

TV Horror: Investigating the Dark Side of the Small Screen

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This is a wide-ranging and extensively researched survey of TV horror from the 1950s to the present. In the 'Introduction', the authors explain that the purpose of the book is to 'explore [the] tension and potential for TV horror' (xiii). Affirming that their methodology is not chronological, they examine a large number of examples from British and American TV 'as a means of unpacking the many approaches and formations of the genre for television' (xiii). The book is certainly packed with examples, a number of which are discussed in detail, and the authors have organised their material thematically: thus there are chapters on 'Mainstreaming Horror', 'Shaping Horror', 'Adaptation', 'The Horror Auteur', 'Revising the Gothic', 'The Excess of TV Horror', 'TV as Horror' and 'The Monster in Our Living Room'. Both authors clearly have an impressive knowledge of recent TV horror and provide a number of close readings of specific episodes from a variety of series, such as *True Blood* (2008-14), *Being Human* (2008-13), *The Walking Dead* (2010-) and *American Horror Story* (2011-). Throughout, the emphasis of the text certainly seems to be on more recent TV series, rather than classic ones, perhaps because there is now more opportunity for horror to be explicit on the TV screen. This is perfectly valid as an approach and results in a key guide to 'modern' TV horror.

However, the elements that are praiseworthy here are also those that create some problems. For example, the large number of detailed descriptions and close readings of series and episodes can be overwhelming, because there is a lot of moving backwards and forwards in terms of chronology and genre. This means that the stronger aspects of the text, such as the context – the changing scope of TV horror, in terms of shifting historical background – are

sometimes blurred. The definitions of genre and the scope of the study could also have been more clearly identified as they are wider than that title proclaims. Although the book is entitled *TV Horror*, the discussion encompasses the supernatural, crime and science fiction. While there are clearly significant overlaps between these genres (for example, *Twin Peaks* [1990-1] or *The X-Files* [1993-2002]), offering a theoretical overview for this ‘increased genre hybridity’ (9) within the genre would have been helpful – and the text could also have been marketed to a wider readership. Of course, as this book was published in 2013, there have now been other studies that address these issues as ‘horror studies’ has grown exponentially, and Jowett and Abbott’s text was key for debating this genre hybridity.

While theory is clearly not the focus of this text, and nor does it have to be, there are theoretical references utilized throughout. For example, in the chapter on ‘The Horror Auteur’ there is some brief theorising of the auteur in TV horror, with acknowledgement of the work of Janet McCabe and Kim Akass, amongst others (83); in the chapter on ‘The Excess of TV Horror’ there is a short discussion of theories of excess (132-3), while scholars in the field of horror, such as Mark Jancovich, are mentioned periodically throughout the book. As mentioned above, the text’s emphasis overall is upon an overview of different generic aspects, and so there is more of a focus on identifying some of the key approaches, rather than a sense of something being said about the subject as a whole. The introduction posits its aim in terms of the ‘tension and potential’ of TV horror (xiii), and the book concludes by stating that ‘horror will undoubtedly continue to be controversial on television...TV horror continues to develop, to evolve and to do what horror does’ (225). These are broad statements and it was not entirely apparent what all these examples and genres indicated, beyond a fairly general expectation, meaning that this text would suit an informed general readership, as well as an academic one.

Overall, this is a valuable resource for students and scholars of genre and television, with a lot of useful and stimulating discussion. Jowett and Abbott write in a lively and approachable style and are clearly deeply engaged with their subject. There is a good selection of stills, and strong individual chapters: ‘The Horror Auteur’, ‘Horror, Art and Disruption’ and ‘TV as Horror’ work particularly well, possibly because they provide the reader with an opportunity to pause and focus. In the concluding chapter, the authors state that ‘we have sought to contest the notion that “real” horror does not and cannot exist on television’ and to expand ‘the definition of what horror is, what it does and what it means’ (223). This they have certainly done and so this book is useful to a wide range of readers.