Darwin on the Cutting-Room Floor: Evolution, Religion, and Film Censorship

DOI:
10.1086/703953

Document Version
Accepted author manuscript

Link to publication record in Manchester Research Explorer

Citation for published version (APA):

Published in:
Osiris

Citing this paper
Please note that where the full-text provided on Manchester Research Explorer is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Proof version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version.

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Explorer are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Takedown policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please refer to the University of Manchester’s Takedown Procedures [http://man.ac.uk/04Y6Bo] or contact uml.scholarlycommunications@manchester.ac.uk providing relevant details, so we can investigate your claim.
Darwin on the Cutting Room Floor: Evolution, Religion and Film Censorship
David A. Kirby, Centre for the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine, University of Manchester

Accepted for publication in Osiris, 34.

Abstract: In the mid-twentieth century film studios sent their screenplays to the Hays Office, Hollywood’s official censorship body, and to the Catholic Church’s Legion of Decency for approval and recommendations for revision. This essay examines how filmmakers crafted stories involving evolutionary biology and how religiously motivated movie censorship groups modified these cinematic narratives in order to depict what they considered to be more appropriate visions of humanity’s origins. I find that censorship groups were concerned about the perceived impact of science fiction cinema on the public’s belief systems and on the wider cultural meanings of evolution. By controlling the stories told about evolution in science fiction cinema, censorship organizations believed that they could regulate the wider cultural meanings of evolution itself. But this is not a straightforward story of “science” versus “religion.” There were significant differences amongst these groups as to how to censor evolution, as well as changes to their attitudes towards evolutionary content over time. Instead, I show how different censorship groups adopted diverse perspectives, depending on their perception of what constituted a morally appropriate science fiction story about evolution.

In June 1942 screenwriters William Bruckner and Robert Metzler completed their script for the first science fiction (SF) film produced by Twentieth Century-Fox: Dr. Renault’s Secret. The film was based on Gaston Leroux’s 1912 novel Balaoo whose plot
involved a scientist teaching an ape to speak, read and write in order to prove that humans are glorified apes.\textsuperscript{1} The ape-man is physically indistinguishable from an educated human. But the scientist ultimately realizes that the “human conscience” is what separates humans from the apes when the ape-man’s bestial nature surfaces and he murders several people.\textsuperscript{2} Bruckner and Metzler’s initial script modified the story to emphasize its SF and horror aspects. To that end they depicted the ape-man, Noel, as more of a mentally deficient brute rather than an articulate gentleman. They also changed Dr Renault’s motivations for transforming an ape into a human. His new experimental goal is to “prove the descent of man from an ape”\textsuperscript{3}, making him not just a mad scientist, but a “mad evolutionist.”\textsuperscript{4} The scriptwriters believed that having Renault’s objective invalidate the biblical account of human origins would provide audiences with an even greater desire to see him punished.

The movie that was made, however, didn’t include anything about evolution, Darwin, or the descent of man from the apes. Why did filmmakers choose not to include this element of the narrative storyline? Did they believe that it took up too much screen time? Did this character’s motivations clash too much with the other plot elements? Did the story perform poorly with test audiences? In actuality, Hollywood’s self-censorship organisation, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America — popularly known as the “Hays Office” — effectively took the choice of using that narrative out of filmmakers’ hands.

The Hays Office was established by Hollywood in 1922, as a response to protests by the Catholic Church and other Christian organisations over what they considered immoral content in movies.\textsuperscript{5} By 1930 studio heads agreed to abide by a code of standards
called the Motion Picture Production Code written by two prominent Catholics. Standard procedure in 1942 was to send screenplays to the Hays Office for review and recommendations on how to alter the script so that it met the standards of the Production Code. The censors at the Hays Office judged that such frank discussions of Darwin and human evolution made the whole storyline in “violation of the provisions of the Production Code.” They believed that such open discussions of human evolution “will undoubtedly offend the sensibilities of large groups of religious people of different faiths,” and hence were inappropriate for movies meant for entertainment. They approved of the script’s portrayal of evolution as immoral, but feared that even a critical account of the theory would legitimize the topic. From the Hays Office’s perspective the only appropriate story about evolution was no story.

This judgement left the studio with limited choices. They could use the existing script and release the film without the Hay Office’s “seal of approval.” But that would likely be a financial kiss of death, since the film would be barred from most movie theatres. Alternatively, they could produce an entirely new script. But they had already invested resources into the project and they also felt that the story had strong box office potential. Finally, they could negotiate with the Hays Office to develop a story acceptable to the censors. Thus, one of the film’s producers and the studio’s director of public relations met with the Hays Office. The Hays Office explained that the script violated the category of “religion” in the Production Code by presenting evolution as a provable alternative to the account of creation in Genesis.

While the studio would have preferred the added horror of a mad evolutionist, the general concept of a scientifically created killer ape-man was more important than the
scientist’s justification of his experiments. Therefore, to the gratification of the Hays Office, the studio “agreed to eliminate any reference to Darwin or his theory, and to establish the ape as a throwback.” They used pseudoscientific words to render the scientist’s motivations nebulous, for example: “My experiment in transmutation begins tomorrow. The throwback is an excellent candidate for experimental humanization.”

Even an SF storyline as ludicrous as the one in the draft script for Dr. Renault’s Secret was off limits if the censors believed that it would legitimate an inappropriate message about the origin of the human species.

In this article I explore the ways filmmakers tried to craft SF stories with evolutionary themes and how religiously motivated movie censorship groups modified these narratives before, during and after production in order to tell what they considered to be more acceptable stories about humanity’s origins. Moving pictures had a level of realism never previously exhibited by mass media. Censorship groups worried that this realism would normalise and legitimate messages in movies. Especially worrying was the fact that cinema’s visuality meant that audiences did not have to be literate. Censors worried that this meant they would lack the mental capacity to critically evaluate a film. Realism, for the censors, made film an extremely powerful and potentially dangerous medium for mass communication.

Concerns about film realism made SF movies particularly problematic for censors because of the role that science plays in the genre. Science’s cultural authority provided an added level of realism, which censors feared might mislead audiences into accepting what they saw as legitimate representations of the world, as well as exaggerating the power of science without acknowledging its limitations. Fundamentally, the censors did
not trust the public to interpret the complexities or the implications of science in cinema.\textsuperscript{12}

For the Christian organisations that motivated the censors, evolution was an exceptionally dangerous scientific topic since it conflicted with literal interpretations of scripture. Evolution challenged many of Christianity’s fundamental beliefs about the elevated place of humanity in creation, the existence of free will, moral responsibility for one’s actions, and a rational and immortal human soul.\textsuperscript{13} Recent historic work on representations of Darwin and evolution in late 19th century popular culture reveals a Victorian fixation on the implications of the human/primate connection.\textsuperscript{14} Gorillas and ape-like human progenitors such as cavemen and “missing links” became symbolic images of the supposed evolutionary relationship between humans and apes. Popular cultural products used these images both for satiric purposes by making fun of evolutionary advocates but also for more ominous purposes to show the dangers of such beliefs.

