

# The Cathartic Power of Christmas Horror Cinema

*Katartyczna moc świątecznego kina grozy*

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores the cathartic potential of Christmas horror cinema, drawing upon Aristotle's concept of catharsis through art, particularly within the context of visual art and horror film. The article provides insights into the heritage of Christmas horror, including the tradition of ghost stories for Christmas in Great Britain. Subsequently, it explores the phenomenon of Christmas horror cinema, analysing its distinctive features and characteristics. The article seeks to understand why cinematic Christmas horror, with its monsters and macabre themes, holds such appeal for viewers. Additionally, the article examines how Christmas horror films critique excessive consumerism and offer catharsis during a holiday season that can be exclusionary and stressful for many individuals. Overall, this research sheds light on the transformative potential of Christmas horror cinema as a means of confronting societal issues and providing psychological release during the holiday season.

**Keywords:** Christmas horror cinema; catharsis; ghost stories; Christmas; monsters

## ABSTRAKT

W artykule zanalizowano katartyczny potencjał świątecznego kina grozy, odwołując się do Arystotelesowskiej koncepcji katharsis, szczególnie w kontekście sztuki wizualnej i horroru filmowego. Ukazano dziedzictwo tego nurtu, w tym brytyjską tradycję bożonarodzeniowych opowieści o duchach. Autorka skupia się na specyfice i fenomenie świątecznego horroru filmowego, próbując odpowiedzieć na pytanie, dlaczego filmy grozy o tematyce bożonarodzeniowej – z ich makabrycznymi motywami i postaciami – przyciągają tak dużą liczbę widzów. Dodatkowo artykuł bada, w jaki sposób tego typu filmy krytykują nadmierny konsumpcjonizm oraz oferują katharsis w czasie świąt, które dla wielu osób mogą stanowić okres wykluczenia i stresu. Została także poruszona kwestia transformacyjnego potencjału

świętecznego kina grozy jako narzędzia konfrontacji z problemami społecznymi oraz zapewnienia psychologicznego „oczyszczenia” w tym szczególnym czasie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** świąteczne kino grozy; *katharsis*; opowieści o duchach; Boże Narodzenie; potwory

## Christmas Horror Heritage

The origins of British Christmas ghost stories tradition remain somewhat elusive, mainly due to its initial oral form. Folklore has long associated winter solstice with transition and change, as well as the season of the closest proximity to the world of spirits and the dead (Yuko, 2021). The long, dark evenings were, therefore, perfect for telling scary stories, which constituted an exciting pastime activity for folks gathered around a fireplace in the pre-electricity times. Thanks to the Industrial Revolution and development of the steam-powered printing press, as well as the increase of literacy among the Victorian society, the old ghost storytelling tradition became popularised and consolidated on pages of newspapers, journals and novels and soon became fashionable even within sophisticated upper-class circles. Interest in the ghostly narratives resulted not only from the undeniable attraction of the stories themselves, but as a folklorist Brittany Warman notices, was “driven [...] by the rise of industrialization, the rise of science, and the looming fall of Victorian Britain as a superpower. All of these things were in people’s minds, and made the world seem a little bit darker [and] a little bit scarier” (Warman, in Yuko, 2021). Hence spooky stories served as a means of exorcising real fears and worries with fictional tales.

The publication of what quickly rose to a status of the most famous and most beloved Christmas ghost story ever told, namely Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* in 1843, sealed the fate of the tradition for good. Subtitled by the author as *A Ghost Story of Christmas*, Dickens’ novella of transformation and redemption has become a cultural phenomenon that consolidated ghost-storytelling at Christmas for many generations to come. The tale of the loner and miser Ebenezer Scrooge and the ghosts of Christmas past, present and future continues being re-read as part of the festive season celebrations, as well as repeatedly televised and adapted for the big screen. Kim Newman (2000) states that “the term »Dickensian Christmas« came to be associated with holly and family gatherings and a happy exchange of presents” (p. 136), thus, setting the path for a family friendly season of joy and merrymaking as portrayed in many a modern Christmas film. However, as Newman points out, “*A Christmas Carol* also sets its most depressing moments – Scrooge’s vision of his unloved, lonely death, picked over by scavengers – at Christmas” (Newman, 2000, p. 136). The motives of ghostly visitations and the protagonist’s ordeal of reliving his past, experiencing the present through the eyes of his unearthly guide, and, above

all, the terrifying, gloomy prospects of the future awaiting him, undeniably fit into the gothic horror formula, currently associated with Halloween festivities rather than Christmas. Nevertheless, a similar ghastly pattern, accompanied by themes of oppositions: joy vs. sadness, wealth vs. poverty, happiness vs. misery, peace vs. terror, and potentially explored motif of light vs. darkness, was used in numerous Christmas tales by Dickens (*The Chimes* [1844], *The Cricket on the Hearth* [1845], *The Battle of Life* [1846], *The Haunted Man* [1848]) and kept recurring in other writers' texts.

