

What is Horror?

Fundamentally, the genre of horror aims to deeply disturb, frighten, and unsettle. It challenges our fears and opens our eyes to the unknown, making us face not only what scares us but also what we might be capable of when we're really scared. True horror does more than just make us jump out our socks; it causes us to question our sense of security and confront unpleasant aspects of ourselves. Martin Cahill's eerie short story "*vi*", Neil Gaiman's "*Click-Clack the Rattlebag*", and "*Sundown*" Lovecraft Country are all examples of the unnerving quality of horror in various ways. Each piece not only evokes dread and fear, but also forces the audience to confront their darkest impulses, ranging from the unknowable and terrifying force of the Click-Clack in Gaiman's story to the eerie collapse of the mind in Cahill's work to the racist violence of the sundown town in Lovecraft Country. These pieces show how horror can effectively evoke our most profound fears related to identity, power, and survival. By analyzing each of these stories, we investigate how they exemplify horror by upsetting viewers and revealing not only fear but also more sinister sides of human nature.

In Neil Gaiman's "*Click-Clack the Rattlebag*", the horror comes from the frightening unknown and the dark nature of childhood fears. The story follows a boy as he tells a spine-chilling tale about the creature, Click-Clack, which lives in the dark and is said to steal children. His older sister's boyfriend, while initially skeptical, is pulled into the story, and Gaiman builds suspense through her growing discomfort. The boy's detached manner of telling the story only heightens the sense of dread, as the audience begins to feel the creeping unease of the unknown. "First they bite you, and then you go all ishy inside, and all your meat and all your brains and everything except your bones and skin turns wet, milk-shakey stuff and then the Click-clack sucks it out through the holes where your eyes used to be." (Gaiman), his casual tone

making the creature all the more terrifying. The repetition of sound builds rhythm that becomes uncomfortable, making the reader feel the presence of something lurking just beyond sight. This plays into the idea of horror being about the uncomfortable, as the story unnerves the audience through its sinister buildup. The story reveals how the mind creates fears from what is unseen, and ultimately, it turns out that the boy himself is the creature he has described. "It was perfectly dark, now, but the opening door disturbed the air, and I heard things rattle gently, like dry bones in thin bags, in the slight wind. Click. Clack. Click. Clack. Like that." (Gaiman) "I would have pulled away, then, if I could, but small, firm fingers pulled me forward, unrelentingly, into the dark." (Gaiman). This twist, revealing the boy as the monster, forces the reader to confront the fear of becoming something monstrous or being complicit in the dark forces that lurk in the world. Ultimately, "*Click-Clack the Rattlebag*" exemplifies how horror is used to tap into our deepest, most primal feelings, revealing that what terrifies us the most may be lurking within ourselves.

In "*√i*" by Martin Cahill, the horror emerges from the loss of control over the mind and body, a physiological terror that strips away humanity. The story's eerie atmosphere is defined by its unsettling exploration of a world where individuals are consumed by a dark, unknown force. As the story unfolds, the characters, especially the new kid, are caught in an eerie moment when the world shifts around them. The students, while trying to survive the sudden appearance of "The Dark", witness the transformation of their peers, where the body is rendered helpless while the mind is taken. "His head drops forward, dead weight on a body that finds the mind suddenly gone," (Cahill). The new kid's body becomes a hollow shell, moving aimlessly, his mind completely gone. The horror lies not only in the disappearance of the mind but in the terrifying way that one can be left helpless in the face of something beyond comprehension. The students,

who remain in the hall, try to cope with the darkness outside, but the creeping fear is palpable as they face a force they can't control or understand. The imagery of the "new kid's body slamming into the door" (Cahill) and the subsequent moaning paints a disturbing picture of how this loss of self and humanity is terrifying. The characters' reactions are less about the physical destruction of their environment and about the horror of losing their humanity to an incomprehensible force. Ultimately, "*√i*" demonstrates how psychological horror can disturb us by exposing the terrifying loss of control, where the mind and body no longer work together.

In "*Sundown*" from Lovecraft Country, the horror is tied directly to racial violence of a sundown town, blending real world terror with supernatural elements. The characters, primarily Black individuals, in a town where the threat of violence looms simply because of the color of their skin. The presence of the white townsfolk, who are fully aware of the town's racial laws, create a sense of dread and foreboding. The horror in "*Sundown*" arises not only from the looming supernatural threats but also from the very real threat of racial violence, a chilling reflection of the systemic racism in the world. "We don't want your kind here," (Green) the townsfolk imply, echoing the historical fears that black individuals faced in places where they were unwelcome. As the episode progresses, the supernatural horror amplifies the racial horror, with the supernatural presence making it clear that characters are at the mercy of forces beyond their control. "The sun was setting, and we needed to leave," (Green). This urgency reflects not just the supernatural threat, but the historical urgency black people faced when caught in sundown towns. The horror here is twofold; the oppressive, real-world racism, and looming, mysterious forces that threaten the characters survival. In combining racial violence and supernatural elements, "*Sundown*" serves as a potent reminder that horror can reveal not just what threatens us from the outside, but the societal structures that constrain us.

In conclusion, horror as a genre serves to expose not only our deepest fears but our darkest impulses, and the works examined “*Click Clack the Rattlebag*, *Vi*, and *Sundown*” demonstrate how horror can disturb, discomfort and force us to confront the unknown, Gaiman’s tale reveals the terrifying power of the imagination and how it can manifest into something monstrous. Cahill’s psychological horror demonstrates the sheer terror of losing oneself, while Lovecraft Country combines the violence of racism with the supernatural to disturb us at the deepest level. Each story does more than just evoke fear; they challenge the audience to reflect on the darker aspects of human nature and existence. Horror, in its most powerful form, is not merely about what scares us, but about what it reveals about our capacity for fear, violence, and survival. The genre forces us to face the discomforting truths about ourselves and the world around us. Horror is not just about what we fear, but about how we fear shapes and reveals the darkest parts of our humanity.

Work Cited

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