

Panel
The Nature of Horror in Classical Antiquity
Edmund P. Cueva (Xavier University), organiser

The five papers in this panel and the respondent aim to define and examine the emotional/mental/physical state of horror in the ancient world, and the concept of “horror” as a literary “genre.” The papers will examine how supernatural or uncanny narratives fit into the texts in which they are found and how they shape, distort, or reflect the storyline; how they relate to ancient and modern, anthropological conceptions or beliefs in witchcraft, ghosts, magic, necromancy, omens, and the like; how they fit in to the Graeco-Roman literary tradition; and how the uncanny and bizarre reflect the contemporary superstitious milieu or religious sentiment in which the authors composed. None of the scholarship on horror in classical antiquity specifically engages what the ancient authors considered or thought of as “horror.” This panel hopes to shed light on what may be truly said to have inspired horror in the reader and to determine if the Greeks and Romans had a concept of horror in the sense of our modern use of the term. In addition to commenting on the panel papers, the respondent will focus on the symptoms associated with the Latin word “horror,” that is, there will be an emphasis on the language rather than on any specific piece of literature or specific author.

The Nature of Horror and Modern Theorists
Edmund P. Cueva (Xavier University)

This paper examines modern horror theory and its applicability to classical literature in order to introduce the four papers that follow this one. First, I shall examine Carroll's definition of horror: a violation of standard ontological correctness that is espoused by both the fictional characters and the reader. This violation must engender revulsion and disgust in the characters that is then paralleled by the emotions of the reader (1987, 52). Key words, cues, locations, reactions, and configurations are embedded in the text that are meant to alert the reader to the fact that they are supposed to be scared by the text. However, Carroll was not the first to grapple with the nature of horror. For example: Lovecraft writes that the "oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown" (2005, 106). Penzoldt comments that not until the Graeco-Roman period did the supernatural "short tale...finds its place in fiction" (1965, 3). The earliest examples, which are written in prose, are Petronius' werewolf story and Apuleius' grisly passages. He then lists Phelgon, Pliny, and Lucian. The model for the supernatural story is short, dramatic, and without a plot. Kristeva posits that one can find horror's origin in a theorized pre-Oedipal stage (1982, 13). Twitchell use the term "horror art" to label an assortment of patterns "in a usually predictable sequence that gives us a specific physiological effect—the shivers" (1985, 8). Carroll suggests in an Aristotelian fashion that the horror genre or passages that can be determined to induce horror create a paradox: how can one be horrified by reading what one knows to be fiction? Carroll labels the emotion produced when reading horror as "art-horror," which parallels the emotions of the certain fictional characters, and is caused by a monster in the narrative (1990, 14-16). Neill notes that the reason people are attracted to horror as a genre is largely that "horror horrifies" (1992, 57); it supplies a pleasure inseparable from horror that cannot be found in other types of fiction. Gaut links David Hume's "Of Tragedy" to Carroll's paradox and notes three similarities: "(1) Some of us enjoy horror fictions. (2) Horror fictions characteristically produce fear and disgust in their audience. (3) Fear and disgust are intrinsically unpleasant emotions" (1993, 333). We can enjoy fear and disgust, and, therefore, there is no paradox. Leffler also focuses on the paradox created by people voluntarily exposing themselves to fictional accounts of horror and violence, but avoid real accounts of horror and violence. Fictional horror must portray horror with the aim of eliciting "pleasurable emotions" (2000, 23). Most recently, Colavito proposes that knowledge is the "primal source of horror," whether the knowledge is forbidden, achieved, or protective (2008, 6). Forbidden knowledge causes horror, while the "loss or corruption" of protective knowledge "creates chaos and pain." Horror for Colavito is a primal biological reaction, intrinsic to human nature, and is the "experience of terror, dread, fear, and unease" (7). Interestingly for this panel, he notes that the ancient world did not develop the horror tale in the modern sense (12). He is careful to point out that the fear felt in the horror genre is not the fear one has in a real-life fright, rather it is an "artistic emotion" (13).

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Horace's *Epode 5* and Modern Horror Theories
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Horace's *Epode 5* is about the torture and death of a boy at the hands of witches who plan to use his viscera as part of a love potion. Horace often refers to Canidia, the ringleader, as an evil and frightening hag in his early works, but the depiction of her and her companions in *Epode 5* gives rise to a sense of fear and disgust, though reading the poem was presumably a pleasurable experience. Pleasure arising from fear and disgust is the primary concern of modern theories of horror, in light of which I would like to pose the following questions: What pleasure did Horace's original audience draw from a poem like *Epode 5*, and to what extent has the poem's original impact changed over the centuries? I will recount some of the ways classicists have interpreted *Epode 5* and then look at some theories of horror fiction to see how these modern interpretations might enhance our appreciation of Horace's technique and intention.

