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## The Horror Genre: Can You Take It?

### Part 1: General Analysis

Popcorn. Horror movies. Gore. Screams. Zombies. Ghosts. Are you scared? The genre of horror plays an important role in a large number of lives worldwide, for a variety of reasons. Viewers often experience a rollercoaster of emotions while sitting through a well-developed horror film. This may include, but is not limited to emotional satisfaction, pleasure, nostalgia, stress, obviously fear and even a “sweet sadness.” Today’s most successful horror movies and horror movie directors are at the top for a few reasons, whether it be the anticipation that is developed before the movie is released, the chatter and talk about how good the movie was, or simply just from good advertising. Additionally, horror has indeed changed from what it once was, from the time it was created to the present day. The lessons, reasons, psychology and demographics behind this genre has altered, and will continue to do so until the end of time, much like many other entertainment genres.

### **Discourse Community**

Horror was known to originate from the ‘gothic novel’, which emerged in the 18th-century pre-Romantic Era. One Horace Walpole, an English writer, is responsible for making the genre “a legitimate literary form” with the publication of the 1764 novel “The Castle of Otranto.” Since then, the genre has been enticing people with numerous interests, pertaining to

no one specific gender. Although it is not limited to just these people, those most interested in horror are more likely to be less empathetic and darker in aesthetic, but as said before, that is not always the case.

Horror also breaks down into numerous other subgenres, thrillers, psychological thrillers, slasher, sci-fi, found footage and more. This broad spectrum of the genre allows everyone to have something that attracts them to the horror scene. Since the community that appreciates the horror genre is incredibly diverse, they might not be able to communicate or share ideas with each other all time, but often do so leading up to, during, or after a showing of a good film. Usually when one goes to see a movie, their thoughts, words, and mindsets can revolve around that movie for hours leading up to it and after it has finished. Joining this discourse community, as some would call it, would require having to take in graphic, gory, and explicit content at times, also sometimes having a tough tolerance for those kinds of images, sounds, and storylines.

Some of the biggest horror influencers are recognized for their craft as they are considered the best of the best. Some of these writers and directors are Stephen King, Jordan Peele, Quentin Tarantino, James Wan, and Alfred Hitchcock, alongside many many others. These individuals are and became successful in different ways. James Wan, the director of the Saw, Conjuring, and Annabelle franchises, to name a few, built up his legacy through releasing multiple films set in the same fictional universes, writing and producing sequels and prequels to these movies, creating franchises. Stephen King, one of the most renowned authors for this genre simply never fails to tell a chilling terrifying story, whether it be through his older novels, or through his spine-tingling filmic adaptations. One of these adaptations, "It", released in 2017, is the highest grossing horror movie to date, making a staggering \$327.5 million in the box office.

Alfred Hitchcock and Quentin Tarantino are known for their classics in the genre of horror and gore. Hitchcock probably takes the cake when it comes to classics, with his 1960 film 'Psycho', known for its slasher music and the infamous Norman Bates character. Tarantino has honorable mentions such as "Kill Bill" Vol.1 (2003) and Vol.2 (2004), "Desperado" (1995) , and "Planet Terror" (2007). Lastly, a personal favorite, Jordan Peele, who was once a comedian has taken a trip to the dark side, with horror installments such as "Get Out" (2017), "Us" (2019), and his newest piece "Candyman", set to release in June of 2020. Peele has gotten recognition for his works because of his drastic shift in interests when it comes to entertainment, and because of his constant showcase of black power, as most of his films have an African-American hero/heroine and take on the stereotypical role of black people when it comes to horror movies.

### **Historical and Social Impact**

Throughout time, African-Americans have been seen in a very different light when it comes to horror movies. Early on, they would usually be the first ones to die or get killed. Even before, they never used to be in them at all, and were portrayed by white people. From then, black people have become more prevalent in these films, and have come to play bigger and more important roles. Directors like Jordan Peele stand as advocates for this historical change in the dynamic of horror movies and the viewpoints of the watchers, especially those that happen to be black, making it a more enjoyable experience for them.

As for feelings that are taken in by viewers, as mentioned, there is a broad spectrum of possible emotions that can be felt. As horror films are naturally meant to scare, a good amount of horror fans find comfort, excitement, and pleasure in these movies. One supported reason that people rely on horror to feel good is that it has the ability to "let us overcome simulated threats in

a safe space, so we can learn how to cope with negative experiences in real life.” (Whyte). So when someone goes into a haunted house, getting scared builds their tolerance for and reaction to scary situations, where jump scares or scary images may be involved, just like in a horror movie. In essence, when people are put to face a temporarily scary situation, having this ‘training’ helps them move forward and become better at reacting to real-life scary situations. This can also lead to less post-traumatic stress if anyone was ever to experience or witness a real graphic or unsettling event.

The horror genre has taken a turn, as mentioned before, for the better. Some newly produced movies come to tackle very important issues in society. Whether they be racism, identity, capitalism, feminism, sex, classism, mental health and so much more. These movies challenge their viewers’ perspectives on these topics, and leave them thinking about them for hours or days later.

