Pillars of Fear: The Gothic Ghost Story’s Influence on 
Contemporary Ghost Horror Films

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Abstract

In my thesis I examine how three elements of the Gothic Literature Ghost Story—fear for the body, fear of the supernatural, and fear of the location—are represented in modern horror films. Close reading of these elements and their presence in contemporary films will give a better understanding of what creates feelings of fear and anxiety in horror works and why these techniques are still being used today. While the Gothic may be more recognizable for its stylistic and mannered contribution to contemporary horror, it has more far-reaching implications for understanding human behavior. The thesis provides a screenplay of my own creation demonstrating these themes. Research informing this project derives in part from a Richter travel grant to England I received, in which I interviewed three experts: Dr. Jim Watt; Gavin Baddeley, and Dr. Luke Thurston.
Preface

So, why did I do this project? What is it about horror films and ghost stories that have made me want to traverse three countries on two continents to find their newest examples and meet the people that study them? I wanted to find out what it was about these texts that scared me.

I started thinking about Horror rather unconventionally, having been terrified of films as tame as *The Mummy* (2001) well into my high school career. This all changed for me when I noticed a book sitting on the Border’s bookshelf entitled, *Horror Cinema* (see Taschen). It opened an entire different avenue of looking at the genre. This interaction I believe first planted the seeds of associating Horror films and the written word in my mind.

After placing the lens of critique that *Horror Cinema* had provided me with over the genre of Horror films I found myself actually able to enjoy the films instead of being kept up nights in terror. This isn’t to say by any means that I was no longer scared in films. My first time seeing James Wan’s *Insidious* (2010) is to this day the most horrifying hour and a half I’ve ever spent in a movie theater. But it allowed the dimension of wonderment about what was being presented onscreen to move itself into the foreground of my mind.

When it came time to select an Honors Thesis I thought back to my scared high school self and sought to better understand what it was that inspired fear in me. I knew that I wanted to examine the link between horror literature and horror films, and, when I thought about the books I most wanted to examine, I found myself gravitating toward the realm of the Gothic.

What I enjoyed about the Gothic was at first hard to describe. It’s the feeling that you get when you first crack open a page-yellowed version of *Frankenstein* or the overwhelming sense of dread that crawls up your spine the minute you realize just how alone you are in the big dark
house and just how little light you have to navigate by. These feelings are well known and researched in the Gothic Literature world and have significantly influenced the project that I will delve further into later on.

I sought to explore this feeling down to its very roots. And I also noted that I detected its presence in films as well. I knew there were films that shocked and films that disgusted. But the films that I felt truly stuck with you, the ones that left your mind and heart racing long after you had left the confines of the theater, were the ones that had this Gothic presence to them. This was a connection that I wished to examine further, I wanted to see if it was as strong and flexible as I thought it was, or would snap at the first tremulous probing.

Eventually, I was forced to narrow my focus even further in order to keep my Thesis from taking up volumes. So, I decided to spend all my energy entirely on the links between the Gothic ghost story and contemporary visual representations of the ghost story. For myself this presents something of a completion of a full circle as it was the ghost story more than anything else that had me as an adolescent cowering with my blankets pressed to my temples come nightfall.

One premise that should be noted throughout the thesis is the language through which both horror literature and film are examined. Roger Ebert was a pioneer in traversing the field between academia and general audience. His works are recognized for their ability to influence the critical field of examining films and for being accessible to everyone. Ebert’s reviews have influenced my personal viewing of film and relation to the material. They jump-started my love of film and when I reached the academic level, his critical works continued my trajectory. It is for this ability to reach both the critical and general audience member that I have consciously chosen to ground the language of the piece firmly in the relatable. Both the genre of Horror and
the medium of film have always been entertainment for the masses and the tone of this project will reflect that goal.
Introduction

Generally speaking the term “Gothic” refers to a certain style aesthetic of architecture and mode of thinking. But its lineage has been traced even further back than that to the tribes north of the Roman Empire known simply as the “Goths.” After the fall of the Roman Empire this term later expanded to include much of what is considered “medieval” looking. It is worth noting the contrasting nature to these two historical timelines. Where Rome has come to be considered in Western Culture as the idealized nation, a place where rules and structure produced prosperity, the medieval and “Gothic” have come to be associated with chaos and excess.

Mired in the late 18th century era of “enlightenment” thinking and movement toward the logical, the Romantic writers in England sought an escape into literature in which they could place their misgivings and dislike of the aristocracy onto a physical structure (see Norton). The new society was once again moving back to the world of structure and logic. The Gothic represented an escape to the past, where the landed gentry and their excess were the source of the misery and where the worst person one could think of lived in the castle on the hill. Thus in classic Gothic Literature a protagonist is often a product of the merchant or middle class who inherits or obtains a large medieval style house in which a terrible crime or accident has occurred.

The previous tenant is consistently a member of the aristocracy and the house is a physical manifestation of the writer’s feelings about the upper class. The spires are tall and foreboding, looking down on the every-man hero and there is an ever-present gloom to the interior, a feeling of darkness that no candle can drive away.

The gloom is quite literally the sins and guilt of the former higher class, stains of excess that are left behind for the honorable middle class gentleman to clean up or deal with. One of the
main tropes Gothic literature deals with is the illusion of wealth and status (see Masse). And the protagonists are cast in a role in which they are unable to move either economically or socially, a sentiment shared by much of the public today.

For the purposes of this study when I refer to something as being “Gothic” it is with this connotation in mind. Gothic will be dealing with either the interaction with the excess or the repercussions of that excess. It is important to note that due to the widespread use and adoption of the word “Gothic” by different areas of study, I will be making the distinction when referring to different employments of the word.

In this study I will be looking at the traditional English Gothic Fiction, as well as newer texts that harken back to this traditional styling. Gothic Fiction occupies a space between the 1760’s and the 1820’s. The word itself may have once been used to identify Germanic tribes or Teutonic castles, but in the literary world it applies to an almost entirely English group of writers working in this period.

In this project I will not be delving into the newer tradition of the American Gothic, popularized originally by the likes of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allen Poe. Nor will I be examining the Southern Gothic style such as Flannery O’Conner or Joyce Carol Oates. While these are all writings deserving of merit in their own right, I principally wanted to focus on the original texts from which their work and that of others derived. The shifting of the authors’ national residence brings in other attributes that would have broadened the scope of the project to unwieldy proportions.

I have selected Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Matthew Lewis’ *The Monk*, and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* to work with principally, as well as English writers who have continued the Gothic Literature styling past its original turn-of-the-19th
century boom. These writers and texts are: Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw*, Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and Susan Hill’s *The Woman in Black*.

