

The distinction between the Gothic as a genre and the horror as a separate literary genre.

(The value of this essay is not to reiterate the extant views on horror literature, but to make available for the first time to the world at large the textual foundations of considering horror literature as a genre by itself. The Gothic is a different genre altogether though most of us want to conflate and confuse between these two genres. Someday I shall write at length about the nature of the horrific. Suffice to say for now that the focus is that long ago, H. P. Lovecraft in his essay mentioned within this essay distinguished between the gothic as a literary genre and horror literature as another literary genre. And Lovecraft showed us that the horror as a literary genre is by far the greater of the two genres.)

Mary Midgely (1919–2018) in her *Can't We Make Moral Judgements?* (1989) builds on the traditions of the problems of other minds¹ and that of empathy². These problems derive from the Continental understanding of the fixed nature of the good and the bad; that is, of the Kantian categorical imperatives of the absolute wrong and the absolute good. Radical

¹ When another mind is entirely unknown, opaque and incomprehensible it leads to a moral complacency which in turn leads us to studying horror through its etymology. The unknowability of another mind as being a part of the literary genre of the horror is to be found in Roger Luckhurst's *Introduction to Lovecraft's The Classic Horror Stories* published by the Oxford University Press, whose 2016 reprinted edition has been accessed by this author.

² The Problem of Empathy is also crucial to understanding horror. The antinomy of Emmanuel Levinas' (1906-1995) absolute Other is that which is demonic as distinct from the daemonic with the latter's roots in Early modernist discourse. The former is the Abrahamic cognate to the absolute/radical evil posited by everyone from St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) to Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Edith Stein's (1891-1942) works are important in understanding how horror arises from our inability to empathise with others. Thus, the proverbial monstrous being can cannibalise another. So an entity like a demon possessing another being can ruthlessly destroy the esse of the possessed as depicted in Peter Blatty's (1928-2017) *The Exorcist* (1971).

evil and the sovereign good have both played important roles within the history of ethics in the West. These ideas through thinkers like George Santayana (1863-1952) and later, Richard Rorty (1931-2007) reached literary critics³ who interrogated the fiction of H. P. Lovecraft (1890-1937) through a hermeneutics constructed from Continental and American ethicists. The problem of other minds encountered within Lovecraft studies leads us to his essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1925-1927). This essay by Lovecraft establishes the literary genre of horror literature as distinct from that of gothic literature. And, also to provide a distinct historical trajectory of the rise of horror fiction which may in some cases parallel the rise of gothic literature but is neither subsumed by the gothic; nor is it a product of the historical forces which have shaped gothic literature. Lovecraft's essay provides us with the best answer about the jaded quality of the gothic vis-à-vis the originality of horror. Here is Lovecraft in his own words:

This novel dramatic paraphernalia consisted first of all of the Gothic castle, with its awesome antiquity, vast distances and ramblings, deserted or ruined wings, damp corridors, unwholesome hidden catacombs, and galaxy of ghosts and appalling legends, as a nucleus of suspense and daemoniac fright. In addition, it included the tyrannical and malevolent nobleman as villain; the saintly, long persecuted, and generally insipid heroine who undergoes the major terrors and serves as a point of view and focus for the reader's sympathies; the valorous and immaculate hero, always of high birth but often in humble

³ S. T. Joshi is the most important Lovecraft critic to date. It is his emphasis on the weird tale that will inform part of this book.

disguise; the convention of high-sounding foreign names, mostly Italian, for the characters; and the infinite array of stage properties which includes strange lights, damp trap-doors, extinguished lamps, mouldy hidden manuscripts, creaking hinges, shaking arras, and the like. All this paraphernalia reappears with amusing sameness, yet sometimes with tremendous effect, throughout the history of the Gothic novel; and is by no means extinct even today, though subtler technique now forces it to assume a less naive and obvious form. An harmonious milieu for a new school had been found, and the writing world was not slow to grasp the opportunity...

X. The Modern Masters

The best horror-tales of today, profiting by the long evolution of the type, possess a naturalness, convincingness, artistic smoothness, and skilful intensity of appeal quite beyond comparison with anything in the Gothic work of a century or more ago. Technique, craftsmanship, experience, and psychological knowledge have advanced tremendously with the passing years, so that much of the older work seems naive and artificial; redeemed, when redeemed at all, only by a genius which conquers heavy limitations. (Lovecraft *n.p.*)

It is worthwhile to mention here that the theories of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and his followers have been used extensively in theorising horror. The cultural work regarding horror

as a genre superior to the gothic has been thus, completed by Lovecraft and yet most of us do not care to distinguish between these two genres. One hears ad nauseum how gothic as a genre contains within it the horrific.

Towards a Philosophical Understanding of Horror

There are extant books in the market that deal with horror but they revolve around Freud, Julia Kristeva (1941-) and leave off at Nina Auerbach's (1943-2017) understanding of horror. The norm is to critique horror through neo-Marxist, structuralist lenses. So, to explain say astrology they would discuss Theodor Adorno's (1903-1969) works. These will be reviewed by this author later, and then we will pass on to theological discussions of horror rooted in the Abrahamic and Indic traditions. For instance, angels within the Hebrew Scriptures and Jinns within Islam are integral to understanding, and not merely engaging with forces of good and evil within the next chapters' varied representations of horror. Horror is not merely a deprivation of the good or, 'privatio boni' as is often reductively attributed to St. Augustine of Hippo. Within various faith traditions, the radically evil is real to the extent that the world is phenomenologically real. Without this knowledge, neither students, nor research scholars will be able to grasp that John Milton's (1608-1674) *Paradise Lost* (1667) is only a colonial text if insufficiently commented upon or, Dante's (1265-1321) epics are not to be dismissed as Scholastic nothings. Without knowing the Buddhist concept of dependent origination, it is impossible to access some of the current Japanese horror. To illustrate further, Lilith in Pre-Raphaelite poetry is not mere fiction with metaphoric meanings to Victorians but she is a figure to reckon within the Apocrypha which is important since the Church Fathers went to great pains in excising the Apocrypha from the various extant Bibles. This is crucial to understand modernist and postmodernist approaches to horror since horror is connected to the flow of capital as mapped by Fredric Jameson (1934-) and earlier in a different context by Hannah Arendt (1906-1975). Arendt did her doctorate on St. Augustine.

Whether horror is real or not will be interrogated some other day. We are not writing here of say, the horrors of the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic or of American racism as represented by Toni Morrison but we have to now search whether there are such qualia which we can call evil. To put it differently, is the dasein sometimes evil. As I have pointed out in a Review published in *Prabuddha Bharata*, August, 2021; everything within our epistemic comprehensibility is corporeal except within non-qualified non-dualism. Let us be content with the fact that we know the effects of evil but we do not yet know the ontology of evil.

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