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Introduction

Horror has such a long standing history within popular culture that its roots can be traced to fables and folklore of long dead cultures, whose use was primarily to instill teachings and morals into the populace (*Jackson, 1981*). These original influences can still be seen throughout the history of the genre, however, crossing the boundaries between mediums. It's no wonder since the horror genre is possibly the most effective genre to elicit a response from its audience through the clever use of several techniques and conventions.

The most accessible storytelling medium for many is arguably through film, as it requires the least amount of input from its audience, contrasting to books and video games which require different amounts of input respectively. As such through film it is also easier to examine specific tropes and literary conventions and the effects they may have on an audience, and within the horror genre there are a lot of examples to be analysed. These cinematic conventions have been used in a variety of ways over the years, going from being used in a serious manner, to actively being utilised to deconstruct the genre as a whole in later years.

Chapter1: Tension

The ultimate goal of many horror films is to shock or terrify the audience, and one of the most common, yet effective, ways to accomplish this is by gradually raising tension throughout a sequence. Whether this is paid off with a jumpscare or any other type of scare or revelation is down to the story and director, what stays true is that the most effective of these scares do not come from nothing, but are built up and established beforehand. One prime example of this is Hannibal Lecter's escape sequence in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). What makes this scene so terrifying is the drip feeding of incomplete information of how Lecter was able to escape his containment, parallel to the police officers in the film following his tracks and protocol to recapture him. Throughout the scene tension is on a near-permanent climb, the only reprieve being when one of the injured police officers is being escorted out to an ambulance. This is revealed to be a mis-direction however as that injured officer was Lecter in disguise, swapping clothes with the now revealed to be deceased officer. This is also aided by the choice in background music for this scene, ranging from a heroic tune that would not feel out of place in a more traditional police story, to a hauntingly religious tone when discovering the body of the murdered officer on display (*see figure #1*).

A larger case study of this can be examined in various aspects in the production of *The Shining* (1980). There are a number of examples within the film of Kubrick using specific techniques and direction to create a sensation of unease within the audience. One prime example of this include Danny's rides on his tricycle throughout the hotel, not only does the sound mixing of his trike travelling over different flooring and carpets, giving the impression the world of the film is real and alive, that anything around the central Torrence family could be detrimental to them. This is further complemented by the camera's movements behind Danny as he explores, always close enough to watch but not enough to be noticed by him, almost as if there is an unseen entity following his every move. This aspect of the film raising the tension is paid off in full when Danny is confronted by the ghosts of the Grady daughters, staring him down and beckoning for him to join them, all the while flashes of their fate are shown to both Danny and the audience alike. There are many instances like this throughout the film, where Kubrick establishes a scenario for each of the Torrence family where they face the horrors of The Overlook hotel, with increasing intensity as the film progresses before culminating in the iconic finale. Kubrick was able to primarily achieve through his grasp on pacing, slowly and

methodically introducing new paranormal aspects and apparitions all the while breaking down the characters.

The two discussed films are regarded as being two of the best within the horror genre, mainly for their use of tension and how to pace the story and it's beats around that, but as demonstrated they are quite different in their execution. Whereas one would focus on the clear and present threat of an individual and the implications of them being set loose, the other would rather focus on the slow build of malice that the characters, for the most part, cannot see, and have them face not only their inner demons, but of those around them too. What is undeniable though is that the work that has been put into building this wave of tension, whether over a large period or just in an isolated sequence, helps lift the respective reveals and shocks of both films to have a deeper emotional reaction from the audience than just them being frightened while the narrative simply moves on.

Chapter 2: The Final Girl

A 'Final Girl' is, as defined by Merriam Webster, "a trope in horror movies, referring to the girl who is alive at the end of the film." The term was popularised by Carol J. Clover in her book *Men, Women and Chainsaws* (1992) which deconstructs the horror genre through a feminist perspective and aims to analyse why there is a distinction between the main character-come-lone survivor being female and the vast majority of the intended audience being male. Throughout the years many characters have worn the title of 'Final Girl' as a sort of badge of honour, bestowing them with strength, resilience and perseverance (McAndrews, 2019).

The role of the 'Final Girl' has changed somewhat over the course of the last half decade, from Laurie Strode defending herself against Michael Myers in the *Halloween* franchise, to more genre savvy heroines, such as Sydney Prescott, able to break multiple rules of the genre as laid out in her own *Scream* franchise and still survive through each and every one of them. At first it was well regarded that a 'Final Girl' is virginal and studious, something many films waste no time in establishing or reinforcing through the course of it's narrative, though over the course of the film she does eventually match the killer on their own grounds, either by developing a strong sense of survival and escaping them, or by matching them in one final confrontation, typically ending with the 'Final Girl' turning the killer's symbolically phallic weapon against them. This trend of evolving the role of the sole survivor has continued into the modern day, with films such as *Happy Deathday* (2017) or *You're Next* (2013) giving their 'Final Girls' more agency towards their survival, either through solving a murder mystery over their own murder, or through reacting aptly to a home invasion respectively.