Each of these novels with the exception of Radcliffe has a direct film adaptation. Some of them, as is the case with *Frankenstein* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, were made into multiple editions, for both television and film. This makes them ideal sources when examining the nature of the connection between literature and film.

From the interface between these texts and films I distilled three elements that bridged the adaptation from one to the other. These elements or as I have termed them, “pillars” are the fear for the body, fear of the supernatural and fear of the location. Time and time again Gothic novels and their film adaptations employ these devices in order to create the atmosphere and tone of the pieces and inspire anxiety in the audience. David Hume examines this as well as dividing up the fear into two distinct categories. One is the Terror-Gothic, a term that Hume borrowed from Radcliffe. The Terror-Gothic is the constant fear of something happening. The audience is made anxious by the impending release of the tension that has slowly been ratcheted up throughout the work. The Horror-Gothic is the fear of continued interaction with something that is scary, such as the supernatural or a subject which could hurt the body.

In this project then, I will be using these pillars as a guideline and framework through which to look at the most contemporary of horror films. I will also be using them as points to touch on and gather opinions about from professionals in the field of Gothic research, Victorian literature, and Horror cinema. To further illustrate the influence and presence of these traits in contemporary writings and stories, I have constructed a screenplay of my own which demonstrates how these pillars have evolved but are still very much present in film.
The Experts

The Gothic texts are one source of information when considering the different traits that are being continued in contemporary films. Another source of this information is the people who examine the Gothic on a daily basis. These are the men and women I considered to be “on the front lines” of what I was working with. It just so happened that a few of them live in England and were available to interview during my time there.

The first person I interviewed was Dr. Luke Thurston, a Senior Lecturer in Modern Literature at Aberystwyth University in Wales. He not only teaches modern and contemporary literature but also specializes in the Victorian, psychoanalytics and literary ghosts. His most recent book is on the very subject entitled, *Literary Ghosts from the Victorians to Modernism: the Haunting Interval*.

Dr. Thurston wished to make it very clear that there was a clear divide between what was horror and what was terror, “Yes you want to go back to Radcliffe. Terror expands the soul, Horror does the opposite.” This was something I had not yet considered, but was an idea I couldn’t shake. It threw into sharp contrast some of my own feelings on effective horror films, theories that I had already been wrestling with. I brought up my ideas about the pillars to him and asked if these might be contributing to what he considered as a “terror” experience rather than a horrific one. He said that he felt that I was tracking down a path that was very much known to the writers of the Gothic, but also defined his differentiation of terror and horror. We talked about Hume’s idea of the Terror-Gothic and the Horror-Gothic, and he brought up the idea that Terror-Gothic works in films by spreading from audience member to audience member, “I like that idea, yeah, states of terror spread. Horror is isolation.”
When asked if horror films grew out of Gothic Literature, Dr. Thurston related that their popularity is an element of both that has often led to their being overlooked by serious critics. “The history of the ghost story is writers differentiating themselves from Horror. It’s always been close to pop culture, the ghost story is for popular consumption.” This is one of the niches that I find most interesting about horror films and the culture surrounding them; they have the reputation of being a subgenre, despite being just as popular as and more profitable than more comedic pieces. Dr. Thurston’s comments forced me to think about the idea that another connection between the Gothic writers and modern day filmmakers may be their intended audiences. There works are not necessarily created to change the world; they are a purely reactionary piece of work, built for the sole purpose of drawing a response out of a mass audience. This in turn forced me to consider again the connective, expanding nature of Gothic literature and horror films.

At this point I brought up many of the adapted films I had looked at as a bridge between Gothic literature and the medium of film itself. I asked him if he felt that these films and filmmakers are limited by the source texts, “Particularly, I look at Ghost Stories. I would relate it back to showing vs. telling. Modes of text and modes of text in cinema. Poe said you need to write a story that can be read in one sitting. Shortness is crucial. One element is time; true to the text is a romantic idea. *The Innocents* is a classic, and it reinvents the text. And it’s just as terrifying.”

This may be true, and on some level I agree with Dr. Thurston. I think to be a good adaptation a film has to differentiate itself from its source. But, where many films, horror films especially, fail is their exclusion of the “expanding” pillars of terror. Dr. Thurston agreed, adding “Terror as a memory is crucial, as a reader requires much more.” In his opinion it’s very easy to
push something from a terror experience into a horror one, “Horror has a proximity to the thing; Terror circles around but is all about not getting close to it. Terror functions by hiding it in the wings, Horror brings it to you. They both function off the notion that what you shouldn’t see has been reached, has been shown. It’s going through a door that says, ‘Do Not Enter.’”

One of the books I read in preparation for the project and which first inspired the idea that one of the pillars that horror functions off of was based on fear for the body is Jack Morgan’s *The Biology of Horror: Gothic Literature and Film*. I brought up this book in my conversation with Dr. Thurston and asked how he felt about it. “I would agree I see the body and mind as interlinked. That’s where our anxiety comes in. It’s about the body and the mind. Body is the symptom and the mind is the influence. It allows us to free ourselves from realism.” His use of the word “anxiety” over fear or terror caught my attention and I asked him to explain his word choice further, “It structures culture. What can we say about anxiety, it works in the texts. Look at Disney and the Wizard of Oz; it’s got to be about anxiety. One of the things anxiety does is show the extreme loss of control of extreme effectiveness.”

I then asked about the pillar of location and its importance to the films which he addressed with the comment, “Locations are crucial, it’s all about the genre. It’s reassuring, ‘We’re in the Gothic now’ and then some.” He then related back to the first pillar we had discussed, “As a site, the Haunted House is a metaphor for the body.” This is something I had struggled with during my consideration of the different elements of fear that translate from the Gothic to horror films. But, I see the two as separate; the location may sometimes be a metaphor for the body. But oftentimes the characters are just as afraid of the location as they are for it, something that differs from the body itself and breaks the metaphor.
I ended my conversation with Dr. Thurston by bringing up the final pillar of fear I was examining in my research, the supernatural, and its presence in both Gothic literature and horror films, he found this relationship to be more slippery than I expected, “When does the natural become supernatural?” This was a turn in the conversation I wasn’t expecting and I’ll admit I was back on my heels. Dr. Thurston then went to his book to clarify his meaning, “There is a relationship between ghost and guest.” To him the supernatural is an essential element, but also just as important is the transitioning to the state of supernatural, this is where the fear is generated.

