

Huzagary Usman

ENG 399W

10 March, 2022

All Around Me Are Familiar Faces: The Role of Anthropomorphism in Creating the Uncanny

Valley

**INTRODUCTION**

“The perception of identity is so intimately bound up with the perception of the human form.”

— *David Hanson*

Picture this: You are exploring a large Victorian castle. You're taken aback; amazed at the preservation of historical relics. The chandelier suspended high on the ceiling, shines bright, highlighting a grand staircase, leading up to a door, a LARGE door with a carving of a rose emblem on the arch. You hear thumping and at first you don't associate those noises with the sound of footsteps, until the door opens. A pale 10-foot woman wearing bright red lipstick, a white dress, and black wide-brimmed hat emerges; a quellizare (long cigarette holder) in one hand and 5 long claws extended on the other hand. You're taken aback once more; threatened by her presence and her lust for your blood.

Fear and unease have long been associated with the genre of horror in multiple forms of media. As technology continues to advance, it's no surprise that these emotions have been utilized in creating horror video games. As a player, part of the whole experience of these games is to feel that sense of fear when we encounter a monster or feel a sense of unease when we hear ominous noises, or even feel the intensity of being scared in a moment when our character is in

imminent danger. However, these scenarios have become so prevalent in many video games, to the point where we've become immune: We are no longer scared of zombies, we don't feel threatened by a deformed animal. As a result, game developers have resorted to redesigning these "monsters," to something we may find more familiar. A large man in a black trench coat and fedora, whose face is wrapped in bandages and eyes covered by bifocals, chases you down an abandoned police precinct. A barefooted little girl with long hair and white clothing has black tears coming out of her eyes; she waits for you at the end of a hospital hallway singing *Mary Had A Little Lamb*. The change in character design, to a monster that appears more humanoid, causes fear and unease, as we question whether it is truly human. This phenomenon is known as the "uncanny valley."

In this paper, I will explore the uncanny valley through an anthropomorphic lens, centered around 3 characters from the recent horror video game, *Resident Evil Village*. To assist with this analysis, I will also discuss familiarity by speaking on the concept of *humanness* or what it means to be human from H.G Wells' novel *The Time Machine*.

### **THE UNCANNY VALLEY**

"There's a theory in the field of aesthetics called the uncanny valley. It holds that when something looks almost like a human being—it creates revulsion in the observer, because the appearance is so close to human, yet just off enough to evoke a feeling of uncanniness, of something that is both familiar and alien."

— *Blake Crouch*

In the 1970s, Masahiro Mori introduced the concept of the uncanny valley to describe his observation that as robots appear more humanlike, they become more appealing but only up to a certain point. This is what he calls the “uncanny valley,” a point where our liking descends into a feeling of strangeness and unease. This negative reaction is ultimately what causes us to be scared or freaked out when looking at lifelike robots. In his essay Mori relates this concept to his observation of a prosthetic hand: “One might say that the prosthetic hand has achieved a degree of resemblance to the human form, perhaps on a par with false teeth. However, when we realize the hand, which at first site looked real, is in fact artificial, we experience an eerie sensation. For example, we could be startled during a handshake by its limp boneless grip together with its texture and coldness. When this happens, we lose our sense of affinity, and the hand becomes uncanny” (Caballar).

A further analysis of this scenario was conducted by R.K Moore, as he attempted to figure out the reasoning behind the uncanny valley. He eventually came up with a hypothesis known as the “Violation of Expectation hypothesis,” where he “proposes that perceptual tension derived from conflicting perceptual cues (i.e., perceptual mismatches) may elicit the uncanny feeling” (Wang, Lilienfeld, and Rochat 396). Moore believes that when a humanlike figure like a robot/android or a mannequin fails to meet our expectations it causes us to experience the uncanny valley. So according to Moore, when an individual attempts to shake hands with a prosthetic arm, the person immediately experiences eerie sensations as they realize that the arm is artificial due to its cold temperature and its texture, due to a lack in skin tissue. An experiment was conducted to test this hypothesis, where researchers created characters with mismatched human features and voices. They found that the eeriest sensations were produced when the

character either had human features and a mismatched synthetic/robotic voice or when the character had disproportionate human features and a mismatched synthetic/robotic voice. This finding led two researchers MacDorman and Ishirugo to conclude, “While many nonbiological phenomena can violate our expectations, the eerie sensation associated with the uncanny valley may be peculiar to the violation of human-directed expectations, which are largely subconscious. If androids are more likely to fall into the uncanny valley than mechanical-looking robots, the reason may be that our brains are processing androids as human” (301).

