**Ramsey Campbell's *The Face That Must Die*: A Step towards Mundane Horror****Dr. Advait Dhondiram Joshi**

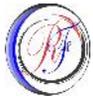
Head &amp; Associate

Professor, Sadashivrao. Mandlik Mahavidyalaya, Murgud,  
Kolhapur.[advait.joshi@rediffmail.com](mailto:advait.joshi@rediffmail.com)**Abstract**

*The present paper aims at explaining Mundane Horror that Campbell manifests in his novel- *The Face That Must Die* (1979). Campbell was born in 1946 in Liverpool. The separation of his parents and his mother's interest in horror fiction and movies (who was a writer) nourished and developed his literary taste for horror fiction. Ramsey Campbell has become successful in establishing himself as a genuine writer of horror fiction. His work combines many types of horror fiction—Lovecraftian lore, psychological horror, ghost stories and more. *The Face That Must Die* presents a serial killer who kills innocent people. The present paper also deals with Campbell's innovative mechanism of horror, employment of internal 'other' and a loathsome and cheerless atmosphere that the novel creates.*

Ramsey Campbell's long awaited novel *The Face That Must Die* appeared after three years of *The Doll Who Ate His Mother* (1976). This first novel of Campbell remained at the center of criticism among scholars, critics and readers. The reasons behind it are very clear. Firstly, Campbell's second story collection *Demons by Daylight* (1973) not only introduced him to the whole world as the writer of horror fiction but also made him the unmatched creator of horror fiction. Secondly, the story collection supported the movement of horror fiction that preferred and showed anything exists in and around human beings can evoke everlasting and disgusting horror. Thirdly, *Demons by Daylight* is and has been praised for its hallucinatory atmosphere, its portrayal of middle class people, its concentration on a single character, and its mood and sensation as he or she faces uncanny situations. In short, this story collection has shaken the world of horror fiction offering Campbell the label of excellent horror fiction writer. Scholars, critics, and readers accustomed to the new Campbellian technique and style of writing. On this background, exactly, after three years, Campbell launched his first novel *The Doll Who Ate His Mother*. The novel was not welcomed and appreciated but it became the matter of bitter criticism. S. T. Joshi commented on the novel:

The development-especially for one who has come from  
reading the best of Campbell's compact short stories-is leisurely

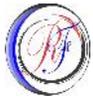


almost to the point of tedium, and the rather flat, atmosphereless style (perhaps an attempt to render the work more commercially marketable) is a disappointment to those who relish the hallucinatory prose in Campbell's short stories (Joshi 65).

Furthermore, Campbell referred another bitter comment of Joshi in his *Afterword* attached to the new edition of *The Doll Who Ate His Mother*. Campbell wrote: "my friend S. T. Joshi, the American critic declared the novel 'very poor'" (Campbell 290). In the same *Afterword* Campbell confessed the fact and hoped for better writing: "After all, it did persuade me I could write novels, and I think I am beginning to learn how to do so" (Campbell 290). Thus, *The Doll who Ate His Mother* is not a tremendous success for Campbell and his second non-supernatural horror novel *The Face That Must Die* (1979) created turmoil before its arrival in the market. It was rejected by many publishers and at last it appeared in the market with the significant editing.

*The Face That Must Die* can take a high place in Campbell's oeuvre. Surprisingly Campbell returns to the setting of his earlier novel—Liverpool. The town is full of castoffs, homosexuals, drug consumers, paranoid serial killer and spree killers. Campbell exposes a clutching horror of urban decay and presents Liverpool as a landscape of alienation and nightmare. Thus *The Face That Must Die* takes place in the modern period. The urban setting not only transforms the novel into a very effective horror fiction but also exposes a true nature of reality. Reality, for Campbell, is an illusion. Beneath the surface of life somebody waits to finish human life off. It is tragic, as Campbell finds; human life is devoured by human beings.

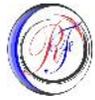
We learn that Lonely and prejudiced John Horridge a native of Liverpool hates those who live on the dole but an injury to his leg does not allow him to work and he himself is living on the dole. This Horridge is shocked and disturbed by a series of murders of gay people in Liverpool. Horror in the novel does not lie in the disturbed personality of Horridge but it springs from the actions that emerge from him. The novel takes an unexpected turn when Horridge notices a police sketch of suspected murderer of Liverpool. On his walk home, Horridge is convinced that he has identified the murderer, Roy Craig who lives in a nearby apartment. Horridge makes an anonymous phone call to the police station about Craig's presumed role in the murders of homosexuals. Horridge



gets frustrated when he sees police instead of arresting Craig appear to apologize for bothering him. Furious with the situation, Horridge decides to take the matter in his hands. One day Horridge goes to the apartment of Craig. When he comes across the fellow tenant and the artist Fanny Adamson, he pretends himself as a private detective hired by Craig. While in Fanny's apartment he manages to steal the imprint of the keys and has a set made. On one evening Horridge with intention of collecting more evidence goes to the flat of Craig. He is shocked to see Craig in the flat and Horridge kills him with a razor. This incident, however, commences other incidents. The event of the murder shocks Fanny who has painted a picture of Horridge. Another fellow tenant, Cathy Gardner recognizes Horridge who frequently visits the library in which she works. Meanwhile, Horridge, who enjoys murder of Craig, realizes that he has left his fingerprints in Fanny's flat and decides to wipe out the traces. So he goes back to the Fanny's flat thinking that she is not there. As Fanny is in her flat, Horridge, taking advantage of it, kills Fanny.

