish, and it is clear that it is nothing more than an animal. To be sure, it is an extremely powerful and dangerous animal, but it has a "small, primitive brain" and its motion is attributed to "countless millions of years of instinctive continuity" (p.1). Later, when it attacks a small boy, Benchley makes the reader understand that the shark does not actually "think" in terms that human beings understand. As the shark senses the vibrations caused by the boy paddling through the water it has "no conviction that what thrashed above was food, but food was not a concept of significance. The fish was impelled to attack: if what it swallowed was digestible, that was food; if not, it would later be regurgitated. The mouth opened, and with a final sweep of the sickle tail the fish struck" (p. 53).

It is clear that even as the shark kills the child it is not aware of the significance of its actions in a human sense. It is too far removed from what humans recognize as rational thought to be described as acting with intent, so can the shark truly be considered evil? It is undeniable that it is the singular enemy which drives the story forward, and this indicates that for Benchley the intention behind an act does not necessarily determine whether or not an act is evil. By making the central villain of the novel a dumb animal, Benchley makes a subtle argument that evil is not defined by *intentions* but by consequences. The shark threatens the lives and livelihoods of the people of Amity. It brings misery and grief to an otherwise tranquil place. And this is why the reader responds to it as an evil creature even though strictly speaking it should not be

defined in terms of human standards. What is more, by making the source of evil a shark, which is a real animal and not a figment of imagination or folklore, Benchley also reveals that his vision of evil is superhuman, but not supernatural. Evil, according to this model, has a place and a function in the natural world, but that role may be far beyond our ability to recognize, comprehend, or control.

Larry Vaughan is a character whose trials exemplify the unintentional nature and uncontrollable power of evil. Vaughan's character closely resembles the traditional hero-villain of a novel of Horror who is seduced by evil and falls from respect to ruin. He begins the novel as the Mayor of Amity and the senior partner of a healthy real-estate business. But by the end of the novel he is a ruined man whose financial straits force him to leave Amity seek out an existence elsewhere. His only crime was once borrowing money from the Mafia in order to pay for his wife's medical bills. It is not clear whether he borrowed the money to save his wife's life or just to keep himself from ruin, but whatever the case, Vaughan made a deal with an agency of evil which eventually causes the very kind of misery he had been trying to avoid. By the novel's end Vaughan is a broken man. He has thrown away all of his assets, and is forced to run away from Amity in an attempt to escape the Mafia.

The fact that Vaughan is not directly responsible for any loss of life, along with the absence of intentional malice, makes him a somewhat sympathetic character. In light of his utter deterioration under the influence of the shark and the Mafia, he even inspires the reader's pity. And yet it is undeniable that Vaughan is responsible for fostering the presence of evil within Amity, first by making a deal with the Mafia, and later by not acting responsibly by closing the beaches to save people from shark attacks. Vaughan enables the entrance of

evil into Amity, but he himself, though seriously flawed, is not an evil man. In fact, Vaughan's flaw may be his apparent inability to recognize evil in the world.

When Vaughan argues to open the beaches, it is true that he is desperate to draw tourists back to Amity. Even if he did not value human life it would obviously still be in his best interest to prevent any deaths, because any tragedies which occur are directly harmful to tourist trade. Vaughan argues that logic dictates the shark should have long since moved out of Amity's waters. And logically speaking, this is true. Hooper, an ichthyologist, would presumably be an authority on this subject, and he confirms Vaughan's argument by explaining that the shark should move away from Amity to deeper, colder waters and a more familiar food supply (Benchley: 1974, 179-180). But what Vaughan cannot grasp is the fact that the shark might not behave logically. It does not have to adhere to rational laws of behavior, and therefore cannot be fought or even understood by these means. Being a force of nature, the shark is capable of acting in a way beyond human comprehension. Evil of this kind, according to Benchley, is superhuman and ultimately unknowable, and all the collected data and applied knowledge at our disposal is wholly inadequate when applied to this other realm.

This assumption of predictability which Vaughan makes for the shark is a reflection of the mistake he made when he borrowed money from the Mafia. Vaughan assumed that after he had stabilized his finances he would repay his debt and all ties would be severed. It never occurred to him that they would refuse his money and wait for a more useful method of extracting payment; it never occurred to him that it is not possible for a man to buy his soul back from the devil; it never even occurred to him that a devil might exist.

In this way, Vaughan may be very similar to the reader. We expect evil to

have immoral undertones, and since Vaughan's mistakes are made with good intentions, it is difficult for us to classify them as evil. It is equally difficult for Vaughan, which is why he makes mistakes in the first place. In Jaws evil moves beyond our ordinary moral definitions and into something more concrete. Vaughan is not an evil man, but because he has brought so much suffering upon Amity it is clear that he has done evil deeds. And the tension between meaning well and doing evil is what makes Vaughan's degeneration as senseless as it is pitiful. He is at least partially responsible for the loss of lives, but it is difficult to condemn him because he never recognizes where or how he made his mistakes until it is too late. But when he does realize the depth to which he has fallen, Vaughan is crushed under the weight of his own conscience. After the shark nearly kills a young man at the Fourth of July celebration, Vaughan seems to grasp, too late, how undefinable and unpredictable evil is. We see him only twice after the Fourth. The first time is through the eyes of his adoring wife, who calls Brody out of concern for her husband, who has drunk himself to sleep in his chair (p. 224). And the last time we see Vaughan is when he says goodbye to Ellen. She notices that he has lost weight, that his eyes have receded into his sockets, and that his whole face seems to have turned a pasty gray. In fact, "the change in his appearance was so startling that she couldn't help staring at him" (p. 259). It is clear that Vaughan is now cognizant of his responsibility for the victims' deaths, because he alludes to his guilt briefly in conversation, and it is clear that the realization has broken him.