In light of the conclusions drawn from the aforementioned hypothesis, other researchers came up with another hypothesis known as the Mind Perception hypothesis. This hypothesis suggests that it isn't the failure to meet our human expectations, but rather the success of creating an artificial intelligence that meets our expectations that makes us experience the uncanny valley: “They proposed that human replicas are uncanny not because they are not realistic enough to be indistinguishable from real people. Instead, they are uncanny because they are so realistic that they trigger the attributions of human minds, particularly subjective experience, to nonhuman entities” (Wang, Lilienfeld, and Rochat 397). The Mind Perception hypothesis argues that we create artificial intelligence as an attempt to not only recreate humans physically but also recreate human perception. This entails giving the robot/android human qualities of agency (the ability to plan and do things) and experience (the ability to feel and sense things) (Wang, Lilienfeld, and Rochat 397). Researchers conducted an experiment, where participants were asked to rate the uncanniness and capacity to feel and sense of robots with human-like features and mechanical robots. The humanlike robot received higher ratings on uncanniness than did the



mechanical-looking robot; importantly, the perceived uncanniness was predicted by participants' perceived experience instead of their agency.

This conclusion brings about questions of humanness and what aspects truly cause us to experience the uncanny valley. In this next section I will attempt to define what traits and characteristics define humans. At what point do we draw boundaries between what is human and what is not? Does the lack or abnormality of one attribute cause something to become non-human and ultimately, uncanny?

### **The Importance of Being *Human***

In speaking about the uncanny valley, I feel that it is necessary to discuss humanness or, better defined, the attributes and characteristics of humans. In the previous section I discussed two hypotheses behind the uncanny valley. The first hypothesis is concerned with the failure to meet our expectation of what a human is, resulting in the experience of the uncanny valley. The second hypothesis, on the contrary, centers on the success of meeting our expectations; in other words, if the artificial intelligence is more "human" it makes us experience the uncanny valley. But one thing that the two hypotheses seem to agree on is how similar the physical composition of the robot is to a human being. But is a human only defined by its physical attributes? Essentially what makes up a human? I will answer this question through an analysis of the Eloi and the Morlocks from H.G. Wells' novel *The Time Machine*.

H.G Wells wrote *The Time Machine* in 1895, as a commentary on the division of social class and inequality of English society at the time. He projects these qualities onto the two species of futuristic humans, the Eloi and the Morlocks. Wells suggests that in order to be

considered “human,” an entity must contain all of these attributes (1.It must be capable of emotion, 2. It must look physically human, 3.It must be able to establish and recognize class divisions and 4. It must be able to think). Throughout the novel both the readers and Wells acknowledge the fact that these creatures are not human, but rather descendants of humans. That’s because they either lack one or all of these attributes.

The first attribute that Wells suggests is that of emotion. He presents this in the Time Traveler’s (T.T.) relationship with Weena. In Chapter 8 the T.T states “Yet her distress when I left her was very great, her expostulations at the parting were sometimes frantic, and I think, altogether, I had as much trouble as comfort from her devotion... It troubled her greatly, but in the end her odd affection for me triumphed, and for five of the nights of our acquaintance, including the last night of all, she slept with her head pillowed on my arm.” (Wells 31) In this scene we see two related emotions The first emotion is sadness and distress. When the T.T. goes down the well to find the Morlocks, Weena is saddened and almost distressed. Weena is from a species known as the Eloi and has long been at the side of the T.T. from the beginning of his adventure in this future world. Even though there is a communication barrier between the two, they are able to bond and look out for each other. Which brings me to the second emotion: affection. Contrary to popular belief, affection is not limited to romance or a romantic relationship; rather it can also be extended to a relationship between individuals that care for each other. Some examples include two best friends, a parent and their child, or even your relationship with a sibling. In this scenario, I would argue that the relationship between Weena and the T.T. is more of a relationship between two companions than a relationship between two

lovers. This is solely based on the fact that the T.T. often carries Weena on his back or Weena holds on to the T.T. leg. This bond of trust is typically a characteristic of friendship.

So, here's where we draw the connection between the two emotions in this scene. The reason Weena is saddened/distressed when the T.T. goes into the well because she is aware of the danger awaiting the T.T. in the darkness. And to have something happen to the T.T. would be equivalent to losing a friend. In addition to this, the inability to communicate this danger to the T.T. adds to that distress. And at this moment we, the readers, are all thinking the same thing along with the T.T.: "Weena seems so much more human." Based on this thought alone we know that Wells intended for the Eloi to be their own species, even though it's made clear that the Eloi evolved from humans. But they've evolved so much to the point where we don't consider them to be 100% "human."

So, it all comes back to the question: what defines a human? Is it the ability to experience more than one emotion? The Eloi are clearly able to do so. When the T.T. arrives, the Eloi are happy and excited to the point where they hold a celebration for his arrival. We also know that they can experience fear because the Morlocks hunt the Eloi at night. Perhaps in addition to emotion, a "human" can be defined based on their physical characteristics.

