

The horror genre

Horror is a genre of literature which has the intention of scaring the reader using horror elements. Horror can be either supernatural or non-supernatural.

Supernatural horror is often based on religious traditions (death, afterlife, the devil) or superstitious creatures like witches, vampires, werewolves and ghosts.

The horror genre is an important genre, because it's the only genre that has the intention of invoking our hidden worst fears, the fears we never say out loud. Horror is often told, written or acted in a terrifying and shocking way – and at the same time the genre entertains us.

Sometimes we need a push to do the things we want or need to do, and the horror genre challenges our lust to do what we want and not to think of the consequences. “In the hands of a serious and genuinely imaginative writer the horror story [...] explores the limits of what people are capable of doing and experiencing.” – Horror makes us experience feelings and emotions we don't experience in any other genre; feeling uncomfortable and excited at the same time gives us a thrill that's (almost) worth all the nightmares that follow.

Horror opens the door to another world; the dark side of life, the forbidden and the strange world. Our worst nightmares are lived out.

Horror often deals with people's everyday problems and their fears; our fear of death, our nightmares, the unknown, our fear of sexuality and loss of identity. By using psychological elements, like a main character who is a schizophrenic, these fears are shown in a realistic and human way.

Horror texts and films always have the same kind of horror elements. The setting in old horror films is often different from newer horror films. The setting in a lot of old horror films is gothic. There is big dark house, and it takes place in a deserted area. Most of the newer horror films take place in a big city. A big city seems like a safe environment, because there are always people in the streets, the city never sleeps, and we don't expect something supernatural or unusual to happen.

Besides the gothic setting, horror films and texts always have a monster that represents evil/our worst fear. Because the horror genre's intention is to live out our worst fears, the morale often has something to do with an ethical issue or a solution to a personal problem. As society develops, the question of what's ethically right changes as well. And that challenges the horror genre and forces it to develop.

There is no doubt that the horror genre has developed. As time and society change, literature changes as well. We get more modern and start to realize that the old horror effects and the quality of the stunts in the film are not as trustworthy as we first thought.

We move from the Victorian Age to Postmodernism. Values and the question of what's morally correct change, and I think the horror genre often crosses these lines to provoke the audience and to live out our worst fears. In the Victorian Age, the morality was very black and white. Everything was based on Christian ethics, a lot of people had a puritanical attitude to sex and there was a lot of talk about the women question. Horror literature from that era deals with some of these subjects.

Newer horror literature from Postmodernity is quite different. Metafiction has been added, and it's popular to mix comedy and horror – maybe to catch a younger audience. Irony is a big part of lots of horror films, maybe because without the irony, the films can be too boring, because we are not as easily satisfied and manipulated by stunts and supernatural things.

One thing that has stayed the same is the intention of provoking the audience and making them question what's morally correct. The writer/director still wants us to be critical of the society we live in. That's why I don't think you can say that the horror genre is unserious – it just uses different tools to make the audience think. And maybe it's a healthy thing to experience these hidden emotions, so hopefully even the weakest soul is satisfied with just reading or watching horror instead of living it out in real life. Because as the horror writer Stephen King once said:

“Monsters are real, and ghosts are real too. They live inside of us, and sometimes, they win.”