Before 1925, these Victorian motifs and thematic content could be used relatively easily in Hollywood movies to poke fun at those who took Darwin’s claims seriously.\textsuperscript{15} The same evolutionary plot that the Hays Office forced Twentieth Century Fox to remove in 1941—a scientist attempting to prove Darwin’s theory by transforming an ape into a human—was a standard plot for SF comedies before 1925. The highly publicized Scopes “Monkey Trial”, which galvanised the antievolution movement, marked the decline of the comedic human/primate genre of SF films.\textsuperscript{16} Evolution—especially for fundamentalist Protestant and Catholics—wasn’t funny any more. After the Scopes Trial antievolutionists’ perception of evolution and its supporters turned from comedic to horrifying. With the
adoption of the Production Code in 1930 and the subsequent re-structuring of the Hays Office in 1934 as well as the creation of the Legion of Decency in 1933, it became more difficult for SF filmmakers to include evolutionary ideas.

The goal of this article is to understand the struggle between studios and censorship groups over the production of meaning in SF films featuring human evolution. The “censors” did not aim to stop studios from releasing films, but to ensure that the movies were not blasphemous, indecent, or legitimating dangerous ideas. The Hays Office did not seek to ban films, but instead operated “at the level of the text” and “at the level of representation.” Subsequent to the development of the Production Code censorship organizations took the approach of closely analysing, commenting upon, and recommending changes to every story treatment and script in order to control “the production of meaning” in films. By altering a film script before production censorship organisations could control a film’s dialogue, visuals, individual scenes, character motivations, plot points, and overall narrative. Thus, they could help create movies that they believed would have a positive influence on audiences.

Censorship groups saw movies as a battleground over evolution’s impact on morality. By controlling the stories told about evolution in SF cinema, they could regulate the meaning of evolution itself. This study will then focus on these negotiations, found in the correspondence held in the archives of the Hays Office and the Legion of Decency. The battle over evolution in SF cinema is a battle over the perceived impact of SF cinema on the public’s belief systems and the wider cultural meanings of evolution. But this is not a straightforward story of “science” versus “religion.” The censors did not reject every evolutionary SF story. Instead, I show how different censorship groups adopted
diverse perspectives, depending on their perception of a morally appropriate SF story about evolution.

**Debating the Blasphemy of Cinematic Evolution in the Pre-Code Era**

In 1930 the Studio Relations Committee (SRC) was the branch of the Hays Office tasked with enforcing the Production Code. Colonel Jason Joy and his successor James Wingate ran the SRC from the adoption of the Production Code in 1930 until its reformation as the Production Code Administration (PCA) in 1934. The SRC advised studios on how to alter their scripts so that they met the standards of the Production Code. The SRC, however, could not force studios to accept their suggestions. This meant that despite their agreement to abide by the Production Code, studios frequently ignored the SRC’s recommendations in the early 1930s. In addition, Joy and Wingate took a particularly lenient approach to the Production Code, which they viewed as a flexible set of guidelines rather than a rigid set of rules. Confusingly, the time period between when the SRC adopted but laxly enforced the Production Code in 1930 and the creation of the PCA in 1934 is referred to as the ‘pre-Code’ period.

For Joy and Wingate, censorship was primarily about protecting audiences from indecent depictions of sex and violence or from overtly immoral stories. They did not think that the SRC should prevent studios from producing films with controversial topics as long as they were handled appropriately. According to film scholar Gregory Black, “Films that were considered immoral by religious clergy and other guardians of morality were often seen by Joy and Wingate as good entertainment, satire, comedy, or legitimate commentary on contemporary social, moral, or political issues.” In essence, they
believed that adult audiences could handle thought provoking stories as long as they did not blatantly incorporate immoral, offensive or blasphemous messages. Joy and Wingate also took into account the cinematic context of potentially controversial topics: they believed they were less problematic if found in non-realist films genres such as SF, fantasy, horror, or comedy, where audiences would not take them seriously.

Joy and Wingate’s permissive stance meant that, in the pre-Code era between 1930 and 1934, studios were able to tell stories where characters contradicted the creation story in Genesis. In contrast, the various regional and international censor boards pushed for stronger censorship measures, and SCR-approved films still had to pass these censor boards before they could be shown in a region’s movie-theaters. Between 1930 and 1934 a number of major studio SF films incorporating evolutionary concepts played a central role in the struggle between the SRC, moral reformers, and the regional censor boards over appropriate movie content.

The Irreverence of Scientific Creation in *Frankenstein*

Universal Studio’s 1931 adaptation of *Frankenstein* was the first SF film involving thematically problematic implications of evolution that the SRC had to grapple with after their adoption of the Production Code. Although the film did not overtly incorporate evolution as a process, its theme of scientific creation conflicted with the biblical creation story. Joy’s response to the script, as well as to the resulting controversy, shows how the SRC attempted to mitigate religious concerns about cinema during the Pre-Code era while also allowing studios to produce movies with challenging narratives.
The SRC requested a single change in the script, replacing the line “In the name of God! Now I know what it feels like to be God!” with the less specific “Now I know how it feels to be a god.” Joy thought this modification would distinguish Frankenstein’s scientific creation from God’s divine creation. The studio, however, ignored this request and filmed the scene as written. Outside of that dialogue the SRC were certain that the film would be “reasonably free from censorship action” by the political censor boards.

They were completely wrong. The film ran into significant opposition from regional censor boards. Censors banned the film in numerous locations because they considered a film about a scientist usurping God’s role in life’s creation to be blasphemous. The Kansas censor board’s initial rejection of the film makes this objection clear:

The reason is given because of BLASPHEMY which Webster says is … the act of claiming the attributes or prerogatives of the deity. Besides being an Ecclesiastical offence, blasphemy is a crime at the common law, as well as generally by statute, as tending to a breach of the peace and being a public nuisance or destructive of the foundations of civil society.

If a scientist could create life merely using organic materials then God’s act was not sacred or unique. In fact, they considered the non-divine origin of humanity such a dangerous idea that they warned that disseminating such beliefs through a movie threatened civil society.

Censors in the Canadian province of Quebec also condemned Frankenstein because the film “foster[ed] creating by Man and it being a dogma of the Catholic Church
that only God can create it is not advisable to be shown on screen.”\textsuperscript{30} Generally, the filmmakers accommodated regional censor boards by removing dialogue or by eliminating problematic scenes before the film’s release. But the blasphemous notion of a scientist creating life is central to \textit{Frankenstein}. Even the dialogue about “feeling like God” was just an overt expression of the film’s underlying theme. There was no way for the studio to overcome the objection without fundamentally changing the film’s narrative, which was an unacceptable solution for both the studio and Joy.

Eventually, the studio satisfied censors’ objections by simply adding a short prologue.\textsuperscript{31} This might seem to be a perplexing solution given that the prologue does nothing to change the blasphemous nature of the story. The film still went on to show a scientist creating human life. But the political censor’s problems were not just with the story, but how it was presented. This particular SF story had existed in book form for over a century without being a threat. Their anxiety stemmed from their conviction that the persuasive power of the audiovisual medium of cinema would lead audiences—especially uneducated working class audiences—to believe that a scientist could create life in a laboratory.