Dr. Thurston, was not the only expert I interviewed about the pillars of fear, however. I also spoke with Gavin Baddeley, a journalist specializing in horror, an ordained Reverend in the Church of Satan, and the BBC news specialist on the occult. Also, one of the nicest men I’ve had the pleasure of meeting. Gavin was a nice reminder that the realm of Gothic Horror is steeped in the popular and everyman, “I’m a populist; I may be a problem for you. I was once at a conference where a man gave a speech entirely on how the positioning of Peter Cushing’s left hand in one of the Hammer films meant he was gay. You know? I mean, it was a great paper, but I don’t buy that bullshit.”

I also spent time with Dr. Jim Watt, the professor of Gothic Literature at the University of York, who by his own admission doesn’t like horror movies because he finds them to be too scary. I asked these men the same series of questions that I asked Dr. Thurston and interspersed his own comments into them as they came back with their answers. Gavin was right off the bat as interested in the split between horror and terror as Dr. Thurston was, “Horror is a misnomer. You’re not even trying to scare people sometimes. At its core it’s dark wonder and exploration.” All of the paring down of horror into something more definable was an element that really struck
me throughout my conversations with the experts. It is such an expansive and broad subject, and when juxtaposed with an equally wide companion in the word, “Gothic,” the scope of what is being discussed and affected is immense.

Baddeley also commented on whether he felt that horror films have grown entirely from Gothic Literature, “Yes and no. There is an obvious yes. But on the other hand Gothic literature grew out of a previous tradition. Does Gothic mean anything spooky? I don’t think so. Gothic is about disjointed and distance. You set it in something strange. And it’s about pushing buttons.” Dr. Watt echoed similar sentiments when I talked with him, “Think of it at as a vocabulary. The tone is ambiguous. Tongue-in-cheek to sublime.”

When I asked whether the adapted Gothic films were limited by their source novel, the two men once again were in agreement, Dr. Watt mentioned, “Films can go beyond the novel. The myth can concede the originary (sic) text.” Baddeley took it even further, “You’ll find very few faithful films. To be good it has to be [unfaithful]. There’s never been a faithful adaptation of Dracula and Frankenstein. They’re ‘reimagining’s.’”

Gavin Baddeley also had an interesting perspective on whether the Gothic was heavily involved with the fear of the body, “There’s overlap. It’s about transgressing the body.” He soon became much more interested in my question about whether the supernatural pillar was necessary to horror films, “[It’s] a problem of definition. We’ve not become more open-minded. In early Hollywood there isn’t any mention of the supernatural. Horror is a junkyard. Horror would be the insertion of the supernatural. Terror is national.”

The idea of the location and especially the American use of location in horror was something that Dr. Watt brought up in his interview as well, “[There are] local inflections, look at the opening scenes of The Shining. The castle is key in Europe, it’s not in America.”
confirmed my decision to attend international horror festivals in order to get the widest swath of horror films I could find and search for the pillars of horror in more than just one culture’s horror offerings.

My interviews with the experts on the Gothic and horror widened the lens through which I was looking at the connection between literature and contemporary texts. They also gave me confidence about the line of thinking. It seemed that the elements of anxiety and terror that I had noticed had been noticed by others and, furthermore, that much of their research and interest was based upon these pillars.
The Films

In order to understand how the pillars of the Gothic were still working in contemporary film, I had to find a way to access the most recent offerings the film world had to offer. I settled on two film festivals that were taking place in the United Kingdom. The first I attended was Grimmfest in the city of Manchester, England. The second was Abertoir, in Aberystwyth, Wales. Both of these film festivals were international scale, meaning that they received films from any country in any language.

Armed with what I had taken from the experts I interviewed, my own framework, and a thorough immersion in both the traditional Gothic written works and peer reviewed criticism on the subject, I attended each screening with the intention of laying the pillars over what was presented and observing the ways in which the differing films interacted with them. I was looking to experience for myself what Hume means when he speaks about the Terror-Gothic. I could feel it when I read Frankenstein and The Woman in Black. Now I wanted to see it onscreen and experience it with an audience of fellow moviegoers.

I quickly discovered though that certain elements of films pushed the pillars out of the Gothic Horror realm. For example, the film What We Do in the Shadows (2014) is a direct satire of much of the Gothic elements, as is the film Wolfcop (2014). As Dr. Thurston says, “The enemy of the Gothic is laughter and sex.” These films start firmly in the realm of horror but quickly are pushed out of it and into comedy where the pillars are no longer present.

I did however find that for the most part films in the horror genre resolutely adhered to the pillar framework I had created. It was notable though that the films that adhered the best were the films that dealt with ghost stories or demonic entities. Two of my favorite films at either festival, Coherence (2013) and Faults (2014), only displayed one or two of the pillars.
Noticeably, *Coherence* is a blend of sci-fi horror and *Faults* is a cult thriller. I have included below three films from three different countries released that year—I was visiting in 2014—that most displayed the pillars of fear.
Let Us Prey (2014)

Director: Brian O’Malley

Writers: David Cairns

Country of Origin: Ireland

*Let Us Prey* was the first film that I saw at Grimmfest and it was a heck of way to start the festivities. The story revolves around a mysterious stranger who enters a small Irish town and immediately ends up a resident of the town’s jail. It’s after his imprisonment that things begin to escalate within the jail itself.

What I found to be interesting about this film was that it tackled the respective pillars of fear one at a time. First when the film’s action begins the group of characters is stuck in the jail. This is textbook use of fear of the location. When strange things start to happen at the jail, we as the audience wonder about the building’s past, this in turn ties hand in hand with what Dr. Thurston was saying about the natural becoming the supernatural. The film is organized so that the audience has to wonder how long the light fixtures swaying and building creaking is natural and when the fear of location will transition over into the fear of the supernatural.

Unsurprisingly, this is the pillar the film tackles next. The source of the action is revealed not to be the location after all but the man who has just been placed in it. Over time it becomes clear that everyone in the jail is guilty of doing something horribly wrong (except of course our first day on the job, female, middle class, protagonist, another nod to the Gothic characterization of the film) and that the stranger in the building is a grim reaper style figure coming to collect his due. His intentions remain murky throughout the remainder of the film as do his loyalties to heaven or hell, but one thing is clear; he is a figure that represents a supernatural other to the rest of the film’s characters.
The fear for the body comes after this character’s reveal as a supernatural figure. The idea that he somehow “knows all” drives the characters he interacts with almost immediately to violence. This constant threat is something that motivates the other characters and inspires fear as they attempt to navigate the night’s events. This fear is later personified by the figure of the town sheriff who it is revealed has killed several men and is going to kill the members of the jail as well. He appears at the jail’s threshold wrapped in barbed wire and wielding a shotgun.