Larry Vaughan's intentions are completely clear: he borrowed from the Mafia to pay for his wife's medical bills, and he didn't close the beaches because he wanted to bolster Amity's prosperity. In both cases he is slightly

selfish in that he is trying to protect himself from social, financial, and political ruin, but these are not necessarily evil motives. Self-preservation is a perfectly natural instinct, but in this case it leads to ruin. Vaughan is a well-meaning man caught up by evil forces which he does not understand and cannot control. Benchley's vision of evil is clearly at work. He makes us feel sympathy for someone who is an accomplice to evil acts, thereby forcing us to question the role of morality in evil. If Vaughan meant well, how responsible is he for the victims' deaths? But if he is responsible, how can his intentions absolve him of his crime?

Ellen Brody is in a situation similar to Vaughan's in that she facilitates evil actions without intending to cause harm. But the difference is that, unlike Vaughan, Ellen knows what she is doing is wrong. At the beginning of the novel, it is clear that Ellen is undergoing a kind of mid-life crisis (p. 18). She wants to call back the days of her privileged youth when she was one of the wealthy summer people who frequented Amity's beaches. She seeks rejuvenation. And to accomplish this goal she decides to have an affair with Matt Hooper, who is young, wealthy, and a constant reminder of Ellen's past because his older brother was Ellen's high school boyfriend. Ellen betrays her husband for the most selfish and shallow of reasons, and never once gives a thought to the possible repercussions of her actions. She sees the affair as a sort of one-night-stand which will have no strings attached. It is quite clear to the reader that "the thought of love never entered her mind. Nor did she want or anticipate a relationship either profound or enduring. She sought only to be serviced, restored" (p. 156). Ellen never considers the possibility that Hooper might not feel the same way or that problems might ensue as a result. She is so self-absorbed that she cannot conceive of other people's feelings, not even the

man with whom she is about to have the affair. And when a random thought about her husband crosses her mind, she feels a twinge of guilt, but "excitement quickly nudged it aside," because her husband is not as important as her own needs.

Ellen is like a drug addict hastening to acquire a long-awaited hit. She lies to her family to keep them out of her way. She lies to her co-workers at the hospital where she volunteers in order to get out of work. She steals her family's emergency cash in order to pay for the meal and the hotel room she intends to share with Hooper. And she meets with Hooper as far away from Amity as she can get in order to prevent anyone from witnessing her crime (p. 152-8). However, when Ellen actually acquires what she has craved, she discovers that it does not produce the euphoric high she had anticipated. She is no more content or relieved after her affair than she had been before; in fact, she is somewhat disturbed by the experience (p. 172).

Furthermore, Ellen has more or less been acting under the assumption that as long as Brody doesn't know about the affair, he cannot be hurt. But it turns out that she is wrong. Even without proof, her husband is tormented by suspicion. Furthermore, at the same time Brody suspects Ellen's infidelity, he feels guilty for mistrusting her because he feels that it is a betrayal of *her* trust (p. 193). In her own way, Ellen is as self-absorbed and destructive as the shark. In her desperation to ease her own suffering due to her insecurities and personal failings, she willingly transfers misery to her husband without realizing how serious and unfair her behavior is.

The person who shocks Ellen into awareness is, surprisingly, the ruined Larry Vaughan, when he comes to say a final farewell to Ellen before he leaves Amity in an attempt to flee both the Mafia and his mounting debts. These two

share a curious link in that they have both injured people who trusted them. Vaughan knows that Ellen is aware of his role in the shark's death toll, but he himself is unaware of her own destructive actions. When he alludes to his guilt and asks what she thinks of him, Ellen, who is still recovering from her unhappy affair, responds that it is not her place to judge. And when Vaughan tells Ellen that, despite the outcome of his actions, he never meant to hurt anyone, Ellen, who has acted in a similarly blind fashion, honestly believes him (p. 259-60). Witnessing Vaughan's disintegration causes Ellen to realize how much she actually enjoys her life and family, and how much she truly values her relationship with her husband. Vaughan makes Ellen aware of how far she has fallen and how desperately she needs her husband to secure her redemption.

Ellen's actions should be unforgivable, yet Benchley continues to portray her as a sympathetic character. After Ellen and Hooper leave the restaurant to find a hotel, Benchley cuts to Ellen returning home and going to bed. This keeps the actual act of betrayal "offstage" in the novel, so that the reader is not subjected to the full extent of Ellen's infidelity. It is clear to the reader that Ellen recognizes that she has somehow made a mistake. It is not until later that she completely realizes the ramifications of her mistake, but Benchley shows us through Ellen's memories that even as the affair is being consummated she knows that something is wrong. Ellen's dissatisfaction and later her real remorse reveal that she is as much a victim of her actions as her husband. In this way Benchley keeps Ellen sympathetic in spite of her appalling behavior.

However, Ellen is not an innocent victim. Like the tourists on Amity's beach, she willingly goes into the water to swim. She is not afraid of the possibility of an undertow, or swimming past a safe depth or distance. She is willing to take the implicit risks of swimming in the sea. But she is unprepared

for the unexpected shark that is lurking below the placid surface of her seemingly harmless affair, and once she has committed the adulterous act, she does not know how to save herself. Indeed, she cannot save herself. Ellen, like Amity, must rely on Brody to rescue her from destruction. Brody is suspicious of the affair, but finally chooses not to pursue the matter because he knows that pressing the issue would only increase the general level of misery instead of relieving it. Ellen recognizes that her salvation lies within Brody's love, which is why she becomes so protective of him at the end. When Brody tells her that he is going to go out to hunt the shark after it has just killed Matt Hooper, Ellen accuses him of behaving selfishly, of "indulging in a personal need for expiation" (293). But in truth, it is Ellen who is once again acting selfishly, because she knows that she needs Brody to forgive her, and if he is killed, she will never be forgiven for betraying him.