The studio suggested the prologue be presented by tuxedo-clad actor Edward Van Sloan (Figure 1), who plays Frankenstein’s teacher Doctor Waldman, to remind audiences that the story they were about to see was a fantasy:

\begin{quote}
The story of ‘Frankenstein’ is pure fiction. It delves into the physically impossible and the fantastic. For almost a hundred years the story has furnished diversion and the picture like the story is for entertainment only. Although no moral is intended it shows what might happen to Man if he challenges the unknowable.\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}
For Universal Pictures, a prologue was an ideal solution because it required minimal resources and it kept their films mostly intact. For Joy, prologues were the perfect form of censorship because they allowed studios to maintain the integrity of their films while reminding people not to take these cinematic stories seriously. The success of *Frankenstein’s* prologue quickly became a strategy whereby studios tried to fend off major cuts to films in the pre-Code era, as was the case with another film that contradicted the biblical origins of humanity, Universal Pictures’ *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932).

“Objectionable and Anti-Religious:” Mad Evolution and *Murders in the Rue Morgue*

In *Murders in the Rue Morgue* Bela Lugosi plays the mad scientist Dr. Mirakle who attempts to prove his evolutionary theories by mixing human and ape blood. In one scene Mirakle stands in front of a chart detailing the evolutionary “tree of life” (Figure 2) alongside Erik the gorilla whose cage is labelled “Le Gorille au Cerveau Humain” (the beast with a human soul). Mirakle explains to an unbelieving carnival crowd his desire to prove that humans evolved from apes:

MIRAKLE: The shadow of Erik the ape hangs over us all. In the darkness before the Dawn of Man. … In the slime of chaos there was a seed that rose and grew into the tree of life. Life was motion. Fins changing into limbs, limbs grew into ears. Crawling reptiles grew legs. Aeons of ages passed. There came a time when a four legged thing walked upright. Behold the first man. (points to Erik, the audience erupts in disbelief)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Heresy!
MIRAKLE: Heresy? Do they still burn men for heresy? Then burn me monsieur, light the fire! Do you think your little candle will outshine the flame of truth.

… My life is consecrated to a great experiment. I tell you I will prove your kinship with the ape. Erik’s blood shall be mixed with the blood of Man!

The image of an unruly crowd threatening a scientist over his scientific beliefs, coupled with the film’s allusion to the burning at the stake was clearly meant to invoke images of the Catholic Church stifling scientific inquiry.

Given Frankenstein’s censorship difficulties Universal Pictures and the SRC might have been concerned about censor boards’ responses to an SF movie that even more overtly challenged the notion of humanity’s divine creation. However, after examining the initial outline for Murders in the Rue Morgue in June 1931 the SRC told the film’s producer Carl Laemmle, Jr. “we find nothing concerning which we feel we need to caution you at the time.”

Jason Joy came to a similar conclusion after watching the completed film in January 1932 telling Laemmle that outside of some scantily clad dancers and some screaming sounds “it is our belief that it is satisfactory from the standpoint of the Code.”

Despite the SRC’s confidence, the studio recognized that the story might offend some people. Laemmle sent Joy a letter wondering if the film might offend the French because it takes place in France. Joy’s response illustrates his approach to controversial topics in certain genres, “Because of the source of the story, its imaginative and fantastic qualities and because it is laid in a period so far away, we doubt if anything in the picture will offend French sensibilities.”

Reviewer J.V. Wilson mirrored Joy’s reasoning in his
“Synopsis and Code Review” by asserting that the story’s “fantastic” elements would protect the film from action by the censor boards.\textsuperscript{36}

It was clear that under Joy’s administration controversy was offensive in direct proportion to its realism. From his perspective \textit{Murders in the Rue Morgue} was not a serious film; it was a ludicrous SF horror film set in a fantastic past where an extremely unsympathetic character championed ideas about human evolution. In his opinion nobody would take Mirakle’s claims seriously. Despite the experience with the similarly-fantastical \textit{Frankenstein}, Joy felt confident that \textit{Murders in the Rue Morgue} would pass through the censor boards without a problem.

Again, Joy and Universal Pictures were blindsided by the hostile response from some regional censor boards to the film. They had not foreseen the implied bestiality in Mirakle’s desire to “mix” Erik’s blood with that of human women. As Barbara Creed argues, cinematic bestiality embodies evolutionary themes, invoking de-evolutionary fears, exposing the blurred border between humans and animals, and indicating general moral collapse.\textsuperscript{37}

It was clear that Joy had fundamentally misjudged regional censor boards’ tolerance for evolutionary ideas, even in movies that were fantastical in nature. British Columbia’s censor board, for example, initially banned the film because they believed that the evolutionary theme would offend religious people. Universal’s Canadian representative informed the studio:

\textit{Rue Morgue} condemned by British Columbia censor Board. The reason “theme of the story Man’s descent from ape objectionable and anti-religious, action macabre in the extreme.” Censor action here, in my estimation, ridiculous.\textsuperscript{38}
The SRC recommended the same solution they had implemented with *Frankenstein*: “We suggested that we would be willing to put a foreword on the picture and order the deletion of a number of the scenes in the hope that the Appeal Board would approve it.”

But by 1932 censor boards considered prologues an unsatisfactory solution. They had decided that movie magic was so powerful that audiences would believe in the story’s veracity, even if they were told it was fiction. Ultimately, Joy convinced BC’s board to accept that the fantastic nature of the SF story and the punishment of the heretic neutered the impact of any evolutionary ideas. Afterward he wrote to them, “It seemed to me so imaginative and fantastic, and I felt that no one could be seriously affected by the incidental idea of the doctor’s experiments.”

**The Blasphemy of Evolution in *Island of Lost Souls***

Paramount Pictures’ *Island of Lost Souls* (1932) was based on H.G Wells’ 1895 novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. In the novel a mad scientist tries to scientifically evolve “perfect” humans but instead creates half-human/half-animal monsters called the “Beast-People.” Given the recent negative reactions to *Frankenstein* and *Murders in the Rue Morgue* the SRC might have been hesitant to endorse another script with such obvious evolutionary themes. Yet, as with those two films, Joy only challenged a single line of dialogue. The line occurs when Moreau explains his evolutionary experiments and asks his companion, “Mr. Parker, do you know what it means to feel like God?” Knowing the difficulty *Frankenstein* had with a comparable line, Joy warned the studio that the film would have trouble with state censor boards.
Although the studio recognised that the blasphemy might offend regional censor boards, they were unwilling to remove the line. Instead they anticipated potential censure by filming the scene in such a way that the shot could easily be removed without harming the story. The stage direction in the final dialogue script shows how they arranged filming so that the line could be edited out seamlessly if necessary (see Figure 3):

56. Medium shot Moreau and Parker
57. Closeup Moreau

Moreau: Mr. Parker, do you know what it means to feel like God?
58. Closeup Parker
59. Medium shot Moreau and Parker.

It would be a fairly easy editing operation to cut out closeup shots 57 and 58 then splice together medium shots 56 and 59 without any loss of continuity. In this way the studio could tell the story the way they wanted but they were protected should censor boards object to this dialogue.

