Ghouls, Gimmicks, and Gold: Horror Films and the American Movie Business, 1953–1968. *By Kevin Heffernan.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2004. viii + 323 pp. Illustrations, photographs, appendix, bibliography, notes, index. Cloth, $79.95; paper, $22.95. ISBN: cloth 0-822-33202-7; paper 0-822-33215-9.

Reviewed by Andrew J. Douglas

Ghouls, Gimmicks, and Gold is a well-written, thoroughly researched history of the developments in horror filmmaking during a period of exceptional complexity for the American film industry. Combining industrial and textual analyses, Kevin Heffernan paints a detailed picture of movie production, distribution, exhibition, and audience attendance for a crucial segment of a business in trouble. Specifically, he argues that during the fifteen-year period in question—bracketed at one end by the industry's loss of footing after a major antitrust ruling and at the other by its steps toward recovery via corporate mergers and the introduction of a ratings system—tremendous changes occurred in the production and reception of horror films, a genre that gained a foothold during this time and gained stature in the estimation of audiences, critics, and business people.

Historians of the medium will appreciate Heffernan's detailed scrutiny of the economic and cultural influences at work on the industry, which he intersperses with lively descriptions and critiques of both notable and obscure horror films of the era.

This is not to say that *Ghouls, Gimmicks, and Gold* is of little value to business historians. To the contrary. Although they may find Heffernan's film synopses less than riveting, they will discover that his descriptions of specific titles are a valuable guide to the industrial changes that these movies facilitated and of which they were emblematic. Another feature that will appeal to business historians is Heffernan's description of certain business strategies that became standard operating procedure for the film industry at the time that it first coalesced in the 1920s into an oligopoly.

Heffernan covers the era that began shortly after the studios' power was greatly diminished by the Paramount Decree of 1948, which forced them to divest themselves of their theater chains and end block booking (a practice that forced exhibitors to rent

groups of low-quality films in exchange for the privilege of showing one or a few desirable features), thus ending the vertical integration that had ensured their position of dominance in the movie business for decades. Despite this setback and the emergence of other challenges to their hegemony, such as television, the newfound ability of major stars to get out from under long-term contracts, and an influx of foreign art cinema, the studios still wielded considerable power in the movie business, which they exercised by tightly controlling exhibition. They did so by decreasing the number of films produced, a strategy that was necessitated partly by their own fiscal difficulties and partly by the cost involved in meeting theater operators' demands for technological and physical upgrades, including stereo sound, 3-D, and CinemaScope (wide screen) presentations. As a result, the antitrust rulings that were intended to benefit small exhibitors, who needed frequent and inexpensive releases, only made their financial positions even more tenuous.

This development left an opening for alternative sources of film distribution, such as American International Pictures (AIP), which was formed in 1954 and stepped into the breach, providing inexpensive genre, specifically horror, films to the neighborhood theaters that were being squeezed by the mainstream industry. Independent producers, such as William Castle, got into the act as well, taking advantage of underutilized studio facilities to create small-venue double-feature fodder, such as *House on Haunted Hill* (1958), *The Tingler* (1959), and *Thirteen Ghosts* (1960). These films also benefited from marketing campaigns the likes of which had not been seen before. The new breed of independent producers and distributors packaged and promoted their products with graphic and provocative print and radio advertisements, posters, and displays carrying sensationalistic headings like "Terrorama!" Public response to these tactics, depending on the venue, varied from applause to condemnation. At times the producers played the part of carnival barker or vaudeville-show announcer in order to promote their films.

Heffernan's account of these practices is based on meticulous research, and it represents an attempt to elaborate on earlier studies of this cycle of horror films by scholars like Thomas Doherty and Robin Wood. Heffernan's most significant contribution is his construction of an industrial framework for these pictures. He has consulted archival collections, transcripts of pertinent government proceedings, popular magazines like *Time* and *Business Week*, trade publications including *Variety* and *Motion*

Picture Herald, and local accounts carried in the Philadelphia press. He based his case study in that city because of its diverse population, rich media market, variety of theaters, and its suburban development, which were representative of the era.

Heffernan critically engages and synthesizes material from these disparate sources to create an insightful narrative of an entrenched but struggling industry and its rival upstarts, showing how the industry borrowed and stole from the upstarts. By combining textual and cultural analyses with industrial history, he imbues *Ghouls, Gimmicks, and Gold* with a depth that will attract academics from a number of disciplines.

Andrew J. Douglas teaches film and television courses at Northwestern University and Dominican University. He has written for the Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, is a contributor to* The Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities*, and has presented papers to the International Association of Media and History and the Society for Cinema and Media Studies. His current project is an analysis of masculine obesity in popular American film and television.*