One of the most popular continuators of the tradition was perhaps an English writer and medievalist scholar, Montague Rhodes James, the author of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century collection of gothic ghost classics: *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1904), including a short story *Oh Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad*, followed by three volumes: *More Ghost Stories* (1911), *A Thin Ghost and Others* (1919) and *A Warning to the Curious and Other Ghost Stories* (1925). The stories, which were initially written with the thought of entertaining his friends and colleagues at Christmas parties, quickly became recognised as complex literary gems and popularised by the subsequent television adaptations.

Like in a seminal 1968 BBC production of *Whistle and I'll Come to You*, directed by Jonathan Miller, James' central characters are often retired loners, scholars or researchers struggling against ancient powers hidden in antique artefacts found anew. The world of the supernatural contradicts and challenges contemporary rational beliefs, logic and reason as represented by the protagonists. According to Kyle Anderson (2022), Miller's version of *Whistle* "is one of the best-received adaptations still to date". This success inspired the producer and director Lawrence Gordon Clark to adapt other James' stories for TV. The idea resulted in an acclaimed series unofficially entitled *A Ghost Story for Christmas*, broadcasting one ghost story every year between 1971 and 1978. The series consists of eight episodes, including five stories by James (*The Stalls of Barchester*, *A Warning to the Curious*, *Lost Hearts*, *The Treasure of Abbot Thomas*, *The Ash Tree*), one by Dickens (*The Signal Man*) and two original ones (*Stigma*, *The Ice House*).

The cultural phenomenon of British TV ghost stories for Christmas was revived in 2000 by a new formula TV series presented by the master of cinematic horror, Sir Christopher Lee, who in subsequent episodes, was reading various ghost stories. Over the next few years, new TV adaptations of James' stories were made, including *A View from a Hill* (2005), *Number 13* (2006), a new version of *Whistle and I'll Come to You* (2010) and *The Tractate Middoth* (2013). The last one, written and directed by horror aficionado Mark Gatiss, was followed by a documentary film *M.R. James: Ghost Writer* (2013) written and presented by Mark Gatiss too. It is Gatiss who has carried the tradition and maintained the Christmas TV ghost stories legacy alive and kicking in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with his atmospheric adaptations of

ghostly literary works, including *The Dead Room* (2018), *Martin's Close* (2019), *The Mezzotint* (2021), *Count Magnus* (2022) and *Lot No. 249* (2023).

A parallel phenomenon could be observed in cinema. Dark Christmas-related stories have been present on silver screen from the very beginning of the medium. The first adaptation of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* appeared as early as in 1901, under the title *Scrooge, or, Marley's Ghost*, and was followed by numerous other versions produced in almost every decade since. The subsequent cinematic versions carried the old Christmas ghost tradition into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the new medium providing additional visual aspect to scare new generations of audiences with their spooky aesthetics and reinterpretations of Dickensian ghost tale of repentance and transformation. Among the most celebrated adaptations of *A Christmas Carol*, the enduring presence of horror remains a defining feature. The 1951 version starring Alastair Sim as Scrooge delves deeply into the eerie and macabre, with shadowy cinematography and chilling depictions of the ghostly visitations. The musical *Scrooge* (1970), while vibrant, does not shy away from grim imagery, particularly in its depiction of Marley's torment and the foreboding spectre of the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. The modern *Scrooged* (1988) takes a darkly satirical approach, amplifying the grotesque through surreal and unsettling sequences, such as a decaying ghost and visions of fiery damnation. Brian Henson's *The Muppet Christmas Carol* (1992), though aimed at families, retains an underlying horror through its vivid portrayal of the Marleys' chains and the hauntingly silent Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. Similarly, *A Christmas Carol, the Musical* (2004), starring Kelsey Grammer, incorporates stark and ghostly imagery, emphasising the shattering consequences of Scrooge's selfishness. Across all adaptations, the story's spectral encounters and grim warnings reinforce its dark, cautionary tone, ensuring that the horror inherent in Dickens' tale remains vivid and visceral, a stark contrast to the warmth of its redemptive conclusion.