Benchley reveals the potential complexities of evil in Ellen's character. Is Ellen evil? She betrayed the novel's hero to an enemy, which is an unquestionably evil act. But by the end of the novel she has recognized her mistake and loves Brody all the more fiercely. However, her love for Brody is not a selfless love, since it stems from the same need for transfiguration which drove her to betray Brody in the first place. Her first selfish act is one which drags her into corruption, and her last selfish moment is a plea for redemption. And what are we to think about this motivation? When Ellen sleeps with Hooper, she doesn't intend for anyone to get hurt, and when she fights to stop Brody she does intend to keep her husband from being hurt. Furthermore, Benchley constantly keeps Ellen sympathetic by allowing the reader to see events from her perspective, which makes it virtually impossible to regard her as a villain in spite of her actions. So are selfish motivations good or evil?

Although we tend to vilify selfishness in others, we often also excuse it in ourselves because the need for personal protection and advancement is so integral to our survival. Our last vision of Ellen is through the eyes of her husband, who *has* forgiven her, before he leaves on his final hunt for the shark. She is sleeping, but even in sleep she has a frown on her face (p. 295). Ellen remains a troubled soul touched by evil, but Benchley allows her the hope of redemption through Brody's love.

Ellen is unusual in that she is the only character in the novel who succumbs to evil that the reader is allowed to experience from within. Benchley gives the reader a chance to examine her perceptions and motivations from a third person limited point of view when Ellen succumbs to the temptations of evil behavior. This window into Ellen's mind keeps her sympathetic to the reader in spite of the terrible crime she commits against Brody. She is also offered the possibility of redemption which is denied all the other characters who have been marked by evil. As Brody is leaving his home for the final confrontation with the shark, "he looked at Ellen, who had a frown on her sleeping face. 'I do love you, you know,' he whispered, and he kissed her brow." Those words make it clear that Brody had forgiven Ellen, and if he returns from his last battle with the shark, he will stay with her and they will work on restoring their marriage to the happy state they once enjoyed.

What purpose is served by keeping Ellen sympathetic and ultimately delivering her from evil? Why is she saved when none of the other evil characters are? Ellen is a counterpoint to Brody. Where Ellen falters, Brody remains true to himself. Between Ellen and Martin Brody, the reader has the opportunity to see from both perspectives how easy it is to make a mistake which cannot be repaired. By watching Ellen give in to the demands of evil, we

are more aware of the effort which her husband makes to resist that call. Ellen's failure makes Brody's success more meaningful.

And Ellen is redeemed, not because she is the only person in the novel worthy of redemption, but because she is the only person who Martin Brody can truly save. Brody cannot magically produce a million dollars to rescue Vaughan from the Mafia. Nor can he protect Hooper from the ichthyologist's own poor judgement. But all Ellen needs in order to be saved is Brody's love, which he has to offer in limitless quantity. And this act of love gives hope both to Ellen and the reader: redemption is *possible*, even if it is not *assured*.

Ellen is left with the promise of redemption, but no such promise awaits Matt Hooper, her partner in crime. Instead of coming to terms with his mistakes, or being left to wander through a lifetime of regret, Hooper dies a gruesome death without ever recognizing his appalling lack of understanding. And yet, Hooper and Ellen are, as it were, equal partners in crime, so why is Ellen saved when Hooper is not? The simplest explanation for this question is that Hooper isn't saved because he doesn't want to be saved. Hooper is not driven by desperate insecurity as Ellen is, or by a frantic need for survival, as in the case of Vaughan. Hooper's actions are a direct reflection of his desire to be close to the shark which preys upon Amity.

Hooper has been summoned to Amity in order to use his expertise to decide how to rid the community of the shark. However, from the very moment we are introduced to Hooper, it is clear that Amity's well-being is not his first priority. Hooper arrives just after the police have discovered that the shark has claimed its fourth victim, a fisherman named Ben Gardener, but instead of offering sympathy about the death, Hooper's attitude is one of excitement. As Brody describes the state of the boat and the evidence that Gardener's chair

had been ripped out into the ocean with him in it, Hooper exclaims, "that's some fantastic fish. Thanks for calling me, I could spend a whole lifetime around sharks and never see a fish like that" (90). Hooper is obviously more interested in the shark itself than in what it is doing to Amity. Later on, when Brody wants Hooper to come and help harpoon the shark, Hooper comes along because he wants to see the fish and knows this will be his only chance (221). Amity never factors into any part of his decision. And when Hooper actually does see the fish, he is "flushed and happy" and "caught up in the moment." Hooper is so excited that he launches into his personal theory that the great white shark is actually the same species as *megalodon*, a prehistoric shark which grew up to one hundred feet in length, and then expresses an ecstatic desire to actually see the extinct creature (255). When Hooper describes the *megalodon* to Brody, he asks, "Can you imagine what a hundred-foot white would look like? Can you imagine what it could do, what kind of power it would have?" (255). Whenever Hooper describes the fish he expresses an admiration for the power it wields. The shark may in fact represent to him a power which no ordinary human being can possess.

Hooper is so enchanted with the shark that he begins to pattern his behavior on that of the terrible beast. When Hooper first meets Ellen he waxes poetical about the beauty, grace, and mystery of sharks (p. 117).

"They're like an impossibly perfect piece of machinery. They're as graceful as any bird. They're as mysterious as any animal on earth. No one knows for sure how long they live or what impulses-- except for hunger -- they respond to... Scientists spend their lives trying to find answers about sharks, and as soon as they come up with a nice, pat generalization, something shoots it down... As you can see, I'm an addict."