After the film’s conclusion there was an open Q + A panel for the actors in the film. The man who played the stranger’s name was Liam Cunningham, as was to be expected most of the questions were directed his way. When asked about what drew him to the film, his answer was, “Horror movies have an operatic, kind of Gothic feel.” At this he was pressed further and he elaborated, “Going to see the old Christopher Lee Dracula movies with your Dad, this reminded me of it.” For me, this brought the idea of the types of films that he wished to make back to the community style, the ones that forge new relationships with the people with whom you view them.
The Forgotten (2014)

Director: Oliver Frampton

Writers: Oliver Frampton, James Hall

Country of Origin: England

I saw The Forgotten at Grimmfest as well. It played after a series of short films and was screened just after the middle of the day which I think suited the film’s tone perfectly. The film has a drab, mumbling tone to it that is very English in a way. It’s definitely a slow burn.

The plot centers on a boy and his father who are for reasons a little unclear forced to squat in an abandoned public housing building before it is demolished. The boy, whose name is Tommy, starts to hear noises coming from the boarded up flat next to his own and soon enlists the help of his new friend Carmen to discover whoever or whatever is making them.

The Forgotten dives heavily into the fear of the location from the outset. There is clearly something happening at the housing project and Tommy is clearly uncomfortable there. He is so lonely and so vulnerable that the audience can’t help but wish for him to have a friend. The isolation of Tommy helps to force the audience into a very mobile state very early on in the film; many people in my screening were squirming in their seats before the first scare actually happened.

There is some very smart writing going on in the film that sets up shortcuts for the tension so that it is present at the plot’s start rather than forcing the filmmakers to build it throughout the length of the film. The first is an audio file that plays over a blank screen. In it we hear a woman screaming for her baby and shouting to the emergency operator that her husband has a knife. This choice sets up fear for the body almost immediately after the film has started.
When the clip ends and doesn’t connect in any noticeable way to the visuals, the fear is still left in the viewer and we are wondering at what point the emergency call will be placed into the film. The fear for the location, as mentioned above, is also palpable and engaged from the very outset. By placing the house in a condemned public housing apartment Tommy must live his life in an almost permanent state of darkness. The windows are entirely boarded up, there are blackout curtains everywhere and the only light comes from one of the numerous battery powered lamps his father has hung throughout the apartment. In this manner the filmmakers have effectively removed the troublesome Gothic issue of daylight from the movie. This is a choice that the film’s writer James Hall addressed in his Q&A after the film, “Horror or ghost stories are about location. You know The Haunting or The Shining, you want isolation.”

The pillar where The Forgotten excels however—and ultimately rests most of its scares—is in the fear of the supernatural. When the supernatural events start happening they are of escalatory nature, each one ratcheting up the tension over the last. Director and Co-writer Oliver Frampton discussed this idea in his panel, “We took from old Victorian ghost stories where everything builds slowly.”

The Forgotten is a purposeful continuation of the Gothic genre. It chooses to follow each of the pillars faithfully and effectively. In a way, this is why I believe it was so effective, it had a clear vision of what it was trying to accomplish and took all the steps to do so. The result was an expansive mobile experience for a willing audience.
De Poel (The Pool) (2014)

**Director:** Chris W. Mitchell

**Writers:** Chris W. Mitchell, Gisj Scholten van Aschat

**Country of Origin:** Netherlands

*The Pool* was the first film that I saw at the film festival Abertoir in Wales. This was another film that I saw in the early afternoon. I was excited to see how a different culture would demonstrate their approach to horror and was pleasantly surprised with the results. Out of all of the films that I saw in the different film festivals *The Pool* was the one which adhered to the pillars of horror the most.

The story revolves around two different families who are going on a camping trip. One is made up of the traditional nuclear family, a father, mother and two sons; the other is the father’s business partner and his daughter. The father fancies himself quite the outdoorsman and decides that the traditional camping ground is too tame for the likes of himself and his family. Instead he crosses over several boundary lines and settles in a serene glade next to the natural pool mentioned in the film’s title.

As with *Let Us Prey* and to an extent *The Forgotten*, *The Pool* focuses on the fear of the location first. The group has very clearly transgressed into an area which they aren’t supposed to be. There is the constantly feeling that the idyllic pool and glade are much more than their supposed to be. This quickly is confirmed and transitions into the fear of the supernatural when all the food the two families have brought along begins to rot.

The filmmakers make the very smart decision to reveal that this point that the mother and the business partner have been having an affair for a while now. This father stumbles upon the
two of them in the forest and elects to keep the information to himself. The rotting food and
general decay of the glade become metaphors for the decaying dynamics of the family.

This is explored further when the older brother cuts his finger, which immediately
becomes infected. The tension for the fear for the body escalates very quickly from these
moments. In short order the business partner dies from fish eaten from the pool and the older
brother’s finger turns gangrenous and must be amputated.

*The Pool* uses all of these elements to comment on the family’s transgression of being in
a place where they aren’t supposed to be. When the source of the supernatural is revealed to be
the ghost of a woman who drowned in the pool it also brings a sexually repressed undertone into
the mix. The drowned ghost is requiring someone in the family to sacrifice the business partner’s
daughter because she is a virgin.

Furthermore, the film sets up—in opposition to each other—the virginal character and the
mad male figure, in the form of the father. Lusting after for the drowned ghost, who appears in
the form of a nude woman to draw him in, after he discovers his wife’s affair the father makes
very subtle and then increasingly blatant moves to keep the business partner’s daughter a virgin
so that he can sacrifice her. This is a classically Gothic plot device, one that forces the audience
to side with the younger brother, who is stuck squarely in the middle of listening to the male
authority figure in his life and helping out the innocent girl he secretly pines for.

*The Pool* hit on more of the pillars than any other film I saw during my time at the film
festivals. I found it of note that it was an international film rather than an UK cinematic offering
that adhered so strictly to the framework. What this suggests perhaps, is that UK filmmakers use
these pillars as a starting point, sort of horror cinema DNA, and then seek to move outwardly and
evolve. It was during this screening that I was most acutely aware of the audience’s reactions;
something I also think speaks to the films intentional Gothic styling. Every gasp and jump was felt throughout the auditorium and as a result I left the film not feeling as though I’d put myself through a harrowing journey, but instead as if my friends and I had just stepped off the same rollercoaster.
Screenplay

My research into the contemporary horror mindset and offering completed I went out to create my own vision of what a horror film would look like. Because I was so familiar with the Gothic I decided to do a traditional Gothic style plot in a contemporary setting.
The Garden

By

Nathaniel Gingrich
FADE IN:

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

A suitcase is being rolled across a sidewalk. It is gripped by all-American-girl-with-an-alternative-streak, KARA, 18. The suitcase has the airport tags still on it. Printed on the tag is ORD and next to it is a luggage tag in the shape of an American Flag.