In due course, timeless Christmas classics like *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), *Miracle on 34th Street* (1947), and *It Happened on 5th Avenue* (1947) made their way to the big screen, each carrying a subtle dark subtext. Most notably, Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*, although currently considered one of the most beloved and heart-warming Christmas films ever made, is built on a dark and gloomy premise. A small-town George Bailey dreams of gaining education, travelling the world and performing grand deeds. Instead, he is forced to stay in the small town of Bedford Falls and protect the town and its people against a ruthless business magnate ruling the town. The plot is set to glorify the purity of American small-town community and family values and constitutes a sharp critique of political situation, belligerent capitalism and big cities' corruption. Indeed, the film has achieved its goals and continues to be read and interpreted as it was intended. However, the twenty-minute-long fantasy sequence during which the discouraged protagonist is

given a chance to experience the world as it would have been had he never been born, is nothing less than a *noir*-like nightmare vision of an alternate horror reality, in which all his lifelong ambitions and efforts are thwarted, resulting in catastrophic changes to his private life and the whole community. Only after the ordeal of the harrowing experience of his non-existence, can he fully appreciate the importance and value of his own life and family, his hometown's community and friendship. As Richard Newby observes, "[e]ven Dickens knew that Christmas mirth also needed a share of Christmas misery, a means of greater appreciating the former" (Newby, 2018). This formula has long become a foundation on which most of Christmas films' storylines are structured. Light requires darkness to be fully appreciated.

A curious tendency can be observed in 1970s cinema. A wave of social and cultural changes in the United States and Europe alike coincided with termination of the Hollywood Hays Code and regaining filmmakers' directorial freedom. At the same time, the audiences grew hungry for a different, more rampant kind of spectacle. The need for cinematic horror at Christmas changed from elegant ghost stories to blood drenched parade of psycho Santas, serial killing maniacs and revenge driven supernatural monsters. The first Christmas-themed horror, *Whoever Slew Auntie Roo?* (1971), appeared in the UK and was followed in 1972 by the first American Christmas horror production *Silent Night, Bloody Night*. While, together with American TV series *Tales from the Crypt* (1972), these early productions introduced a lot of elements that would later become a genre canon (Santa on a killing spree, Christmas title puns, etc.), critics agree that it was Bob Clark's *Black Christmas* (1974) that attracted proper attention and established a new Christmas horror pattern. The plot revolves around a group of young women in a sorority house at Christmas as the maniac killer (with use of prank calls) picks them up one by one in the confines of the building. The film that preceded John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1977) by three years, sets the rules for future slashers. Newby (2018) accurately points out that "[w]hile it's now become the formula for slasher movies, *Black Christmas* offered something audiences hadn't seen before, including a shocking ending that still has the ability to haunt today. While Clark made use of the atmosphere of Christmas, the lights, the decorations, the snow, he didn't pervert any of the childhood sacredness of the holiday. That would come later". Nevertheless, *Black Christmas* becomes a harbinger of what is to come. Kim Newman (2000) states that "Clark, who also made the unsentimental *A Christmas Story* (1983), wins points for intercutting an angelic choir of doorstep carol-singers with the Dario Argento-style stabbing of Margot Kidder" (p. 137). Moreover, the film became a genre template repeatedly cited, referred to and copied. Eventually, a remake was made in 2006 and released under the title *Black X-mas*.

Another genre milestone appeared in 1984. Directed by Joe Dante, Christmas comedy-horror *Gremlins* is a story in which a "mogwai" called Gizmo, a pleasant

furry creature purchased in a Chinatown antique store, is given to a teenage boy as a Christmas present from his father. The new owner is warned against breaking the three rules of mogwai maintenance: Gizmo must not be exposed to sunlight, must be kept away from water and must not be fed after midnight. Yet, through a series of unexpected events, the rules get broken, leading to the small town of Kingston Falls becoming infested by an army of vicious gremlins emerging from the kindly Gizmo's back. Before long, the reptilian monsters unleash havoc upon the once tranquil, Capraesque town, weaving a tapestry of Christmas-themed terror and humour. As Newman (2000) notices, "Kingston Falls evokes a Capra Christmas only to launch a violent assault on everything connected with the institution. Santa Claus is throttled with fairy light while a couple of cops refuse to get involved, and even posting a Christmas card proves fatal thanks to a gremlin lurking in the mailbox" (p. 138). Christmas horror is also reflected in the protagonist's girlfriend's story of her father dressing up as Santa and breaking his neck while trying to get through the chimney with presents for the family.