Another attribute that Wells attaches to "human" is physical similarity. By default, a human's physical characteristics include hair, a pair of eyes, hands, feet, and ears, a nose, arms, legs, etc. And every human varies in shape and height and skin color, which is all dependent on where you come from and your ancestry. But despite these differences we're still able to distinguish a human being from a bird or a chimpanzee. The Eloi are the closest in physical appearance to humans. This can be seen in Chapter 5 when the T.T. first encounters the Eloi:

I saw some further peculiarities in their Dresden china type of prettiness. Their hair, which was uniformly curly, came to a sharp end at the neck and cheek; there was not the faintest suggestion of it on the face, and their ears were singularly minute. The mouths were small, with bright red, rather thin lips, and the little chins ran to a point. The eyes were large and mild; and—this may seem egotism on my part—I fancied even that there was a certain lack of the interest I might have expected in them. (Wells 18)

Here we see that the T.T. notices the similarities that the Eloi and himself share despite evolution. Notice how the T.T. reacts to his encounter. He seems to be intrigued and interested in the Eloi because of how similar they look, if I may add, how “human” they look. However, when the T.T. encounters the Morlocks he experiences something completely different. “...and the nights grow dark, when the appearances of these unpleasant creatures from below, these whitened Lemurs, this new vermin that had replaced the old, might be more abundant... You can scarce imagine how nauseatingly inhuman they looked—those pale, chinless faces and great, lidless, pinkish-grey eyes!—as they stared in their blindness and bewilderment.” (Wells pg.29, 33) Unlike his encounter with the Eloi, the T.T. seems to be frightened, disgusted, and almost loathes the Morlocks. He even states that their appearance is inhuman. Despite the fact that the Morlocks are also descendants of humans, they’ve evolved in such a way that makes them indistinguishable from their ancestors. Since we’ve established that from a physical perspective the Morlocks are not “human,” does that make the Eloi “human”? It would seem so, since the Eloi experience emotions and are physically similar to humans. Not quite. Wells also explores the perspective of human social class.

The next perspective that Wells defines a “human” in is from a social perspective. The term social encompasses things such as class structure and interaction, which are both important aspects in human life. Social class is something that is greatly highlighted by Wells in *The Time Machine*. An individual's social class is often determined by wealth and wealth is determined by your job or occupation. Although we don't see the Eloi and the Morlocks having what we would consider to be traditional jobs, we see that there is a clear distinction in class. In fact, the Morlocks seem to be the only working class in this futuristic society. The T.T. points out,

At first, proceeding from the problems of our own age, it seemed clear as daylight to me that the gradual widening of the present merely temporary and social difference between the Capitalist and the Labourer was the key to the whole position....that Industry had gradually lost its birthright in the sky... it had gone deeper and deeper into larger and ever larger underground factories, spending a still-increasing amount of its time therein, till, in the end—! Even now, does not an East-end worker live in such artificial conditions as practically to be cut off from the natural surface of the earth? (Wells 34)

So based on the T.T's observation, we can determine that the Morlocks are the laborers of this society. They're the ones who provide the Eloi with the goods that they need to live, whether it be clothes or chairs, etc. The entire species is subject to this labor, which I find interesting because it's become such a norm that it doesn't seem as if it is forced upon them. It just happens to be the natural order of things. The Eloi on the other hand live, what would be considered in this futuristic society, a lavish lifestyle. Unlike the Morlocks, the Eloi live on the surface, which means that in addition to material items, the Eloi also get to enjoy agriculture: “Fruit, by the bye, was all their diet....the fruits were very delightful; one, in particular, that seemed to be in season

all the time I was there—a floury thing in a three-sided husk—was especially good, and I made it my staple. At first I was puzzled by all these strange fruits, and by the strange flowers I saw, but later I began to perceive their import” (Wells 20). We also know that the Eloi live in ancient-styled homes:

The building had a huge entry, and was altogether of colossal dimensions....The big doorway opened into a proportionately great hall hung with brown. The roof was in shadow, and the windows, partially glazed with coloured glass and partially unglazed, admitted a tempered light. The floor was made up of huge blocks of some very hard white metal, not plates nor slabs—blocks, and it was so much worn, as I judged by the going to and fro of past generations. (Wells 19)

What do homes and agriculture have to do with social class? If we think about class structure during Well’s time period, we can say that these luxuries were available to upper class or even middle-class individuals. The lower-class individuals were most likely the laborers who tended the fields and built the homes. And as such were probably not able to or did not intend to enjoy these luxuries. Although it's unclear whether the Eloi fall under the upper or middle class, it would be safe to say that the Eloi are the Capitalists in this society. Because they are surface dwellers, by natural order, I would argue that they are pre-destined to enjoy their luxuries. While the Morlocks, the underground-dwellers, are mandated to work and live in lesser conditions than those on the surface. This idea of a working-class structure is a very human characteristic. One might argue that animals are able to divide themselves into different classes so doesn't that make them human? Not necessarily, animals divide themselves based on things like strength, not labor.

