

BARTON

LIBRARY

Dare to Know

Horror Fiction

Fiction that is intended to shock or frighten by inducing feelings of revulsion, terror, or loathing. With roots in eighteenth century Gothic literature, this is a genre in which frightening narratives, themes, and situations are depicted in order to elicit an emotional, psychological, or physical response in a reader. Author H. P. Lovecraft once wrote, “The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown.” A good horror story will seek to disturb, upset, or repulse in its exploration of the strange, and plot, characters, mood, and atmosphere are equally important to this end. The monster is typically portrayed as a creature with deformed features or terrifying qualities, and represents the range of wicked or negative human emotions: rage, anxieties, repressed lusts. Many times, the story will include a backstory as to why or how the monster came into existence. These antagonists may result from magic, ancient myths, or cultural tradition. They may be reanimated from death or be the product of a science experiment gone wrong. Works written since the 1940s have presented more technological or scientifically driven explanations for occurrences once portrayed as supernatural. The vampires portrayed in this genre are seldom the sympathetic lovers of paranormal romance. Rather, they are decaying, grotesque creatures who feed on human blood. The genre also appeals to the fear of familiar animals turning on humanity. These creatures can come in the form of classic or mythological monsters, neo-monsters, giant monsters, wolves, sharks, birds, cats, dogs, and spiders. John William Polidori’s “The Vampyre” (1819), Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872), Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) and *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903), Gaston Leroux’s *The Phantom of the Opera* (1910), H. G. Well’s *The Croquet Player* (1936), Richard Matheson’s *I Am Legend* (1954), Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), and Ira Levin’s *Rosemary’s Baby* (1967) are classic examples.

Common Elements

Eerie and frightening atmosphere
Metaphors for larger societal fears
Demons
Sexual violence
Gore

Torture
Cannibalism
Vicious animals
Duality
Zombies
Golems
Vampires

Werewolves
Emphasis on science
Isolation and loneliness
Desolation
Sorrow

Benefits of Reading

Channels readers’ fears by allowing them to safely experience fright
Allows readers to explore the unknown in a controlled setting free of actual danger

Introduces readers to diverse viewpoints and belief systems
Assists readers with cognitive growth and social awareness

Develops new neural connections in readers' brains that aid in recollection, creativity, inspiration, and problem

solving
Encourages readers to be empathetic as characters suffer

Modern Literary Examples

<i>The Beast Within</i> (1981) by Edward Levy
<i>Black Creek Crossing</i> (2004) by John Saul
<i>Blue Bloods</i> (2006) by Melissa de la Cruz
<i>The Book of Renfield</i> (2005) by Tim Lucas
<i>Book of the Dead</i> (1989) by John Skipp and Craig Spector
<i>Carrie</i> (1974) by Stephen King
<i>Cujo</i> (1981) by Stephen King
<i>Dread Nation</i> (2018) by Justina Ireland
<i>The Exorcist</i> (1971) by William Peter Blatty
<i>Ghost Story</i> (1979) by Peter Straub
<i>Golgotha Falls</i> (1984) by Frank De Felitta
<i>Haunted</i> (2005) by Chuck Palahniuk
<i>The Hellbound Heart</i> (1986) by Clive Barker
<i>The Howling</i> (1977) by Gary Brandner
<i>House of Leaves</i> (2000) by Mark Z. Danielewski
<i>Interview with the Vampire</i> (1976) by Anne Rice

<i>Little Black Spots</i> (2018) by John F. D. Taff
<i>The Manitou</i> (1976) by Graham Masterson
<i>My Soul to Keep</i> (1997) by Tanarive Due
<i>Necroscope</i> (1986) by Brian Lumley
<i>The Rats</i> (1974) by James Herbert
<i>The Rust Maidens</i> (2018) by Gwendolyn Kiste
<i>Ring</i> (1991) by Koji Suzuki
<i>She Walks in Shadows</i> (2015) by Silvia Moreno-Garcia and Paula R. Stiles
<i>The Shuddering</i> (2013) by Ania Ahlborn
<i>The Stand</i> (1978) by Stephen King
<i>What Moves the Dead</i> (2022) by T. Kingfisher
<i>The Winter People</i> (2014) by Jennifer McMahon
<i>The Wolfen</i> (1978) by Whitley Strieber
<i>World War Z</i> (2006) by Max Brooks