

# How is the theme of horror presented to the viewer up

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



The film *Sleepy Hollow* is a fantasy/gothic horror film; the rating 15 tells us it probably has some gore in it. As we watch the film, some parts could also be described as thriller. The director Tim Burton is known for his love of Hammer horror films and before starting work on this film he encouraged his team to watch Hammer horror films like "Black Sunday" and "The Fearless Vampire Killers", as this was the effect he wanted to put across in *Sleepy Hollow*. The film focuses on images of darkness, conflict, references to torture, isolation, ghosts, violence and a sense of questioning.

As far as main characters go, Burton chose an all-star cast of actors of whom he thought were suitable for the parts in *Sleepy Hollow*. Burton chose Johnny Depp to play lead character, Ichabod Crane. Depp plays a bit of over the top acting, which is the usual style of Hammer horror films. Crane is squeamish and uptight; he also has some romance in this story, but is not a typical romantic lead character. Actress Christina Ricci plays the daughter of the richest man in *Sleepy Hollow*. Katrina Van Tassel is very innocent and fond of love stories, which is why she immediately falls for Ichabod on his arrival.

Katrina seeks something more than just *Sleepy Hollow* though. Competing with Ichabod for Katrina's heart, Casper Van Dien plays Brom Van Brunt. Lady Van Tassel, Katrina's stepmother and matriarch of the Van Tassel estate, was chosen to be Miranda Richardson. As her husband, Baltus Van Tassel sees one of England's most admired actors, Michael Gambon playing the richest man in *Sleepy Hollow*. A cameo role as New York burgomaster has a great horror effect on us as actor Christopher Lee takes this part.

Lee is well known for his part as Dracula in the Hammer horror films. The horror in the film is presented through camera shots and angles, sound, lighting and editing. Fairy-tale like images throughout the film are improved by Emmanuel Lubezki's style of lighting from the set design to the costume's worn. As most of the shots are outdoor, mist was often needed; an almost black and white feel was needed, very monochromatic. The score for the film is by Danny Elfman. Danny has built up a reputation for producing scores for films of a horror genre.

Sleepy Hollow, as a film, and its soundtrack are often compared to Edward Scissorhands, but Sleepy Hollow has added an element of violence and is described as a pure horror film. For the volume and intensity needed for the music Elfman got 2 full London choirs involved. The music is very significant and to achieve the haunting sounds needed Elfman mixes both the adults and children's' choirs together. In this creepy story, Sleepy Hollow, Ichabod Crane is sent from New York on an investigation of mysterious deaths, in which all the bodies were found headless.

Crane soon realises whom everyone suspects, the Headless Horseman; the ghost of the Hessian. The film was produced in a studio and digitally reconstructed, being shot like this gives the film a sense of unreality which adds to the theme of horror and fantasy, " like a nightmare world". The cast, village sets and haunted woods all create a thrilling film for viewers to watch. In this essay I shall be taking the first eight sequences of the film and seeing how images of horror are presented in each of them and their connotations

for the viewer. From the moment we start watching the film we begin to get involved.

The first few images of the film are very important to us as they give out lots of clues of what the film will be about. We look at the opening shots of place and time, and put them in context. We look at the actors we are presented with and make assumptions about their characters and roles in the film and their relationship to each other. We look at the title of the film-the way it is worded and the style of lettering and we try to guess what genre of film it will be. We listen to the sound, which is often predominantly music at this stage, and the tone and beat of this again give us further clues as to how the film will develop.

We do all this automatically-at this time we are extremely receptive and actively involved. At the start of Sleepy Hollow we as the viewer take in the gothic style in which the titles are written and this gives us the idea the film is of a gothic/horror genre. The film starts at a slow pace; we see droplets of wax and a man and woman holding hands as a relationship of agreement. There is then a big close-up on Van Garrett's will. Showing this in a close-up shot makes us focus purely on the will, which then immediately places upon us the thought of death or anything attached to death.

The slow pace of the background music slowly builds up as the camera pans across the will, all over we see words, which represent the horror of death. Adding to these thoughts and ending the opening sequence we focus on a blood red Van Garrett crest, which seals the will. As we move on to the coach

ride, the music continues using high-pitched violins, by this we can be put "on edge". We also start to see Van Garrett's facial expressions, which begin slightly worried, and then as we hear sword strikes his expression changes to fear.

