

Source 1b

Prohászková, Viktória. "The Genre of Horror." American International Journal of Contemporary Research, Vol. 2, No. 4, 2012, pp. 132-142.

The oldest and strongest human emotion is fear. It is embedded in people since time began. It was fear that initiated the establishment of faith and religion. It was the fear of unknown and mysterious phenomena, which people could not explain otherwise than via impersonating a high power, which decides their fates. To every unexplainable phenomenon they attributed a character, human or inhuman, which they associated with supernatural skills and invincible power. And since the human imagination knows no limits, a wide scale of archetypal characters have been created, such as gods, demons, ghosts, spirits, freaks, monsters or villains. Stories and legends describing their insurmountable power started to spread about them. Despite the fact by the development of science many so far incomprehensible phenomena have been explained, these archetypes and legends are still being used in literature and other branches of art. Three genres are based on fear and imagination: science fiction, fantasy and horror, which together form a so-called fantastic triangle. It is why they so often overlap and enrich themselves. [...]

In his work "An Introduction to Studying Popular Culture" Dominic Strinati created the following definition that characterizes horror "as a genre that represents the need for suppression if the horror shown is interpreted as expressing uncomfortable and disturbing desires which need to be contained."

Horror is a varied genre that is hard to be defined by one single definition. And therefore the most accurate is the one that defines horror through each of its categories and its subgenres. Todorov distinguishes between three forms of horror as a genre: uncanny, marvelous and fantastic.

In the first category -- the uncanny, the end of the story contains elements of supernatural, events that seem to be unreal, impossible or irrational, or events that follow the laws of rational but are incredible, disturbing, unusual, shocking, unexpected or unique.

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The viewer/reader has an opportunity to explain them in their own way. Yet the laws of reality remain untouched. Examples of this category are the following films: *Taste of Fear* (1961), *Nightmare* (1964), *Psycho* (1960), or films that overlap with the genre of science fiction. Extraterrestrials can be inhuman but not unnatural; they represent the boundaries of human knowledge.

In the second category -- the marvelous horror, seemingly irrational and incomprehensible phenomena can be explained only by accepting the second layer of reality the supernatural while the story lasts. To explain the incomprehensible phenomena of the story we must accept "the new laws of nature". Films of vampires, werewolves, living dead, demons etc. represent this category.

The third category -- the fantastic horror does not allow us clear explanations of the irrational; it offers us several alternatives. The viewer/reader can decide whether they will explain the phenomenon as the existence of the paranormal or as a hallucination of the main protagonist. The fantastic horror raises doubts and hesitation between the natural and supernatural alternative, which the recipient may (or may not) share with the character. Examples are film such as *Shining* (1980), *Cat People* (1942) *The Innocents* (1920) or *I Walked With a Zombie* (1943). [...]

Cosmic horror is mostly characterized by the work of Howard Phillips" Lovecraft. In his books he wrote of a civilization coming from outer space, which conquered the Earth before humankind. Cosmic horror implies elements of science fiction and depicts emotions when a person finds out

something he would rather not know about. Including Lovecraft's works we can also mention the works of Clive Barker, Peter F. Hamilton or *The King in Yellow* by Robert W. Chambers. [...]

Occult horror focuses on exorcism, the arrival of the antichrist, cults, mysticism, curses and a wide scale of so called occult sciences. Horrors such as *The Exorcist* (1973 and the related sequels and prequels), *Constantine* (2005), *The Amityville Horror* (2005), *The Omen* (1976, remake 2006) or *Final Destination* (2000) are only a few examples representing this subgenre. [...]

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Horror is one of the most paradox genres (if not the most paradox at all). It attracts its followers with elements that are in general considered repulsive, disgusting and incendiary. People in their mundane lives try to avoid violence, blood, danger and things evoking fright, fear and dread. However, they often decide to reach out for horror production that is fully charged with these factors. Why is it then that the genre of horror is so popular?

