

M.R. James- “Some Remarks on Ghost Stories”

1. What should the narrator establish at the opening of the story?
2. What feeling should a good ghost story inspire?
3. What does James say about prose style?
4. What does James say regarding setting?
5. Name one thing that a ghost story should not contain.

Introduction to *Roald Dahl's Book of Ghost Stories*

1. What was Dahl shocked to find out about the kind of writers that write the very best ghost stories?
2. Why are children's books the "most important" ones?
3. What is said about famous writers and children's books?
4. Dahl relates an anecdote (short narrative of an experience told to prove a point) about his proposed television pilot. What do you think is said about Hollywood or the TV viewing public in this anecdote?
5. What does Dahl say the best ghost stories should not contain? How is it possible that the best ghost stories do not contain this item?

H.P. Lovecraft's “Supernatural Horror in Literature”

1. What is mankind's strongest emotion?
2. What attempts to replace our fear, but never will? Why do we fear?
3. Cite one of the sources of horror in literature.
4. Why are Nordic (northern European) cultures more predisposed to horror than Latin ones?
5. What are two qualities of a good horror story?

M.R. James- Remarks on Ghost Stories

- 🕷 Pretense of truth
- 🕷 Inspire a “pleasing terror”
- 🕷 Keep prose short
- 🕷 Keep ghosts original, yet familiar
- 🕷 Setting should be contemporary
- 🕷 No gratuitous sex or violence
- 🕷 No scientific explanation of the machinery of the ghost

Roald Dahl on Ghost Stories

- Women compete more with men in writing ghost stories than in any other genre, and many of them are among the best of the genre
- Children's stories are the most important because they help create literate readers
- Famous writers have a hard time with children's stories and ghost stories
- The best ghost stories don't contain ghosts-- at least not the ones that can be readily identified as such

H.P. Lovecraft's views on horror

🕷️ FEAR:

- The oldest emotion, ingrained in our species
- Science will never totally replace primal fear
- We fear because of what our imagination creates

🕷️ Origins of horror in literature:

- Ancient times: oral tradition folklore, fertility ceremonies, etc.
- Middle ages: invasions of Goths, Huns, Mongols
- Nordic cultures more predisposed to horror than Latin cultures

🕷️ Qualities of a good horror story:

- The fear should never be rationalized or explained
- Focus should be on the fear and not plot or character
- The tale should not be totally outlandish
- There should be no notions of “immature romanticism”
- The tale should be natural and convincing

Open-note quiz:

- 🕷️ “The Statement of Randolph Carter”- H.P. Lovecraft
- 🕷️ “The Waxwork”- A.M. Burrage
- 🕷️ “1408”- Steven King; film & print
- 🕷️ “On the Northern Ice”- Elia W. Peattie
- “The Upper Berth”- F. Marion Crawford
- 🕷️ “The Telephone”- Mary Treadgold
- 🕷️ “The Signal-Man”- Charles Dickens
- 🕷️ Ghost/Horror theory: Lovecraft, James, Dahl
- 🕷️ Prompted writing about one story