

Rise of the Ghosts: A History of YA Horror Literature

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The overarching genre of young adult literature is, in itself, a fairly new genre. Consequently, the rise of horror literature for young adults is even more recent. In fact, it was not until the mid to late 80s that horror books began to appear widely in the young adult genre. This increase coincided with a more general return to specific fiction genres, such as romance, within the young adult sector (Cart, 2001).



Though horror did not become a popular YA genre until 25 years ago, it was certainly not completely absent from earlier youth literature. Even before there was really a distinction between children's literature and YA literature, horror themes and tones appeared often in youth literature. In these cases, horror usually served as a moral lesson or warning, often in a religious context (Hood, 2008). This is something that is still occasionally present, as seen in the *Left Behind: the Kids* Christian post-apocalypse series. However, this approach is

no longer very common in the YA horror genre.

In 1985, Christopher Pike published his YA horror novel, *The Slumber Party*. This was the beginning of an explosion of horror books. The following year, 1986, R. L. Stine wrote his first horror novel, *Blind Date* (Hood, 2008). Stine would go on to be arguably the most prolific author in the YA horror genre, publishing many books and series. The most notable of these is, of course, his *Goosebumps* series, popular among children and young adults alike.

As publishers began to see the opportunities of horror literature, series began to be produced in the same manner of early YA mystery books. Popular series were published as paperbacks and widely marketed. However, sometimes this type of mass marketing can be damaging, as the sometimes cheap look of the books can turn youth off not only the books themselves, but also other books that are found in the same place (Crowe, 2001).

Since its initial rise in the 80s, horror has quickly become a popular YA genre. Though many of the



horror stories and tropes are not new, creating ones that are marketed specifically to young adults is something that was not being done before. Many of the plots and themes that are found in classic and popular horror movies are present in YA horror literature. The difference is that many of these horror movies, especially the gorier ones, have an adult rating, preventing many young adults from seeing them, at least in theatres. However, with the opening of the YA horror genre, these types of stories became more accessible to young adults (Hood, 2008). The genre therefore successfully caters to a very viable audience who were previously overlooked.

There are many trends in the early YA horror books, which are still present in some of the current, non-horror books. Most notable is the lack of adult presence in these books (Hood, 2008). If adults are present, they are often tangential to the story. These books are also usually very plot-driven and are very focused on the primary story. Unlike earlier mystery series, the endings are regularly ambiguous, without any permanent solution to books' main issues (Hood, 2008).

Over the years, the YA horror genre has become wider and more diverse. While there

are still books that follow the trends developed in the books from the 80s and 90s, authors have added new twists on the classic styles. Additionally, many distinct subgenres have emerged, establishing themselves as genres in their own right.

As YA literature has continued to develop and evolve, the different genres have become blurrier. It is more and more common for books to fall into several genres instead of neatly fitting one genre's characteristics. Unlike the more traditional YA horror literature, these books tend to diverge from the more straightforward, purely plot-driven stories. The "paranormal romance" genre is a relevant example of this, combining the paranormal elements of horror with the romance genre. These cross-genres are extremely popular right now, with classic horror creatures, like vampires and zombies, being a very common topic of YA literature.

The YA genre is currently more prolific than it ever has been before. As a result, the different genres within this literature are being explored more widely and deeply. Supernatural and paranormal horror literature has been especially trendy in the last few years, due in part to the popularity of legendary creatures, like vampires.

However, all horror subgenres are being expanded, and it will be very interesting to see what new and exciting trends will emerge in the next few years.

References

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