And later, when he is invited into her home for a dinner party, he gives her a silver rimmed shark tooth to be hung from a necklace. Hooper draws upon what he perceives as the shark's power to seduce Ellen. But what really

drives Hooper to seduce Ellen remains unclear. Is it a desire to dominate Brody? Does the inherent risk involved with adultery appeal to him? Or does Ellen's insecurity prompt an instinctive response from Hooper, the way blood in the water incites a shark to attack? Whatever his motivations may be, it is clear that Ellen herself is not the primary attraction. When Hooper and Ellen actually consummate the affair, Ellen is briefly frightened by him because the "ferocity and intensity of his assault seemed to her a pursuit in which she was only a vehicle" (173). Benchley overlaps the seduction scene with images of a violent attack, and there is the distinct impression that Hooper is mimicking the shark's behavior of waiting patiently for unwary swimmers to enter the water, and then striking them once they have passed the point from which they can safely swim back to shore.

Jaws is written from the point of view of the third person. This perspective shifts between characters, but remains limited to one character for each situation. Until his death, Hooper is consistently portrayed from an external perspective, and Benchley never allows the reader to have a sense of his feelings or ambitions. Hooper's mind and motivations are completely closed to us, and the questions related to why he is so fascinated with the shark and why he pursues Ellen Brody remain unexplored and unanswered. And yet, at the same time we are left in the dark about Hooper's reasons, we are also left with the certainty that no matter what his reasons, he is confident in his actions and fully cognizant of their ramifications. During the seduction scene with Ellen, when Hooper describes his "fantasy" to Ellen, in which he essentially outlines how they will consummate their affair, it is clear that he is fully in command of the situation and completely aware of what he is doing. It is even clear to Ellen at what point Hooper takes command (p. 165).

"Something's happened, Ellen thought. She wondered if he could sense-- smell? like an animal?-- the invitation she had extended. Whatever it was, he had taken the offensive. All she had to do was avoid discouraging him."

In this way Benchley controls the reader's perception of Hooper and makes him completely unsympathetic. We never understand the reasons behind his actions, but instead are left to wonder in horrified amazement. So when Hooper finally meets his end, there is no sense of sorrow or loss even though his death is just as terrible as the other deaths in the novel.

A better word to describe Hooper's death might be *senseless*, partly because he died for no reason, and partly because his death could have been avoided if he had used good sense. Hooper is an ichthyologist who specializes in sharks. He is well versed in the lore of how dangerous and unpredictable sharks can be, and yet in spite of this, he places himself within the shark's reach by diving down in a shark cage to get a closer look at the Great White. Quint and Brody both recognize the foolishness of this gambit, and Quint argues with Hooper that confronting the shark in a cage is beyond his limits. "It's beyond any man's limits. A fish that big could eat that cage for breakfast" (264). But Hooper responds that he doesn't believe that the shark will actually attack the cage: "he might bump it, might even mouth it, but I don't think he'd seriously try to eat it." And this statement is important, because it shows how far Hooper is willing to go to get close to the the shark. Earlier in the novel, when Hooper is explaining the nature of sharks to Brody, he tells the chief that "sharks do so many uncharacteristic things that the erratic becomes normal. Anyone who'd risk money-- not to mention his life-- on a prediction about what one big shark will do in a given situation is a fool" (91). We know, then, that Hooper is playing the fool by ignoring his own wisdom when he climbs into the shark cage, but does he really believe that the shark will behave predictably, or is he simply too

infatuated with the inscrutable monster to care?

The way Hooper convinces Brody to let him go down in the shark cage is by suggesting that this will provide the perfect opportunity to kill the shark with a bang stick (a special underwater gun), and since they haven't had any luck with other methods, they decide to let him try. But once Hooper is in the water, it is clear that killing the shark is the last thing on his mind. When he sees the great fish, his thought is to shoot pictures of it with his camera; the idea of using the bang stick never occurs to him. Watching the Great White, Hooper marvels at its colors and at its "proud display of its incalculable mass and power." And when it moves close enough for Hooper to shoot it, the ichthyologist sticks his hand through the bars of his cage and "let his fingertips caress the flesh-- past the pectoral fins, the pelvic fin, the thick, firm genital claspers-- until finally (the fish seemed to have no end) they were slapped away by the sweeping tail" (286). Hooper is enthralled by the shark, and just as he touches the prize he has been searching for, he is destroyed by the object of his obsession.

Hooper dies after rejecting his own advice and the advice of the people who want to save him. Clearly, unlike Ellen Brody and Larry Vaughan, Hooper is not interested in being saved. He wants to pursue the dark power that will eventually destroy him. Hooper has patterned his behavior after the shark: why should he be afraid of seducing another man's wife? Something as powerful as a Great White transcends the rules laid down by man's society and the implicit risk involved. He dives in the shark cage because he *wants* to surpass his limits and discover himself unrestrained. Hooper's desire is to touch and be a part of the shark's terrible omnipotence. Unlike the other characters in this novel who struggle to free themselves from evil, Hooper struggles to *belong* to evil. He is the human disciple of an inhuman power, and he discovers too late that evil,

even when beckoned, freely invited, and lovingly accepted, is as destructive to its followers as it is to its foes.

Once it becomes clear that Hooper will not succeed in driving the shark away, Brody contacts Quint, a deep sea fisherman who has had experience in killing sharks. What makes this character so interesting is the fact that he is so very similar to the shark. Quint behaves like a human version of the shark, and through him we get a new perspective on the shark's nature. Quint hunts the shark because he needs the money which the work will earn him. He has no altruistic sentiments regarding the shark, and he does not agree to hunt the shark for Amity until the board of selectmen agree to pay the exorbitant sum of four hundred dollars a day. While he is hunting the shark with Hooper and Brody, Benchley reveals that Quint has the same indifferent attitude towards life that the reader has, up until this point, associated with the shark.

At one point Quint snares a smaller shark in one of his nets, and he hauls it on board, cuts it lengthwise from head to fin, and then throws it back into the water to incite a feeding frenzy among the other small sharks in the water. Hooper is appalled. When Quint comments on Hooper's disapproval, Hooper responds: "That's right. I don't like to see things die for people's amusement." And when Quint snickers, he asks, "Do you?" Quint's reply reveals his quintessential equivalence to the shark. "It ain't a question of liking it or not," he says. "It's what feeds me" (235). Quint kills fish in the same unconcerned way that the shark kills people. Like the Great White, Quint holds no malice for the creatures he kills, and derives no pleasure from killing them; he is simply performing a function which is necessary for his own survival.

