



<== Watch for the twist!

ENGL 10: Global Fictions

# Class #11: *A Pale View of Hills* 2/2

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# Fun with Genre

*A Pale View of Hills* crosshatches (or blends) immigrant fiction and historical fiction on one hand with horror fiction on the other.

Immigrant fiction:

- emphasis on cultural/geographic displacement
- concern for assimilation/fitting in
- transnational comparative framework



Historical Fiction:

- disjunctive setting/temporality
- attention to authenticity/"real life"/accuracy
- historical comparative framework

# What makes horror (as a genre)?



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[www.filmratings.com](http://www.filmratings.com)

[www.mpa.org](http://www.mpa.org)

# What makes horror (as a genre)?

## 1) The Return of the Repressed

“One might say that the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization *represses* or *oppresses*: its re-emergence is dramatized, as in our nightmares, as an object of horror, a matter for terror, the ‘*happy ending*’ (when it exists) typically signifying the restoration of repression.

-Robin Wood, Introduction to *American Nightmare*

## 2) Body Genre

”Gratuitous sex, gratuitous violence and terror, gratuitous emotion are frequent epithets hurled at the phenomenon of the ‘sensational’ in pornography, horror, and melodrama. This essay explores the notion that there may be some value in thinking about the form, function, and system of seemingly gratuitous excesses in these three genres.... My hope, therefore, is that by thinking comparatively about all three ‘gross’ and sensational film body genres we might be able to get beyond the mere fact of sensation to explore its system and structure as well as its effect on the bodies of spectators.”

-Linda Williams, "Film Bodies"

## Dreams and Nightmares

"It becomes easy...to offer a simple definition of horror films: they are our collective nightmares. The conditions under which a dream becomes a nightmare are (a) that the repressed wish is, from the point of view of consciousness, so terrible that it must be repudiated as loathsome, and (b) that it is so strong and powerful as to constitute a serious threat."

-Robin Wood

I laid down the supports I had been using and turned to her. "You know, it's strange. I had that dream again this morning."

"What dream?"

"I was telling you about it yesterday, but I don't suppose you were listening. I dreamt about that little girl again."

"What little girl?"

"The one we saw playing on the swing the other day. When we were in the village having coffee."

Niki shrugged. "Oh, that one," she said, not looking up.

"Well, actually, **it isn't that little girl at all**. That's what I realized this morning. It seemed to be that little girl, but it wasn't."

Niki looked at me again. Then she said: "I suppose you mean it was her. Keiko."

"Keiko?" I laughed a little. "What a strange idea. Why should it be Keiko? **No, it was nothing** to do with Keiko."

Niki continued to look at me uncertainly.

"It was just a little girl I knew once," I said to her. "A long time ago."

"Which little girl?"

**"No one you know**. I knew her a long time ago."

Niki gave another shrug. "I can't even get to sleep in the first place. I think I only slept about four hours last night."

"That's rather disturbing, Niki. Especially at your age. Perhaps you should see a doctor. You can always go and see Dr Ferguson."

Niki made another of her impatient gestures and went back to her father's newspaper article. I watched her for a moment.

"In fact, I realized something else this morning," I said. "Something else about the dream."

My daughter did not seem to hear.

"You see," I said, "the little girl **isn't on a swing at all**. It seemed like that at first. But it's **not a swing she's on**."

Niki murmured something and carried on reading.

Negation in this novel is connected to the psychic act of repression.

*Horror is what happens when repression no longer works.*

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## “good” vs. “bad”

very tired. That was done. He had made his camp. He was settled. Nothing could touch him. It was a **good** place to camp. He was there, in the **good** place. He was in his home where he had made it. Now he was hungry.

before, but had not been able to sit- it. He could have made camp hours before if he had wanted to. There were plenty of **good** places to camp on the river. But this was **good**.

hands.

“I know it was a **terrible thing** that happened here in Nagasaki,” she said, finally. “But it was **bad** in Tokyo too. Week after week it went on, it was **very bad**. Towards the end we were all living in tunnels and derelict buildings and there was **nothing** but rubble. Everyone who lived in Tokyo saw **unpleasant** things. And Mariko did too.” She continued to gaze at the back of her hands.

“Yes,” I said. “It must have been a very difficult time.”

“This woman. This woman you’ve heard Mariko talk about. That was something Mariko saw in Tokyo. She saw other things in Tokyo, some **terrible things**, but she’s always remembered that woman.” She turned over her

and held it down. The water came almost halfway up the wire-grid. She continued to hold down the box, then finally pushed it with both hands. The box floated a little way into the river, bobbed and sank further. Sachiko got to her feet, and we both of us watched the box. It continued to float, then caught in the current and began moving more swiftly downstream.

Some movement caught my eye and made me turn. Mariko had run several yards down the river's edge, to a spot where the bank jutted out into the water. She stood there watching the box float on, her face still expressionless. The box caught in some reeds, freed itself and continued its journey. Mariko began to run again. She ran on some distance along the bank, then stopped again to watch the box. By this time, only a small corner was visible above the surface.

"This water's so dirty," Sachiko said. She had been shaking the water off her hands. She squeezed in turn the sleeve-ends of her kimono, then brushed the mud from her knees. "Let's go back inside, Etsuko. The insects here are becoming intolerable."

"Shouldn't we go and get Mariko? It will be dark soon."

Sachiko turned and called her daughter's name. Mariko was now fifty yards or so away, still looking at the water. She did not seem to hear and Sachiko gave a shrug. "She'll come back in time," she said. "Now, I must finish packing before the light goes completely." She began to walk up the slope towards the cottage.