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - AFTERNOON

Kara sits with one hand supporting her face. In front of her a woman, mid 40’s speaks.

WELCOME SPEAKER
All international students staying longer than a term should have applied for a tier-4 visa...

Around Kara, British students ignore the speaker at the front of the room.

INT. DORM ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Kara enters her room with her suitcase behind her. She takes a single look around and then begins to unpack. She removes much of the general college items: clothes, toiletry items which she sets on the sink in the room, books, and a framed picture of her family.

Kara glances at the window. The curtains, made of a heavy black-out material, are closed. She pulls them open to reveal a view of the garden. Her room is located on the second story.

The sun has begun to set and the world is enveloped in the blue of pre-dusk. She stares a moment, transfixed at the high, shaped hedges and perimeter wall of orange bricks. Then a KNOCK at the door, followed by it opening behind her. DAVID, 18 and mischievous, peeks through the opening.

DAVID
Hey, we’re all starting pre-drinks downstairs if you want to come.

Kara shifts to see him.
KARA
Oh, yeah I’ll be right down.

She turns once more to the garden before following him out the door.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

A group has gathered around the table. Kara sits next to David. They are joined by seven other people who are housemates. Two other older students also sit at the table, separated by matching shirts that say "Fresher Mentor." The first is LILY, 20, pretty in an I’m-older-than-you-and-unattainable way. The other is EWAN, 19 and obviously a footballer. On the table is evidence of the consumption so far.

The housemates sit facing the mentors, giving the older students their undivided attention.

DAISY
I had him first year, he’s all right once you figure out he teaches exactly what’s on the syllabus.

HOUSEMATE 1
Can you meet with them outside lecture?

EWAN
Oh, yeah, I’ve gone to the pub with mine loads of times.

KARA
You meet with your professors outside of class?

EWAN
Course, we do. We just grab a drink.

KARA
And that’s totally fine?

Both of the mentors nod. Kara, surprised by their comments and nonchalance, casts glances around the room for help. She receives a few looks from others at the table. She looks uneasy. David breaks the silence.
DAVID
So where are we going tonight?

DAISY
Well the plan is to hit Fibbers first, then Revs and probably end up at The Walnut Room.

Kara is still uncomfortable. The cultural differences may be more than she imagined.

EXT. ROAD BY THE GARDEN – NIGHT

The group walks past one of the walls of the garden. Kara’s uneasiness seems to fade with the more she drinks. She pats the wall of the garden with her hand.

KARA
So, what is this place?

DAISY
Everyone calls it The Quiet Place. It’s the garden that was leftover from the mansion that used to be here.

A HOOT from behind her and some GLASS BREAKING, she looks slightly concerned, but turns back to Kara.

DAISY
Now the Uni basically uses it as a place for students to study. But, every now and then if there’s like a big gala or something, they have a party there.

The drunken members of the group catch up to them.

KARA
So we can use it whenever we want?

DAISY
Yeah, of course, some people do. I like it. Just feels nice in there.

David, clearly intoxicated, breaks into the conversation.

DAVID
Seems like a good place to have sex.

Daisy grins at him.
DAISY
Well, I’m sure it’s happened.

Kara gives the garden one last look as the group rounds the corner.

INT. DORM ROOM - MORNING

Kara lies in bed the morning after. Soft light filters in from the window next to her. She is a little groggy from the night before but gets up and opens the blinds. Down below her, the garden seems to look up. It’s as if there is a presence outside her window.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Kara enters the kitchen. David is slumped over a table, a plate of half-finished toast and jam in front of him. A couple of housemates move around fixing their own breakfast. Kara sits at the table. David looks up.

DAVID
Morning.

KARA
Morning. How’d the rest of the night go?

DAVID
Well, I woke up bullock-naked with our mentor beside me. So you know, could be worse.

KARA
Oh, is she still here?

DAVID
Wasn’t Daisy. Was the other one.

KARA
Ewan?

DAVID
(sheepishly)
Yeah.

Kara laughs.

KARA
Well, it had to happen to someone. Here I was thinking that it was the girls we had to keep away from him.
She pauses, the laughter dying, and looks out the kitchen window.

    KARA
    Hey, I was going to go see about reading in The Quiet Place today. You wanna come?

David senses an opportunity.

    DAVID
    Yeah, sure.

EXT. THE GARDEN - MORNING

Kara and David enter the garden through a small cottage building on the side. Inside the garden seems larger in both space and height. The walls loom around them. It is not a maze or labyrinth but there are numerous corners, turns, and hideyholes. Light does not seem to give much illumination here, as if the hedges themselves are sucking it up and preventing it from escaping. Kara has a book with her. David does not.

    KARA
    Well, this is, you know, beautiful.

David begins to explore the space.

    DAVID
    It’s not bad, yeah?

Kara turns a corner and finds a place where the light seems to be brighter. She begins to read contently while David walks through the garden. He is uninterested in his surroundings. The topiary and hedges loom over him. David appears in front of Kara, interrupting her reading. Kara doesn’t look up.

    KARA
    You should’ve brought a book.

    DAVID
    Term hasn’t started yet. We don’t even have lectures until next week.

    KARA
    You don’t have to be in lectures to enjoy reading.

David places his hand in the middle of Kara’s book and lowers it.
DAVID
But, then I couldn’t look at you.

Kara begins to realize that David may have more on his mind than reading.

KARA
Listen David, that’s not happening with me. And especially not here.

The garden seems to have become one shade darker, even though it is still mid-morning at the latest. David continues to look at Kara.

KARA
I’m serious, David. It’s not happening.

David blinks and shakes his head a little.

DAVID
Hey, no worries, I get it.

David looks tense and uneasy.

DAVID
You know, I think I overdid it last night. And I’m feeling a bit poorly. Think I’m gonna head back.

KARA
(clipped)
Sure, whatever you think is best.

David leaves the garden, shaking his head.

INT. THE GARDEN - AFTERNOON (A HALF HOUR LATER)

Kara is still reading. She looks up and inhales the beauty around her. She breathes out and her shoulders drop. She is comfortable. Kara pulls her hair out of the pony tail and continues to read.

INT. THE GARDEN - AFTERNOON (10 MINUTES LATER)

The light changes and Kara gets up to leave.

She follows exactly the path she entered, and has seen David take out. The light grows dimmer. A slight layer of fall fog begins to form. She takes a couple turns. She gives a look of concern.
She looks around confused. The fog thickens, she cannot see the hedges or cottage anymore. She begins to panic. Kara charges in one direction into the mist, her arms outstretched.