Quint's cold-hearted, self-serving nature illustrates an important point. His behavior could easily be construed as evil, yet Brody, who continues to

function much like a moral compass which wheels away from evil, feels a certain sense of camaraderie with the fisherman. It is not hard to understand why; in Quint, Brody has finally found another man who is as determined to stop the shark as he himself has been. Quint may be cruel, but since Brody values the lives of fish far less than he values the lives of human beings, he is quite willing to overlook the cruelty. And this is essential to understanding Benchley's vision of evil, because it demonstrates that the nature of this evil is dependent upon the *perspective* from which it is viewed. Benchley has implied that evil is a visitation of suffering which is independent of the intentions that prompt the action, and depends instead upon the outcome of the action. But now Benchley intimates a new and important twist--whether or not an action can be considered evil is also dependent upon whom the outcome affects. Up until this point the reader has only considered evil from the perspective of the character presented through Benchley's narrator. But Benchley now presents Quint through the eyes of Brody, who, while admittedly not an impartial observer, nevertheless accurately relays the shark hunter's actions and behaviors in a way which is neither judgmental nor sympathetic. This, along with Hooper's valid condemnation of Quint's behavior (he objects to Quint hunting and killing endangered species, like bottle-nosed dolphins), allows the reader to step back and consider that what may be good for one person could be evil for another. Quint helps Brody hunt the shark, so Brody sees Quint as a friend. But when Quint kills fish for pleasure, the fish would undoubtedly regard Quint as an enemy.

And this new presentation allows us to finally answer the question which has been plaguing us: "is the shark evil?" Yes, in Benchley's terms the shark is evil *to us*. The shark threatens the safety of the human residents of Amity, and

the reader is naturally more sympathetic to other human beings than to a fish which has been presented in such alien terms. The shark may be a victim of circumstance, and it may be a dumb creature which has no ability to comprehend the misery its presence has brought to Amity, but it nevertheless endangers the lives and happiness of human beings, and the fear which that threat inspires makes it perfectly valid for us, as Benchley presents the case, to describe the shark as evil.

In Jaws, Benchley has stripped away convention, intention, and morality, and has reduced evil to its purest and most primal form: a visitation of suffering. However, Benchley also explores how human beings project their own vision of evil onto the source of their misery--creating the appearance of intention where none truly exists. Our first glimpse of this comes from Minnie Eldridge, Amity's post-mistress. She quotes the Book of Job: "Canst thou draw out leviathan with a hook?" and states with absolute conviction that the shark's presence is an act of God (113). To Minnie, evil is a tool God uses to test the faithful, and for her, the shark embodies this divine intention. But this vision of the shark as a test of faith is solely espoused by Minnie; each person has his or her own conception of evil and projects that view onto the shark.

This can be most clearly seen when Brody, Quint, and Hooper first see the shark while they are out on the boat. After their first encounter, the three men have markedly different reactions to the creature. Brody shudders and remarks that the fish "looked like he was grinning," but Quint retorts that all shark mouths appear that way when open, and cautions Brody not to see the shark as anything more than a "dumb garbage bucket." Hooper is astonished. "How can you say that?" he asks. "That fish is a beauty" (253). Each man has an entirely different perception of what evil, and the embodiment of evil in the

shark, is: Brody sees it as an enemy, Quint as a stupid (although dangerous) brute, and Hooper as an elegant and powerful beauty. The shark is not necessarily any of these things; none of these men really possess a great deal of factual information about sharks, but each perceives the danger the shark presents and projects his own responses to that threat onto the shark. The Great White acts like a mirror that reflects the state of each man's mind.

And this explains why the shark appears to display supernatural qualities during the climactic finale on the boat. After Hooper's death, Quint and Brody go out for a final showdown with the shark and, when the shark appears, Brody yells: "He was waiting for us!" And Quint calmly replies, "I know" (300). This is a telling moment in the novel, because it shows that *both* men, despite Quint's assertions that the shark is nothing more than a dumb fish, are attributing intentionality to the shark. As the encounter progresses, the men are surprised by how hard the shark fights, how powerful it is, and how its behavior seems to be directed by an unpredictable malice. Benchley subtly shifts the perspective of the narrator to highlight the impression that the shark is a supernatural creature, that it can predict Quint's actions, and that it has been waiting to kill them.

But when one reads the text of Jaws dispassionately, with the idea that neither Brody nor Quint can be considered reliable witnesses, the situation alters slightly. It has already been established that the shark is an extraordinary specimen of its kind. Hooper has never seen a fish like this in all his years of ichthyology. And yet, during the fight with the shark, Quint exhibits surprise in response to its strength. When he utters that it's "no normal fish that can sound [submerge in deep water] with three irons in him and three barrels [flotation devices] to hold him up" (304), he seems to arrive at the astonishing realization

that the shark is somehow paranormal. But rationally, we already know that the shark is not a "normal" fish; it is in fact exceptionally powerful and therefore most probably lies beyond the boundaries of most people's experience. So it should be no surprise to us that the shark does not appear "normal" to Brody and Quint.

Furthermore, after Quint has harpooned the shark with two irons (attached to floating barrels) the shark turns to fight the boat. When Quint realizes that the shark is going to attack, he frowns "as if, in a game, the rules had been changed without warning, or the stakes raised" (303). Again, the way Benchley phrases this sudden alteration of purpose makes it seem as though the shark is once again exceeding the expectations of "normal" fish. But at face value, what is abnormal about lashing out in pain? If someone were to throw rocks at a German Shepherd, that dog might very well attack its antagonist, and in fact we would expect it to do so or to run away because fight or flight is a natural instinct in all animals. If the shark is limited in its ability to escape because of its injuries and the impairment of movement caused by the flotation devices, why wouldn't we expect it to attack?

