

FRIGHTENING FICTION AND JACK THE RIPPER



a different way of seeing

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Inspired by Bertha, heroine for those who dare to be free

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In this issue, read about the different kinds of horror and why so many people enjoy them. There is also something about self-publishing: you will be astonished by the number of self-published books that went on to become classics or bestsellers. Even Stephen King's earliest short stories were self-published (sort-of). Staying with the theme of horror, in the non-fiction corner, read about Jack the Ripper and true crime.

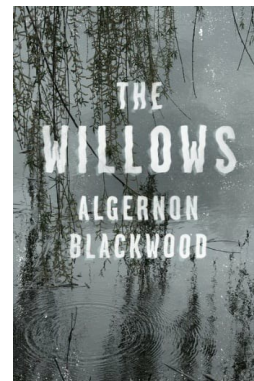
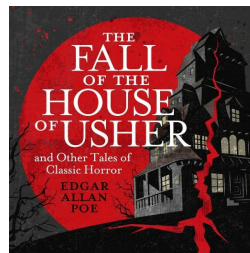
On my podcast channel I've uploaded [my interview with YA writer Marianna Pieterse](#) and, lo and behold, I have joined Facebook. Who would have thought! I'm [there if you would like to follow me](#) for a more personal touch to the world of books.

Horror Or Just Slightly Scary?

I am not hugely active in literary circles, but one thing I do enjoy is listening to readers of both commercial and literary stories speaking about what attracts them to a particular genre. And avid readers of horror are usually very eager to share that information. So, what is it about frightening books and films that attracts them?

As you probably know, there are many kinds of 'frightening'. Stephen King is a different kind of scary from say Edgar Allan Poe; and Guy de Maupassant is different from Gothic writers like Mary Shelley or Bram Stoker. A few newsletters ago I wrote about *Dracula*, which I called frightening at the time, but in retrospect I was never really frightened, although it certainly belongs on the shelf of scary books. In contrast, I do find stories by Maupassant and Poe frightening. Why? It's

difficult to say, but it is interesting that I also find Poe and Maupassant more enjoyable and the two things—frightening and enjoyable—seem connected in some way. And the same with more contemporary works like *Haunting of Hill House* or *The Shining*. I was genuinely unsettled by them and also enjoyed them tremendously. Perhaps it's the psychological tension that links frightening to enjoyable. I asked a few horror readers what they thought about that, and while it's definitely not the case for everyone, it seems that for most fans there is a loose association between the two experiences. Curious that, how emotions we typically think of as being negative become associated with something else that is pleasurable.



Book covers and movie posters are just as intriguing. Have a look at the three book covers above. What kind of experience do they suggest to you? And based on the cover, which of the three do you think might be the most unsettling? Which one would you want to read if you had to make a choice? I've read all three and although I find the cover for *IT* the most unsettling, I found *The Willows* perhaps a bit more troubling. I definitely find *The Fall Of The House of Usher* the least unsettling cover, but of the three authors, Poe is certainly my favourite.

Cover creation, I have discovered, is an art in itself. Publishers, writers and designers haggle endlessly about them because it's the first thing readers see. And the statistics bear it out: readers do make judgement calls based on the cover. If you interested in covers, take a look at some of [the creepiest book covers of all time](#).

Everyone agrees that covers are important, but they can be very misleading. Or maybe it's because of their marketing importance that they can be misleading, which leaves readers frustrated. Check out this cover of *The Vivisector* (apparently it's from a celebrated painting). For some people it comes as a shock so rather than showing it, [here is a link](#). What frustrated me when I saw this cover (I read a version with a different cover), is that I feel like it is misleading. It is only if you know something about paintings of dissections and how that connects to the artist as a dissector of human nature that you will get the meaning of the cover. But for the average reader like me, the cover suggests a horror novel or at least something pretty unsettling (not sure if you get the same impression), while the book is anything but that. I think the 'dissected eye' version of the cover doesn't do the book justice: the story is a lot more sophisticated. Incidentally, the book is one of the most memorable I have read. I can't recommend it more highly; it is literature out the top draw and Patrick White deserved all the accolades he received. And if I went entirely with the cover knowing nothing about the book I would have missed out on a wonderful book.

Disturbing Books And Transgressive Horror

Disturbing and transgressive horror is, I have discovered, very different from mainstream horror. I won't dwell on it because it isn't my kind of thing. Seems that readers think of 'disturbing' as something where the horror is either completely believable or where transgressive themes are introduced; themes that push the limits of depravity. In both cases, I opt to get off that bus long before it reaches its destination. I don't have the stomach for it. Quite literally. I've only ever walked out of two movies, one of which I remember well. It was one of the *Hostel* movies (the first one I think) and Quentin Tarantino was somehow involved which is why I opted to see it. Crickey, the gore! I had to leave the cinema to avoid throwing up. And, fans of horror tell me that *Hostel* is not even part of the disturbing and transgressive sub-genres, which go well beyond that.

Incidentally, if you're wondering about the second movie I walked out of. The reason was much more banal. It was *Chariots of Fire*, apparently a good movie. Unfortunately, I wouldn't know because I was again threatening to throw up, only this time it was because I ate too much chocolate!

Self-published Classics And Bestsellers

While I was reading up about horror for this newsletter, I discovered that Stephen King's first story was self-published, sort-of. I say sort-of (but I think we can call it self-published) because his brother published it for him in his magazine. Here is a pic of that famous magazine that featured his very first publication.





Thank Heavens for the courage of self-publishers. It's easier to self-publish nowadays (although probably more difficult to get noticed) but just think about what we would have missed out on if writers didn't go that route. You can check out [a longer list here](#), but consider these gems:

- Sense and Sensibility
- Wuthering Heights
- Leaves of Grass
- The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
- Swann's Way
- Mrs Dalloway
- A Christmas Carol
- Paradise Lost

The list goes on and on.

The Non-fiction Corner: Jack the Ripper

As far as true horror goes you can't do better than Jack the Ripper (JtR). Ever since my mother bought me a copy of *Jack the Ripper* adapted for children—you'll be amazed what was considered okay in the eighties—I've had a passing interest in the subject. The biggest of all JtR questions is: Who was he? If you interested in the topic the two people who I would recommend listening to are Edward Stow (podcast channel House of Lechmere) and Steve Blomer who features regularly on the Jack the Ripper tours podcast. These two gentlemen must have spent an enormous amount of time researching the subject because the breadth and depth of their knowledge is quite astonishing. Stow suggests Charles Lechmere is a promising candidate and I think he makes a strong argument. Certainly, Lechmere is someone they should have investigated in much more detail. Blomer is less convinced and also makes a very good argument. Watching their rivalry can be quite entertaining.

More about true crime...there are many entertaining channels and I recently met the podcaster Nicole Engelbrecht who runs the True Crime South Africa channel. It is wildly successful and you can [check it out here](#).

In July...

...it will be just over a year since I published my first fiction book. The process for me was revelatory and pulled me into a long-term writing career. Writing has brought me tremendous pleasure, but my word it is difficult, very difficult, or at least that's what I find. But worth it; if you allow it to be. So, I have many plans for the next 12 months and I'll share those with you in July. I look forward to it.

Until then, warm greetings from Bertha and me.

Pierre



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