Kara hits the hedges and scrapes her fingers on the edge of the brick cottage. She grabs the doorknob and runs through the door.

It’s palpably brighter outside of the garden. The fog remains in The Quiet Place.

INT. BATHROOM – AFTERNOON

The bathroom is very small - just a door with a shower and toilet behind it. On the back of the door is a mirror. The light is set on a timer next to the door frame.

Kara enters and turns the timer. As soon as the knob is twisted the room is bathed in a yellow glow and the timer begins to tick down.

This is not an erotic scene, more just the performance of a daily task. A ritual to take her mind off the slight unease of The Quiet Place has instilled in her. There’s a KNOCK.

DAVID
Hey, Kara, how much longer?

Kara sighs, exasperated.

KARA
Why?

DAVID
I’ve got a date tonight. Just wanted to hop in before I left.

Kara makes a face and then refuses to answer.

DAVID
I...uh...I’m sorry about earlier.

He shuffles away, uncomfortable. Kara returns to washing her hair. The timer is near the end. She shuts off the water.

The timer stops. The lights click off and it’s pitch black. Kara is in the middle of drying her hair.

KARA
Shit.

A woman’s SCREAM fills the room.
The lights pop back on. Kara stands shivering and crouched next to the door. Her hand trembles on the twisted timer.

INT. KITCHEN - DUSK

Kara sits at the table picking at her fingers. There is a plate of half-eaten food sitting in front of her. She is uneasy and gloomy.

Daisy enters carrying a bottle of wine that she sets on top of the fridge. She shivers slightly and shuts the window. The Quiet Place is in the background. Daisy turns to Kara and pulls up short of the fridge.

DAISY
Whoa, you all right?

Kara looks up.

KARA
You’re here already? I thought you were coming later after your date?

Daisy grabs two wine glasses from the sink but KARA waves her off. Daisy shrugs and pours both glasses anyway. Positioning them in front of herself. She sits across the table from Kara.

DAISY
I’m back already. Wasn’t that excited about it anyway. We just went to the Freshers Week deal but it was completely dead.

KARA
So, he’s cool?

DAISY
Yeah, he was all right. Smart, funny, had a pulse.

KARA
You gonna see him again?

DAISY
Nah.

Kara cocks her eyebrow. Daisy shrugs.

DAISY
It’s Freshers week. These dates are half the reason I do this.
Kara suddenly stares into Daisy’s eyes.

DAISY
What’s going on?

KARA
How old is the Uni?

DAISY
Uhhh, I dunno 40-50 years. It’s actually pretty young for a university.

KARA
But the city’s old?

DAISY
Oh, yeah, the city’s ancient. The village is even older. Now all that’s left really is the garden.

Kara pauses for a moment, picking at her nails again.

KARA
You ever hear of anything weird going on here?

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Kara stumbles into the room. She is clearly drunk.

The blinds are open. She goes to close them and looks out at the garden. As usual The Quiet Place dominates the scene. It completely grabs her attention. She stares at it.

From the The Quiet Place the fog starts to creep forward out of the hedges. First it stays within the confines of the topiary before finally starting to creep towards Kara and the dorm.

Kara breathes heavily and slams the window closed, locks it, and pulls the the blinds shut.

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Kara sleeps. The blinds let a small shaft of light through.

Moments later, the blinds open by themselves, the window as well. Fog pours into the room. The same SCREAM fills the air.
Kara awakens. The fog is gone. The blinds closed. Still a little drunk, she sits up without looking at the window and locks the door at the foot of her bed. She lays back down. Now assuming the same position, she closes her eyes.

VOICE
Why did you lock the door?

The voice comes from behind Kara near her desk. There is movement at the desk. Kara’s eyes fly open.

INT. DORM ROOM - MORNING

Kara rolls over looking around the room. She leaps to the window and pulls the blinds open. The window is unlocked and open.

EXT. ROAD BY THE GARDEN - MORNING

Kara walks by the garden, backpack slung over her shoulder. Signs for the "First Day Poster Sale" are hung and pillars boards. Small groups of friends move around. Kara walks with two others.

FRIEND 1
So, not a bad first day.

KARA
Yeah, seems like classes should be alright.

FRIEND 2
You mean lectures.

Kara laughs.

KARA
You’re right, lectures.

Kara moves from the center of the group to the outside to be as far from the garden as possible. But she can’t help looking over her shoulder at it as she passes.

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Kara sits with her head in her hands. Behind her through the window of the kitchen is The Quiet Place. Its hedges and topiary loom in the background.

Kara looks out the window at the garden.
Something starts to move.

The fog emanates again. Kara backs up in horror as the garden begins to threaten her inside her own house. Kara stands against the wall, her eyes wide with fear.

Out of the garden, a WOMAN IN WHITE approaches. She is in her 40's, black hair pulled in a tight bun. Her face is chalk white, her lips blue. The SCREAM fills the air around her. Kara begins to cry.

There is a CLATTER, Ewan and Daisy rush in.

The two mentors crouch down next to Kara and begin to shake her.

EWAN
Kara, Kara. Are you okay?

Kara continues crying, gazing out at The Quiet Place.

DAISY
Kara, honey, calm down.

They continue to console her.

INT. DORM ROOM - MORNING

Kara is staring out her window at the garden. It looks smaller. Kara sets her jaw and grimaces.

EXT. THE GARDEN - NIGHT

Kara moves quickly into the garden. She is dressed head to toe in black, and checking over her shoulder constantly. She bends down at the base of the one of the larger topiary.

She has matches. Behind her fog begins to form.

She tries several times to light the garden on fire, but the matches keep sputtering out the moment they hit the wet wood. The fog gets thicker and moves towards her. She begins to panic.

From her bag Kara removes a bottle of lighter fluid. She sprays down the bushes. She attempts to light the matches. This time there is a dim flicker.

Legs clad in a white dress approach Kara from out of the fog.

She notices them over the shoulder.
She pours more lighter fluid on the small flickering flame. It begins to grow and then sputters out again. The Woman in White is behind her now. She looks up and runs.

EXT. DORM HOUSE - MORNING

Kara is unconscious in front of the house. David shakes her.

DAVID
Kara. Kara.

She doesn’t move. David becomes more forceful.

DAVID
Kara.

She slowly begins to wake. Then scrambles back.

Kara is still dressed in her black clothes from the night before. She still carries her bag. There is a large dark stain and a strong stench of lighter fluid. David backs up.

DAVID
Kara...are you okay?

Kara doesn’t answer. Instead she takes quick stock of herself, moving her hands over her body. As if suddenly realizing something is missing, she spins quickly behind her and gazes at the garden.

It stares back at her, as perfect and omnipresent as ever.

David notices her clothes.