By the time the finished film was sent to the SRC for approval James Wingate had taken over from Joy as director. Aside from the one line Wingate’s approval letter stated “we see nothing in the picture to which any objection could be made … in our opinion it is satisfactory from the standpoint of the Code.” Wingate concluded by writing that he “enjoyed this picture thoroughly.” He reiterated this sentiment in his monthly censorship report to Will Hays saying that the film “struck us as one of the best horror stories that
have been brought to the screen,” drawing explicit attention to the film’s evolutionary theme by saying “Charles Laughton provides another fine performance as the doctor whose dream it is to hasten evolution by turning animals into human beings.” With that level of endorsement Paramount Studios felt safe sending the film to regional censor boards.

Unfortunately for Paramount, censor boards did not share Wingate’s enthusiasm. Many censor boards insisted that Moreau’s line comparing himself to God be cut. But this was only one of the issues. More worryingly for Paramount, censor boards considered the plot’s overt reliance on evolutionary theory and the insinuation of bestiality to be unacceptable; removing a few lines of dialogue would not be enough. The film was “rejected in toto by fourteen state censor boards” as well as being banned in Germany, Italy, Hungary, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Latvia, India, South Africa, Tasmania, and Singapore. The British Board of Film Censors banned the film until 1958 because of religious concerns over its evolutionary story being “repulsive” and “unnatural” as well as its vivisection scenes. While Joy and Wingate felt that audiences could handle such “unnatural” themes, most censor boards believed the public was best served by not being exposed to these ideas.

*Island of Lost Souls* was the third evolution themed SF film in two years endorsed by the SRC that subsequently ran into strong resistance from regional censor boards. Joy and Wingate’s approach to evolutionary themes were in line with their response to other provocative ideas that were not in direct violation of the Production Code. Scholars refer to 1930-1934 as the “pre-Code era” because the SRC only loosely enforced the Production Code during this period. Joy and Wingate believed that it was better to allow
the public to grapple with controversial themes like evolution as long as films did not present biased versions of these themes or did not treat the ideas seriously.

Regional censor boards’ responses to evolutionary heavy SF films showed how Joy and Wingate’s views were out of sync with the majority of moral reformers. Religious reformers believed that the danger of motion pictures demanded an approach that prevented disturbing narratives from even reaching audiences. These moral crusaders along with regional censor boards considered evolution to be an inappropriate topic for motion pictures no matter how delicately the film handled the sinister idea, how ridiculous the film’s plot, or if the film punished any characters advocating human evolution. From their perspective Joy and Wingate’s failure to censure evolutionary elements was further evidence that Hollywood’s self-regulation of movie content was not working and that movies were just as morally problematic as they were before the adoption of the Production Code.

**The Production Code Administration and the Blasphemy of Evolution in SF Cinema**

Religious reformers were frustrated with the SRC’s refusal to rigidly enforce the Production Code because they believed that cinema’s reality effect was normalizing and legitimating messages including scientific ideas like evolution. Sociological studies of movies in the early 1930s, such as the Payne Fund studies, seemingly provided scientific evidence for religious reformers’ assumptions that individual movies could directly affect a person’s attitudes and behaviors. This research made the practice of closely analyzing and commenting upon the minute details in every script seem to be a rationale approach for censors. If individual films could have such a powerful effect on audiences, then it
made sense for censorship organizations to only permit what they considered to be “acceptable” narratives to reach the screen.

This moral outrage resulted in the Catholic Church forming its own censorship organization the Catholic Legion of Decency in 1933. Will Hays also dissolved the SRC in 1934 in order to curtail calls by religious groups for governmental movie censorship. In its place Hays created the PCA with the tough-minded Catholic Joseph Breen as director. Although the Catholic Church was not the only religious voice in these organizations it certainly had an immense influence. Studios’ agreement not to release any films without the PCA’s Seal of Approval gave Breen the power he needed to force studios to alter their scripts if they did not meet the standards of the Production Code. Breen’s more inflexible approach meant that – after 1934 – evolution was no longer a permissible theme.

In Breen’s 1938 “Annual Report of the President of the Association” he warned that the film industry “must continue to resist the lure of propaganda.” For Breen, motion pictures were for entertainment and that “the distinction between motion pictures with a message and self-serving propaganda is one determinable only through the processes of common sense.” Francis Harmon, who was in charge of the Eastern division of the PCA, was uncomfortable with Breen’s definition of propaganda. Harmon felt that the line between a message and propaganda was too indistinct and subjective to be determined by “common sense.” To demonstrate this, he asked colleagues in the PCA to decide if certain books were propaganda.

Almost 90% of respondents to Harmon’s survey felt strongly that Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* was propaganda, the same percentage that categorised *Mein Kampf*...
as such. More PCA employees believed that Darwin’s scientific book was propaganda than those who considered the *Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx’s *Das Capital*, or Jean Jacques Rousseau’s “Social Contract” to be propaganda. Harmon defined propaganda as: “A deliberate distortion or manipulation of facts or realities.” From the PCA’s perspective, Darwin’s text was propaganda because they considered it to be dishonest. For them the book was not presenting an alternative hypothesis in a debate over human origins; it was propagating a dangerous lie and claiming it was truth. Their belief that Darwin and by extension evolutionary biology was propaganda justified, to them, their caution regarding evolutionary themes in SF movies.

**Scientific Creation in *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) and a Change in Policy for the PCA**

Unlike Joy’s lenient examination of the first film’s script, Breen found numerous violations of the Production Code in the script. Most prominent were the story’s comparisons of Frankenstein to God and dialogue comparing the creation of the monster to God’s creation of man. Breen asked that “all such references should be deleted or changed in a manner which will avoid all possible objection.” He reminded the studio that the first *Frankenstein* had been censored because of an “alleged irreverent attitude on the part of some of the characters, particularly wherever they even suggested that their actions were paralleling those of the Creator.” Breen requested two modifications to appease regional censor boards. First, they should punish the scientists to convey a moral lesson. Second, it must remove dialogue suggesting any equivalence with God’s creation as well as dialogue mocking the Biblical creation story.
The PCA convened a meeting with director James Whale to discuss Breen’s requests.\textsuperscript{56} Whale proposed minor alterations to dialogue that he felt would diminish the film’s blasphemous premise.\textsuperscript{57} He also offered to put in a prologue and epilogue where Mary Shelley would clearly state that her “purpose was to write a moral lesson – the punishment that befell a mortal man who dared to emulate God” and that “no one is meant to know these things - it is blasphemous and wicked.” For Breen Whale’s dialogue changes ameliorated the blasphemy sufficiently to avoid “the censorship difficulties from which your first Frankenstein picture unfortunately had to contend with.”\textsuperscript{58} He still believed, however, that “it is more than likely that this picture will meet with considerable difficulty at the hands of [regional] censor boards both in this country and abroad.”\textsuperscript{59} As predicted, the regional censor boards severely edited the film. Gruesomeness was the primary issue but a number of boards insisted on removing apparently blasphemous dialogue. Pennsylvania and Quebec, for example, eliminated the line, “After twenty years of secret scientific research, and countless failures, I have also created life as we say – in God’s own image.”\textsuperscript{60}

As they had done previously with Joy/Wingate and the SRC, the studio asked Breen to intervene with the censor boards to minimize cuts.\textsuperscript{61} In response, Breen decided that it was not the PCA’s role to convince censors to retain scenes and dialogue that the PCA had recommended be cut from the script. \textit{Bride of Frankenstein} thus represented a major turning point for Breen and the Hays Office. The studio’s failure to heed his advice led him to enact a new policy. He would guarantee that the PCA would fight for studios against the political censor boards, but \textit{only} if the studios agreed to make changes to their scripts when requested by the PCA. Breen’s new policy gave him the leverage he needed
to force studios to remove what he considered to be problematic themes and contexts, thus enabling him to become one of the most powerful men in Hollywood.

