

» *Medical Knowledge and its 'Sitz im Leben': Body and Horror in Antiquity* «

Noel Carrol

(Graduate Center, City University of New York, USA)

Philosophy, Horror and Popular Culture

In this talk I will present a philosophical account of horror in which disgust is an essential feature. In this respect I will emphasize the importance of body horror and suggest its importance in enlisting a continuing response in popular culture.

Giulia Maria Chesi

(Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Germany)

*Horror in the Odyssey: Polyphemus and Odysseus
in comparison*

In the language of the *Odyssey* there is no word for 'horror'. Nevertheless, two horrific scenes are present: one in book 9 (287-293), with Polyphemus' cannibalistic eating of Odysseus' companions; another in the scene of the slaughtering of the suitors in book 22 (326-330), with the beheading of Leodes, whose head rolls down on the floor, while still speaking. The textual interplay of the scenes is crucial to a critical assessment of Odysseus' killing of the suitors: is it the dreadful and monstrous "cyclopean" massacre of unruly men, or the heroic and legitimate punishment of enemies? In this light, the *Odyssey* presents horror as a necessary aesthetic category for revealing the ethical discourse of the poem; in other words, a notion which problematises the separation between ethics and aesthetics.

Greg Eghigian

(Penn State University)

*Terror and Horror from the Cosmos: Medicine and Therapy
in the Making of the Alien Abduction Phenomenon*

The first reports of "flying saucers" appeared in 1947. Within a few years, individuals were coming forward claiming to have had personal encounters with the spacemen occupying these UFOs. Throughout the 1950s, their stories told of benevolent and advanced space brothers and space sisters who had come to save earthlings from nuclear annihilation.

In the 1960s and 1970s, a new cohort of "contactees" began reporting a very different experience with aliens. In their accounts, the aliens had kidnapped them and forced them to undergo horrifying medical tests and experiments. By the 1980s and 1990s, psychiatric and psychotherapeutic practitioners began offering their services to these "alien abductees," helping the latter to deal with their trauma as well as to understand the meaning of their bizarre encounters.

This paper examines how medical and therapeutic knowledge and professionals played key roles in shaping the alien abduction phenomenon. The evidence shows that the phenomenon provided contactees, caretakers, and interested observers a way to comment on a host of emerging health technologies and concerns.

Debbie Felton
(University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA)

The Ancient Emotion of Horror

Recent years have seen an “emotive” turn in classical scholarship – an increased interest in the study of emotion in classical literature. My presentation examines aspects of horror as an emotion in antiquity. I delve into the questions of whether the ancients had a notion comparable to what we mean today by horror (yes, they did), what sort of emotional situations and environments triggered horror (e.g. war, the uncanny), what vocabulary the Greeks and Romans used to describe this emotion, and what other emotions they related with horror. For example, the emotions of anxiety and dread often served as a precursor to horror. If dread, as has been demonstrated elsewhere, results from a nameless, indefinite fear, horror may be the feeling that rises once fear becomes definable. Given that the term originated from the Latin verb *horrere*, meaning “to tremble, shiver,” this presentation also discusses aspects of the physical reaction accompanying the emotion.

Maria Gerolemou
(University of Exeter, UK)

Heracles' automatic body: Madness, Horror and Laughter in Euripides' HF

Important for the understanding of the body in classical antiquity is the notion of automatism; this is often attested in the Hippocratic corpus, and signifies bodily functions that are held responsible for the vitality of the human body, and that, though defined through regularity and repetition (e.g. breathing), elude conscious control. This figure of the automaton in the body, though it resists explanation and it's actually concealed, is detected in cases of tragic madness which exhibit a disconnection between the mind and body; detached from the intellect, bodily movements seem to be merely mechanical and automatic. In Euripides' *Heracles*, it is clearly stated that by losing your mind you simultaneously lose control over your body or vice versa (HF865-871). Heracles, madden by *Lyssa*, is transformed into an automaton: Madness makes his body malleable; specifically, it causes his muscles to contract violently; he is tossing his head, rolling his eyes and cannot control his breath. After his crisis of madness is over he stands in silence (867-71), as if someone has unplugged him (929f.). In v. 931 is stated that “he wasn't he anymore” (ὁδ' οὐκέθ' αὐτὸς ἦν). Heracles' silence indicates his complete loss of consciousness; he is neither present nor he can perform. Loss of control over the body can be funny, horrific, or both. Indeed, the servants watching Heracles simultaneously laugh and are horrified (950). They laugh over his dissolving limbs credited with independent activity, like an automaton (he dances, he undertakes imaginative travels) and they, simultaneously, fear the possibility of someone losing contact with his own subjectivity; according to the play, the latter can happen anytime and to anyone; after all, Heracles' madness is not caused by his deeds, οὐδὲν ὧν αἴτιος (1310, 1393).