We move to an outside shot of the coach as to be introduced to the chase that is happening, but also so we can take in the surrounding where we see the background, which is dark woods with skeletal like trees everywhere, everything is very misty and eerie which creates mystery. The pace of music speeds up and drums are introduced to make a deeper sound for the chase. We get a diegetic sound of hoof beats, which make us anticipate something will happen. We then have a typical point of view, low angle shot, the lighting is dark and misty but soft on Van Garrett's face to make it look pale which creates a fearful look.

As soon as we first see a shot of a pumpkin head, the music cuts out. There is horror put across to the viewer from just seeing this shot of the pumpkin head, as its eyes and mouth are cut in with sharp, jagged edges. This is also a low angle shot, but this time it gives us the feeling that the pumpkin has some sort of power; these low angle shots are stereotypical of horror films. The background music starts up again at a high pitch but quieter, we get the sound of the headless horseman passing and then we hear a non-diegetic sound of a sword. Moments of visual horror are accompanied by louder sounds, including thunder which on its own gives a sense of horror, and music of a higher pitch and faster pace. Seeing Van Garrett's reaction hints to us what he is feeling. As we focus on the victim; Van Garrett, there is a non-diegetic

sound of a sword and the camera moves to a shot of the pumpkin head. This is a delaying tactic, another very popular feature in horror films, as it keeps the viewer in suspense and eager to find out what will happen. There is then an extreme close up of the pumpkin head with blood over it creating a feeling of unease, as we don't know what else is happening around it.

Such a close up is "unnatural" to us and therefore distorts the image in our minds. This shot with added lightening strikes imposes a very clear image of horror upon the viewer. To indicate this sequence of shots is over and a new set about to begin we get a fade out shot, where the screen fades to black. This type of shot causes us to interact by giving us time to think about what has happened. In the New York sequence there are a series of high angle shots focusing down, these shots are often used to show vulnerability.

There is not much lighting, but the little that is used is direct, this is produced by using only the key and back lights. The key light is the brightest and most influential, therefore giving the directness of the shot and the back light helps counteract the effect of the key light, this making the shot look more "rounded". There is a threatening atmosphere that is evident in gothic horror when only shadows of things are shown, these shadows can be decoded by the audience to suggest also an air of mystery, as used in the dark films from the 1940's and 1950's. They can also decode to suggest a world where there is depression and decay.

The first sound we hear are the bells ringing, this comes across as a signal of warning and becomes diegetic as the camera moves to show Crane ringing a

bell to signal he wants help. As the lighting illuminates the dead body found in the city, we are taken into a close-up to show it as an image of horror. In the courtroom the use of low-key lighting can be found, where the faces are lit from beneath (under lighting). This gives a dramatic, often distorted and also skeletal image of the faces. Low-key lighting is often seen as expressive. When Sleepy Hollow is mentioned there is almost an echo and the background music builds up.

We see more titles and as the lighting comes from behind together with low background music, we notice silhouettes of dark misty trees. These silhouettes, on their own create an air of mystery again because of the contrast of light and dark. The music gains in pitch as the coach passes. This gain in pitch often "awakes the audience" by telling them something is or going to happen. The camera traces the journey of the coach, with Crane into Sleepy Hollow, through the woods. Movement of the cameras in this way gives a feeling of unsteadiness and unease to the viewer and our brains register that all is not well within this screen world.

We get a point of view shot for Crane, showing us he probably feels threatened by his surroundings. The camera then pulls back and moves around him, this shows disorientation and even weakness on his behalf. The light then picks out "instruments of torture" as we are shown Crane's examining equipment. We are taken back into the woods again, now at nighttime, where we hear a non-diegetic wolf cry, and then there is haunting background sounds, the two choirs brought in (mentioned earlier), create

this. The lighting is very low and misty, which creates a very spooky and expressive atmosphere.

On Crane's arrival, the music increases as he sees the watchtower for the first time. The blackness of the monochrome lighting appetizers his whitely lit face, this contrasts with the background, this style of lighting adds a gloomy feel over the shot. There is then a silhouette of a house and with soft lighting against the darkness of the background a mood of mystery is created. The images of horror begin to seize, as does the intensity of the music when the meeting with the gentlemen commences. Although there is low eerie background music the main element of horror comes from the dialogue.