According to Lovecraft, supernatural horror evokes sacred dread and "cosmic fear" in the readers, which he sees as the main feature of the genre. The essence of the cosmic fear lies in some instinctive intuition that can reveal what the materialistic society denies. It is the "sacred" horror, which is related to the bewilderment typical for religion that wants to assure us of the existence of things, which the materialistic society cannot embrace. But Noël Carroll notes that this dread is only one of the many effects of horror, because not every work of this genre can be considered as the so called supernatural horror.

One of the other possibilities to explain the attraction to horror is offered to us via monsters, which represent the deformation of reality and which possess supernatural powers and abilities. [...]

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As horror does not always have a happy ending, where the good conquers above evil, this subject offers us a hypothesis about what could happen if the control was taken over by negative forces and is in the meantime a kind of warning for the people, to act in good spirit.

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Source 2b

Hartwell, David G. Introduction. *A Fabulous Formless Darkness*, Ed. Hartnell, 1987, Tor, 1992, 1-16.

What It Is

Sigmund Freud remarked that we immediately recognize scenes that are supposed to provoke horror, "even if they actually provoke titters." It seems to me, however, that horror fiction has usually been linked to or categorized by manifest signs in texts, and this has caused more than a little confusion among commentators over the years. Names such as weird tales, gothic tales, terror tales, ghost stories, supernatural tales, macabre stories-- all clustered around the principle of a real or implied or fake intrusion of the supernatural into the natural world, an intrusion which arouses fear--

have been used as appellations for the whole body of literature, sometimes interchangeably by the same writer [...]

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We choose “horror” as our term, both in accordance with the usage of the marketplace (Tor Books has a Tor Horror line; horror is a label for the marketing category under which novels and collections appear), and because it points toward a transaction between the reader and the text that is the essence of the experience of reading horror fiction, and not any thing contained within that text (such as a ghost, literal or implied). And moreover, H. P. Lovecraft, the theoretician and critic who most carefully described the literature in his *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, who was certainly the most important American writer of horror fiction in the first half of this century, has to the best of my memory not a single conventional ghost story in the corpus of his works. [...]

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To them [people who don't read horror] it is a kind of pornography, inducing horripilation instead of erection. And the reader who appears to relish such sensations-why he's an emotional masochist, the slave of an unholy drug, a decadent psychotic beast.

-- David Aylward, *Revenge of the Past*

First, the longing for mystic experience which seems always to manifest itself in periods of social confusion, when political progress is blocked: as soon as we feel that our own world has failed us, we try to find evidence for another world; second, the instinct to inoculate ourselves against panic at the real horrors loose on the earth ... by injections of imagery horror, which soothe us with the momentary illusion that the forces of madness and murder may be tamed and compelled to provide us with a mere dramatic entertainment.

-- Edmund Wilson, *A Literary Chronicle*

I used to read horror when I was depressed to jump-start my emotions-- but it only gave me temporary relief.

-- Kathryn Cramer (personal correspondence)

It proves that the tale of horror and/or the supernatural is serious, is important, is necessary. . . not only to those human beings who read to think, but to those who read to feel; the volume may even go a certain distance toward proving the idea that, as this mad century races toward its conclusion-- a conclusion which seems ever more ominous and ever more absurd-- it may be the

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most important and useful form of fiction which the moral writer may command.

-- Stephen King, Introduction to *The Arbor House Treasury of Horror and the Supernatural*

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The Three Streams

We return to the life and state of horror fiction in the present. Contemporary horror fiction occurs in three streams, in three principal modes or clusters of emphasis: 1. moral allegorical 2. psychological metaphor 3. fantastic. The stories in this anthology are separated according to these categories. These modes are not mutually exclusive, but usually a matter of emphasis along a spectrum from the overtly moral at one extreme to the nearly totally ambiguous at the other, with human psychology always a significant factor but only sometimes the principal focus. Perhaps we might usefully imagine them as three currents in the same ocean.