Lutz Alexander Graumann
(University Hospital, Justus-Liebig-University Gießen, Germany)

Overcoming horror: faintness and medical agents. Some tentative thoughts on Antiquity and today

Physicians and of course also their medical assistants in both Antiquity and today were and are confronted from early on with horrific medical scenes: badly suffering, crying and dying patients, strange flows, swells and smells, ugly deformed bodies with congenital or acquired conditions. Especially surgeons are conditioned to act on human conditions that normally no ordinary fellow human being comes up with or

even can stand, e.g. strange conditions inside the opened (operated) human body. Thus, overcoming the encounter of medical horror is one of the principles and prerequisites in medical careers. Sometimes, this comparable 'too much' faintness can lead to stress reactions like burn-out in the medical professional. As pediatric surgeon I would like to present some specific cases from both ancient and modern medical context including my own medical career with this question of horrific encounter in mind. Realizing today's knowledge of coping strategies in medical professionals I will draw some conclusions about the possible conduct of ancient doctors and their staff with an anthropological outlook.

Lutz Käppel

(Cluster of Excellence ROOTS, Kiel University, Germany)

"Roots of horror: Environment, bodies, societies"

George Kazantzidis (organizer)

(University of Patras, Greece)

Horror and the Body in Early Greek Paradoxography

Although there is no such thing as 'horror fiction' in antiquity, paradoxography is still worth looking at as a distant forerunner of the genre (H. P. Lovecraft, whose work had a tremendous impact on our modern concept of horror, appropriately includes a significant reference to Phlegon of Tralles in his essay 'Supernatural Horror in Literature', published in 1927). Thaumata/thaumasia is a complex term: it can be used to indicate wonder and informed admiration but it can also be found in contexts of sheer mental confusion and blind terror (see especially Aesch. Eum. 34-54). The aim of this paper is to collect and discuss 'marvelous' stories from early Greek paradoxographical collections, in which the human body is seen to interact with the natural wonders around it in ways that usually result in gruesome forms of incapacitation and death. The world of paradox remains in essence an inhospitable landscape; it is a world in which spatial and conceptual boundaries have been breached, often at the cost of exposing us to new, unimaginable dangers. In this context, I will focus my attention on how the mental pleasure of discovering bizarre facts about nature goes hand in hand with an increasing awareness of our vulnerability as humans; I will subsequently discuss how the blend of thrill and extreme uneasiness that shapes our encounter with the semi-fictional/semi-real 'facts' of paradoxography might help to open a window on ancient notions of the horrific.

Dunstan Lowe

(Kent University, UK)

Hot and Cold Blood in Lucan's Civil War

War and violence always feature in classical epic, but Lucan's Civil War is exceptionally full of the imagery of bodies undergoing horrific trauma. This occurs both in the narrative and in metaphors, and has been convincingly read as political and metapoetic allegory (Bartsch 1997, Henderson 1998, Dinter 2012). I propose to expand this critical conversation to include blood, the liquid form of corporeal transgression. This adds something distinctive to both political and metapoetic readings, especially in the important distinction between vital, vigorous blood (sanguis, cruor) and its seeping, sickly opposite (sanies, tabes). The first of these often represents traditional Roman bravery and stamina (virtus and vis), converted by violence into fuel for Caesar's unstoppable energy. The second represents vitality turned to decay, in moments of horror and disgust that reflect a more profound dread about the Rome of the text.

Nick Lowe**(Royal Holloway University of London, UK)***A Terrible History of Classical Horror*

Modern horror theory has been comfortable with claiming that the modern transmedial genre which emerges under that name in the 1950s has classical and early modern ancestors, and that genre-historical narratives which locate its modern origins in the gothic risk erasing the debt to classical antecedents. But the examples habitually cited, from Odyssean monsters to Roman ghost stories, are a haphazard selection, with little sense of literary-historical through line or the continuity of surrounding ancient critical discourse. There is in fact a rich tradition of ancient horror theory and poetics, which is strongly aligned with a counter-Aristotelian strand in the history and poetics of tragedy that culminates in, and is transmitted to posterity through, the distinctive Senecan model in which cosmic and somatic horror are integrated in a universal moral physics. Attention to the high- and low-cultural reaches of this tradition (which culminate respectively in Senecan tragedy and Lucian's *Philopseudes*), together with consideration of the Greek and Latin lexicon of horror terms, can not only indicate the lines on which a history of classical horror might be written, but can shed important transhistorical light on key questions in present-day horror studies, including the relationship to the historically constructed post-Romantic categories of the sublime, the grotesque, and the uncanny; the relationship between somatic and supernatural horror; and the interaction between cognitive and affective dimensions of response.