One standout example of a 'Final Girl' is Heather Langenkamp as Nancy Thompson in the *A Nightmare on Elm Street* franchise (see figure #2), first appearing in the 1984 original. Despite only having a limited number of appearances within the series, her character had connected with the audience so much Craven had brought Langenkamp to somewhat reprise her role for *A New Nightmare* in 1994, and it's not hard to see why. In the first film the audience sees Nancy as the sole survivor of her friend group as supernatural serial killer Freddy Krueger targets the children of the adults who killed him, and throughout the film Nancy develops well as a character. Despite starting off as a rather meek and passive character, once the situation has become serious and the adults of her town don't recognise the threat she takes matters into her own hands, trying to fight Krueger on his own element of the dream world. She is ultimately triumphant, repelling Krueger's sexually suggestive attacks and growing into a more

mature woman, despite losing her friends and mother along the way. Nancy does reappear in the the second sequel, *Dream Warriors* (1987) in a mentorly role for the new set of teens, and despite being killed by Krueger in the course of the film she is still instrumental in bringing down her nemesis as she inspires the current cast of kids to embrace who they are and what makes them special.

To summarise, this particular trope is one that has resonated with audiences over the course of the horror genre's history, for both male and female fans alike. While the reasoning behind why is different for each person, it's easy to see how a tale of a vulnerable victim fighting back and claiming victory over them is so popular, especially as writers and directors keep adding new elements to the formula to ensure the stories don't become stale.

Chapter 3: Empathy

Empathy is a concept that is almost intrinsically tied to the horror genre as there have been examples of protagonists that the audience connects with and understands their motivation to survive and the emotions that come along with that even in the earliest stories. The desire to survive is one of the oldest and strongest human desire, so it's no surprise that that audiences identify with protagonists so easily for the most part, whereas bland or unlikeable characters are almost rooted against by the audience to be killed, so it falls upon the directors to make the audience care about the characters, or at the very least make sure their character's deaths have impact.

A majority of horror films rely on 'the illusion of fear' (Carroll, 1989) to place the viewer in the world of the film, making them believe they are face to face with the cinematic monsters alongside the characters on screen. This has precedent within the cinematic canon, many horror films confront the audience about their viewing habits, some directly and some through more subtle means. The 1997 film *Funny Games* (see figure #3), and the 2007 remake of the same name, with the villains directly addressing the audience over why they are watching such a film, even further breaking the fourth wall to ensure the events of the film play out in such a way where they come out on top. The effect of this forces the audience to confront not only their own views on watching films, but the fact that even when they do they may not be safe from the cinematic villains, or at the very least from their judgement and psychological profiling. Carroll considers this a drawback of the horror genre, however, as if the events were real and were happening in front of the audience, why wouldn't the audience simply turn the film off and walk away? There's nothing stopping the viewer from doing so, so it's far more effective for a film to leave the audience with something they cannot simply run from, and instead sticks with them long after the film ends.

These points raise an excellent question of what is the best way for writers and directors to get the audience to care and empathise with their characters, directly confronting them on their own morals, or using embedded imagery and metaphor within the film to let the audience come to that realisation themselves? The modern cult classic *Cabin in the Woods* (2012) uses the metaphor of the 'Old Ones' as a substitute for the audience, demanding the blood of innocent teenagers to be spilled in a predetermined order or they would rise and destroy the world as the characters know it. Writers and director Whedon and Goddard have since confirmed this is the case, as they saw this as an extension of and a love letter to the horror genre from themselves and saw a connection between their story and the fickle and ever changing demands of the general audience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, creators within the horror genre have used innumerable techniques to make their audiences react how they want, some have been more effective than others, some draws deep from human psychology to craft a very specific experience, whereas others use quick shock tactics to ensure a quick scare, allowing room for more in a short time. It's the role of the writers and directors to decide which approach is more appropriate for their stories, as certain techniques do not work together, where as some, such as the three discussed within this proposal, work very well together, complimenting each other over the course of a movie to leave a lasting impression on the audience, ensuring they would be talking and dissecting the themes for a long time to come. It is now, however, that an important question on the genre must be asked; "How have horror films effectively psychologically affected their audiences?"

Figures



Figure #1- Silence of the Lambs, guard murdered and decorated by Lector



Figure #2- Nancy Thompson, seen here from ANOES 3: Dream Warriors

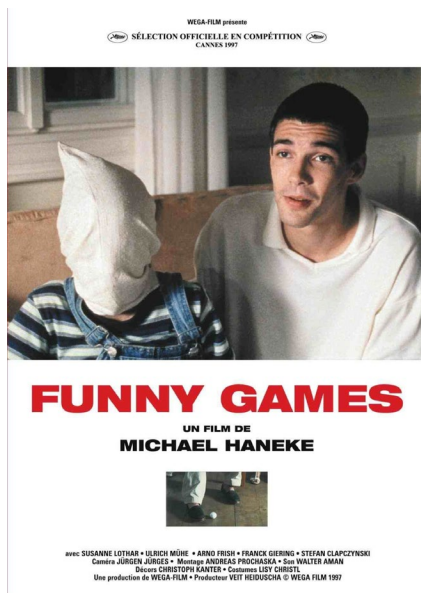


Figure #3- Funny Games (1997) poster

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