Removing Evolution and Re-Affirming Creation Narratives in SF Films

After 1935 the PCA began to routinely ask studios to modify SF scripts that could be interpreted as containing evolutionary ideas. In the original script from Warner Bros. Studio’s *The Walking Dead* (1936), for example, a scientist resurrects Boris Karloff’s character Dopey by transforming him into an apeman. The PCA rejected the script because the evolutionary connotations were too obvious. They instructed the studio that there should “be no suggestion in the character of Dopey –after his death– that he is a half-man/half-animal. In our judgment this would be most offensive.” The studio removed the apeman element. In its place they indicated Dopey’s resurrection from the dead by putting a white streak in Karloff’s hair (Figure 6).

The PCA was also concerned about more subtle representations or dialogue that could be read as supporting an evolutionary origin for humanity. For instance, in the original script for *The Monster and the Girl* (1941) the mad scientist delivers this dialogue: “Look –the human brain! Even more than the human heart it is nature’s greatest handiwork.” Although these lines might seem neutral, the use of the word “nature” implies that humans were the result of an organic evolutionary process. After a phone call with the PCA the studio agreed to make several major alterations to the script including its evolutionary elements. One minor change involved substituting a single word so that the previous dialogue now read: “Look –the human brain! Even more than the human
heart it is God’s greatest handiwork,” thus making explicit who was responsible for the origin of the human brain.66

Re-Framing Moreau’s Evolutionary Experiments in Island of Lost Souls

The PCA even rejected SF films the SRC approved before 1934 that studios put forward for re-release. When Paramount tried to re-release Island of Lost Souls in 1941 a much more stringent PCA rejected the film because of the evolutionary basis of Moreau’s experiments.67 For Breen, Island of Lost Souls violated the spirit, if not the precise wording of the Production Code by including an evolutionary concept of human origins that he believed would be deeply offensive to Christians. As Breen explained to the studio: “The general unacceptability of this picture is suggested by the blasphemous suggestion of the character, played by Charles Laughton, wherein he presumes to create human beings out of animals.”68

Paramount responded by suggesting they would eliminate dialogue suggesting that Moreau was “creating” humans by evolving them from animals.69 The studio was particularly attentive to dialogue indicating that Lota the panther woman was Moreau’s creation. Unlike the other Beast-People, Lota appears to be human (Figure 4). Any suggestion that she was Moreau’s creation legitimated the idea that humans could be created using the “lower” animals. The studio removed dialogue such as “Lota is my most nearly perfect creation” to make it appear that she was the scientist’s daughter instead.

The studio assured the PCA that “these cuts eliminate from the picture the suggestions that Moreau considers himself on par with God as a creator, and reduces him
to the status of a scientist conducting bio-anthropological experiments.” In the edited film there is no longer any indication that Moreau made the creatures on the island; he is now merely an anthropologist studying their behaviors. In this way, the Beast-People simply become another of God’s creations. That was a scientific idea that the PCA deemed appropriate for audiences.

Fears of Gorilla Love: The Evolutionary Threat of Bestiality in SF Cinema

It is important to note that the PCA did not remove every evolutionary idea from SF films. Although Breen cast a long shadow over the organization it was not a monolithic entity but a collection of individuals, and the PCA’s response to evolutionary aspects sometimes depended on which censor read the script.70 There was one element related to evolution, however, that every PCA reviewer flagged as problematic. The PCA automatically rejected scripts that even subtly suggested bestiality.

Julia Voss observes that there has been a long association between gorillas, evolution, and bestiality: “the gorilla embodied the essence of bestiality, and thus represented an affront to humanity.”71 Gorillas were a staple of SF and horror films from the 1930s through the 1950s. The animal featured in a wide variety of mad science plots such as scientists turning humans into gorillas or gorillas into humans and putting human brains into gorillas or gorilla brains into humans. The original scripts for these films frequently involved the human to gorilla or gorilla to human character developing romantic feeling for a human character. From the PCA’s perspective the implications of such a relationship, even if unrequited, made this type of plotline unsuitable. They rejected a large number of scripts with this narrative element including *White Pongo*
(1945), *Bride of the Gorilla* (1951) and *The Bride and the Beast* (1958). The love triangle was a basic plot element in this time period but the love triangle became problematic for the PCA when one point of the triangle was a gorilla as was the case in *Jungle Woman’s* (1944) original script.

Evolution in SF Goes from Objectionable to Acceptable After *Inherit the Wind*

Evolutionary themes within SF movies were an issue for the PCA well into the 1950s. But the PCA’s response to scripts for the non-SF film *Inherit the Wind* (1960) reveals how the organization altered their approach to evolution in general by the end of the 1950s. *Inherit the Wind* is the most well-known fictional film that dealt overtly with human evolution. The film is based on a stage play that debuted in 1955 and was written as a response to the McCarthy hearings. Its story consists of a highly fictionalized retelling of the 1925 Scopes Trial.

Given that the story openly supported the teaching of evolution and mocked anti-evolutionists it is not surprising that the PCA initially rejected Twentieth Century Fox’s script submitted for approval just after the play’s opening on Broadway in March 1955:

> A story such as this violates the portion of the code which states that “No film...may throw ridicule on any religious faith.” This material contains an attack on Christian doctrines and, in general, presents religious thinking people in an extremely unfavorable light.

The PCA judged the story to be making fun of Christian doctrines about creation and implying that all Christians were Biblical literalists. Burt Lancaster’s production company Hecht-Hill-Lancaster subsequently bought the screen rights from Twentieth
Century Fox and re-submitted the script in June 1955. While the PCA did not immediately reject the script as they had in March, they requested extensive changes that the studio could not accommodate.\textsuperscript{76}

So, why after two initial rejections did the PCA approve a script in 1959 that was still clearly about the realities of evolution? Four years after rejecting those scripts, the PCA’s power was in serious decline. The post-World War II period saw a general loosening of moral standards and the American public began questioning the group’s control over movie content.\textsuperscript{77} Protestants also began complaining that the Production Code was biased against non-Catholic themes.\textsuperscript{78} In addition, the Supreme Court’s decision to give movies First Amendment protection in 1952 put significant restrictions on film censorship.\textsuperscript{79} Breen retired in 1954 and the PCA replaced him with Geoffrey Shurlock, a more lenient regulator who questioned the contemporary relevance of the Production Code.\textsuperscript{80} These changes led to a revision of the PCA’s philosophies that allowed some treatment in SF films (if tasteful) of previously banned topics like evolution.