Glenn Most**(Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Italy / Chicago, USA)***The Horrific Body in Sophocles*

More even than the other two great Athenian tragedians, Sophocles stages the suffering human body so drastically and so effectively as to produce profound horror in the other characters, the chorus, and presumably the audience. This article discusses the mechanisms and possible motivations for this tragic theme and its relation to contemporary medical practice and theory, focusing on the Trachinians and Philoctetes but with reference to the other tragedies as well.

Alessandro Schiesaro**(University of Manchester, UK)***Apocalypse: horror and divine pleasure*

The 'apocalyptic sublime' represents a distinctive strand in the reception of the classical sublime in modern culture. This form of the sublime shares in the linguistic ambiguity of the term 'apocalypse', thus straddling the line between the revelatory and the catastrophic. A key element in its development is to be found in Lucretius' bold extension of the sublime to the revelation of a varied set of fundamental material truths in both space and time, and his linking it with horror. Horror is defined as a physical experience of boundlessness and fragility which is inextricably connected, he explains, with pleasure (both cognitive and, we must infer, physical), and anticipates some of the key elements of the modern 'architectural sublime', while at the same time providing an unusual form of embodied aesthetic experience.

Rodrigo Sigala
(Independent, Germany)

The thrilling forces behind horrific experiences: a neuroscientific approach

Phenomena perceived to be horrific can give rise to a strong fascination and may exert intense attraction over many people from different backgrounds and cultures. Characters perceived as (physically and morally) monstrous can become fulcrums of creative endeavors; fear and pain, while being negative experiences, are also primitive instinctual reactions which offer a prominent ethological advantage for adaptation and survival. Although the attraction towards supernatural phenomena and horrific experiences has variously emerged to be rooted in scientific facts, their relation and interactions among themselves are not commonly considered. In this talk I propose to approach this human trait, the attraction to horrific phenomena in the multidisciplinary perspective of the neurosciences, with a focus on the nervous system, on evolutionary aspects, and on perceptual mechanisms. By reviewing acquired scientific findings such as those related to supernormal stimuli, the fight-or-flight reaction, the concept of 'hopeful-monsters' or the differential susceptibility hypothesis, I shall shed some light over the neuroscientific mechanisms underlying human fascination and attraction to horrific experiences.

Evina Sistikou
(Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece)

The Visceral Thrills of Tragedy: Flesh, Blood and Guts Off and On the Tragic Stage

The paper focuses on passages from all three tragedians that depict bodies disintegrating into their components (flesh, blood and guts), being mutilated or dismembered, bodies melting after poisoning or suffering extreme physical pathos – what I shall call 'the horrific bodies'. Tragedy abounds with such bodies, either in explicit descriptions or integrated into metaphoric language and imagery; however, it is especially in the messenger speeches that the most extreme representations of horrific bodies can be found. In addition to the verbal representations, tragedy also exploited a visual means to put on display horrific bodies in the theater, i.e. the ekkyklema. The paper argues that Greek tragedy thus explored a dual way of steering the audience's attention towards the horrific body, a verbal and a visual, by first hinting at the horrific bodies offstage and then revealing them onstage. As is the case with modern horror too, the spectator in the ancient theatre was initially called to imagine the horror through words and then to experience it through vision. Rather than attempting to give definite answers, the paper poses questions regarding the effect of horror on ancient spectators: Did gore and graphic violence hold a central place in Greek theater? Was horror an effect sought after by the tragedians? How does modern horror relate to the 'pity-and-fear' theory introduced by Aristotle? Did the social and cultural contexts, the 'Sitz im Leben', of the ancient theater encourage the engagement with horror? Did horror trigger a pleasurable response in ancient audiences?

Dimos Spatharas
(University of Crete, Greece)

Enargeia, the lower senses and the abhorrent

In this paper, I propose to explore the ways in which enactive understandings of enargeia enhance emotional scripts of horror, I will emphasize the implications of disgust, a particularly visceral emotion, for ancient scripts of phrike and audiences' aesthetic responses to narratives so designed as to cause knee jerk feelings.

Chiara Thumiger (organizer)
(Cluster of Excellence ROOTS, Kiel University, Germany)

Having Guts

There is a special horror associated with guts – the organs of food ingestion and assimilation – among the innards of the human body. If the sight and exploration of bodily organs is by definition a bloody and messy business, when it comes to the gastric system a network of additional implications has to be explored: the cultural aspects of nutrition, its nature as a form of communication between inner body and outside world, and the excreta (stools, urine, vomit) which give the human observers – professional doctors, but also patients and bystanders – cues and, to an extent, some access to the processes taking place internally. Starting from a new reading of the famous teknophagic meal prepared in the 'dismemberment scene' in Seneca's Thyestes (749-88), in my paper I shall explore precisely these connections between nutrition as positive fulfilment of a necessity to life, the horrors of its itinerary through our body, and the particularly terrifying nature of disemboweling and of the observation of innards in the light of all these.

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FURTHER DETAILS: www.cluster-roots.uni-kiel.de/en/projects-and-activities