

Transcript

Ben

Hello, welcome to Season Eight, Episode Four of the Rough Draft podcast, your favorite student-run literary art and cultural podcast here at York College. This week, I'm your host, Ben.

Tara

And I'm Tara.

Ben

And we're talking with Dr. Ian Olney, a professor here at York College, Pennsylvania, about some of his favorite literary--er--some of his favorite films and books in the horror genre. It's a nice way to segue into the upcoming Halloween holiday.

Tara

I do love spooky season. What are some of the stories you are currently reading or teaching?

Professor Olney

Well in the horror genre, I'm teaching a class right now called Literature Itself that, many times I teach it, it focuses on literature and film adaptation more generally. But this time, I'm teaching it as a class that focuses on horror literature and film. So we're actually reading quite a bit in this class right now that relates to the horror genre, we just finished reading the novel Psycho by Robert Bloch and looking at the Alfred Hitchcock film based on that novel, and this coming week, we're going to be taking a look at two short stories by Edgar Allan Poe, the Mask of the Red Death and Hot Frog and looking at a movie from 1964 directed by Roger Corman that's based on both of those stories. It kind of combines the two stories, and the title is The Mask of the Red Death. We're looking--we've already looked at Frankenstein, in the class. And a little bit later on in the semester, we're going to be looking at a number of or short stories, The Fly is one, The Legend of Sleepy Hollow is another. We're going to be looking at HG Wells, the Invisible Man and the recent film adaptation of that novel with Elisabeth Moss in it. And then Candyman, the Clive Barker short story that led to the movie Candyman. I was hoping we'd be able to get to look at the new version of Candy Man, which was supposed to come out over the summer and then got delayed to the fall. Now it's been pushed back to next year. So we'll probably look at the original film adaptation of that short story from the 1990s.

Ben

I personally scare pretty easily. What drew you to the genre of horror?

Professor Olney

I'm just fascinated by other people's fears, I guess. I think one of the things that the horror genre does that makes it such an interesting genre and so different from other literary and cinematic genres is that it's all about fear and what people are afraid of. And I think that looking at stories, short stories, novels, that attempt to play on people's fears give us a sense of what frightens us as human beings and who we are as human beings, but also as, uh, cultures as well. So one of the things we talked about in this literature film class, that I mentioned a moment ago is what horror novels and short stories can tell us about social or cultural fears at the time that they were published. So I find it fascinating for those reasons. I've, I've studied horror literature and horror cinema for a long time. I've written a couple of books on the topic, and I just keep coming back to it because I think it's an endlessly fascinating genre for those reasons.

Tara

So I guess building off that, what drew you to, like, the horror genre?

Professor Olney

Well, when I was younger, I just--I loved movies, and I loved horror movies in particular. I was always drawn to them. You know, when I was a kid, it was sort of a golden age of horror cinema in particular, the 1970s and 1980s. A lot of great horror movies were coming out, I sort of grew up with those movies. And I think like a lot of teenagers, I was just sort of drawn initially to the idea of testing myself, you know, could I get through a really scary movie or a movie that was supposed to be really gross or or whatever. It wasn't until probably a little bit later that I started thinking more philosophically about them. Or critically, or, or however you want to put it. So at first it was just the entertainment value and the fun of watching with friends and everybody, you know, yelling and screaming and that sort of thing. But later, you know, as I begin to approach them from a more academic perspective, they started interesting me for the reasons that I mentioned a couple of minutes ago.

Ben

As we get closer to Halloween, you know, spooky season, what kind of things should students do? Or like what kind of films or books should students get into that might be a little easier for people like me or more in depth for people more like yourself?

Professor Olney

Yeah, well, there's a lot out there of course, 'tis the season and every year in October around Halloween time, you have a lot of movies coming out a lot of TV shows. Of course now nothing's being shown in theaters, but there's a ton of content on Netflix and Amazon and Hulu--online and streaming platforms in general. And even movies that have been released not into theaters, but online, like Video On Demand. You know, you can't go wrong with the classics, I think I'm always surprised by how many people haven't seen, you know, landmark horror movies. And we just looked at Psycho. And in my literature/film class, I'm always amazed every time I teach that class by how many people haven't actually seen Psycho mean, they've heard of it, obviously. And they know about the shower scene and all of that, but they haven't actually seen the film.