Neither Brody nor Quint know enough about the shark to successfully predict its behavior, but Quint has previously been certain that it is nothing more than an eating machine. Brody wants to believe Quint, but can't help noticing that the shark's behavior does not coincide with Quint's classification. Also, from the beginning Brody has wanted to protect Amity from the shark's predations, and he sees it as an enemy, not simply as an animal. Both men are projecting false expectations onto the shark, and when it surpasses those expectations, they perceive what is only superhuman as being supernatural.

When something threatens us, we instinctively perceive it as evil, but our social and cultural conditioning produces a conception of evil more complex

than our primal recognition of danger. We intuitively associate the idea of a malevolent force with the source of our fear. But even as Benchley strips away all of the trappings which society has attached to evil, he also acknowledges that evil will always be associated with those accessories because humans use them to establish a semblance of order in suffering which is beyond our power to control.

Evil, then, as defined by Benchley, is anything which causes suffering. However, suffering is merely the symptom, the actual manifestation of evil is more overwhelming, insidious, and alien than anything in human understanding. But are we helpless to resist this unseen power in our lives? And if not, how should we fight something so far beyond our experience? For the answers, Benchley looks to Police Chief Martin Brody, who is unquestionably the hero of this novel. Just as the shark symbolizes all that is evil, Brody represents an oppositional force of good, and the way in which Brody reacts to the threats which mount against himself and his town reflect Benchley's vision of how to combat evil effectively.

Brody's initial reaction to the evil is defensive. When the shark claims its first victim Brody tries to avoid a second confrontation by closing the beaches. He thinks that if the threat can be circumvented it will go away. Unfortunately, it is not possible to keep evil at a distance. By trying to close the beaches Brody encounters another problem: Mayor Vaughan brings up the valid point that as long as the beach is closed Amity runs the risk of financial ruin. And the terrible truth is that Vaughan is right. The measures which Brody wants to impose to protect Amity could very easily endanger the town's survival. By trying to give a wide berth to one threat, Brody runs right into another confrontation which he would prefer to avoid. There is no simple solution to this problem; there is no

clear indication of what constitutes right and wrong. When Brody protests that the beaches should nonetheless be closed for a period of time, Vaughan threatens Brody's job, and Brody reacts to this situation just as he did to the shark: he tries to diffuse the situation by backing down. When Brody sees Vaughan "in a mood so aggressively ugly" (44), he chooses to cave in to Vaughan's authority in order to retain some control of the situation.

Of course, this action is no more successful than the last, and when the beaches are finally closed and Amity is facing economic collapse, Matt Hooper is called down to explain the shark's behavior. Interestingly enough, Brody instinctively recognizes Hooper as a threat, but he doesn't act upon those feelings. As the two men are shaking hands for the first time, Brody sizes Hooper up and "with what Brody recognized as juvenile pride, he determined that if it ever came to a face-off, he could take Hooper." But even as something in Brody rises to respond to the threat of Hooper's presence, that instinctive reaction is rationalized back into quiescence : "Brody sensed his own resentment at the intrusion... and he recognized the resentment as stupid" (85).

Brody also responds to this same, subliminal awareness of danger when Hooper and Ellen interact during her dinner party. When Hooper gives her the shark tooth pendant, she exchanges the cultured pearls Brody had given her as a wedding present for Hooper's gift (p. 130). Brody does not consciously recognize the significance of her actions, but when he has a moment alone he "took a deep breath and clenched and unclenched his fist. He was fighting anger and confusion, and he was losing. He felt threatened, as if an intruder had come into his home, possessing subtle, intangible weapons he could not cope with..." (p. 132). And throughout the meal, Brody is aware that whenever Ellen speaks to Hooper, she touches Hooper's arm "lightly, but Brody thought,

intimately, as if they were sharing secrets" (145). On a conscious level, Brody doesn't know that anything is wrong, but he becomes nauseous during the meal, and does not recover until Ellen begins to pay attention to the other guests. After the party has ended and Ellen and Brody are alone, Ellen accuses him of ruining the occasion with his awful behavior. And, although initially Brody's behavior may have bordered on brusque, Benchley never portrays him as being rude; in fact, once Brody masters his bout with nausea, he acts as a good host and enjoys the rest of the evening. When Ellen rounds on him, Brody is "genuinely surprised at the ferocity of her attack." But even in his surprise he doesn't allow the argument to escalate. Brody "was ready for a fight, but he backed off, sober enough to realize that his only weapons were cruelty and innuendo, and that Ellen was close to tears" (149). Brody chooses to let his wife's attack go unanswered and leaves his honor undefended, rather than confronting the danger that lurks beneath all of the hurt feeling that engendered the conflict.

In retrospect we realize that Brody's instincts about Hooper, Ellen's attraction to Hooper, and the threats against Amity were entirely justified, but as long as we are totally unaware of how dangerous and predatory these enemies really are, we feel that Brody has done the right thing by being pleasant, refusing to engage in pointless aggressions, and leaving unpleasant matters alone. If he had flouted Vaughan's authority, Brody would have appeared to be impervious to reason; if he had attacked Hooper he would have looked both stupid and vicious; and if he had fought with Ellen he would have seemed to be an insensitive brute. As observers, we feel that instincts alone are not enough to justify an aggressive reaction. It is important to the reader that reason be applied to an unusual situation and that a rational approach be used to resolve

any conflict. As long as both the readers and Brody are unaware of the true state of affairs, we are unwilling to support intuition with aggressive action.