This is not to say that *Inherit the Wind* was awarded a seal of approval without comment. The story still violated the Production Code. But the modifications director Stanley Kramer negotiated with the PCA did not alter the tenor of the film in any way. The PCA asked that the film depict Reverend Brown as “earnest and sincere but misguided” and that a “sympathetic character” promote the idea that “religion, as practiced in this one community, was not representative of the true Christian faith.”\textsuperscript{81} They also required the removal of irreverent phrases including “hot for Genesis” and “belching beatitudes.” These were minor changes overall especially compared to the
script’s hostile rejection just four years earlier. The PCA had become less worried about the theological implications of scientific topics, focusing instead on retaining some influence over the growing explicit depictions of sex and violence. Ultimately, the PCA dissolved in 1968 and was replaced by the Code and Ratings Administration, which provided guidance to audiences but did not censor content.

Evolutionary Narratives, SF Films, and the Catholic Legion of Decency

The PCA was Hollywood’s official self-censorship organization but there was another important movie censorship group that also began operating in the US in the early 1930s. As previously mentioned, the Catholic Church formed its own censorship organization called the Catholic Legion of Decency in 1933. Although these two organisations shared a similar philosophy about cinema’s supposed moral dangers, the two were completely distinct censorship groups with very different operating procedures, relationships to the film industry, and parent organizations (the Hays Office for the PCA and the Catholic Church for the Legion of Decency).

The Legion of Decency’s primary means for compelling studios to modify their scripts was their film classification system, which advised Catholics as to a film’s moral acceptability. They had three levels of classification: A—morally acceptable, B—morally objectionable in part, and C—condemned. Studios believed that a B or C classification would seriously impact their box office if it drove significant numbers of Catholics away from the film, and were willing to negotiate to avoid this. This could include sending scripts to the Legion for approval before filming or recommendations for scenes to cut from the finished films.
Before 1950 movie depictions that even implied an evolutionary connection between humans and primates led to B classifications, even if the films had already been passed by the PCA. Twentieth Century Fox’s removal of dialogue concerning the scientist’s evolutionary goals in *Dr. Renault’s Secret* may have satisfied the PCA, but the Legion gave the film a B classification because “the subject material and treatment reflects some acceptance of the possibility of changing an ape into a human being.” The Legion of Decency were even more concerned about films that visualized a connection between humans and apes through graphic transformation scenes such as in *Jungle Woman* (1944). From their standpoint these SF films were theologically unpalatable because they legitimated a biological connection between apes and humans and indicated a natural progression from ape to human.

Looking for a Few Catholic Apes: Embracing Evolutionary Narratives in SF Cinema

Catholic reaction to evolutionary stories changed significantly after Pope Pius the XII’s papal encyclical *Humani Generis* in August 1950 affirmed that there was no inherent conflict between biological evolution and Catholic doctrines. Catholic views on evolution were further influenced by Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s 1955 book *Phenomenon of Man.* After the 1950 papal encyclical the Legion of Decency no longer considered stories involving human evolution to be inherently problematic. Instead, the Legion frequently used these films as an opportunity to congratulate themselves for being open to evolutionary ideas and to express bemusement at their fellow Christians who did not accept this science.
The Legion’s reviewers, a combination of clergy and lay Catholics, were extremely complimentary about Inherit the Wind and several wanted to give the film a special award. One reviewer’s comments sum up the Legion’s general opinion:

The theory of evolution as shown in this film is allied with our acceptance. I doubt that anyone holds any longer the literal seven day interpretation of Genesis. At least among Catholics. The Fundamentalists, as well shown in this film, make a pain of religion when it is really a joy.  

Another reviewer relished the film’s portrayal of Protestant Fundamentalists, “The Bible gets a whalloping in ‘Inherit the Wind’ that is wholly justified and convincing.” Catholics were sensitive to Protestant characterizations of their religion as anti-Biblical. One of the main differences between the two faiths is that Catholics reject the doctrine of sola scriptura, the reliance on the Bible alone as sufficient for spiritual guidance. It was gratifying for these Catholic reviewers to see a film questioning this element of Protestant doctrine. Inherit the Wind’s treatment of Protestant Fundamentalists seemed like a vindication for Catholic beliefs as well as those of Darwin.

By the late-1960s the Legion’s perception that “nobody can seriously doubt evolution now” comes out in their and subsequently NCOMP’s responses to several SF films. The central conflict in Planet of the Apes (1968) concerns a science/religion debate about evolution. The stranded human astronaut’s ability to talk leads to a Scopes trial parody pitting literalist orangutan religious leaders against freethinking chimpanzee scientists who believe his speech supports their contention that apes evolved from humans. Even NCOMP reviewers who found the film silly considered it a “provocative and ironic statement about mankind and evolution.” Several reviewers thought the film
was behind the times on the religion/evolution issue. One reviewer wrote, “Is it not a fact that the evolution ‘problem’ is dated? Surely there is not an intelligent person alive today who does not at least suspect the possibility of evolution?” In fact, NCOMP’s only problem with the evolutionary theme in *Planet of the Apes* was that the movie legitimated the perception that all religious groups had a problem with evolution. NCOMP would have preferred that the film include a few Catholic apes that sided with the scientists in this debate.

NCOMP’s reviewers also embraced *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) because of its inclusion of supreme beings whether metaphorical, alien, or divine. Despite the fact that the film never refers to religion or God most of NCOMP’s reviewers felt that the film conveyed a spiritual message about the role God has played in human evolution. The vague nature of the black monolith in the film allowed for multiple interpretations of its meaning (Figure 6). Director Stanley Kubrick and scriptwriter Arthur C. Clarke may have considered the monolith advanced alien technology, but many NCOMP reviewers believed that the monolith “symbolizes God, who is unchangeable, always present and powerful”.  

For NCOMP the monolith was an acknowledgement that human evolution was too complex to happen without external intervention. The monolith appears at crucial stages of human evolution; when humanity’s ancestors first learned to use tools, when humanity was on the cusp of space travel, and when *Homo sapiens* evolved into *Homo superior* as represented by the “star child” at the film’s end. NCOMP argued that the monolith’s influence on these events supported the concept of directed evolution. The moment hominids learned how to use tools is the moment in which the monolith/God
infused humanity with an immortal soul. Because of this interpretation NCOMP eventually conferred on the film its award for “Best Film of Educational Value” in 1968. For NCOMP, the SF film not only confirmed that humanity’s future will be awesome, it established that God had made this future possible.

Rejecting Inappropriate Cinematic Narratives About Evolution in SF Cinema

I do not want to give the impression that the Legion of Decency simply embraced every evolutionary story in SF films after 1950. The Legion’s response to evolution post-1950 actually reveals how the Catholic Church continued to be conflicted about the moral implications of evolutionary narratives. The 1957 movie *I Was a teenage Werewolf* illustrates this. The Legion gave the movie a B rating because it “tends to give credence to certain philosophical theories whose acceptance can lead to serious moral harm.” A mad scientist espouses these ideas when he explains that his goal is to re-evolve humanity by regressing a teenager back to his primitive state:

DR. BRANDON: Through hypnosis, I’m going to regress this boy back….back into the primitive past that lurks within him. I’ll transform him and release the savage instincts of life hidden within. Then I’ll be judged a benefactor. Mankind is on the verge of destroying itself….the only hope for the human race is to hurl it back to its primitive dawn….to start all over again.

