



## **Anna Höglund: INTRODUCTION TO THE MODULE "HORROR AND FANTASY"**

Welcome to the module "Horror and Fantasy"!

This part of the course will be about horror and fantasy. Or more precisely, about what is sometimes called *Fantasy Horror* or *Horror Fantasy*, that is to say, fantasy literature containing matter that we recognize from what is known in general terms as horror literature.

In this introductory lecture I begin with a brief mention of the difficulty of creating distinct genre definitions when talking about *Fantasy Horror*. I also present the articles you will read to this module and also the articles that you are recommended to read from our reference work, *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, and I say a little about how I have chosen to arrange this course.

When one considers the genres of horror and fantasy literature one realizes at once that these are very broad genres that include a great many literary expressions.

Unlike fantasy literature, horror literature can be realistic, totally lacking fantastic elements. In these cases it is not so problematic to determine the genre of a work. It is very common, however, for horror literature to contain fantastic and supernatural elements, and in those cases it is often extremely difficult to distinguish one genre from the other.

Several attempts have been made, above all in earlier fantasy research, to establish firm genre definitions for horror literature and fantasy literature. In this module you will read H. P. Lovecraft's article *Supernatural Horror in Literature* as one early example of such an attempt and you can also read more about this in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*.

I therefore choose to address the problem of genre identification by asking myself what is the typical subject matter we meet in fantasy that makes us associate certain fantasy books with the horror genre.

There can be numerous elements that make us experience a fantasy book as being akin to horror.

In the article “Dark Fantasy and Paranormal Romance” in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, for example, Roz Kaveney emphasizes the importance of catharsis in the horror genre. In horror literature the reader can often identify with a protagonist who is subjected to dreadful events or who lives under the threat of some form of evil.

Another aspect that is often highlighted is that the main purpose of the horror genre is to frighten the reader. The same happens often in fantasy books where horror is a prominent ingredient.

It is also clear that we find a great deal of matter in horror-based fantasy that is borrowed from a tradition of horror literature handed down for centuries to our own day.

An example of this is the Gothic literary tradition which is described as follows in the article “Gothic and Horror Fiction” in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*:

When thinking of the Gothic novel, a set of characteristics springs readily to mind: an emphasis on portraying the terrifying, a common insistence on archaic settings, a prominent use of the supernatural... Gothic fiction is the fiction of the haunted castle, of heroines preyed upon by unspeakable terrors, of the blackly lowering villain, of ghosts, vampires, monsters and werewolves.

Yet when it comes to influences and literary tradition, is it often hard to determine which influences were shaped in the horror genre of earlier times and which have their roots in early fantasy. Both the horror tradition and the fantasy tradition, for example, derive influences from old mythology and folklore. In this sense, the genres existed long before they were defined as literary genres.

As you will understand, it is highly complicated to establish watertight boundaries between the genres of horror and fantasy. There are, however, a number of subgenres within fantasy which are often described as being closely related to the horror genre since they contain an extra dash of matter associated with it.

In Leigh McLennons article *Defining Urban Fantasy and Paranormal Romance* and in the suggested articles in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* you will make the acquaintance of three of these: Gothic Fantasy, Dark Fantasy and Paranormal Romance.

In *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* it is above all in Adam Roberts’s article “Gothic and Horror Fiction” and Roz Kaveney’s article “Dark Fantasy and Paranormal Romance” that these genres are explored exhaustively.

In “Gothic and Horror Fiction” Adam Roberts writes about what I would rather describe as the Gothic literary current. Roberts paints a detailed picture of the origin of the Gothic in literature and lists important representative works. If you want to learn more about the roots of Gothic, this is a good introduction. On the other hand, I don’t think that Roberts’s text gives the reader so much information about how to distinguish the Gothic horror genre from the Gothic fantasy genre.

In that respect Roz Kaveney's "Dark Fantasy and Paranormal Romance" is more rewarding. Kaveney addresses the difficulty of clearly distinguishing the horror genre and the fantasy genre from each other in order to be able to proceed to concentrate on Dark Fantasy and Paranormal Romance.

According to Kaveney, Dark Fantasy can be defined as:

a genre of fantasy whose protagonists believe themselves to inhabit the world of consensual mundane reality and learn otherwise, not by walking through a portal into some other world, or by being devoured or destroyed irrevocably, but by learning to live with new knowledge and sometimes with new flesh [...] In dark fantasy physical change may be a road to wisdom.

Paranormal Romance is described as a subset of Dark Fantasy. Kaveney concludes: "What identifies a book as paranormal romance has to be the extent to which its plot is determined by its erotic dimensions."

If you want to learn more about the differences between the horror genre and the fantasy genre in general, and Dark Fantasy and Paranormal Romance in particular, I refer you to *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* and the articles mentioned above.

Now I will leave the genre discussion and instead let the other lectures on this course revolve around "critical responses" and "political readings" of horror-based fantasy. I have also chosen to focus the lectures on a character who is central to both the horror genre and the fantasy genre: the monster.

In my own research I have worked a lot with studies of monsters and the monstrous. In my experience, the monster is a fruitful object to study, especially if you want to ask questions such as: what can the literature teach us about humankind and the society in which we live?

This makes the character of the monster well suited to illustrating some of the exciting interpretative perspectives presented by the authors of the mandatory and suggested articles in this module.

In the second lecture on this course, "The Fantastical Monster", I provide a general introduction to the concept and the phenomenon of monsters and present some primary tendencies in the portrayal of monsters through history. You will recognize the ideas that I present when you read Mc Lennons article and the articles "Modernism and Postmodernism" and "Dark Fantasy and Paranormal Romance" in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*.

In the third lecture, "Political Readings and the Monster in Fantasy", I proceed from M. Bould and S. Vint's article "Political Readings" in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* and perform an analysis of the Paranormal Romance books by C. Harris in order to illustrate how different species of monsters can represent ideological notions of class and power hierarchies in today's society.