

# Horror genre essay

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Film Genre Report Horror is considered an ancient art form, delivering thrills and telling stories of the dark and forbidden side of life and on the contrary, death. Horror's most far back influences go to the year of 1235, where ideas of witchcraft took position in these ancient societies, it wasn't until the seventeenth century these beliefs amongst society faded. By the 1400s artists begin producing paintings of a nightmarish impact, and illustrations and tales of supernatural forces begin publishing.

Development continues throughout time and by 1800 'Wake Not the Dead,' by Johann Ludwig Tieck becomes the first known English vampire story when it is translated from German. By 1910 the first Frankenstein movie is made, with Thomas Edison having much input, and as the expansion in technology continued we have seen the production of many horror films in our society today. The top 5 Horror films of the 21st Century include Jurassic Park, The Sixth Sense, Jaws, I Am Legend and Ghostbusters, with these films engrossing millions for their production.

Horror films attempt to extract the emotions of fear, horror and terror from viewers. Their plots frequently involve themes of death, the supernatural or mental illness and include a central villain. When comparing old horror films to new films, it is evident that the films reflect the social, cultural and technological values of their time. When evaluating the 1963 film *The Birds*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, there is much proof of how the values and attitudes of portrayed within the film may be seen as anachronistic in our contemporary society.

The film shows social values such as the women in the film being in danger, typically known as a “damsel in distress.” The woman is unprotected and cannot fend for herself without the help of the strong, masculine man within the film. When comparing this to a new film such as the 1999 film, *The Sixth Sense*, directed by M. Night Shyamalan, the typical social ideas are abolished. The film does not carry the idea of a woman in distress, and explores deeper meaning with family values included, rather than the typical hero and villain initiative.

Cultural values such as smoking are portrayed throughout the older film *The Birds*, as the main character frequently holds a cigarette in her hand. During the 1960s smoking was an accepted and encouraged habit, and cigarette brands were frequently sponsors of television shows. In current society, cigarettes are frowned upon and the only advertising to do with smoking are full-on campaigns demoting cigarettes, explaining the danger and risks associated with smoking, including cancer and heart disease.

When considering the technological values between older and new films, the obvious factor is special effects. When viewing *The Birds*, the underdeveloped special effects in comparison to at the present are detected with the use of simple backgrounds and the mixture of real and mechanical birds. Alfred Hitchcock's most expensive film to date (at the time) featured a stylized sound track - composed from a constant interplay of natural sounds and computer-generated bird noises.

Real birds and animatronic birds were used throughout the film; advanced rotoscoping (an animation technique in which animators trace over live-

action film movement, frame by frame) and male/female traveling mattes were used in the 20-second scene of hundreds of birds flying over an aerial view of the town. A combination of real live-action footage with hand-drawn matte paintings, in the scene of the bird-attack at the school, special effects combined the shot of the schoolhouse in the background with kids running on a treadmill in the foreground.

With the progression of technology in the late 20th century and 21st century, films such as *The Sixth Sense* have been able to use higher standards of special effects, enhancing the illusion of the 'dead,' effective camera angles and photorealistic characters. Horror movies generally have similar codes and conventions - including the symbolic, written, audio and technical codes. Symbolism is used within horror to portray an important idea. For example, within the film *The Sixth Sense*, the colour red is used to symbolise death and the colour red is seen often at moments in the film when death is significant.

Written codes include anything written on the screen, this may be subtitles, letters etc. Audio codes within horror films are a major aspect of adding suspense. Without intense music, a horror film is nothing but a mixture of moving images and words with no suspense added. Music adds to the build up of a terrifying or horrific moment, leaving the viewers on the edge of their seats. Finally, technical codes are important in creation of the film and the supernatural characters associated with horror films.

Technical codes also include the use of camera angles, which can help in adding suspense for the viewers. Camera shots such as extreme close ups

and panning shots are effective in adding tension within horror films. Overall, with the comparison of the new film *The Sixth Sense*, and the older film *The Birds*, we can effectively interpret the difference in values and attitudes portrayed from these times, and how the use of codes and conventions have influenced the portrayal of these ideas.