Words like "hell" and "terror" are used. There are close-ups on the men's highlighted faces, which draws the room in and also starts to block out the background. As the story of the Hessian is told there is a crescendo in the music and we are taken into an image of flames. We then get the image of the horseman fighting and diegetic sounds of swords, which suggest destruction and death. There is the shot of the horse alive in the flashback but because the horse is dead this is a hugely impacted image of horror placed upon the viewer.

Music from the flashback is seized by the sound of a gunshot, very common in horror films, and we see and also hear the body and head of the horseman hitting the ground. We have a high angle shot showing Crane's reaction of distress and fear. High angle shots are commonly used in horror films to



show a character is feeling vulnerable. More horror is added into the dialogue from the phrase "seeing is believing", Crane is very sceptical of this comment; this is shown in his facial expression. To conclude this sequence there is the shot of a bible that contradicts Sleepy Hollow completely.

We move from the discussion to medium angle, panning shots of Sleepy Hollow. These two types of shots are good here because they show the background and let the viewer "look around"; it is nighttime, dark and misty this all helps to create an unknown feeling for the viewer. We have a sequence of three shots, the village where we cannot see past the torch, this implies fear upon us. Then there is a close up of Jonathon Masbeth's face, to show us his reaction and as we see his eyes are lit up this suggest he is perhaps fearful. This makes the viewer feel nervous. Lastly, we see a shot of the forest from Masbeth's view; a P.

O. V shot to show this character feels threatened. The audience is taken into a sense of anticipation as the close up shots of Masbeth and the external shots of the forest are repeated, making the viewer feel the horseman could appear at any time. When we get an extreme close-up of Masbeth's eyes we start to feel uneasy and as we hear hoof beats in the distance but cannot see where these are coming from it heightens the horror for the viewer. There is a climax of music, its gets much quicker and louder and the lighting is also very misty, all this helps keep the viewer in suspense.

We see the chase between the horseman and Masbeth but to still delay the horror we only see individual body parts. We see an arm holding a sword and

then we focus on the back of the victim, then as soon as we get a shot of the victim's face we get the image of the sword going through his neck and all the blood. Finally, we get the horrific image of the decapitated head. For a short sequence of shots we get back to a "normal" feeling, but once we hear a gun shot the peace is disturbed, and there is the harsh sound of a crow to make the viewer uncomfortable, and so again introduced back to horror.

As Crane examines and speaks about the victim's head being chopped off there is an element of horror in his words. The lighting is still low and misty as we get a shot of all the character's reactions around Crane. Opening the funeral scene is the Vicar holding a cross, which comes across to the viewer as a kind of sign of "protection from the devil". As we hear the church bells, there is a contradiction between the good and evil in the film. The camera focuses on the conversation between Crane and Phillips as they discuss the five deaths but only four bodies.

This is a medium angle shot so the viewer can see and take in the background (in this case the graveyard) and also the appearance of the two characters. The final shot of this sequence is of the Vicar who brings up the thought of heaven and hell, very sinister. We see Crane getting close to the bodies holding a handkerchief over his mouth and nose that gives the notion of decomposition to the viewer. As we see the neck wound of the body, which is brought in to be examined this creates an image of horror in our minds.

To increase the atmosphere there is a close-up of the examining instruments; sharp blades and so like, which could be portrayed as weapons.

We are also shown where the head has been chopped off, a horrific image as it has decayed. When we move to a shot of the people waiting for the outcome the viewer is put in more suspense. This is because they're not seeing the examination only the apprehensive clergy awaiting the result. Visual gore is displayed as an image of horror as we get a close up of the examined body and blood squirting out.

As Crane leaves the examining room, to end the sequence there is a visual display of blood over Crane. To see this a medium angle shot is used, as it is more effective than a close up would be because we see more of the blood. This film " Sleepy Hollow", in terms of its genre fantasy/gothic horror does show a lot of stereotypical gothic horror graphics. This like blood and gore, which the viewer expects from a film in the genre. What makes " Sleepy Hollow" different is Burton's use of the monochrome of colour and the new element this adds to this horror.

Also, his use of things like the church and bible are made to have a horror effect about them. Elfman's use of music, especially by the two choirs bought in created the haunting sounds very well. All the music used was done so in a significant and effective way. The lighting in a film like this is a very important signifier and the way it was used helped convey the atmosphere of the scene's we were watching. What is great is that Burton took something unreal and made it real. All in all, every element of the film made it enjoyable for a range of viewers.