Nowhere in the animal kingdom will you find a class structure determined by labor and wealth. Only humans are capable of that.

In addition to this, I also find that interaction between like-species to be a very human characteristic. Think about it, as humans, we all come from different ethnicities. And when we're in a foreign place we tend to form communities. Whether it be a religious community or a community of close friends and family just so we have a safe haven to go to if we're feeling uncomfortable. At the beginning of the story, when the T.T. arrives, the Eloi throw him a huge welcome celebration, inviting other Eloi to join for dinner. This act of eating together shows a sense of community. Similarly, the Morlocks show this sense of community, when they hunt together at night. The Morlocks are hunter-gatherers which means that they hunt their prey as a group. If the Eloi and Morlocks have this social structure and interaction, why are they still deemed to be human-like or inhuman? What is that missing percentage that would deem the Eloi or the Morlocks to be 100% "human"? Cognition.

By definition, cognition refers to the mental processes that are involved in gaining knowledge and comprehension. With cognition you're able to think analytically and critically which is important because it's what drives a person's decision making and judgement. Although Wells does not delve into this aspect much, he implicitly mentions it in Chapter 8:

I saw a real aristocracy, armed with a perfected science and working to a logical conclusion the industrial system of today. Its triumph had not been simply a triumph over Nature, but a triumph over Nature and the fellow-man. My explanation may be absolutely wrong. I still think it is the most plausible one. The too-perfect security of the

Overworlders had led them to a slow movement of degeneration, to a general dwindling in size, strength, and intelligence. That I could see clearly enough already. (Wells pg.35)

This line shows why the Eloi and the Morlocks cannot be considered human. The absence of intelligence translates to the absence of thinking. And the absence of thinking halts development. Thinking occurs when an organism or individual faces a problem or is put in a situation that threatens their livelihood. E. Ray Lankester, a British biologist, writes an article in 1880 on a process known as degeneration. In this article he notes, “....all the young born of one species are not exactly alike- but some larger, some smaller, some lighter, some darker, some short-legged, some big-eyed, some long-tongued, some sharp-toothed, and so on- furnishes the opportunity for a selection. Those varieties which are best fitted to obtain food and to baffle their competitors, gain food and survive, the rest perish.” (Lankester pg.159) The process that Lankester discusses here is Darwin’s theory of natural selection. In natural selection, organisms that are able to adapt to their environment the quickest are the ones that will survive and reproduce. Those adapted traits are then passed onto the next generation which overtime causes the organism to evolve. Adaptation is a form of problem solving and problem solving is a process in cognitive thinking. Now here’s where degeneration comes into play. There eventually comes a time when this adapted trait becomes a natural part of the organism itself and it no longer feels the need to change because the problem has been solved. As a result, the ability to think begins to decrease until they’re faced with another problem. This can prove to be detrimental, take the Eloi and the Morlocks for example. We know that they are the descendants of humans, but the reason we don’t define them or consider them to be “human” is because they lack this cognition.



What exactly caused this to happen? This human degeneration was caused by human reliance on technology, that was our form of adaptation to the environment. Think about it for a moment, what are some of the things that we normally take for granted? When we light up a room it's as easy as flipping a switch. We no longer have to light a candle or a gas lantern to light up a room. When we cook we no longer have to blow an open flame in order to maintain a desired temperature. Now we can control our temperature with a turn of a knob. When we take a math test, we no longer have to memorize mathematical formulas, they're all given to you on a formula sheet. But what happens then? Since we are living in a comfortable environment, we no longer feel the need to have to **understand** how circuits work to power a lightbulb, we no longer feel the need to **think** about stabilizing our heat source, we no longer have to **remember** our formulas since they're all given. Notice the bolded words: *understand, think, and remember*, these processes are an integral part of cognitive thinking. So when our reliance on cognitive thinking decreases, so does our intelligence, which can be seen in the development of the Eloi and the Morlocks. Hence, the reason why the Eloi and the Morlocks cannot be defined as "human".

Given this explanation, it brings up a new question: why is the T.T. considered to be human? So ultimately, we've come to the conclusion that to be defined as "human" you must be able to experience emotions, you must physically have "human" characteristics, you must be part of a social class structure, and lastly you must be able to think. The T.T. checks off all of these boxes. When he's being chased by the Morlocks in the dark, he experiences fear. We know that he's from the middle or upper class based off of the furniture he has at the dinner party he hosts at the introduction of this story. Although we don't get a physical description of him, when he

describes the Eloi and the Morlocks he compares their characteristics to himself. Lastly, we see him think, when he makes the connection between technological advancements in his era to the degeneration of humans into the Eloi and the Morlocks. And let's not forget that he also built a time machine, which I believe required the utmost amount of cognition.