Canidia in *Epode 5* is usually singled out for discussion because she appears frequently in Horace's early works (*Sat.* 1.8; 2.1.48; 2.8.95; *Epod.* 3.8; 17). Some scholars believe that she was a real person, or at least representative of a real type, and that the rites in *Epode 5* are based on something from Horace's experience. Some argue that the cold and calculated tone of *Epode 5* is an indication that Canidia and her magic are literary inventions with roots in iambic and Hellenistic poetry. At times Canidia is taken as a symbol, a representation Rome's recent past and the dark days of civil war, or a representation of rival literary claims of bad poets. She is also thought to be an unconscious symbol of male anxiety and impotence in the face of the breakdown of traditional social hierarchies. Canidia certainly fits the description of what N. Carroll calls the focus of art-horror, a monster full of "revulsion, nausea, and disgust" . . . "so unwholesome that its very touch causes shudders" that is often "associated with filth, decay, deterioration, slime, and so on." According to art-horror theory, her frightening appearance and behavior evoke pleasure.

The paradox of horror is obvious: how do readers draw pleasure from what should (and would certainly if the events were real) cause fear and disgust? For Carroll, it is the structure of the horror narrative that causes pleasure, whereas the negative emotional reactions that horror inspires (disgust, shock and edgy anticipation) are part of the price we pay for the pleasure that we derive from the text's structure. In the case of *Epode 5*, the narrative framed by the boy's plea and curse is worth the horror we experience from anticipating his torture and death. Y. Leffler takes Carroll one step further, noting that the reader of such horror enjoys a privileged position, and the momentary experience of the fictional world is outweighed by the reader's outsider (and pleasurable) view of the horrific event. The reader can take particular pleasure in *Epode 5* in the boy's curse, the last word, so to say, which predicts dire consequences in store for the witches. According to B. Gaut horror attracts because people enjoy being scared and disgusted, which are physiological reactions based on evaluation or disvaluation of the emotions that inspire fear and disgust. A world populated by *numina* that could be controlled through magic and ritual creates ample opportunity for his contemporaries to apply evaluation and disvaluation of the contents of *Epode 5*. Horace's original readers, therefore, naturally derived greater pleasure (and experienced greater fear and disgust) than modern readers ever can.

The Emperor of Nightmares: Suetonius' *Life of Nero* as Horror Fiction
Christopher J. Nappa (University of Minnesota)

Suetonius is sometimes felt to be an author lacking in literary qualities, but, because he is so often raided for historical information, it is especially urgent that we attend to the way he shapes his biographies and to the artistic features of his work. In this paper, I will examine the *Life of Nero* for some of the ways in which Suetonius has shaped his narrative to produce in the reader the mixture of fear, unease, and apprehension of the uncanny that we now associate with the genre of horror fiction. I will focus on four sections of the *Life* and the ways in which each section makes use of techniques familiar from the horror fiction of the modern world. These sections are the genealogy of Nero, the murder of Agrippina, the nightmares and omens just before Nero's death, and the text's final implications that Nero has either not died or will return.

In the case of Nero's genealogy, we find the implication that the emperor is in fact really the sinister avatar of an earlier ancestor, one of several in a line marked by evil. Moreover, the text is notable for its suppression of any mention of Nero's descent from Augustus, the first *princeps*; instead he is the scion of a line marked as special by a supernatural event. The murder of Agrippina makes the reader into Nero's accomplice as we experience his frustration over her apparent invulnerability. Suetonius' technique here is mirrored in many post-classical texts and films in which the audience is positioned as a collaborator with a sympathetic villain or misunderstood killer. Examples include Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Patricia Highsmith's Ripley novels, and Michael Powell's film *Peeping Tom*. When Nero's nightmares are described, the text makes it very difficult to establish the boundary between the weird events in his dreams and those alleged to have occurred in waking life, a blurring of distinctions between reality and the subconscious world, which is a common feature of horror as a genre. Finally, the text raises questions about whether Nero actually died, as often in horror fiction.

It is important to recognize that Suetonius' *Life of Nero* is not horror fiction in the sense that it posits Nero as a monster or villain who must be thwarted (as, for example, Dracula). Instead, Nero is both hero and villain in a work that elicits horror not only about what Nero did but about why. In a way that anticipates modern psychological horror, the *Life of Nero* attempts to capture both the frightening deeds of its protagonist and the atmosphere of dread in which they were produced and experienced.

Horror in the Ancient Greek Novel: A Brief Review
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“Horror—beyond its etymologic meaning that implies stiffening, shiver, horripilation—indicates a type of scare mingled with loathing and repugnance.”¹ But horror is not terror: the circumstances that elicit terror do not imply a real peril. Horrific circumstances have their effect on us when they upset, they warp, they disfigure the homeostatic integrity of our inner world (i.e. our system of aesthetic, moral, ideal values), or of our usual physical world. Horror seems related to the *unheimlich*, the Freudian “uncanny” situations.² Furthermore, horror ranges widely: it varies in content by subjective reactions.