And when they do watch it, in many cases, they're really blown away by it, because it's a very modern film. In many ways, even though it's, it's in black and white, and it was made...it was made over 50 years ago, 60 years ago, this year now. So you know, Psycho, I think, you know, some of the classic universal horror movies go back to the 30s in the 40s, the Frankenstein, the Dracula, the Wolfman, Wolf Man movies, those were all a lot of fun and not too scary, I think, for a contemporary viewer. That's one of the bonuses of going back a little bit further in time. And one of the things that's actually interesting about horror films is what we find scary changes over time, we're no longer as scared by the things that audiences were scared by in the 1930s, or 40s, or the 60s or the 70s, or 80s, or even more recently. So that's something else about horror. That's interesting. It changes over time in response to the things that we're afraid of as human beings, but also as a culture.

Tara

So what's your favorite horror movie of all time? If you had to choose?

Professor Olney

That's a really hard question. I'm not sure I could choose honestly, there's so many that I like and so many that I've seen over time, it would be really, really tough for me to narrow it down to just one I can throw out a few favorites though. Obviously Psycho is a great film. That's, that's a landmark horror film. I'm a big fan of Night of the Living Dead, the original Night of the Living Dead from 1968 to George Romero film. I wrote a book recently on, on zombie movies. And I spent all the time in the book talking about that one. That's a great film. I'm a big fan of not just American horror films, but European horror films as well. There's a group of British movies from the 50s and 60s that came out of Hammer Film Studios, a lot of them are sort of Gothic type horror movies. The Dracula and Frankenstein and Wolf Man follows us on those are really great. I love Italian horror films from the 60s. I tend to, for some reason, gravitate towards the 60s, I think it's a really interesting decade in the history of war, where there's sort of a shift away from the older kind of creaky old dark house, supernatural horror movies to more of an interest in psychological horror. And of course, it's in that decade that you start getting horror movies in color, and not just in black and white. They start getting a little gorier, you know, than movies had been in the past. So it's it was a sort of a transformative decade in the history of horror. But I like a lot of recent horror movies as well. I just watched one over the summer online that I thought was really good called Relic. It's an Australian horror movie, directed by Natalie Erica James. There have been a lot of interesting movies, horror movies come out of Australia in the last few years. You guys may have heard of The Baba Duk that came out.

Tara

I did see that years ago.

Professor Olney

Yeah, really interesting horror films. And they're interesting, in part because like all good horror movies, they're not setting out just to scare the viewer. I mean, that's kind of part of the point.

But they, they have something else in mind. There's, you know, thematic issues that they're looking looking at. And this movie Relic that I saw over the summer is interesting, because it's a horror film that deals with dementia, and Alzheimer's. It's about a family, a mother, a daughter and a grandmother. And the grandmother disappears. At the beginning of the film, she kind of lives out in the middle of nowhere in the bush, in Australia, a really small town, and she disappears. So the mother and the daughter come to look for and she eventually turns up, but she seems different in some way. And it seems pretty obvious that something happened to her when she was missing. And so the movie sort of about what happened to her why she doesn't seem to be herself after she returns, and these sorts of things. But the film ends up being a metaphor for the way that we lose family members to diseases like Alzheimer's, where at a certain point, they sort of stop being the person we remember, and become somebody else. And so it's a horror movie and there are scary moments in it. It's, it's in some ways, it's kind of like a haunted house film. And you think for a long time as you're watching and then it might be a ghost movie, or that's something supernatural might be going on. But really, it's all a metaphor for forms of dementia like Alzheimer's, so I was really impressed by that way. I think, I think The Baba Duk's a really interesting film as well, there, I think horror becomes a metaphor for grief, and the grieving process. It's about a woman who's lost her husband, and she's, you know, dealing with raising a very challenging son on her own as a single parent. So, there have been plenty of great horror movies that have come out since the turn of the 21st century over the last 20 years or so. It's not just old horror movies that are worth your time. Lots of good stuff out there.

Ben

Do you have any specific recommendations that you would make to celebrate spooky season this year?