While the 1980s audiences revelled in the new horror-comedy chapter admiring the bold mixture of gore and humour, *Gremlins* constituted much more than a mere entertainment. Dante's film achieved immense success and continues to stand as a cinematic landmark of its era, owing not only to its spectacle but also to its metaphorical portrayal of contemporary society, delivering a sharp critique that remains relevant to this day. In Newby's (2018) article we encounter the following observation: "Filmmaker John Landis recently said on Eli Roth's *History of Horror* that the Gremlins were us, an American society unchecked and driven by consumer habits and insatiable appetites. Alternatively, the film can also be seen as a story of how Americans take things from other cultures, but refuse to care for them". Thus, the genre, born out of a desire for sensation and controversy, gradually evolved into a more profound and significantly more valuable cinematic spectacle over time.

Nevertheless, since the genre's inception, a considerable number of low-budget, lower-quality Christmas horror films have also surfaced. Numerous slasher B-movies (like 1980 *Christmas Evil* aka *You Better Watch Out*), while never making their way to cinemas, have managed to attain cult status, circulated from hand to hand on video tapes and DVDs. Distinct thematic and structural patterns have become ingrained within the genre. In addition to the iconic masked serial killer commonly found in slashers, the motif of a deranged psycho Santa has become one of the most frequently recurring themes in Christmas horror films. One of the most significant, although by no means the first film featuring a psycho Santa, was Charles Sellier's 1984 *Silent Night, Deadly Night*. The film tells a story of a man dressed as Santa Clause, who following the Christmas-related childhood trauma, is on a mission of punishing naughty members of the community by means of decapitating them with an axe, strangling with strings of Christmas lights, etc. After

all, Santa knows “who’s been naughty or nice”. The film met with loud protests of concerned parents and subsequently was condemned by critics and removed from cinemas. However, the popularity of the psycho Santa theme prevails, and numerous productions return to the subject year after year.

At the turn of the century, films like *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) directed by Henry Selick and produced by Tim Burton, and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (2000), based on the famous 1957 children book by Dr. Seuss and directed by Ron Howard, signified the attempts to reintroduce and reacquaint young viewers with darker aspects of Christmas traditions. Subsequently, a number of new animated versions of *A Christmas Carol* emerged, equipped with the latest technological visual wonders and innovations, including the 2009 3D production featuring Jim Carrey as Ebenezer Scrooge, to scare new generations with Christmas ghost stories.

In the new millennium, Christmas horror films have expanded their thematic scope, embracing more diverse and intertextual narratives. While films like *Black X-mas* (2006) and *Silent Night* (2012) serve as straightforward remakes of the classics *Black Christmas* and *Silent Night*, *Deadly Night*, other recent entries delve into underexplored motifs, such as zombies, within the context of holiday horror. For instance, John McPhail’s musical *Anna and the Apocalypse* (2017) introduces a small-town setting besieged by a zombie army during Christmas, echoing the monster theme popularised by *Gremlins* but with a significantly more gruesome tone. Traditionally, the genre has often attributed horror at Christmas to human-driven causes, such as trauma-fuelled rampages or madness stemming from obsession. As Noël Carroll (1990) asserts in *The Philosophy of Horror*, monsters and horrific events violate what is supposed to be the natural order of things (pp. 12–52). Films like *Anna and the Apocalypse* exemplify this violation, extending it to festive spaces once deemed safe, and reshaping the holiday horror landscape by combining traditional Christmas cheer with the grotesque intrusion of the monstrous.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century saw the emergence of another intriguing monster character on screen. Krampus, the Christmas Devil (often depicted as an Evil Santa), has made appearances in both European and American cinema, solidifying his status as an icon of Christmas horror in popular culture. The creature, deriving from the Alpine tradition of Austria and southern part of Germany, is pictured as half goat, half demon with hooves (or one foot and one hoof), long horns, pointed tail, sharp teeth, slithering tongue and black fur covering his body. Traditionally, he is equipped with a long chain and a stick for punishing naughty children, and a wicker basket or a sack for carrying them to his lair in hell. The motif was explored in a remarkable number of films within a short time span. Notable examples include Jalmari Helander’s *Rare Exports: A Christmas Tale* (2010), Michael Dougherty’s *Krampus* (2015), and the Canadian production *The Christmas Horror Story* (2015).