### **WELCOME TO THE FAMILY**

“Lady super-sized bitch... Ugly-ass psycho doll... and that moronic freak. Don't you get it? It's a test, to see if you're strong enough... to be part of Miranda's family.”

— *Karl Heisenberg*

Media has always been a medium in which we can express some of our deepest thoughts and imaginations. Oftentimes, these thoughts and imaginations are translated into characters across different genres, such as horror; and when we think of horror, we often think about monsters or villains, as these are the characters that elicit emotions such as fear or tension, which ultimately makes us experience the uncanny valley. As technology continues to advance, we've transitioned from creating uncanny characters through words in a text to creating a realistic model of these characters virtually. In this section, I will analyze the uncanny valley in the recent horror video game, *Resident Evil Village*. I will also discuss anthropomorphisms in creating the uncanny valley by dehumanizing the characters in the game.

### **Synopsis:**

*Resident Evil Village's* story picks up several years after the events of *Resident Evil 7* (2017). We play as the main protagonist, Ethan Winters, and the story plot centers around the

abduction of his daughter, Rosemary, by a group of armed men led by Chris Redfield. Ethan decides to look for his daughter by exploring the outskirts of the village. There, we encounter a group of inhuman beings known as “Lycans.” We escape and meet up with a group of survivors, but they are all killed when one of the group transforms into a Lycan himself. As we make our way to the castle, we’re caught by Karl Heisenberg. Here we are introduced to the four lords of the village: Alcina Dimitrescu (Lady Dimitrescu), Donna Beneviento, Salvatore Moreau, and Karl Heisenberg; I will be analyzing the first 3 lords for this paper.

As we continue playing the game, we come across a diary that reveals that the 4 lords and their inhuman characteristics, were a result of an experiment conducted by the matriarch of the village known as Mother Miranda. She infected the villagers with the *Cadou Parasite*, a mold from a superorganism known as the *Megamycete*, causing them to mutate; the 4 lords took well to it, while the other villagers were either healed of their ailments or became the inhuman creatures, known as the Lycans.

In the game, the mutation presents itself differently in each of the lords. In addition to giving them superhuman abilities, the mold also causes physical changes in each of them: Lady Dimitrescu’s fast growth rate and deformities in Donna’s face and Salvatore’s entire physique. In the previous section, I defined “human” through H.G. Wells’s novel *The Time Machine*. In order for an entity to be considered “human,” it must contain or be capable of experiencing these 4 attributes : 1) Emotion, 2) Physical Structure, 3) Social Class, and 4) Cognition. The 3 lords experience emotion: Lady Dimitrescu is angered when we kill her daughters, Moreau finds happiness when he talks about Mother Miranda and Donna expresses her madness and sorrow through her dolls; they understand social class as each of them are lords of their respective

houses; and they are able to think, each of them plotting ways to kill Ethan Winters. However, they all lack the physical attribute and therefore cannot be considered “human.” Because we are not introduced to their human origins until later on in the game, their presence throughout the game elicits a feeling of uncanniness as we question whether or not they are truly human.

### **LADY DIMITRESCU (Alcina Dinitrescu)**



The first lord that we encounter in the game is Lady Dimitrescu. According to Mother Miranda’s journal, she is of noble descent and is therefore the rightful inheritor of Castle Dimitrescu. She is pale in appearance due to a hereditary blood disorder and is seen wearing only white, black, and red lipstick. Miranda experiments on her around the 1950s and records her observation of Lady Dimitrescu’s reaction to the Cadou parasite: “Regeneration rate is incredibly fast. The subject can heal any external wound within seconds, and grow her nails into claws in mere moments. Rapid regeneration also means an increased body size...I suspect that if the subject’s regeneration is not properly balanced then she may mutate uncontrollably. An unfit

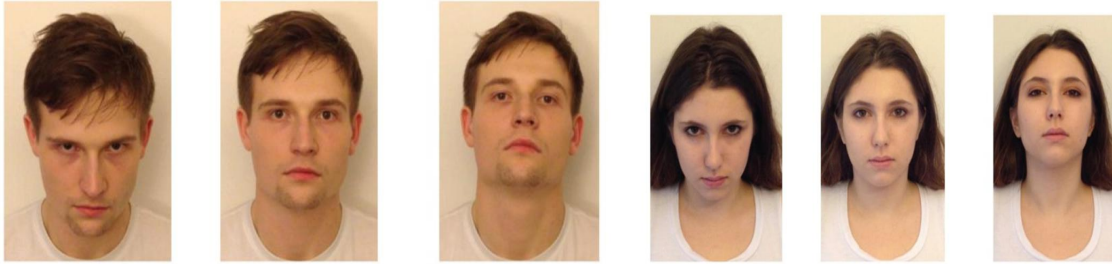
vessel for Eva.” (Resident Evil Village) In the game she is revealed to be 9ft. 6in., an irregular height for humans. In the U.S., the average height for men is 5ft 9in and the average height for women 5ft 4in. (Marcin) Based on these statistics, we can see that Lady Dimitrescu had an abnormal growth rate and physique.