Some horror movies do depict possible real life situations while others showcase the extreme, such as the supernatural, disasters, or never-seen-before events that surely would never happen. The latter, since it is often stretched and obviously could “never happen,” people are not as phased by them afterward, for the most part.

In the following statement, authors Eduardo Andrade and Joel Cohen convey the message that movie goers, when watching a graphic film, tend to prefer watching movies that make them feel strong emotions, like sadness, disgust, fear, etc because it shows that soon it will be made up for and replaced with more positive emotions, such as excitement, joy, and relief. “Theories that have attempted to explain such behavior rely on the assumption that people cannot experience positive and negative emotions at the same time, and they build either on the premise that some

level of arousal is experienced positively or that people are willing to endure negative affect in order to experience a positive aftermath.” (Andrade, Cohen). These authors present the idea that the human mind usually turns negatives into positives, making it justifiable to watch these movies. It is also believed, and can probably be proven by yours truly alone, that when watchers actually sit through a horror movie, the feelings of accomplishment and pride are surely prevalent and reside with them for an amount of time following their viewing experience.

Another source, deriving from the Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, expands on the idea of how viewers internally convert negative emotions they receive from horror movies into positives. “...they [researched discussions] assume that the attraction of horror has its source in the negative effect that it elicits...Focusing on the feeling components of fear and disgust—“the adrenalin rush, the tingles and the queasiness”—Feagin argues that one can come to enjoy these aspects of the emotional experience and such enjoyment “can function to reinforce one's attraction to the kinds of things which generate them,” in this case horror fiction.”

(Batinaki)

### **Rules and Message**

Horror has never and probably will never necessarily be constrained to a certain set of rules. Directors can go as far as they want with what they create. That includes the amount of blood, gore, profanity, sex, nudity, and other graphic content that they are comfortable with putting into their masterpieces. Their job is to scare, disgust, or really and truly traumatize the viewers. So as a horror fan, your job is to simply just be ready to take it all in.

When it comes to the message behind these movies, it can also be anything the director, writer, and producer want it to be. Honestly, any movie does not need to have a message, but to

ensure that the watcher leaves with something worth remembering about the movie, why not drop a lesson in there somewhere? Surely, all horror movies, and any films in general, don't focus on conveying the same life lesson.

### **Focused Analysis**

American actor, comedian, writer, director, and producer Jordan Peele, as of late, has gotten much recognition for his highly successful horror films. Although it was a drastic step in his career, to go from performing comedy to producing horror movies, he handled it in such a way that gave him tons of credit where it was due.

A personal favorite movie of mine, "Us," was released in March of 2019, and shook millions of watchers, including yours truly, to our core. This spine-tingling movie follows a family of four as they try to live their best life on vacation at their beachfront family home. The mother, Adelaide becomes increasingly anxious that something bad is going to happen throughout the rising action time of the movie. One night, four masked strangers descend upon the house, seeming to resemble a family of sorts. Sending our protagonists into a fight for survival, we are shocked to see that the four strangers are doppelgangers set to kill their respective look-alikes. During this movie's runtime of 2 hours, us viewers are presented with eerie scenes and jumpscars that leave us at the very edge of our seat the entire time.

This movie speaks about the self, and how emotionally, physically, and socially damaging it can be sometimes. Everyone presented in this movie has to face someone who looks exactly like them, and as if that was not a big enough challenge, has to outsmart them and find a way to kill them. It is shown that not many people were successful, showing just how really unready our society is to deal with ourselves.

There are not many movies like this one around, so not everyone who would consider themselves a horror fanatic sat well with this movie. It although received a 93% on Rotten Tomatoes, meaning it was widely accepted and praised by loads of critics. Viewers everywhere although say “Us” would never surpass “Get Out,” which dealt with a more realistic problem still facing our world, racism.

The film won a number of awards because of its phenomenal cast, including Lupita Nyong’o, Elizabeth Moss, and Winston Duke, all of whom had to play double roles, one as regular people, and another as their killer doppelgangers, referred to as tethers in the film. The movie won the Critics’ Choice Movie Award for Best Sci-fi/Horror Movie. Interestingly enough, Peele also won the same award for “Get Out.” Nyong’o also won the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Actress in a Motion Picture for her portrayals as Red and Adelaide in the movie. The film also won 3 other awards ranging in category.

This movie does not include much profanity or up-close bloodshed, so it does show some constraint that is not shown in the majority of horror movies that have ever been made. The intended audience could really be anyone, but because of the eeriness and ambiance of the movie itself, a young adult to mature adult audience was probably ideal.

Horror has come such a long way, and is only moving forward. The genre of horror will continue to be redefined again and again, and will be portrayed in exciting and invigorating new ways every year. From Alfred Hitchcock to Jordan Peele, from Horace Walpole to Stephen King, the known directors and writers of the horror genre will go down in history for allowing this category to be considered one of the best in terms of fictional literature and film.

Works Cited

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