DAVID
Why are you wearin’--Holy shit, Kara, your clothes are singed.

Kara looks at her clothes.

DAVID
And you’re burned!

Kara waves him off with the her burnt arm, and winces.

KARA
I’m fine.

David reaches for her arm. A pink sear runs the length of her forearm. She jerks her arm back.
KARA  
Listen, David, I’m fine. I’m good, okay?

David is a little shaken.

DAVID  
All right yeah, I get it. I’ll see you later.

David heads off.

Kara looks at her arm and grimaces, then looks away. She appears clearly frustrated and angry. Agitated, she moves back inside.

INT. BATHROOM - AFTERNOON

Kara is in her bathroom. She moves out of the shower and in front of the mirror. The steam swirls around her. It starts to grow thicker, almost like the fog that emanates from The Quiet Place. She looks down and fiddles with a wash cloth.

Just as she looks up her image in the mirror blinks. Kara lets out a cry.

KARA  
Jesus.

Slowly the MIRROR KARA holds up her arm. It shows the burn that Kara received the night before.

KARA  
What the hell...

Mirror Kara smiles. The burn on Mirror Kara’s arm begins to grow pink and red as if it’s being burned all over again. The red area begins to grow and then the rest of Mirror Kara breaks out in flames, starting from the spot on her arm.

She screams as the flames consume her.

MIRROR KARA  
Please. Please. Let me out. Oh my God it hurts so bad.

Mirror Kara throws her burning hands against the edges of the mirror. She pounds on the glass from the other side. Kara screams and backs up against the shower stall.
KARA

God damn!

Kara sits against the shower stall and cries. Steam flows out of the mirror.

EXT. THE GARDEN - NIGHT

KARA approaches the garden. She is dressed in regular clothes.

Her hair is pulled back in a pony tail, and a white bandage wraps around her forearm where The Quiet Place has burned her.

Kara approaches the cottage and stops before the entrance. She sets her jaw.

Kara enters. She seems determined. Once again on the inside the garden and cottage seem somehow bigger than they were on the outside. She doesn’t really know what she’s looking for only that she will find it here.

KARA

(under her breath)

Okay, here we go.

Kara pushes open the door and enters The Quiet Place. It becomes apparent just how small Kara is once she’s inside it.

All the sound seems to have been sucked out of the air. She begins shouting to the walls of the topiary.

KARA

All right, I’m here. Something you want from me?

The garden remains silent and still. Kara continues to shout.

KARA

What? You never actually had someone come here?

She begins to laugh, a little crazed, frightened.

KARA

Yeah, not so tough when I come to you, huh?
Kara moves further into The Quiet Place searching through the topiary and around the corners. She reaches the bush that she attempted to burn the other night.

The bush is blackened at the base but green sprouts have already sprung around the edges. The garden is healing itself. A noise comes from over her shoulder.

Kara gets up and whirls around, searching for the source of the noise.

Behind her, the fog starts to pour out from the hedge with the burned base.

Kara wheels around the corner but still nothing is visible.

She enters the main vestibule of The Quiet Place, searching anywhere for the source of the noise. The Woman in White moves from one topiary to the other behind Kara’s back.

The fog moves towards Kara from out of the hedges. She backs up afraid.

KARA
Oh, shit.

Kara is up against a hedge. The moon’s lights illuminates how afraid she is, her eyes are wide. From out of the hedge, the Woman in White’s face appears next to Kara’s.

WOMEN IN WHITE
Boo.

Kara screams and jumps into the middle of the garden’s vestibule.

She has nowhere to run. She is trapped out in the open. The fog has entirely surrounded her. The Woman in White approaches from out of the hedge.

She gets closer and closer to Kara. Kara has no other choice. She runs.

She hits the fog at full force and makes it in a few steps before crashing into a hedge. She rolls off of it and keeps going. Her face is scratched down the side.

The Woman in White’s SCREAMS echo from all around Kara. She circles around the topiary and keeps going further into the The Quiet Place. The fog deepens in thickness. The ground starts to ripple close to the hedges. Kara screams.
Arms crusted in dirt and mud erupt from the ground. They reach for Kara’s ankles attempting to trip her and hold her down. She leaps over them searching for something, anything to hide in.

Kara rounds a corner and finds herself face to face with The Woman in White. The Woman opens her mouth and SCREAMS again. She throws Kara against the brick edge of the cottage, where she crumples.

The Woman in White approaches. She is taking her time savoring each second. Kara pulls herself up, willing her body to keep going. She makes for the cottage door, but it bursts into flames.

Kara has no way out.

Kara looks at the corner where a topiary and the hedge wall join. She wills her legs into motion and she runs pell-mell as hard as she can at it.

She enters the hedge at a full tilt. The arms that have come out of the ground reach and grab at her feet but she kicks them away. The branches of the hedge grab at her clothes and scratch at her skin. Several tearing it open. The Woman in White SCREAMS again and reaches in with a pale arm, snatching at Kara’s ponytail. The Woman grabs hold.

Kara’s head snaps back. Kara screams.

    KARA
    God damn!

    THE WOMAN IN WHITE
    Come here.

Kara keeps pushing harder and harder to get out of the hedges. Its branches seem to dig in deeper. She wrenches her head forward with all her might. Several strands of hair are left in The Woman’s hand.

Kara makes one last final push, kicking the arms reaching out of the ground one last time. She comes stumbling out of the garden.

Kara’s clothes are torn, her body is scratched and bloody but she has made it out. Behind her The Quiet Place sits solemnly. It’s as usual smaller on the outside. Over Kara’s bleeding shoulder, the sun is rising.

    FADE OUT.
THE END
Personal Commentary

My decisions in The Garden where based entirely on the manipulation of the three pillars of fear and the belief that they create an effective and scary film. I wanted the film to be more Terror-Gothic than Horror-Gothic and for this reason I chose to include more than one character, even though this may be non-traditional for a short film.

First, I want to address the choice of location and characters in the film. It should be noted that when I first set out to write this film I had no intention of setting it in England, or for it to have a very foreboding atmosphere for that matter. When I started the creation of the screenplay I wanted to set in on a train in Middle America. But once I arrived in England and began my schooling at the University of York I became transfixed with setting a ghost story in one of the many traditional gardens that litter the countryside.

The Quiet Place is in fact a real place at the University of York and is very similar in construction as the place I have described. It is not, as far as I know, haunted. The house in which Kara lives overlooks the garden is also a real place though it is actually a facsimile of the house I lived in during my time there. The student housing which overlooks the garden is in fact more traditional dorm style rooms rather than a standalone house or flat.