It is reasonable to want to avoid confrontation, and to follow the precepts of "live and let live." And this rational, defensive method of approach was highly successful in the tradition of Gothic Terror. However, Benchley shows us that reason is not necessarily an effective weapon against evil, because instead of using it to fight the threats which appear, Brody and the other people in Amity use reason to justify and to rationalize away the impending danger. True to the form of Gothic Horror, Benchley shows us that there is no place where evil can be safely avoided. It is omnipresent, and it has many faces. Just when Brody thinks he has left evil behind him, it rises up in a new form to threaten him.

It gradually becomes clear to Brody that defensive tactics are generally ineffective against the problems he is facing. And in response he moves from a defensive to an offensive position. He stops being complacent about Ellen's behavior and Hooper's attitude, stands up to Vaughan's authority, and finally, Brody goes out to hunt the shark himself.

It is important to note that when Brody fights back against his problems inside of Amity, there seems to be an invisible line which he will not cross even to win his battle. Even as Brody unmasks Vaughan's connection to the Mafia, he still retains some sympathy for his one-time friend. In deference to Vaughan, Brody honestly reconsiders his motives for keeping the beaches closed: "How much of it was the residue of prior guilt, how much the fear of another attack? How much was he indulging himself, playing it safe, and how much was prudent concern for the town?" Although Brody does have the option of exposing Vaughan's duplicity to the other selectmen on the town council, thereby removing any support Vaughan might have for threatening Brody's job,

instead the police chief chooses to compromise with Vaughan: the beaches will open, but the police will patrol them and warn tourists of the danger (188). And although this approach sounds somewhat implausible, it results in one of the town's most economically productive days of the summer, and no one gets killed.

In a similar vein, Brody also knows where to draw the line when dealing with Hooper. Although Brody intensely dislikes the ichthyologist and suspects Hooper of seducing his wife, when Hooper wants to photograph the shark in a shark-cage, which would almost certainly become a death trap in the water, it is Brody who objects (p. 282).

"'Come on. We can't let him go in that thing.'... Brody's emotions were jumbled. Part of him didn't care whether Hooper lived or died-- might even relish the prospect of Hooper's death. But such vengeance would be hollow-- and quite possibly unmerited. Could he really wish a man dead? No. Not yet."

In spite of Hooper's offensive upper-class attitude and his slimy behavior, Brody values Hooper's life and does not want to see it wasted. This ethic is also apparent during what is "almost a no-shit punch-up" that occurs after Hooper angrily (and stupidly) alludes to his affair with Brody's wife. Overcome by rage, Brody grabs Hooper by both sides of his collar and rams his fists into Hooper's throat. Brody's knuckles are cutting off the flow of blood to Hooper's brain, but just as Hooper begins to lose consciousness Brody releases him and pushes him away, allowing him to sit and suck in air (266). Even in a blind, unthinking fury prompted by Hooper's goading and Ellen's betrayal, Brody doesn't fall into the pattern of destruction that traps so many other characters in this novel.

This conscious decision to stop short of destructive behavior is most apparent in the decision Brody makes about his wife. After nearly strangling Hooper, Brody is tempted to cancel the trip to hunt the shark and return to Amity

to discover the truth about Hooper and Ellen. "But," he reasons, "suppose the worst was true. What could he do then? Confront Ellen? Beat her? Walk out on her? What good would that do? He had to have time to think" (267). The important question that Brody asks is "what good would it do," because that is the question which defines the line which he is not willing to cross in a fight. Brody recognizes that at a certain point fighting an enemy can do more harm than good; he sees that it is possible to destroy the very thing he is fighting to save. And in the end, after Hooper's horrible death, Brody chooses not to pursue the matter further. He lets Ellen's infidelity go, and instead chooses to put what little energy he has left to a more constructive purpose: killing the shark.

The shark is the only villain in this story against whom Brody's wrath is unmitigated. When fighting the shark, Brody never slackens, never doubts, and never quits. And this is important, because although Brody's willingness to walk away from a fight makes him a good man, it does nothing to combat the problems which arise from the presence of evil. Death on the beaches was only avoided by the narrowest of margins, Hooper still dies, even though Brody does not kill him, and although Brody's refusal to press the issue of Ellen's betrayal confirms his love, it does not reestablish his trust. At some point it becomes necessary to take action against the enemy in order to preserve the integrity of the soul, and at that point it is impossible to entertain notions of compromise or retreat.

Even though the shark is utterly overwhelming to Brody in both the physical and emotional sense, the police chief remains true to the motto of his corps: "protect and serve." Although not a strong swimmer, and having a mild fear of the water, Brody goes out on Quint's boat to do battle with what has

been an anathema to himself and his town from the moment it appeared. When Ellen, understandably fearful for Brody's safety, asks him why he has to go back out to finish the shark, Brody can only say that "it's a feeling. I can't explain it. But giving up isn't an answer. It doesn't put an end to anything" (292). Brody understands that, unlike his other, smaller, battles, this is one fight from which he absolutely cannot back down. In the face of true evil, it is not acceptable to compromise, waver, or yield. True evil, suffering which has no bounds and no end in sight, must be fought to the death. And Brody is the good man who, in spite of his fear, cannot stand by and do nothing while evil succeeds, not because he wants to fight, or to be a hero, but rather because he cannot live with himself if he gives up. He knows that to give up the fight is to give up his soul.

CHAPTER III

A NEW VISION OF EVIL

In previous works of Gothic fiction evil is easily recognized and has a clear place of residence. In Gothic Terror evil resides within human beings, usually as a result of some defect of character which impedes the contribution of either emotion or reason to a person's actions. In Gothic Horror evil is a separate entity from humanity, and lurks outside waiting for the foolish or unwary to let it inside and give it the chance to corrupt. In Jaws, the separation between the two Gothic traditions begins to blur. Although the external evil of the shark is unquestionably the spark which ignites the injurious events within Amity, it is also true that the evil was already in the town waiting to be uncovered. Vaughan was already in debt to the Mafia and Ellen was already having problems with her marriage long before the shark ever came to trouble their lives. In Benchley's vision, evil exists both within and beyond the human world, and there is no clear line which separates the evil without from the evil within. He has exchanged the familiar problems and straightforward solutions of traditional Gothic for a moral complexity which reflects the uncertainty of the modern world.