Several other SF films of this period involved mad scientists releasing humanity’s inherited but submerged animal instincts. The scientist in *Blood of Dracula* (1957), for example, argues that our bestial ancestry left us with “a power strong enough to destroy the world buried within each of us.” Her experiments unleash this power in her teenage
assistant who then kills several classmates. The Legion gave the film a B classification because the “film tends to give credence to an erroneous philosophy of the origins of human life.”

It might seem surprising for the Legion to respond so negatively to such absurd low budget SF horror films, especially since they had recently commended films with far more realistic views of evolution. But the Catholic Church’s acceptance of human evolution was conditional: suggesting that evolution could explain sinful behaviors such as murder or adultery was unacceptable. The mad scientists’ use of hypnosis in both films points to a link between psychology and Darwinism that the Catholic Church found to be a particularly alarming misapplication of evolutionary thought. Darwin’s writings were a major influence on the field of psychology and on Sigmund Freud’s theories in particular. According to Lucille Ritvo, Freud made it clear that Darwinian theory was “essential to psychoanalysis” and that it “has always been present in Freud’s writings, albeit never explicitly.” Frank J. Sulloway similarly argues, “Freud, ethology, and sociobiology share a common evolutionary heritage.” Freud derived concepts such as the libido, id, and psychosexual stages from the Darwinian notion that behaviors are the result of a few basic animal instincts produced by natural selection to facilitate survival.

The Catholic Church took issue with scientific explanations including human evolution that removed personal responsibility from an individual’s actions. For Catholics the root of sin is God’s gift of free will. Sinful actions represent choices by individuals, not the product of “primitive instincts” inherited from our animal ancestors as the scientists in these films claimed. From the Legion of Decency’s perspective, these fictional scientists appeared to be offering absolution through scientific explanations
based on Darwinian informed psychiatry. The fact that these were frivolous SF films actually made the underlying ideas more worrisome. These were exploitation films aimed squarely at teenagers who may not be able to think through the moral implications of this philosophical position. What this demonstrates is that the Legion of Decency’s film reviewers used the lens of Catholic theology to think through all the potential moral implications of evolutionary narratives in a film, even in a grade Z movies like *I Was A Teenage Werewolf* and *Blood of Dracula*.

**Conclusions**

The administrators of the SRC, PCA and Legion of Decency were not trying to destroy the movie industry. They strongly believed that they were acting in a parental role by protecting audiences from immoral and indecent films. From their perspective films told linear stories using a heightened visual realism that conveyed easily understandable narratives to a monolithic audience. From this simplistic viewpoint cinema seemed to be a powerful medium of persuasion. By controlling the content of scripts these religiously-oriented elitist groups believed they could ensure that movies disseminated only morally appropriate messages including those about human origins. Ultimately, I find that censors found even the idea of evolution to be a moral danger, so they modified cinematic narratives in SF films in order to tell what they considered more appropriate stories about evolution as a social, cultural and moral force.

Censorship organizations favored SF narratives that recognized God’s role as creator and they prohibited stories implying a materialistic explanation for humanity’s origins. SF stories about evolution were not just about humanity’s past, they were also
about our visions for the future. Therefore, censors rejected many scripts that included evolutionary connections between humans and animals. They rejected stories that included attempts by fictional scientists to “prove” Darwin’s theories or to find the “missing link,” and irreverence towards the notion of a divine creator. They also deemed evolutionary ideas indecent because of the implications of bestiality in many human/gorilla films. The threat of censorship forced filmmakers to make decisions about including evolutionary themes based on reasons that had nothing to do with artistic merit. This means that we need to look beyond the finished film or we miss the story of how and why organizations outside Hollywood studios shaped and influenced cinematic depictions of evolution in SF cinema.

There were significant differences amongst the groups as to how to censor evolution, as well as changes to their attitudes towards evolutionary content over time. For the SRC, the context was crucial as to whether or not they removed a script’s evolutionary aspects. The organization felt that evolution was only dangerous if the film itself took the idea seriously. But their handling of cinematic evolution was not in line with moral reformers who demanded more stringent censorship. Moral crusaders considered evolutionary themes to be inappropriate no matter how delicately a film handled the idea, how ridiculous the film’s plot, or if characters were punished for advocating human evolution.

SF movies, in particular, led to disagreements between the SRC and regional censor boards. As SF film scholar Christine Correa argues, “science fiction is a genre that is demonstrably located between fantasy and reality.” The different approaches taken by the SRC and regional censor boards to evolution in SF cinema could be viewed as a
debate over which aspects of SF cinema were stronger - the fantasy or the realism. The SRC felt that SF cinema’s fantasy elements rendered its messages harmless; while regional censor boards believed that SF’s realism made the genre a potential moral danger if it contained inappropriate ideas. The SRC’s handling of evolutionary themes in SF films was one factor that led to its replacement by the PCA in 1934. The head of the PCA, Joseph Breen, rejected any distinction between fantasy and realism in SF cinema. Breen believed that cinema was a problematic medium no matter what genre or how fantastic the stories were. From his perspective the potential danger of motion pictures demanded an approach that prevented what he considered to be unacceptable stories from even reaching audiences. Ultimately, the theological implications of evolution in SF films became far less significant than the growing depiction of graphic sex and violence as the PCA’s lost power in the early-1960s.

Until 1950 the Legion of Decency concurred with the PCA’s approach to excluding evolution from SF movies. But institutional and cultural changes in the 1950s and 1960s led to them changing their opinion of what constituted an inappropriate story about evolution. The Legion’s censorship decisions for post-1950 SF films illustrate the Catholic Church’s continuing conflict with the moral implications of evolutionary narratives. The Legion’s reviewers often congratulated themselves for their progressive views on evolution. But they also reacted strongly to evolutionary narratives that they believed removed moral responsibility for a person’s actions such as the notion of inherited animal instincts or the idea that evil is a legacy of evolution. SF narratives including evolution may have become acceptable to the Catholic Church but they still
wanted to control how stories about the implications of evolutionary thought were told in movies.

Acknowledgements
I want to thank all of the editors and two anonymous reviewers whose invaluable suggestions have improved the work substantially. A debt of gratitude is particularly owed to Laura Gaither who read and commented on many versions of this manuscript. This work was supported by the Wellcome Trust (100618) through an Investigator Award entitled Playing God: Exploring the Intersections between Science, Religion and Entertainment Media.
Figures

Figure 1 – In this film still actor Edward Van Sloan reminds the audience that the story of scientific creation they are about to witness is only a fiction.
**Figure 2** – Dr. Mirakle explains his theories about human evolution in front of an “evolutionary ladder” in this film still.

**Figure 3** – Film stills showing how filmmakers anticipated censure. They could easily remove shots b and c, then splice together shots a and d with no loss of continuity.
**Figure 4** – Lota the panther woman shows no signs of her animal origins in this film still.

**Figure 5** – Instead of becoming half-animal, Dopey’s resurrection indicated with a white streak of hair as shown in this film still.
Figure 6 – Many reviewers for NCOMP considered the black monolith, shown in this film still, to be symbolic of God’s influence on human evolution.

