

On Christian Horror

Christian horror is a genre which might seem to be self-contradictory at first glance. The topics which horror fiction typically deals with, such as the occult or paranormal, blood and gore, demons, and other such evil things might seem at first to have no place in a Christian story whose purpose ought to be to glorify God and draw readers closer to Him. Is it even possible for a horror story to do this?

If we considered only the typical modern horror story or film, then we might be tempted to say that it's impossible for such a thing to honor God. We might even go farther and say that such writing is downright wicked. None of us would have any trouble at all coming up with examples to support such a view. Secular media is saturated with such things, and some of them are truly the stuff nightmares are made of. If these types of books and movies are what we mean when we talk about horror fiction, then it would indeed be very difficult to find any redeeming features in them.

But on the other hand, let's consider some alternative examples. In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, for instance, we find a story as horrifying as any ever written, and yet the book contains important Christian elements. The vampires in the story are not presented in a fashion which would encourage readers to sympathize with them or to admire their exploits. Instead, they are depicted as evil creatures which must be fought and overcome, however powerful and monstrous they may be. This alone is an excellent lesson for the reader; that evil is to be resisted at all costs. The mere presence of evil things in a story, then, is not necessarily a disqualification from the Christian label. The everyday world is full of evil things which are utterly real, and since that is so, it is a great glory to God that readers should learn courage in the face of darkness from fantasy stories such as this one.

Another horror story which contains Christian elements is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Although Dr. Frankenstein himself is full of pride and hubris, I can think of few stories which are such excellent illustrations of the Scriptural precept that pride goes before a fall. Dr. Frankenstein ends up paying dearly for his sins, and that is one good lesson to be taken from this book. Another aspect of the story which is helpful for the Christian reader is the monster. We are all at times tempted to uncharity and lack of compassion, especially toward those we fear. By giving the monster's side

of the story, we are enabled to go out of ourselves a little bit and learn something deeper about what it means to love the unlovable. As Frederick Buechner has said, the world dies for lack of love, and in many ways that has never been more true than it is today.

So, if you aspire to write horror stories with a Christian thread, don't despair. This genre is probably one of the more difficult ones for a Christian author to write successfully, but for that very reason it can be even more satisfying when done properly.

The main difficulty here is not so much the monsters, or even the bloody scenes. It's the temptation to linger too long or too lovingly over things which are not good for the reader to think too much about. The author is in just as much danger of being corrupted by that temptation as his readers are. Many horror novels are full of perversion and filth, and at times one gets the distinct impression that the author writes about such things not because he hates them or even because they are necessary to the plot of the story, but because he has learned to savor the taste of them. He spends just a little too long, and goes into just a bit more detail than he needs to. That is among the most subtle and dangerous of snares for a writer in this genre. . . great sins almost always begin with small things, and a thirst for full-blown perversion usually begins with learning to tolerate and then to enjoy the flavor of it. Be very careful you don't fall into this trap, nor entice your readers into it. If you begin to find that this is a problem for you, then it might be best to focus on another genre of writing, at least for a while. If you don't, it will almost surely get worse.

If your Christian horror is to remain Christian, you should remember at all times that evil is evil, and not to be taken lightly. You are to make no treaty with it, no attempt to display it as anything other than the rottenness that it is. In fact, horror is a rather serious genre for a Christian writer, in many ways. It has the potential for dealing with many deep spiritual issues in a way few other genres can, but for that very reason it has to be handled with an extra measure of humility and care, if the writing is to be kept sweet.