Stories that cluster at the first pole are characteristically supernatural fiction, most usually about the intrusion of supernatural evil into consensus reality, most often about the horrid and colorful special effects of evil. These are the stories of children possessed by demons, of hauntings by evil ghosts from the past (most ghost stories), stories of bad places

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(where evil persists from past times), of witchcraft and satanism. In our day they are often written and read by lapsed Christians, who have lost their firm belief in good but still have a discomfiting belief in evil. Stories in this stream imply or state the Manichean universe that is so difficult to perceive in everyday life, wherein evil is so evident, horror so common that we are left with our sensitivities partly or fully deadened to it in our post-Holocaust, post-Vietnam, six-o'clock news era. A strong extra-literary appeal of such fiction, it seems to me, is to jump-start the readers' deadened emotional sensitivities.

And the moral allegory has its significant extra-literary appeal in itself to that large audience that desires the attribution of a moral calculus (usually Ideological) deriving from ultimate and metaphysical forms of good and evil behind events in an everyday reality. [...]

The second group of horror stories, stories of aberrant human psychology embodied metaphorically, may be either purely supernatural, such as *Dracula*, or purely psychological, such as Robert Bloch's *Psycho*. What characterizes them as a group is the monster at the center, from the monster of Frankenstein, to Camilla, to the chain-saw murderer-- an overtly abnormal human or creature, from whose acts and on account of whose being the horror arises. D. H. Lawrence's little boy, Faulkner's Emily, and, more subtly, the New Yorker of Henry James' "The Jolly Comer" show the extent to which this stream interpenetrates and blends with the mainstream of psychological fiction in this century. Both Lovecraft and Edmund Wilson, from differing perspectives, see

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Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* as essentially horror fiction. There has been strong resistance on the part of critics, from Wilson to the present, to admitting nonsupernatural

psychological horror into consideration of the field, allowing many to declare the field a dead issue for contemporary literature, of antiquarian interest only since the 1930s. This trend was probably aided by the superficial examination of the antiquarianism of both M. R. James and H. P. Lovecraft. [...]

The stories tended to focus equally on the supernatural and the psychological. Psychology was often quite overtly the underpinning for horror, as in, for example, Hubbard's "He Didn't Like Cats," in which there is an extended discussion between the two supporting characters as to whether the central character's problem is supernatural or psychological . . . and we never know, for either way he's doomed. *Unknown* broke the dominance of *Weird Tales* and influenced such significant young talents as Ray Bradbury and Shirley Jackson. The magazine encouraged the genrification of certain types of psychological fiction and, at the same time, crossbred a

good bit of horror into the growing science fiction field. This reinforced a cultural trend apparent in the monster and mad scientist films of the 1930s, giving us the enormous spawn of SF/horror films of the 1950s and beyond.

It is interesting to note that as our perceptions of horror fiction and what the term includes change over the decades, differing works seem to tell naturally into or out of the category. The possibilities of psychological horror seem in the end to blur distinctions, and there is no question that horror is becoming ever more inclusive.

Stories of the third stream have at their center ambiguity as to the nature of reality, and it is this very ambiguity that generates the horrific effects. Often there is an overtly supernatural (or certainly abnormal) occurrence, but we know of it only by allusion. Often, essential elements are left undescribed so that, for instance, we do not know whether there was really a ghost or not. But the difference is not merely supernatural versus psychological explanation: third stream stories lack any explanation that makes sense in everyday reality-- we don't know, and that doubt disturbs us, horrifies us. This is the fiction to which Sartre's analysis alludes, the fantastic. At its extreme, from Kafka to the present, it blends indistinguishably with magic realism, the surreal, the absurd, all the fictions that confront reality through paradoxical distance. It is the fiction of radical doubt. Thomas M. Disch once remarked that Poe can profitably be considered as a contemporary of Kierkegaard, and it is evident that this stream develops from the beginnings of horror fiction in the short story. In the contemporary field it is a major current.

