

Between the Weird and the Eerie

Paranormal Wales



Horrible History

a brief philosophy of horror

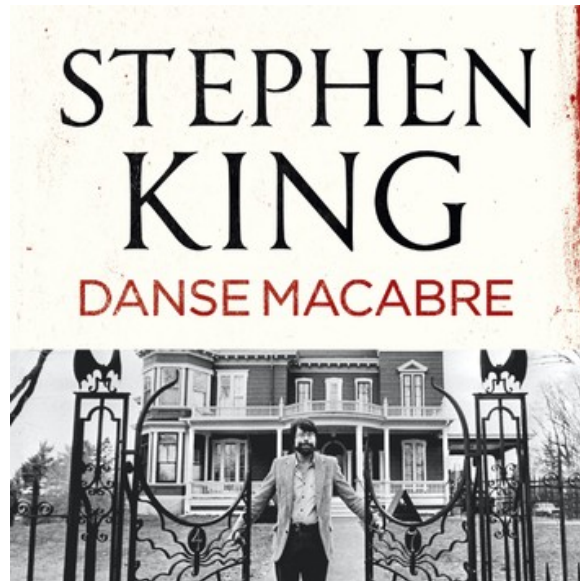


- **Horror is Good for you!**
- **Horror is cathartic** (Aristotle) – witnessing artistic representations of fear and cruelty - purging the audience of these emotions...
- **The power of ritual** – consecrated behaviour and cultural performances. Societies provide models of external social reality (they reflect reality) and models for that reality (they shape it)
- **Confronting our limits** - Horror is an extreme art form that forces an audience to confront the limits of their own tolerance.

Danse Macabre (1981)

Stephen King

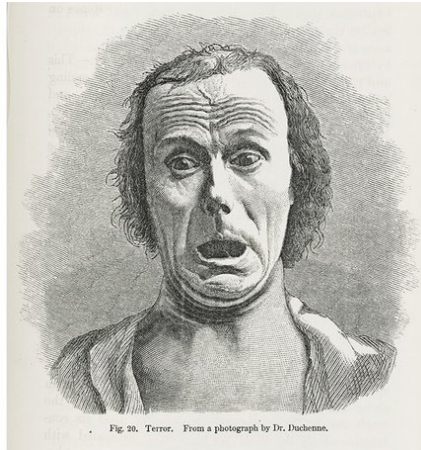
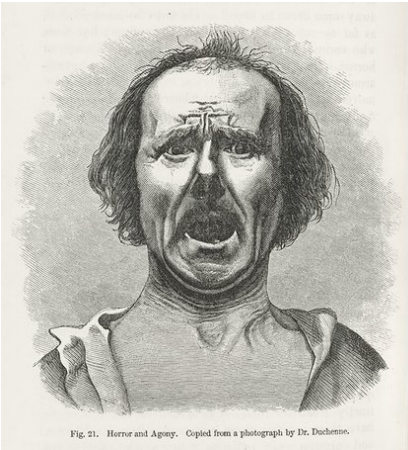
...on the horror genre



‘So: **terror on top, horror below it, and lowest of all, the gag reflex of revulsion....**I recognize **terror as the finest** emotion...and so I will try to terrorize the reader.

But if I find I cannot terrify him/her, **I will try to horrify**; and if I find I cannot horrify, I’ll go for the gross-out. I’m not proud.’

Terror or Horror (or Revulsion)



- **Terror** - poses existential questions for the audience as to the nature of reality, the validity of their beliefs, the reliability of perception. It is often expressed in the **paranormal or supernatural**, in *'things which should not be'*. Feelings of **dread** and **anticipation**. **It is productive of fear.**
- **Horror** - might best be thought of as embodied, corporeal, articulated through pain or through the dissolution of the flesh. **It can be productive of shock.**
- **Revulsion** - The aesthetics of disgust as an artistic aim, the **'gross-out'** as the lowest form of horror governed by powerful taboos.



the Uncanny
Freud's *unheimlich*

the Uncanny

Freud's *unheimlich*

“homely”

the psychology of fear

- **When the strange and the familiar meet.**
- The **uncanny** is about the strange within the familiar, the strangely familiar, the familiar as strange.
- **Undecidability.** When the world is not quite as we thought it was we begin to question the nature of reality
- **(Un)homely** - The Haunted House - a classic example

*the weird and
the eerie*

*presences and
absences*

- The feeling of **the weird** is very different from that of **the eerie**.
- “The simplest way to get to this difference is by thinking about the **opposition** — perhaps it is the most fundamental opposition of all **between presence and absence.**” (Mark Fisher)
- the weird is constituted by a **presence** — the presence of that which does not belong.
- The eerie, by contrast, is constituted by a **failure of absence** or by a **failure of presence**.

*the **weird** and
the **eerie***

*a **fascination with
the strange***

- What the weird and the eerie have in common is a preoccupation with the strange.
- **The strange — but not the horrific.**
- **a fascination for the outside**, for that which lies beyond standard perception, cognition and experience.

the *weird*



- **Reality is unstable** - the weird arises from 'a fascination for the outside, for that which lies beyond standard perception, cognition and experience'.
- The weird is ***that which does not belong*** and often stresses the insignificance of humanity.
- Not *horror* as such but *fascination*
- the weird cannot only **repel**, it must also **attract** our attention – a **sublime affect**
- If a story were merely horrible, it would no longer be weird.

**the insignificance of
humanity**

H. P. Lovecraft
(from the Call of Cthulhu)

The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents.

We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far.

The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little, but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.

the *eerie*



The *eerie* concerns the most fundamental metaphysical questions one could pose, questions to do with **existence and non-existence**:

- **failure of absence** - why is there *something* here when there should be *nothing*?
- **failure of presence** - why is there *nothing* here when there should be *something*?

“eerie cry”

the failure of absence

why is there *something* here when
there should be *nothing*?



there is some kind of intent at work, a form of intent that we do not usually associate with the call of the bird.

“eerie silence”

the failure of presence

failure of presence - why is there
nothing here when there should be
something?



the feeling of the eerie that pertains to ruins or to other abandoned structures

The Turn of the Screw

Henry James

An Uncanny Story - Henry James's

The Turn of the Screw is a **supernatural tale of a haunted house, AND/OR** a psychological tale whose narrator imagines ghosts as an aspect of her **mental breakdown.**



The Turn of the Screw (2009)



The Turning (2009)

*the **weird** and the **eerie***

constructing the paranormal

- **Creative Directions...**
- How can notions of the weird and eerie influence creative directions?
- narrative 'gaps' – absences and presences
- making the invisible - visible (or audible)



Picnic at Rosehill Quarry