One of the tallest human beings to have existed in recorded history is Robert Wadlow. Wadlow was born in 1918 in Alton, Illinois. As a child he had a noticeably rapid growth rate, gaining 37lbs between the ages of 6 months to 18 months. By the time he started pre-school, Wadlow was 5ft 1in in height and scientists found that this was a result of hypertrophy to his pituitary gland, resulting in an excess production of human growth hormone (HGH). Wadlow continued to grow until he passed away in 1940 at the age of 22. He grew to a height of 8ft 11in.<sup>1</sup> Unlike Lady Dimitrescu, who is often referred to as “The Tall Vampire Lady,” Wadlow did not strike people as threatening, in fact he was often referred to as a “Gentle Giant.” Wadlow also appeared more human, as he did not possess the pale skin that we see in Lady Dimitrescu. So how does height play in creating uncanniness? Simply put, it’s all a matter of perspective.

Facial expressions play an important role in conveying emotions. A simple smile could represent a happy individual, however a wider smile with a slight eyebrow curve could represent a psychopath with evil intentions. Misconceptions about an individual's facial features could be a result of perspective. In an experiment conducted by the University of British Columbia, a man and woman had 3 photos taken of each of them from different angles:

---

<sup>1</sup> For more on Robert Wadlow, watch the documentary *The Story of Robert*.



It turns out, neither of these two people changed their facial expressions across their three pictures. Instead, the camera simply caught their faces from different angles. On the left, the camera caught their heads tilted downward. From that angle, it looks like people are contracting their eyebrows in an intimidating glare, even when they are exhibiting the same neutral expression shown in the middle images. (Ubel)

According to this experiment, we can interpret or, more likely, misinterpret an individual's facial expression based on perspective. And the facial expressions when an individual looks downward seems to conclusively convey a feeling of dominance which leads to intimidation.

In the case of Robert Wadlow, it would be easy to see why kids his same age may have been intimidated by him as he is constantly looking down to converse with them. However his compassionate behavior makes him appear less intimidating, earning him the title the “Gentle Giant.” Lady Dimitrescu on the other hand elicits a different emotion when we encounter her in the game. According to the game, Ethan Winters is 5ft 11in, which means that when we come in contact with Lady Dimitrescu, she towers over us by another 3ft 7in. When we converse with her she is, at most times, looking down at us. The sense of intimidation created by her height, paired with her other inhuman features and capabilities is what elicits the sense of unease and fear, ultimately making us experience the uncanny valley.

### SALVATORE MOREAU



Salvatore Moreau is the second lord we encounter in the game. Moreau's family once controlled the reservoirs and the fishing enclaves of the village and also served as the village's doctors before Miranda's rise to power. Unlike the other lords, Moreau was infected with more than one parasite and as a result his reaction was more extreme than that of the other lords. While the other lords mostly retained their human form, Moreau's human appearance is unrecognizable. His skin formed into a mass of boils, he has fish like eyes appearing throughout his hunched back, an indication where the mutation was most extreme. His feet became webbed and his adoption of a swim bladder allowed him to breathe underwater. Miranda writes in her journal:

The Cadou has caused drastic changes to internal organs, transforming them into organs similar to fish-like gills and a swim bladder. Another subject with irregular cell division

causing him to transform into a giant fish. The subject is unable to control this transformation. Too many defects. An unfit vessel for Eva. (Resident Evil Village)

Moreau's extreme physical change makes him seem more monster than "human." Similar to the Eloi and Morlocks in *The Time Machine*, Moreau is essentially a human who has evolved at a faster rate due to the parasite. They are unrecognizable as humans in appearance, but the awareness that there are other traits and attributes that showcase that they were once human creates an uncanny feeling within us.