The character of Kara was someone I mulled over for quite a bit. It was important to me that I honor the Gothic and horror traditions of the female lead character but I also wanted to make it very clear that she was not a person who allowed very much to “happen to” her. Instead I chose her to be a proactive character, this is why when the garden begins to threaten her and invade her space she acts first, attempting to burn it down.

These choices of location and character were again, not something that I came into the project with already floating around my head. I became inspired by the location and landscape of
the place I was in. In this way I have come to believe that in a certain sense England has the ability to prime the author to write Gothically. It is a place in which these pillars fall shockingly neatly into place and form a strong skeleton from which we can hang our writing.

I’ve already delved a bit into the fear of the location aspect of *The Garden* but now I want to take some space to address it further. It was very important to me when creating the screenplay that the location of the supernatural events become as much of a character as Kara herself. This is one of the reasons I think the most effective ghost stories have stood the test of time. The Overlook hotel in *The Shining* (1980) is given all of the space in the frame; the human characters are quiet small. I wanted this same effect for *The Garden* which is why Kara often finds herself dwarfed by the hedges and why The Quiet Place’s first act of malevolence is to extend the door further around one corner. This is also why at the end of the film when Kara has burst through the hedge to the other side, the garden seems to have shrunk. Victory makes challenges seem smaller in hindsight.

Fear for the supernatural was something which I wished to highlight as well, and based on my conversations with Dr. Thurston, I knew I wanted to play with the idea of the transition line between the natural and supernatural. *The Garden* was always going to be a ghost story, not only because these were the films that always scared me the most when I was a child but because of the heavy relationship they have with the Gothic and the fact that they age well. The problem with the ghost story is that most of the scares have been done before, something goes bump, a face suddenly appears behind the protagonist. The challenge is finding new tricks that reinvent the old ones.

For much of this I based on personal experience, the scene where Kara gets up and locks the door only for the voice to speak behind her actually happened to me. Only in real life I had
forgotten my friend was sleeping over and it was his voice rather than a ghostly entity, but for the few seconds which I had no one to attribute it to, my blood ran cold. The shower scene as well was something I had personally experienced; the lights in college bathrooms often run on timers and will sometimes go off when you are in the middle of bathing yourself. The inclusion of the Woman in White’s scream was just the addition of an old scare tactic.

The fear for the body was the most difficult to apply in writing form. When the final version of the film is up on screen, I think it’s easy to know exactly what the stakes are, but it’s sometime difficult to get this across in screenplay format. But I wanted it to be very clear that Kara was sacrificing a lot of herself whenever she chose to do battle with the garden. Furthermore, I wanted it to appear that whatever you lose to the garden will in some way aid it, which is the reasoning for Kara’s burn and the garden’s regrowth. Kara is an incredibly strong and proactive character but her rash decision to try to destroy the evil in her life instead of overcoming it leads to her own injury and its growth in power. When she returns to The Quiet Place with this question taught, she leaves part of herself behind, but is ultimately triumphant.
Conclusion

The Gothic and the modern, the Victorian and the contemporary, through my project I discovered that they are more connected than I ever considered before. The truth of the matter is that this study became a study in fear. I was seeking to look at what it is that creates fear for entertainment purposes.

What I discovered though, was that what scared people in the 1790’s are the same things that scare us today. The human consciousness has a built in fear for the spooky house, the unattributed movements, and the possibility of bodily harm. We want to be shown, or at least have the possibility of being shown, what it is beyond the doorway. People are curious and that curiosity brings with it the possibility of terror.

Modern films still build on the pillars of fear, as is shown through movies like, *Let Us Prey*, *The Forgotten*, and *De Poel*. These are elements that are unable to be removed from the DNA of horror films. Certain pieces can bend these pillars or focus on one more than the others but one of them will always be present within any film that bills itself under the horror banner.

The Gothic’s dedication to the popular culture, to the masses is what made it famous in the first place. Gothic fiction was a genre for the people, by the people, and horror has grown to follow this trend. It is because of this that the pillars of fear carry through and connects one genre to the other. It was purpose-built to be shared among the crowds. With this in mind, filmmakers and writers can continue to make films that push the boundaries of what audience members can handle, whilst staying true to the expansive experience that terror is.
Bibliography


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Suggested Reading and Viewing

Books:

The Woman in Black by Susan Hill
The Monk by Matthew Lewis
Frankenstein by Mary Shelley
Dracula by Bram Stoker
House of Leaves by Mark Z. Danielewski
The Turn of the Screw by Henry James
Horror Cinema edited by Taschen
The Biology of Horror by Jack Morgan
The Literature of Terror: The Modern Gothic Vol. 1 and 2 by David Punter
Gothic by Fred Botting

Films

The Innocents (1961)
The Shining (1980)
Insidious (2010)
De Poel (2014)
The Forgotten (2014)
Let Us Prey (2014)
The Haunting (1963)

Stage Play

The Woman in Black
Appendix

These are the questions I asked the experts when interviewing them followed by the questions I asked myself when viewing the films.

Questions for the experts:

1.) Why do you think horror continues to be an effective genre? Why is the genre still around?

2.) Do you feel horror films have grown out of Gothic literature?

3.) If so, do you believe that an adapted film is limited by its source novel?

4.) Are there elements that translate from Gothic Literature to horror films? What about these three (fear for the body, of the location, and of the supernatural) pillars? If so, is the use of these elements what makes a horror film successful?

5.) Do you think that there are Gothic elements in all horror films?

6.) Jack Morgan, author of The Biology of Horror: Gothic Literature and Film defined Gothic horror as being heavily involved in the body (see Morgan). Do you agree? Or would you say Gothic’s main influence is one of the other pillars?

7.) Is the location important in horror films? If so, why?

8.) Is a supernatural presence important to horror films? Is it necessary?

9.) Why do we continue to see examples of these three pillars? Why are we still afraid of the same things? Is the genre exhausted?”

Personal Questions when watching Horror films:

1.) Are the three pillars of Gothic literature elements present in the film? If so, are all three pillars present? Which ones are or aren’t?
2.) Is a certain pillar focused on more than the others? What might this mean for the film? How does it affect plot, tone, narrative structure and story?

3.) Is the film an adaptation of a source Gothic horror novel? If so what elements from the novel are present?

4.) Are there any references or “shout outs” to past Gothic novels or horror films?

5.) Dissect the director’s camera work relative to the three pillars; is the focus on the character, the supernatural, the location? Or, is there another focus?

6.) How do these elements translate to the screen in terms of execution? For example, is there a literal word-for-word adaptations?

7.) To what degree is the adaptation of the film from a novel? Are there any shots that explicitly reflect speakers (or author’s) point-of-view or staging?