

Title:

Works From the True Masters of Fear and Anxiety

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735

Summary:

Fear and anxiety are among the fundamental things that are part of the collective human psyche, which easily explains the existence of the horror genre. However, horror, dread, and anxiety are not easily captured in the written word, such that most horror stories lose their "bite" after time. There are, however, quite a few that endure and have come to be considered among the finest examples of horror in existence.

Keywords:

anxiety

Article Body:

Fear is part of the fundamental core of human existence, as connected to the basic functions of survival and the psyche as the survival instinct or the need to mate. Fear and anxiety, therefore, are among the staples of any genre that deems itself fit to entertain the masses, an art form to be mastered in the hands of a true artiste. Fear, dread, and anxiety are all integral components of any successful horror story, for example, but not everyone who writes horror manages to get the mix of the important elements --- pacing, plot, and characterization --- all of which must be just right to create a classic that will frighten generations long after the first copy was printed. There are a few that manage to accomplish the difficult feat of being eternal in their horror and long-lasting in their ability to turn anxiety into outright terror.

Edgar Allan Poe, author of "Annabel Lee" and "The Fall of the House of Usher", is easily recognized as one of the foremost masters of horror and the macabre. His works have inspired terror and anxiety in many individuals, primarily through the use of heavy psychological tones, as opposed to the gore and blood themes used and abused by writers of his time. Poe's collected works easily counts as some of the most frightening material ever written, especially now, in an age where horror movies are relegated to two hours of bloodshed and senseless violence, lacking any true horror and relying solely on shock value to appear "scary." Poe also stands out as being among the few who can make even the most mundane things seem utterly terrifying, a feat emulated by Stephen King and several Japanese horror authors, but never truly duplicated.

In a completely different vein of horror from his predecessors, and arguably creating a sub-genre of horror through his works, H. P. Lovecraft also stands out. His works, while lacking in humanity, are difficult to see as anything but terrifying, particularly because of the apparent lack of humanity in them. In contrast to writers of previous generations, Lovecraft focused more on the truly monstrous, ignoring the human element that most horror writers tended to insert into their works since the days of the Gothic era. His stories were littered with monsters that knew neither morality nor mercy, seeing humanity as insignificant insects and, in Lovecraft's malignant world of ancient races and Elder Gods, humanity was insignificant. He also brought back something from the Gothic horror era, showing his readers that knowledge, even just a little knowledge, can lead to the most terrifying of discoveries. This is perhaps best exemplified by the so-called "Cthulhu Mythos," a collection of stories that centered around Lovecraft's anti-mythological beings.

Among the most enduring horror classics in the world is that of Shelley's "Frankenstein," which combines the elements of horror with the intrinsic questions that plagued morality and philosophy at the time. In some ways, the story is one that puts a new spin on the old ghost story, in that the "ghost" is inevitably caused by the actions of mortal men who meddled in things they were not meant to. The story, aside from being a genuine tale of terror, also took on the role of a lesson in morality and the limits to just how far medical science could go. Prolonging life is one thing, but bringing back the dead is another thing entirely, which is one of the subtle messages of the novel. The underlying question of whether or not Frankenstein's creature is the monster, or if it is Frankenstein himself, also contributes to making the story a memorable, chilling tale.

However, very few stories can truly stand up against the pure terror and the subtle anxiety and dread caused by Bram Stoker's infamous novel, "Dracula." The novel is a hallmark of the Gothic horror era, presenting a villain of potentially epic scope in the guise of a remarkable gentleman and nobleman. It deviated from other vampire stories of the time in that the vampire, Dracula, was not monstrous in appearance. He looked every inch a master and nobleman, establishing the "lord of the night" archetype that would be a stock image of vampire characters in literature for centuries to come. It also had all the elements necessary to both frighten readers and keep them coming back for more, marking it as the most enduring horror novel in history.