Professor Olney

Well, I you know, the movies that I just mentioned, I think would all be great. I'm trying to think if there are any other films that I would...that I would recommend, that I remember seeing online or on Netflix, there was an interesting Indian film that I haven't seen yet myself, but that I've read a fair amount about called Bulbul. It's on Netflix. And it's based on an Indian folk tale, like India, from India, and the the director's Indian, the cast is Indian. And that looks really interesting. But again, I haven't I haven't seen it yet, there's a lot that I still need to catch up with on on my list. I mentioned The Invisible Man. That one I don't think is on Netflix yet, but I know you can watch it online and it's out on DVD and Blu Ray and that sort of thing now, but that's also a really interesting take on the HG Wells novel, because the focus shifts in that movie away from the scientist who's discovered this formula for invisibility to in the movie, his wife who is the victim of his abuse, and their the horror becomes a metaphor for stalking, and domestic abuse. And this poor woman, who's played by Elisabeth Moss in the film, is never sure when her, when her husband is around because she can't see him. And it sort of captures that sense of, you know, being followed by somebody or being stalked by somebody, but not always knowing where they are not being able to really do anything about them or get people to believe you that you're in

danger. So great film, and again, there's that that deeper layer of meaning below the...the scares and the kind of 'gross-out' moments and that sort of thing.

Ben

So I think it's a lot of a lot of different choices or listeners have if they want to stay up all night, unable to sleep.

Professor Olney

Absolutely. There's no shortage of horror out there. Just take your pick.

Ben

Thank you for coming on and talking to us this week.

Professor Olney

My pleasure. Yeah.

Ben

Do you have any questions for us?

Professor Olney

I don't think so. I'm just a big fan of your podcast. I know I've done one interview with y'all before, a year or two ago about the film program here and it was a lot of fun. Just keep up the good work!

Tara

Thanks. All right. Do you have a Halloween costume yet?

Ben

I do not have a Halloween costume yet. Oh, you know, it's Coronavirus, so there's not gonna be any trick-or-treating this year. So my girlfriend doesn't want to dress up. I on the other hand, would love to dress up and just go to class. Last year, I dressed up as one of my favorite hockey players and went to class with a hockey stick all day. Got some weird looks.

Tara

Yeah, did anyone stop and be like...so what are you doing?

Ben

A friend of mine is on the hockey team here at the school and he stopped me, he's like, "yo, are you trying out?" Like, I don't know how to skate but sure.

Tara

Once I learn how to skate, I will join.

Ben

Once I learn how to skate and like, go to the gym once...then maybe.

Tara

my favorite part about Halloween I mean, I do love trick or treating and all that. But my favorite is getting like my step-mom always sends me a photo of like, my little brothers' costumes. I love seeing them. Last year they were, oh one of them was a blind ref, and one of them was like a disco man! It was so cute!

Ben

I want to dress my dog up for Halloween but according to my dad, it's demeaning so we're not allowed to.

Tara

I love those costumes that like...uh, I don't know cuz I don't have a dog, but it's like, you see them as like the UPS man, and like they run around! I love those videos.

Ben

My friend, back in like elementary school, he dressed his dog up as a Capri Sun. They just got cardboard and aluminum foil and tied it to their dog.

Tara

All right. Thank you so much Dr. Olney for coming in. This is Ben and Tara, thanks for listening. Sorry, I totally just introduced myself but that's okay. Um, so for more information about the Rough Draft podcast, please follow the York Review on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram or you can check us out on the yorkreview.org website. So join us next week with Dr. Smith and Dr Kope about protests and the elections. Should be a fun topic.

Ben

It will be a fun topic. I also want to remind all of our listeners that if you have any art or writing that you want to share, you can submit it to the yorkreview@gmail.com or head over to our website, yorkreview.org, where you can fill out a Google form and submit your work. We want to have our print episode, I think, published in November. That's the date that we're thinking of

right now. I just like to thank the York Radio Station, WVYC, for letting us use their studio to record. Thank you everyone for listening again this week. This has been Ben...

Tara

and Tara!

Ben

And we hope you all have a great two weeks and enjoy your Halloween safely and socially distantly...if that's even a word.