

Society of Horror

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Throughout history, people have been drawn to the dark and mysterious. They are drawn to the things that scare them because it exhilarates them and floods their bodies with adrenaline. Being scared and still knowing in one's mind that there is no real danger is a way to relieve the stress associated with real fear. It is said that horror films are a way to face one's fears and conquer them. The horror film has arisen as a new way to evoke old fears. The horror film draws society in because it contains things that people fear and arouses the superstitions of the audience.

Fear of death, pain, and the unknown are exploited by the horror film industry. The reason people keep watching horror films is because they are, generally, intrigued by the things they fear or do not understand. This may act as a way to deal with personal misunderstandings or fear. If one knows an extensive amount of information about a subject, then most likely, that subject would not be feared. People may watch these horror films to familiarize themselves with the unknown, therefore weakening their fear. Of course, the film industry cannot put the fear of actual death into the audience, but by playing on elements of suspense, they evoke fear nonetheless. Whether people are afraid of a monster lurking in the dark, scary woods, or whether they associate real-life fears with the movie, they watch horror films for one simple reason-to be scared.

Horror films may aid people in understanding their fears. As Dirks acknowledges, "The horror film dramatizes our nightmares so that we can confront them, and from the safety of a

darkened theater, laugh at them" (Behrens and Rosen 782). This serves as a therapy of sorts. By confronting what one is afraid of, he or she may gain courage and confidence. The two or so hours of the movie allow one to forget, temporarily, the fears associated with real life, since he or she is focused on human-eating creatures of the night. One may emerge from the theater feeling energized and better able to deal with their everyday stresses.

The popularity of Halloween and its role in history bring out this need for fear in society. The use of masks as veils to conceal the true nature of the wearer is important because it plays on the fear of the unknown. As Dirk states, "Much of the time you cannot tell monsters from real people because their true nature is concealed beneath a civilized façade" (Behrens and Rosen 781). This fear that anyone can be a monster allows the imagination to run wild. A person's mind is what causes fear, and the fear can be raised in a number of ways.

There is a part of society that may believe horror movies have no relation to fears of reality but are, instead, the works of mentally ill, sick-minded, twisted, dangerous individuals that should not be able to walk the streets. Other people may dislike horror films because they are scared of being scared. As King realizes, the mythic horror movie:

deliberately appeals to all that is worst in us. It is morbidly unchained, our most base instincts let free, our nastiest fantasies realized . . . and it all happens, fittingly enough, in the dark. For those reasons, good liberals often shy away from horror films. (786)

These people fear the unknown and are fearful of what a little research may come about. This fear does not constitute their hate for horror films.

Horror films use wide varieties of scenarios and creatures to cause fear. Some are blatant and outright, while others are more subtle. Some films draw out the suspense of their plots to put

the audience on its edge before allowing to final frightening scene to take place. Whichever method these films use, they may all aid society in facing its fears by understanding the unknown.

Works Cited

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Ms. Whitton's Comments: *In this essay, Holly discusses what makes horror films commercially successful. Her well-written essay taps into our human desire to understand and acknowledge fear. She also discusses the exploitation of these desires in popular culture. I was impressed by Holly's use of sources, as well as by her concrete use of vocabulary.*