

## Written Assignment on The Horror Genre

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People are curious creatures and there is just something naturally attractive and thrilling about things that are covered up. Like a wrapped-up present, whispering voices, secret military operations, an old boarded-up house or an unsolved murder, everything we don't know or don't understand interests and stimulates us. And hunting for the answers is even more exhilarating. Horror films and stories let us hunt the answers for all the terrible, horrific and forbidden things hidden in ourselves and that is one of the most blood-tingling experiences there is. These stories, the genre that houses them, how they have changed with time and the strange and strong attraction they possess, this will be analysed below.

There are many different kinds of horror stories, but they all have things in common which when combined make up the horror genre. The immediate goal of the horror story is to scare, terrify and shock its audience. To scare us they have a "monster" which can be many things: people, ghosts, demons and so on. The monster acts and/or represents evil and is what the viewer is ultimately afraid of. An example of a monster is Count Dracula, the bloodsucking vampire with terrible powers in "Dracula" by Bram Stoker. The monster, however, doesn't have to be something supernatural. An example of this is the upper-class maniac and murderer Patrick Bateman in Brett Easton Ellis' "American Psycho" who in the midst of busy New York kills people in macabre ways.

The setting of horror stories is of great importance to evoke the feeling of horror and terror. It is characterised by being dark, gloomy and decayed. Often with places like a large and creaky old house, a forest at night or a cold and dark dungeon. A lot of horror stories have what is known as a Gothic setting, which includes some of the following: Big dark castles, ruins, full-moon nights, exaggerated weather etc. and have a dark romanticist feel to them. Francis Ford Coppola's production of "Dracula" is an example of a story with a Gothic setting.

Horror stories, like most art, contain elements which mirror the time they are created in, in terms of morale, theme, setting and so on. Some maybe more than others or just more clearly, for example Stoker's "Dracula", which was written in the 1890's, the Victorian age. This is an era which is known for its strict manners, technological revolution and increasing equality for women. Bram Stoker comments on all these things in the novel. Lucy and Mina are cast as the two different types of women, new Winchester rifles act as symbols of new technology, and strict rules of social conduct control the characters.

Throughout the genre's lifespan from the 1840's with Poe until today, it has undergone a lot of changes. The goal of giving the viewer/reader a scary, unsettling and terrifying experience is still there, but the extremity has increased. The "Saw" series with its gallons of blood, mutilation and very vivid imagery is an example of this. People have become harder to rattle and therefore horror has become less based on a creepy atmosphere

and story and more on gruesomely gory scenes. Because of this turn, special effects have also been greatly developed in terms of realism and have become an important factor in the modern horror movie.

The development discussed above raises the question “what it is that horror aims to touch in us?” An answer could be this quote from *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1992): “*The horror story [...] is part of a long process by which people have tried to come to terms with and find adequate descriptions and symbols for deeply rooted, primitive and powerful forces, energies and fears which are related to death, afterlife, punishment, darkness, evil, violence and destruction.*” A Freudian interpretation could be that watching horror is a way to try to resolve and contain the unconscious worries and impulses deep down in our IDs. Something which, because of the powerful nature of these issues, has made horror a genre that possesses a strong and somewhat mystical attraction.

The exciting experience it is to watch or read a horror story is reflected in the genre's popularity in today's society: “*The reading public's appetite for the fare of horror appears insatiable.*” In movie-making this demand has turned horror films into big business. Maybe this is because horror is almost like a product of necessity. Something people can't do without, like toilet paper or food. This need has created great horrors, but also bad ones packed with bloody killings, latex-faced monsters and one dimensional victim characters. B films produced on assembly line, designed to draw in as many people as possible and make money. However, this development isn't all bad. The fact that people will pay good money to be scared lightens the possibility of new and great horrors.

In the future there will definitely be a craving for horror. This seems obvious when we look at the genre's history: “*From late in the 18<sup>th</sup> c. until the present day – in short, for some two hundred years – the horror story (which is perhaps a mode rather than an identifiable genre) in its many and various forms has been a diachronic feature of British and American literature [...]*” but it is hard to say what future horror will look like, because in some ways most horror has mirrored its contemporary society. So to predict the future of horror, you will need to be able to predict the future of society. However, it seems that in the last two hundred years some things in horror haven't changed. We still fear murderers, violence and death.

The horror genre has scared, terrified, frightened and shaken the very core of our beings for two hundred years now, but tales of horror seem to have aroused and attracted people always. Something that seems to suggest that in the great chaotic maze that is our mind the darkness takes up quite a lot of room.