Sachiko lit the lantern and hung it from a low wooden beam. "Don't worry yourself, Etsuko," she said. "She'll be back soon enough." She made her way through the various items strewn over the tatami, and seated herself, as before, in front of the open partitions. Behind her, the sky had

## Dream becomes a nightmare



now." Sachiko glanced up, then shrugged. "Perhaps you'd best take the lantern with you," she said. "It's quite slippery along the bank."

I rose to my feet and took the lantern down from the beam. The shadows moved across the cottage as I walked with it towards the doorway. As I was leaving, I glanced

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# Dream becomes a nightmare

back towards Sachiko. I could see only her silhouette, seated before the open partitions, the sky behind her turned almost to night.

Insects followed my lantern as I made my way along the river. Occasionally, some creature would become trapped inside, and I would then have to stop and hold the lantern still until it had found its way out.

In time, the small wooden bridge appeared on the bank ahead of me. While crossing it, I stopped for a moment to gaze at the evening sky. As I recall, a strange sense of tranquillity came over me there on that bridge. I stood there for some minutes, leaning over the rail, listening to the sounds of the river below me. When finally I turned, I saw my own shadow, cast by the lantern, thrown across the wooden slats of the bridge.

"What are you doing here?" I asked, for the little girl was before me, sat crouched beneath the opposite rail. I came forward until I could see her more clearly under my lantern. She was looking at her palms and said nothing.

"What's the matter with you?" I said. "Why are you sitting here like this?"

The insects were clustering around the lantern. I put it down in front of me, and the child's face became more sharply illuminated. After a long silence, she said: "I don't want to go away. I don't want to go away tomorrow."

I gave a sigh. "But you'll like it. Everyone's a little frightened of new things. You'll like it over there."

"I don't want to go away. And I don't like him. He's like a pig."

"You're not to speak like that," I said, angrily. We stared at each other for a moment, then she looked back down at her hands.

"You mustn't speak like that," I said, more calmly. "He's very fond of you, and he'll be just like a new father. Every-

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thing will turn out well, I promise."

The child said nothing. I sighed again.

"In any case," I went on, "if you don't like it over there, we can always come back."

This time she looked up at me questioningly.

"Yes, I promise," I said. "If you don't like it over there, we'll come straight back. But we have to try it and see if we like it there. I'm sure we will."

The little girl was watching me closely. "Why are you holding that?" she asked.

"This? It just caught around my sandal, that's all."

"Why are you holding it?"

"I told you. It caught around my foot. What's wrong with you?" I gave a short laugh. "Why are you looking at me like that? I'm not going to hurt you."

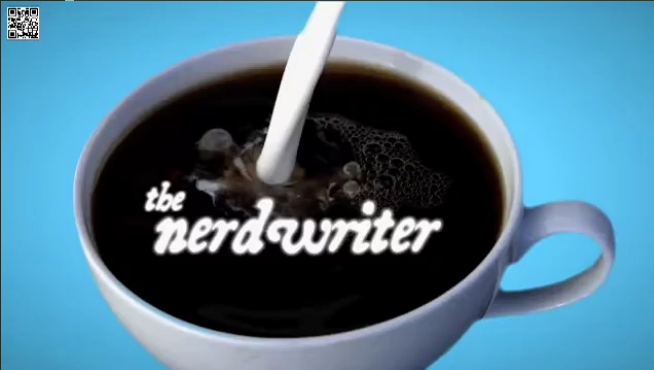
Without taking her eyes from me, she rose slowly to her feet.

"What's wrong with you?" I repeated.

The child began to run, her footsteps drumming along the wooden boards. She stopped at the end of the bridge and stood watching me suspiciously. I smiled at her and picked up the lantern. The child began once more to run.

A half-moon had appeared above the bridge, gazing at several quiet moments I remained on the bridge, gazing at it. Once, through the dimness, I thought I could see Mariko running along the riverbank in the direction of the cottage.

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# The Twist



- 1) Reevalutate
- 2) Reposition – characters/stories
- 3) Technique of forced discontinuity

History is experienced as a horrific twist in the novel.

## Do the twist?

In contrast to pornography, the fantasy of recent teen horror corresponds to a temporal structure which raises the anxiety of not being ready, the problem, in effect, of “too early!” Some of the most violent and terrifying moments of the horror film genre occur in moments when the female victim meets the psycho-killer-monster unexpectedly, before she is ready. The female victims who are not ready for the attack die. This surprise encounter, too early, often takes place at a moment of sexual anticipation when the female victim thinks she is about to meet her boyfriend or lover. The monster’s violent attack on the female victims vividly enacts a symbolic castration which often functions as a kind of punishment for an ill-timed exhibition of sexual desire. These victims are taken by surprise in the violent attacks which are then deeply felt by spectators (especially the adolescent male spectators

drawn to the slasher subgenre) as linked to the knowledge of sexual difference. Again the key to the fantasy is timing—the way the knowledge of sexual difference too suddenly overtakes both characters and viewers, offering a knowledge for which we are never prepared.

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- transnational comparative framework



Historical Fiction:

- disjunctive** setting/temporality
- attention to authenticity/"real life"/accuracy
- historical comparative framework

Horror Fiction (as figured in *A Pale View of Hills*):

- Return of the Repressed
- Body Genre
- forced discontinuity**

This cross-hatching with horror can be thought of as an attempt to turn immigrant/historical fiction into a kind of body genre.



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