These were succeeded by a range of low-budget, spine-chilling (often for the wrong reason) B-movies. Krampus films heavily draw on folklore while simultaneously creating a new, attractively terrifying cinematic monster. This creature is ready to punish anyone who misbehaves or loses their Christmas spirit, children and adults alike. The movies serve as a stark reminder to “better watch out,” as an encounter with Krampus can lead to a perilous and bloody ordeal.

In 2023, Tyler MacIntyre directed a modern slasher variation on 1946 Frank Capra’s classic, complete with a title pun. *It’s a Wonderful Knife* takes place in a small town called Angel Falls (like *Gremlins*’ Kingston Falls, reminiscent of Capra’s Bedford Falls), where a teenage girl Winnie witnesses a series of brutal murders committed on local teenagers at Christmas by a masked criminal called “The Angel”. The town is freed from the villain by Winnie herself, who in self-defence manages to electrocute him with her jumper cables. The following Christmas, and still suffering from trauma, the teenager makes a wish and is given a chance to see how the world would look like without her in it. The Angel is still on the loose and terrorising the town, as she was not there to stop him. Her family and friends do not know her and, as in the original film, eventually the protagonist gets to realise the horrors of her nonexistence and to fully appreciate her old life. While this peculiar homage to Frank Capra’s classic may give rise to controversy, the evident success of the movie among slasher fans highlights the undeniable appeal of subverting the tradition of sacred Christmas movies and themes. Arguably, Capra successfully opened the door for such transfigurations himself, by darkening the potentially pure romantic comedy with a *noir* fantasy sequence in *It’s a Wonderful Life*.

Released at the start of the 2024 Christmas season, Jake Kasdan’s film *Red One* offers a captivating blend of family-friendly fantasy and horror-inspired elements. The story revolves around Santa’s abduction by an ancient revenge driven witch, creating a narrative that, while not strictly a horror film, taps into familiar folkloric motifs. Drawing on figures like Krampus, the evil witch, and the ominous threat of a Christmas that might not happen, the movie plays with themes of destabilising the comforting rituals and traditions that define the holiday season. By evoking these elements, *Red One* highlights how cinema often engages with our fears of unsettling the familiar, transforming the security of cultural icons into a space for both entertainment and introspection.

### **Christmas Horror Cinema as a Medium of Catharsis**

The concept of catharsis, originating from the ancient Greek word *κάθαρσις*, meaning “cleansing” or “purification,” was introduced by Aristotle in his *Poetics* to describe the emotional effect of tragedy on its audience. According to Aristotle,

catharsis involves the purging or purification of emotions, particularly pity and fear, through the experience of art. This process allows individuals to achieve emotional balance and clarity. By depicting profound human suffering and moral dilemmas, tragedy helps audiences confront and release intense emotions, offering not only therapeutic relief but also an educational experience that deepens their understanding of human nature.

The perennial appeal of Christmas horror cinema seems to lie in its unique capacity to merge festive cheer with the terror and suspense of the horror genre, offering a modern avenue for this cathartic process. As explored in the discussed earlier traditions of ghost literature and its evolution into cinema, this intersection of joy and fear fulfils distinct psychological and cultural functions. By combining Aristotelian theories of catharsis with contemporary understandings of horror and the uncanny, Christmas horror cinema emerges not only as a source of entertainment but also as a medium for emotional and social reconciliation.

In Aristotle's framework, catharsis is achieved through the controlled evocation and subsequent release of pity and fear (Aristotle, 2022, p. 10). Horror films similarly evoke intense emotions: dread, anxiety, unease, but contextualise them within a narrative that often culminates in resolution and reassurance. In Christmas horror cinema, this emotional cycle is amplified by the sharp juxtaposition of holiday warmth and horror's darkness. For example, in *Krampus* (2015), the terror wrought by the vengeful folkloric figure symbolises anxieties tied to familial discord, guilt, and unmet expectations during the holiday season. The narrative resolution, where the characters face the consequences of their actions but also find redemption, mirrors the structure of tragedy, providing emotional release and clarity. Therefore, the supernatural chaos offers a symbolic platform for viewers to confront their anxieties and emerge reassured by the reestablishment of order.