The aim of my paper is to present a more detailed introduction on horror based on modern “physiologic” and psychoanalytic sources.³ Then, a few ancient passages from Plato, Aristotle, and Galen will be presented that seem to support, in some aspects, the general definition of the topic. But principally, on the basis of this definition, I aim to answer the following questions: 1) What kinds of horrific “elements” are there in the ancient Greek novel? 2) What narrative purposes do the horrific elements assume in these stories (e.g. to shock, to keep the audience in suspense, etc.)? 3) What importance do the horrific elements have in these works? My paper primarily focuses on Chariton’s *Chaireas and Callirhoe*, Xenophon of Ephesus’ *Ephesiaka*, Achilles Tatius’ *Leucippe and Clitophon*, and Heliodoros’ *Aithiopika*. These love and adventure stories follow a same stereotypical pattern and even share an amount of horrid motifs: their plots show a series of dreadful necromancies, human sacrifices, cannibalistic meals, disquieting supernatural phenomena and, what I call, “uncanny life-and-death games.”

¹ I translate from *Enciclopedia Medica Italiana*, s. v. Paura, Firenze 1984.

² Sigmund Freud, ‘Das Unheimliche’, *Imago*, 5, 1919.

³ Cf. J. Alexander, ‘L’affetto dell’orrore’ in *Orrorre, Pathos e Trauma*, Torino 1996, pp. 14ff.

Ancient Horror in *The Dark Knight*
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In only three weeks the new Batman movie, *The Dark Knight*, has become the eighth highest grossing movie in American history. Its success can be attributed to certain elements within the story that the ancients would call *horrific*. Horror comes from the *gravitas* of suspense in a story. The experience of horror, as its Latin meaning indicates, causes one physically to shudder and emotionally to feel dread. The intellectual response is twofold: fascination and a sense of *wrong*, what a Roman might call *nefas*. The purpose of this paper is to explore examples of ancient horror as they appear in the modern film *The Dark Knight*. These examples include the recognition of Ate, the appearance of *daimones*, especially the kind known as *alastores*, and finally the sacrificial death of a woman before her marriage.

The Greeks and the Romans feared reckless abandonment because it led to destruction and senseless murder. The goddess of such recklessness was Ate, daughter of Eris, who figures prominently in Homer's *Iliad* and also in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. She represents moral blindness, being in complete opposition to reason, and as such, brings only death and destruction in her wake. In the movie *The Dark Knight*, the character that is the personification of Ate is the Joker. The Joker claims that he has no plan or scheme, implying that he does not act with rationality. The Joker, moreover, is aware that he is Ate, calling himself the "agent of chaos", similar to Clytemnestra's description of herself as the embodiment of Ate in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.

Ate was a unique *daimōn*, a type of spirit in which the ancients believed. What *daimones* were developed over centuries, particularly through the influence of Neo-platonism, but they were generally seen as guardians of households, cities, and individuals with the possibility of being either good or evil. One of the most fearsome types of *daimones* was the *alastōr*, a spirit of vengeance, summoned to repay suffering with suffering. Besides the Joker, there are two other *daimones* in *The Dark Knight*: Harvey Dent and Batman. Harvey, the white knight as he is called, is a *daimōn* in the Hesiodic sense of keeping watch over "cases of law and criminal deeds". Batman, the dark knight, is a dreadful *daimōn*, an *alastōr* in the tragic sense, born out of desire for vengeance due to the murder of his parents. Both of these *daimones* serve as guardians of the city, but only one, Batman, is more frightening since he is an *alastōr*.

Some *daimones* were *aōroi*, young men and women who died before their time and who became hideous creatures stuck between this life and the afterlife, never finding peace in either, and they, therefore, terrorized the living. Untimely death was especially feared by Greek and Roman women, not only because of the gruesome *post mortem* fate but more so for never having the chance at the joys of life natural to women – marriage and childbirth. The fear and the sorrow that accompany such a fate is clearly seen in Euripides' version of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, while the horrific results of this maiden sacrifice are revealed best in Stesichorus' version in which Iphigenia becomes Hecate, goddess of witchcraft and the *aōrē par excellence*. In *The Dark Knight* the character that exemplifies this fear is Rachel Daas. Her death is a sacrifice due to a choice not of her making, similar to Iphigenia, to save the hero, Harvey Dent. Harvey, the law-abiding *daimōn*, however, does not spring forth from Rachel's death, but rather a terrible *erinyes*-like *aōros*, the villain Two-Face is born, hellbent on making all involved in her death feel the same terrible pain he had to before eventually killing them.

Although there are multiple comparisons to ancient myth and culture in *The Dark Knight*, especially regarding the hero, these three elements create the most suspense needed for an experience of horror. They cause audiences' hearts to tremble and to feel apprehension, motivating them to return over and over again to experience such a thrilling performance. *The Dark Knight*'s success teaches that what inspired the ancients with fear and dread continues to terrify today – reckless, senseless destruction, vengeful acts, and untimely death.