Third stream stories tend to cross all category lines but usually they do not use the conventional supernatural as a distancing device. While most horror fiction declares itself at some point as violating the laws of nature, the fantastic worlds of third stream fiction use as a principal device what Sartre has called the language of the fantastic.

At the end of a horror story, the reader is left with a new perception of the nature of reality. In the moral allegory strain, the point seems to be that this is what reality was and has been all along (i.e., literally a world in which supernat-

ural forces are at work) only you couldn't or wouldn't recognize it. Psychological metaphor stories basically use the intrusion of abnormality to release repressed or unarticulated psychological states. In her book, *Powers of Horror*, critic Julia Kristeva says that horror deals with material just on the edge of repression but not entirely repressed and inaccessible. Stories from our second stream use the heightening effect on the monstrously abnormal to achieve this release. Third stream stories maintain

the pretense of everyday reality only to annihilate it, leaving us with another world entirely, one in which we are disturbingly imprisoned. It is in perceiving the changed reality and its nature that the pleasure and illumination of third stream stories lies, that raises this part of horror fiction above the literary level of most of its generic relations. So the transaction between the reader and the text that identifies all horror fiction is to an extent modified in third stream stories (there is rarely, if ever, any terror), making them more difficult to classify and identify than even the borderline cases in the psychological category. [...]

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Source 3b

McCracken, Scott. Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction. Manchester University, 1998.

The central and indispensable element of gothic horror is fear. In the words of Stephen King, “I suppose the ultimate triumph would be to have someone drop dead of a heart attack ... I’d say, ‘Gee, that’s a shame,’ but part of me would be thinking, *Jesus*, that really worked.’ At the centre of every horror narrative there is the emptiness which cannot be explained, or, to use a well-worn but serviceable phrase, a heart of darkness. The very effectiveness of the horror story depends upon the reader’s inability to rationalize the source of the terror. Once explained or tamed, that which was monstrous is no longer terrible and, like the defeated King Kong, is more likely to appeal to our sympathies than to summon up our dread. This means that there is a fundamental contradiction between the reader-identity of the academic critic and the function of the horror narrative. Where the critic wishes to understand, the horror narrative resists interpretation, numbing the critical faculty with the spectacle of the unknown. [...]

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Horror stories [...] take apart a secure sense of self. They explore the fragile border between identity and non-identity and thus confront the frightening possibility of the self’s destruction. Madness, disease and death, as well as those social and sexual bonds that reveal the limits of our autonomy, are all subjects of horror. [...] Gothic horror explodes what we know to be certain and true so that anything imaginable may happen.

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Source 4b

King, Stephen. Danse Macabre. Gallery Books, 1981.

The tale of horror, no matter how primitive, is allegorical by its very nature; that it is symbolic. Assume that it is talking to us, like a patient on a psychoanalyst’s couch, about one thing while it

means another. I am not saying that horror is consciously allegorical or symbolic; that is to suggest an artfulness that few writers of horror fiction or directors of horror films aspire to. [...]

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The element of allegory is there only because it is built-in, a given, impossible to escape. Horror appeals to us because it says, in a symbolic way, things we would be afraid to say right out straight, with the bark still on; it offers us a chance to exercise (that's right; not exorcise but exercise) emotions which society demands we keep closely in hand. The horror film is an invitation to indulge in deviant, antisocial behavior by proxy-- to commit gratuitous acts of violence, indulge our puerile dreams of power, to give in to our most craven fears. Perhaps more than anything else, the horror story or horror movie says it's okay to join the mob, to become the total tribal being, to destroy the outsider. [...] When we turn to the creepy movie or the crawly book, we are not wearing our "Everything works out for the best" hats. We're waiting to be told what we so often suspect-- that everything is turning to shit. In most cases the horror story provides ample proof that such is indeed the case.

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All tales of horror can be divided into two groups: those in which the horror results from an act of free and conscious will-- a conscious decision to do evil-- and those in which the horror is predestinate, coming from outside like a stroke of lightning. The most classic horror tale of this latter type is the Old Testament story of job, who becomes the human Astro-Turf in a kind of spiritual Superbowl between God and Satan.