1 Leroux is best known for his 1911 novel The Phantom of the Opera. Baloo had been adapted previously in 1927 as The Wizard.

2 Full text of Baloo found at gutenberg.net.au/ebooks08/0800281h.html [last accessed 2 September 2018]. Experiments discussed in Chapter XXI.

3 Brand, Synopsis of “Dr. Renault’s Secret,” undated, Production Code Administration archive, Los Angeles (subsequently PCA archive), Dr. Renault’s Secret file.


5 On the formation of the Hays Office in 1922, see; Leonard J. Leff and Jerold L. Simmons, The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood Censorship and the Production Code,

6 I will use the term “Production Code” to refer to the Motion Picture Production Code of 1930. For a history of the Production Code see Leff and Simmons, op. cit. (5).

7 This and subsequent quote in Letter from Breen to Joy, 30 June 1942, PCA archive, *Dr. Renault’s Secret* file.

8 The potential economic impact of not having a seal of approval from the Hays Office is discussed in Black, op. cit. (5); and Leff and Simmons, op. cit. (5).

9 Unless noted otherwise, the information in this paragraph and the next comes from, Memorandum for the Files, T.A. Lynch, 1 July 1942, PCA archive, *Dr. Renault’s Secret* file.

10 William Bruckner and Robert F. Metzler, script, 2 July 1942, PCA archive, Mike Mazurki papers, 4-f.59.

11 See Walsh, op. cit. (5).


This article is part of a larger book project exploring film censorship of science titled *Indecent Science: Religion, Science and Movie Censorship*.


For a history of the SRC and the PCA see Black, op. cit. (5); and Thomas Patrick Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema 1930–1934*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. Both the SRC and the PCA were referred to as the Hays Office. However, I will use the designations for the SRC and PCA to differentiate between the Pre-Code Hays Office and the Hays Office after the creation of the PCA in July 1934.


Joy/Wingate’s Stance on the Production Code is discussed in Black, op. cit. (5).


The SRC referred to the various regional censor boards, including city and state censor boards in the US as well as international censors, as the “political censor boards.” However, for clarity I will refer to them collectively as the “regional censor boards.”


The Boards were also concerned about the horrific nature of the monster and the film’s visuals.
Censorship Decision on *Frankenstein*, 17 December 1931, Kansas State Board of Review. Kansas State Historical Society, Kansas State archives.

Telegram from Leduc to Fithian, 12 January 1932, PCA archive, *Frankenstein* file.

Letter from Leduc to Joy, 12 April 1932, PCA archive, *Frankenstein* file. The studio also suggested “a fade out on the windmill burning, leaving the impression that Frankenstein was dead, for this would help the moral purport of the story.”

“Suggested Preface for Frankenstein,” undated, PCA archive, *Frankenstein* file. The version used in the film is a variation on this preface.


Joy to Laemmle, op. cit. (34)


This and subsequent quote from Letter from Wingate to Hurley, 8 December 1932, PCA archive, *Island of Lost Souls* file.


Massachusetts, Maryland, British Columbia, Pennsylvania, Quebec and Australia were among the boards making this request. See the various censor board reports in the *Island of Lost Souls* file, PCA archive.

Letter from Breen to Hammell, 18 September 1935, *Island of Lost Souls* file. PCA archive. See also the various national censor board reports in the *Island of Lost Souls* file, PCA archive.

The UK’s censorship of *Island of Lost Souls* is discussed in David Skal, *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror*, New York: Penguin, 1993; and Karen Myers, “Case Study: *Island of Lost Souls* (1932),” in Edward Lamberti (ed.), *Behind the Scenes at the BBFC*, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012: 27-28. Although the original judgment letter from 1932 is lost, the existing evidence suggests that a major part of their decision was the board’s belief that the concept of evolving humans from animals was too “repulsive.” When the studio re-submitted the film for approval in 1951 and 1957 the BBFC re-affirmed their unease with the evolutionary aspects of the story. For example, see Letter from Nicholls to Sheila White, 29 October 1957, British Board of Film Censors archive, *Island of Lost Souls* file.


Leff and Simmons, op. cit (5). It should be noted that films approved by the PCA could still face significant censorship trouble from the various regional censor boards including city, state and international censors. Unlike the SRC, the PCA used this threat to leverage changes to scripts before production.


Information in this and subsequent paragraph from Harmon, op. cit. 52.


Quotes and information in this paragraph from Letter Breen to Zehner, 5 December 1934, PCA archive, *Bride of Frankenstein* file.


For example, he suggested changing the line “As they say in God’s own image” to “As we say in God’s own image,” and the line “If you are fond of your fairy tales” to “If you are fond of your scriptures.” Letter Whale to Breen, 7 December 1934, PCA archive, *Bride of Frankenstein* file.


Pennsylvania and Quebec censor board reports, PCA archive, *Bride of Frankenstein* file.

The remainder of the information in this paragraph comes from Letter Breen to Hays, 8 May 1935, PCA archive, *Bride of Frankenstein* file.


Letter from Breen to Luraschi, 4 March 1941, PCA archive, *Island of Lost Souls* file.

All quotes and information in this and subsequent paragraph come from Letter Luraschi to Breen, 15 March 1941, PCA archive, *Island of Lost Souls* file.

Although censors approached each script differently, there is little historic information on individual censors. One exception is Jack Vizzard’s book on his time at the PCA, but there are some questions about the reliability of his memoir. Jack Vizzard, *See No Evil*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970.


Van Schmus, Memo for the Files, Re: Inherit the Wind, 10 June 1955, PCA archive, *Inherit the Wind* file.

See Leff and Simmons, op. cit. (5), p. 173.


Ellen Draper, “‘Controversy has probably destroyed forever the context:’ *The Miracle* and Movie Censorship in America in the Fifties,” *The Velvet Light Trap* (1990) 25: 69–79.

See Leff and Simmons, op. cit. (5).

All quotes and information in this paragraph from Letter Shurlock to Kramer, 15 October 1959, PCA archive, *Inherit the Wind* file.

See Walsh, op. cit. (5).
After receiving the PCA’s seal of approval the studio would submit their film to the Legion for classification prior to its theatrical release. The organization changed their name to the National Catholic Office of Motion Pictures (NCOMP) in 1966. This title change did not alter the organization’s mode of operation. On the change to NCOMP see Walsh, op. cit. (5), p. 318.


Movie studios took the threat of a Catholic boycott seriously. In the 1930s one in five Americans was Catholic. Catholics were concentrated in the Eastern urban areas like Boston and New York that were essential for a successful box office. See Black, op. cit. (5), pp. 162-170.


Scovotti, Reviewer’s Comments, undated, Legion of Decency archive, *Inherit the Wind* file.


“The National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures Presents its 1968 Award for Best Film of Educational Value To *2001: A Space Odyssey*,” undated, Legion of Decency archive, Box 175, File: Awards 1968-1969.


The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* covers the relationship between Catholicism and free will. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican: Libreria
Editrice Vaticana, 2000. The specific section on free will can be found at:

www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s1c1a3.htm [last accessed 3 September 2018].