In 1974, when Jaws was first published, America was in a state of upheaval. The idealism of the sixties was giving way to the cynicism of the seventies. After betraying the trust of his constituents, Richard Nixon became the first President to resign from office. The Vietnam War, the first military defeat in our nation's history, was drawing to a close. This was also the first war which had lost nearly all popular support from the American people by the time of its

conclusion. Disillusionment was the sign of the times. And in this climate, Peter Benchley introduced a novel which tore apart the traditional concepts of what constituted right and wrong and redefined the face of evil.

The first thing to recognize about this new interpretation of evil is that it is a natural phenomenon. The epitome and embodiment of evil in this novel is the Great White Shark, and this is important because the Great White is a real animal which can be found swimming in our oceans. Evil is not some imaginary creature like a vampire or a dragon, nor is it the product of the unfeeling mind of an unnatural human being. In Benchley's vision, evil is not alien but *intrinsic* to our nature. And in a sharp contrast to the flowery glorification of the natural world which was so popular in the Sixties, Benchley reminds us that the wilderness can also be dark and brutal.

In Gothic Terror and Horror novels it is not terribly difficult to identify the villains, as they tend to betray themselves through their acts of insensitivity, violent emotions, and occasional bloodthirsty cruelty. But in Jaws the lines which separate friend from foe are not nearly so distinct. Since evil is an inherent part of the world, it resides not only in the outsider, but also in the hearts of people Brody loves and trusts. Neither his home nor his job can offer Brody a safe haven where he can gain a moment's respite from the dangers which are moving toward him from all sides. When Brody lowers his guard, he finds himself blindsided by people he had never suspected of betrayal.

And perhaps the most unnerving aspect of evil is that it does not merely lie within Brody's friends, but also within Brody himself. Throughout the novel Brody struggles with himself to avoid being evil and causing harm. What is worse, he is not always successful. When given the choice of whether to keep the beaches open or to shut them down, Brody tries both tactics at different

points in the novel and both choices end up causing harm to the community of Amity. He can't win because there *is* no good decision to be made. The line which separates right and wrong has blurred so badly that it is nearly impossible to determine whether or not any black and white answers exist among the shades of gray. It is extraordinarily difficult for even the ordinary, decent man that Brody is to avoid making choices which will not result in someone else's suffering.

Furthermore, Brody walks along a knife-edge as he tries to protect his family, friends, and community without succumbing to the violent frustration which evil sparks within him. Despite his good intentions and his sincerity of purpose, he destroys his friendship with Vaughan, his marriage is in serious jeopardy, he nearly kills Hooper in a jealous rage, and he ultimately fails to save Hooper's life. Even in the very best of men, evil is only a heartbeat away.

The fact that evil is a part of who we are is most likely the reason why there is no clear way to fight against it. The attributes of patience, virtue, and moderation which are so highly valued in Gothic Terror are ineffective against evil in Jaws. Patiently waiting for the shark to leave does not protect Amity from the threat of starvation and bankruptcy. Virtue does not protect Vaughan from the Mafia or Ellen from Hooper. The attributes of enduring faith and love which seem to offer some defense against evil in the realm of Gothic fiction are equally useless and insubstantial in the face of violent death, unexpected betrayal, and lingering fear.

Brody moves through this novel searching for the right way to fight evil and restore safety and prosperity to Amity and his own life. He never truly finds what he is looking for. However, of the three people who struggle to rid Amity of the shark, it is Brody who makes the greatest effort and comes closest to finding

a solution.

Hooper's attempts to thwart the shark with knowledge are counter-productive, because Hooper is not truly interested in fighting evil. He has come by his knowledge because he is *attracted* to evil, and wants to get closer to it by understanding it more fully. Likewise, Quint's concept of repelling evil by refusing to examine it in any of its various forms is equally ineffective. At one point, he and Brody discuss the possibility of Hooper having had an affair with Ellen (p. 269):

"What is it, you think he's been poking your wife?"

Confronted with his own thoughts stated so brutally, Brody was shocked. 'None of your damn business,' he said.

'Whatever you say. But if you ask me, he ain't got it in him.'

It is clear in this passage, that Quint is so blind to evil's nature that he cannot recognize it in other people, much less in himself.

Ironically enough, Hooper's and Quint's opposite ideologies end up bringing them to the same place. At the end of the novel, they are both very much like the shark in their casual cruelty. Hooper because he wants to be, and Quint because he doesn't know enough about the shark to realize when he is mirroring its behavior.

Brody is the compromise between these two extremes. He doesn't want to become so enmeshed in evil that it colors all his perceptions and draws him into its seductive grasp. But neither does he want to live in ignorance, and thereby allow evil to thrive because he does not recognize it on sight. He has already seen what both attitudes can do to people he loves by looking at what has happened to his friend, Vaughan, and his wife, Ellen. Vaughan didn't recognize evil when he was dealing with the Mafia, and that naivete eventually leads to his ruin. And Ellen's life has been equally ruined by her interest in the

evil represented by Hooper.

It is this compromise between understanding and rejecting that carries Brody through the novel. But it does not, however, resolve any of his problems. The closest he comes to a solution is when he recognizes that giving up is not the answer. He comes to realize that although there is no method of combatting evil which will assure success, it is still his duty as the protector of the town to continue the fight. This is what makes Brody such an important and compelling hero. Even after he has experienced failure he continues to fight for what he believes in. Evil is all around us, and often we cannot hope to succeed against it. But Brody makes it clear that all a good man can do, is do the best he can. Success against the enemy is not the measure of a man's worth. It is the effort he makes to battle the darkness, win or lose, which determines the goodness of a man's soul.

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