The stories of horror which are psychological-- those which explore the terrain of the human heart—almost always revolve around the freewill concept; "inside evil," if you will, the sort we have no right laying off on God the Father. [...]

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Novels and stories of horror which deal with "outside evil" are often harder to take seriously; they are apt to be no more than boys' adventure yarns in disguise, and in the end the nasty invaders from outer space are repelled; or at the last possible instant the Handsome Young Scientist comes up with the gimmick solution. [...] And yet it is the concept of outside evil that is larger, more awesome. Lovecraft grasped this, and it is what makes his stories of stupendous, Cyclopean evil so effective when they are good. Many aren't, but when Lovecraft was on he money-- as in "The Dunwich Horror," "The Rats in the Walls," and best of all, "The Colour Out of Space"-- his stories packed an incredible wallop. The best of them make us feel the size of the universe we hang suspended in, and suggest shadowy forces that could destroy us all if they so much as grunted in their sleep. After all, what is the paltry inside evil of the A-bomb when compared to Nyarlathotep, the Crawling Chaos, or Yog-Sothoth, the Goat with a Thousand Young?

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Source 5b

Dziemianowicz, Stefan. Introduction. Rivals of Weird Tales, Ed. Robert Weinberg, Stefan Dziemianowicz, and Martin Greenberg, Bonanza, 1990, xiii-xx.

With the exception of several western and detective magazines, most of the early pulps were general fiction magazines that were not limited to a particular genre. Then, in March of 1923, *Weird Tales* made its

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debut. The first and greatest of the weird fiction magazines, *Weird Tales* was to last for more than thirty-one years and give America a hand in shaping supernatural literature, a body of fiction that hitherto had been almost exclusively the domain of English and European writers. Over the course of 279 issues and three editors-- and with offerings from the imaginations of perhaps a thousand writers-- *Weird Tales* laid the foundations for modern horror and fantasy fiction.

If one had to choose the single outstanding quality of *Weird Tales*, it would be editorial diversity. In its lifetime, *Weird Tales* published everything from mild science fiction to sword-and-sorcery fiction and anything from Gothic horror to light fantasy. The broad range of tastes catered to not only helped it to survive in spite of perpetual financial difficulties, but also to live up to its subtitle, "The Unique Magazine." As a result, *Weird Tales* was able to accommodate the work of several generations of writers instrumental in the evolution of weird fiction beyond its Gothic primitiveness. [...] It's true that the majority of stories these and other authors published in *Weird Tales* were no better than the fiction found in any other pulp magazine, but a good many more have aged remarkably well and are still read today.

What kind of diversion or entertainment did a magazine full of unspeakable monsters, old dark houses, and Gothic nightmares provide for a populace already shocked by the hard times of the Depression years? The answer is very simple: the average *Weird Tales* story seemed to imply that no matter how bad daily life was, things could always be worse. Whether it ended happily or horribly, whether it provided an uplifting moral or an insight into the darkness of the human soul, a *Weird Tales* story always let the reader see his worst fears acted out at a safe distance. In this respect, *Weird Tales* provided the same sort of catharsis for weird fiction readers that the western or detective pulps did-- but with a bit more imagination.

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Source 6b

Lovecraft, H.P. Introduction. Supernatural Horror in Fiction, 1927, Palingenesis, 2013.

The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown. These facts few psychologists will dispute, and their admitted truth must

establish for all time the genuineness and dignity of the weirdly horrible tale as a literary form. [...]

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The appeal of the spectrally macabre is generally narrow because it demands from the reader a certain degree of imagination and a capacity for detachment from everyday life. Relatively few are free enough from the spell of the daily routine to respond to tappings from outside, and tales of ordinary feelings and events, or of common sentimental distortions of such feelings and events, will always take first place in the taste of the majority; rightly, perhaps, since of course these ordinary matters make up the greater part of human experience. But the sensitive are always with us, and sometimes a curious streak of fancy invades an obscure corner of the very hardest head; so that no amount of rationalisation, reform, or Freudian analysis can quite annul the thrill of the chimney-corner whisper or the lonely wood. [...]