In today's day and age, change in physical appearance has become a trend, as people attempt to look a certain way in order to meet a particular beauty standard or aesthetic. The most recent trend in appearance is that of East Asian beauty standards: "....more contouring, more highlights, bigger, better.... Whether it's cheeks or jawline, breasts or butt, everything is highly carved... [The Asian look] is youthful and genteel, kind of fading away as much as possible." (Hazelhurst). Part of the desire to want to meet unrealistic expectations of beauty, can be a result of celebrity influence. "A few years ago, she noticed an influx of celebrity-influenced Asian patients wanting 'exaggerated features' like large eyelid creases, high nose bridges, and fuller foreheads (achieved through fat transfer)." (Hazelhurst)

In 2013, British influencer, Oli London went through his first plastic surgery operation, in an attempt to look like Park Jimin, a member of the South Korean boy group BTS. In 2021 he revealed that he spent over \$140,000 to go through 18 cosmetic procedures to look like Jimin. In an interview London had with the *Daily Mail* he states,

The painful procedures have included five nose jobs, lifting eyelids, facial contouring including restructuring their cheekbones and jaw to make them appear



'symmetrical'...'About three weeks ago, I had my eyelids cut to lift them up to make them more Korean. I also had a brow lift, I had all my teeth replaced with veneers to have the Korean look' (Tran)



While it may not seem as though London's change in appearance elicits an uncanny feeling, it brings into light the concept of the reaction one has when they see something unrecognizable. London has received backlash from BTS fans and close friends as he is adamant about his similarity in appearance to Jimin.

Similar to when we see Moreau for the first time and are aware that he was once human, when we look at Oli London, we are aware that he is not South Korean. His facial features have been altered to the point where he is unrecognizable, both from his original self and the k-pop idol he tries to look like. The extreme changes in both Moreau and London make us take a step back and question, as we are unsure of why a human would have such a form. This extreme change in physical appearance is what causes us to experience the uncanny valley.

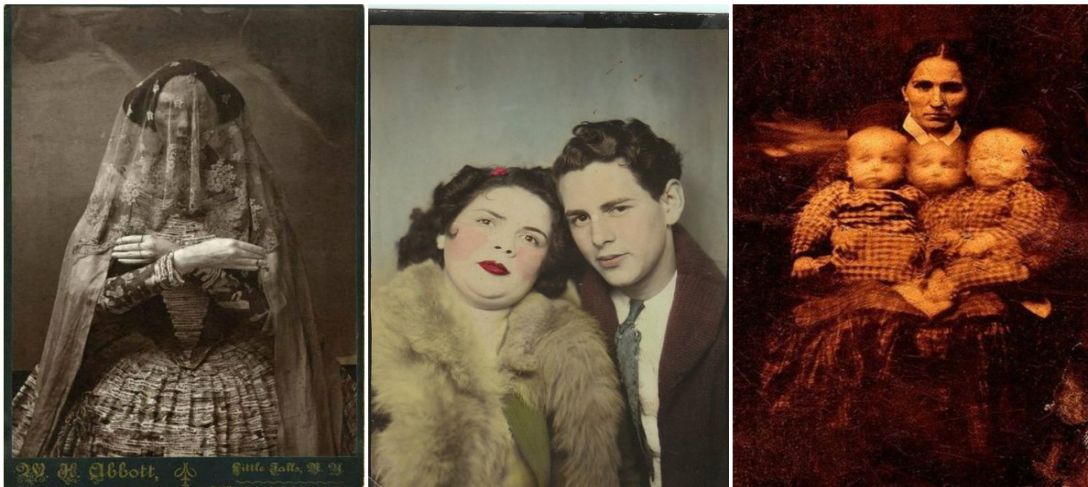
**DONNA BENEVENTO and ANGIE**



Donna Beneviento is one of the last lords that we encounter in the game. She resides in the old Beneviento manor in the village and her family was once known as the “Dollmakers” of the region. Her parents committed suicide when she was young and was taken under Mother Miranda’s care around the time she conducts her experiments. Just like Lady Dimitrescu, the

parasite's effect on her physical appearance was very minimal. She still retains her human structure, but is left with a scar on the side of her face. Donna wears a black Victorian funeral dress to mask both her scar and herself, as she is emotionally scarred by her traumatizing childhood experience. Unlike the other two lords, Donna's character doesn't create a sense of uncanniness through the change in her physical form, but rather in her clothing and posture.

In the portraits above, Donna is wearing a black funeral dress and she is accompanied by her doll Angie, a doll made by her father. The fact that she wears a funeral dress throughout the game, when no funeral occurs, makes her seem out of place. Her face is completely covered leaving us to wonder what lies beneath the covering; In addition to this, her dialogue is minimal, so we are unsure of what her motives are throughout the game.



Donna's portraits are taken in a similar fashion to the post-mortem photos taken during the Victorian era. "Post-mortem photography allowed people to have an image of their deceased family members and they used them to remember and mourn loved ones." (UM Clements Library) In these photos, children and adults were often positioned in a manner that seemed

realistic, such as standing or sitting, to commemorate the individual's life .<sup>2</sup> The first photo in the set above is similar in fashion to Donna's picture, where she is covering her face. The face of the individual is barely visible, so we are unsure whether or not the individual behind the covering is alive or dead which creates a sense of uncertainty. The third photo is similar to the painting of Donna without her covering. They are both portrayed in a dark background, Donna is pale and her eyes are surrounded by dark circles, similar to the mother's in the photo. What makes Donna's painting seem more creepy, is the fact that Angie, a doll, an inhuman object, is the only thing that looks alive. This contrast between our expectation, a human who looks dead and a doll who seems to be alive, makes us experience the uncanny valley.