The unique cathartic power of Christmas horror also stems from the cultural dissonance it creates. Christmas, traditionally associated with joy, family, and nostalgia, contrasts sharply with the fear and dread inherent to horror. This juxtaposition intensifies the emotional impact of both elements, creating a heightened sense of catharsis. Films like previously mentioned *Black Christmas* exploit this tension by subverting the safety and comfort associated with the holiday. The intrusion of violence into a festive sorority house evokes a sense of vulnerability, confronting audiences with the fragility of perceived security. This emotional confrontation is balanced by the film's narrative arc, allowing viewers to process their fears and find symbolic closure. Similarly, *Gremlins* blends comedy, horror, and holiday sentimentality, using its mischievous creatures to criticise consumerism and holiday excess. The resolution reaffirms traditional Christmas values, offering audiences a way to reconcile cultural critiques with a reaffirmation of hope and togetherness, achieving a cathartic balance.

Victor Turner's (1969) theories on ritual and liminality can also help to understand the cathartic power of Christmas horror. Horror films act as a liminal space, where societal norms are temporarily suspended, and chaos reigns. In Christmas horror, this liminality is layered over a setting deeply rooted in ritual and tradition, such as family gatherings, gift exchanges, and festive celebrations. In Sellier's *Silent Night, Deadly Night*, the killer Santa figure becomes a metaphor for suppressed fears and traumas, disrupting the idealised vision of Christmas. By confronting such transgressions in the safe space of fiction, viewers symbolically purge their fears and anxieties, ultimately returning to the real world with a renewed appreciation for stability and tradition.

In a similar fashion, Freud's theory of the uncanny, which describes the unsettling effect of encountering something simultaneously familiar and strange (Freud, [1919] 2003), further supports the cathartic role of Christmas horror. The holiday season, with its rigid traditions and idealised imagery, becomes fertile ground for exploring repressed fears and societal pressures. *Krampus* weaponises familiar holiday elements: snow globes, Christmas carols, festive dinners, by making them eerie and threatening. This subversion allows audiences to confront the darker aspects of their psyche and societal expectations. The catharsis emerges as the narrative resolves, restoring the balance between the uncanny and the familiar.

Christmas horror films also function as a mirror to collective anxieties. They provide a space to process fears that transcend the individual, such as consumerism (*Gremlins*), familial dysfunction (*Krampus*), and the commercialisation of holidays (*Black Christmas*). Through shared viewership, audiences engage in a collective cathartic experience, bonding over common emotions and tensions. For instance, the nostalgia-driven aesthetic of *Gremlins* critiques the commodification of Christmas while delivering a chaotic spectacle that leads to eventual emotional resolution. Similarly, *Black Christmas* addresses issues of gender and vulnerability, inviting viewers to grapple with societal fears and find catharsis in the characters' resilience and the eventual triumph of justice.

Finally, Christmas horror cinema can be understood as a modern ritual. Victor Turner and other anthropologists have argued that rituals serve to release societal tensions and reaffirm cultural values. Watching Christmas horror films has become a seasonal tradition for many, functioning as a communal experience that blends ritualistic engagement with emotional catharsis. Whether it is the moral redemption in *Krampus*, the criticism of modernity in *Gremlins*, or the subversion of tradition in *Black Christmas*, these films offer audiences a way to symbolically confront their fears, process collective anxieties, and emerge emotionally renewed. The act of viewing a film, often shared with friends or family, becomes a communal ritual of release and renewal, akin to traditional holiday celebrations but reimagined for a contemporary audience.

To conclude, Christmas horror cinema achieves immense popularity not just because of its entertainment value but because it offers a profound cathartic experience. By blending the joy of the holiday season with the terror of horror, Christmas horror films allow audiences to confront and purge deep-seated fears, anxieties, and cultural tensions. The above discussed theories of catharsis, the uncanny, and liminality provide the key to understanding how the genre functions as emotional purifier, helping viewers reconcile the contradictions of modern life. The enduring appeal of Christmas horrors lies in their ability to transform the holiday season into a space of emotional exploration and renewal. In this way, Christmas horror cinema serves as a contemporary form of tragedy, providing audiences with a cathartic release and reaffirming the resilience of hope, family, and tradition in the face of darkness.

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