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With this foundation, no one need wonder at the existence of a literature of cosmic fear. It has always existed, and always will exist; and no better evidence of its tenacious vigour can be cited than the impulse which now and then drives writers of totally opposite leanings to try their hands at it in isolated tales, as if to discharge from their minds certain phantasmal shapes which would otherwise haunt them. [...]

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This type of fear-literature must not be confounded with a type externally similar but psychologically widely different; the literature of mere physical fear and the mundanely gruesome. Such writing, to be sure, has its place, as has the conventional or even whimsical or humorous ghost story where formalism or the author's knowing wink removes the true sense of the morbidly unnatural; but these things are not the literature of cosmic fear in its purest sense. The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present. [...]

Naturally we cannot expect all weird tales to conform absolutely to any theoretical model. Creative minds are uneven, and the best of fabrics have their dull spots. Moreover, much of the choicest weird work is unconscious; appearing in memorable fragments scattered through material whose massed effect may be of a very different cast. Atmosphere is the all-important thing, for the final criterion of authenticity is not the dovetailing of a plot but the creation of a given sensation. We may say, as a general thing, that a weird story whose intent is to teach or produce a social effect, or one in which the horrors are finally explained away by natural means, is not a genuine tale of cosmic fear; but it remains a fact that such narratives often possess, in isolated sections, atmospheric touches which fulfill every

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condition of true supernatural horror-literature. Therefore we must judge a weird tale not by the author's intent, or by the mere mechanics of the plot; but by the emotional level which it attains at its least mundane point. If the proper sensations are excited, such a "high spot" must be admitted on its own merits as weird literature, no matter how prosaically it is later dragged down. The one test of the really weird is simply this -- whether or not there be excited in the reader a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers; a subtle attitude of awed listening, as if for the beating of black wings or the scratching of outside shapes and entities on the known universe's utmost rim. And of course, the more completely and unifiedly a story conveys this atmosphere the better it is as a work of art in the given medium.

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Source 7b

Wisker, Gina. Horror Fiction: An Introduction. Continuum, 2005.

Other roots of horror are in psychology, the mind, and in our imaginations. In this, Freud is the key figure [...] -- the notion of 'the uncanny' is the chief theoretical instrument. Defamiliarisation of what we take for granted unquestionably destabilises, disturbs, and enables us to question; prevents dangerous complacencies; enable imaginative escapes from real oppressions; and enable problematising of givens and some distance, some problem-solving strategies. It is a mirror to our desires and fears and a crucible in which the fantastic and the real mix, so we might work out their origins and perhaps address them (not necessarily crushing them, perhaps giving them rein). [...]

Freud is not exactly a critic of horror, but his theories do lie behind our understanding of how horror operates and how disturbance

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operates in us. As such, these theories enable a critical understanding of horror, its intentions, representations, and the ways we read it. Freud is credited with recognising the origins of psychological horror and its basis in the uncanny, in dream. His groundbreaking essay 'The Uncanny' (1919) (the *unheimlich*) identified the particular effects of defamiliarisation, where the familiar becomes strange and the strange more familiar; where whole bodies seem mechanical, sick, uncontrollable; where boundaries between what we take for granted and strange events destabilise our sense of solid reality and communication through language. Freud's essay is possibly the earliest piece of formal theorising that begins to enable us to explore the genre's origins locations, and effects. 'The Uncanny' exposed horr's strategies for defamiliarising the familiar, threatening us where we feel most secure. It exposes dread, 'that class of frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar' (Freud 219). Dictionary definitions of uncanny suggest the supernatural or inexplicable. [...] People are uncanny if we expect something evil of them. Distinctions between the imagination and reality tend to be erased within the uncanny.

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