### **CONCLUSION: Disturbing Frontiers of Humanity**

“...it creates revulsion in the observer, because the appearance is so close to human, yet just off enough to evoke a feeling of uncanniness, of something that is both familiar and alien”

— *Blake Crouch*

In every form of fiction there is nonfiction, which brings about the question: why create a game like *Resident Evil*? In addition to it being a source of entertainment, there are real-life issues that the game is based around: the effects of a viral outbreak and the advancement of biomedical technology.<sup>3</sup> The obstacles that we face when playing as Ethan Winters, presents a

---

<sup>2</sup> For More on Post-Mortem Photography, read Ingrid Fernandez's article, "The Lives of Corpses: Narratives of the Image in American Memorial Photography."

<sup>3</sup> Read Alex Rajczi's article, "One Danger of Biomedical Enhancements" for more on the effects of biomedical advancements.

scenario of a post-apocalyptic world that we may face in the near future. In a way the creation of the game is not a “How-To-Guide” to survive such a reality, but rather a “What-We-Can-Expect” guide to a reality that we are close to experiencing. When the Covid-19 pandemic started, there were rumors that the virus was man made and created in a lab in China. Many believed this rumor as people were aware that the technology we possess as humans in this day and age is very much capable of doing that. Although the effects of this virus are not as extreme as that of the Cadou parasite in the game, the possibility of a virus to have similar effects is not 0.

The game developers' choice in designing these characters in a way that makes them seem more human is not only a way to scare us, but also serves as an extreme representation of our inner selves. The realization that these characters showcase our darkest potentials and impacts as humans, makes the game that more uncanny.

## Work Cited

Caballar, Rina Diane, “What is the Uncanny Valley”, IEEE Spectrum, Aug. 2021

<https://spectrum.ieee.org/what-is-the-uncanny-valley>

Fernandez, Ingrid. “The Lives of Corpses: Narratives of the Image in American Memorial Photography.” *Mortality*, vol. 16, no. 4, Nov. 2011, pp. 343–64. EBSCOhost,

<https://doi-org.queens.ezproxy.cuny.edu/10.1080/13576275.2011.613270>.

Lankester, E. Ray (Edwin Ray), Sir, *Degeneration*, 1880, London : Macmillan and Co.

MacDorman, K. F., & Ishiguro, H. (2006). “The uncanny advantage of using androids in cognitive and social science research.” *Interaction Studies: Social Behaviour and Communication in Biological and Artificial Systems*, 7, 297–337.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1075/is.7.3.03mac>

Marcin, Ashley, “The Average Heights of Men Around the World,” Healthline, Mar. 2022,

<https://www.healthline.com/health/average-height-for-men>

RAJCZI, ALEX. “One Danger of Biomedical Enhancements.” *Bioethics*, vol. 22, no., Jul. 2008, pp. 328–36. EBSCOhost,

<https://doi-org.queens.ezproxy.cuny.edu/10.1111/j.1467-8519.2008.00637.x>.

*Resident Evil Village*, Capcom, 2021

Tran, Cindy, “Oli London Reveals Cosmetic Procedures they underwent to look like Korean popstar Jimin from BTS,” *Daily Mail Online*, Jul., 2021,

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-9812135/Oli-London-reveals-cosmetic-procedures-underwent-look-like-Korean-popstar-Jimin-BTS.html>

Turquoise Film/Video Productions, “The Story of Robert,” 1975,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQHI15sUDjE&t=577s>

Ubel, Peter, “Why Tall People Feel So Intimidating. A Surprising Explanation,” *Forbes*, Mar. 2020,

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/peterubel/2020/03/05/why-tall-people-feel-so-intimidating-a-surprising-explanation/?sh=2c9316be37ab>

UM Clements Library, “Post-Mortem Photography: An Overview”, Apr. 2021,

<https://clements.umich.edu/exhibit/death-in-early-america/post-mortem-overview/#:~:text=Post%2Dmortem%20photography%20allowed%20people,remember%20and%20mourn%20loved%20ones>

Wang, Shenseng & Lilienfeld, Scott O. & Rochat, Phillippe, “The Uncanny Valley: Existence and Expalnation”, *Review of General Psychology*, American Psychological Association 2015, Vol.

19, No. 4, 393–407

<http://www.psychology.emory.edu/cognition/rochat/lab/Uncannyvalley.pdf>

Wells, H.G., "The Time Machine", 2004

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/35/35-h/35-h.htm>