Now the peculiar incident follows in which Cathy (who thinks Horridge is a detective) encounters him on one foggy evening and follows to question him. Suspecting that Cathy might know of the murders he has committed, Horridge flees from the place. Cathy chases Horridge but she is totally unaware of the fact that she is the next victim of Horridge. This encounter ends abruptly as Cathy loses Horridge in the fog. Now Horridge determines to flee the place and thinks to return to his old homes in Wales. But he cannot go to the place because he has lost the payment book that allows him to collect his disability benefits. So he makes a sinister plan to catch Peter, Cathy's husband in Fanny's flat. Having done so, he forces Peter to drive him to his old home. But Peter cannot drive so they wait until Cathy arrives, and Horridge forces both of them into the van. He threatens Cathy to cut Peter with his razor if she does not take him to Wales.

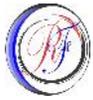
Then, the novel moves to the tense situation in which Cathy drives a van with Peter and Horridge in. It seems that their journey will not long last. But they stop at a remote quarry where Horridge forces Cathy to walk forward in the dark. As a result of it, she falls into the quarry. She clings to the edge of the quarry when Horridge approaches to her with the intention of killing. But Peter hits him with a rock, and Horridge falls into the quarry. Peter and Cathy are saved but police do not find any trace of Horridge. Presumed him dead, they leave the place. The epilogue of the novel shows that Peter and



Cathy have moved to their own house and Cathy is pregnant. But she has developed a limp following the fall into the quarry. Days and months have passed and one day a peculiar letter comes from the tenants who now live where Gardner couple used to live in Liverpool. The letter states that a man had called and wanted Gardner's address and they had given it to him. When asked by Cathy about the mail, Peter replies: 'nothing worth bothering about' (FD 351).

Though the novel, like other novels of Campbell, fails to compel and to evoke chilling horror in readers, its salient features cannot be neglected. Earlier Campbell in his first story collection *Inhabitant of the Lake and Less Welcome Tenants* (1964) demonstrated his interest in Lovecraftian cosmic horror moving around strange entities from vast cosmos. Similarly in his first novel *The Doll Who Ate His Mother* Campbell turned to the supernatural horror. But Campbell turned to and exposed mundane horror in *The Face That Must Die*. Like his second story collection *Demons by Daylight*, Campbell in *The Face That Must Die* focuses on the shifting moods of an individual consciousness which makes the tale of the novel haunting one. Moreover, His employment of newly emerged trend of horror in his fiction- the trend of exploring mundane horror- stamped on him as the versatile writer of the field. While Campbell's contemporary and American horror fiction writer Stephen King (b. 1947) grew his interest in vampires and in animating dead bodies, Ramsey Campbell preferred to peep into a darker mind of human beings. *The Face That Must Die* reveals the bitter truth that there is no difference between human beings and monsters putting readers in a puzzling state making them unable to locate their own roles as victims or villains. Ghosts and monsters are horrible not because they live beyond human control but they are in human beings. The 'other', which exists in human beings, fascinates Campbell very much. Human beings are beyond control when this 'other' springs up. Campbell's mundane horror is much appealing because it presents an inescapable horrible world. This world occurs in *The Face That Must Die*. The world with diseased and disturbed human beings not only appalls readers but also gives a sense that supernatural icons of horror have left their shadows on the earth.

With debut of *The Face That Must Die* Campbell placed himself in the array of modern horror fiction writers and joined in the movement of widening the scope of horror fiction and inculcating upon reader's mind that anything can be a source of horror. This is really a great revolution of horror fiction writers to bring earthly things or things from the 'known' world as icons of horror when it has been perfectly accepted and

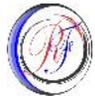


presumed that a horror story or a horror novel must be supernatural. There is make-believe that any supernatural element employed in the horror fiction can generate more horror than the mundane horror of being murdered or maimed. Ramsey Campbell joining his contemporaries shattered this idea and offered the status of icons of horror to earthly things. Thus, instead of ghosts, ghouls, witches and vampires, diseased persons, serial killers, criminals, dark personalities and cannibals have occupied pages after pages of horror fiction equally doing and arousing horror like supernatural elements. This change is beautifully noted by the famous critic Hank Wagner has quoted Huger B. Cave's quotation.

Back onto dusty shelves went most of the vampires, the werewolves, and other such beasties of the Victorian novelists. To front and centre came a probing of people's minds and an awareness of the frightening things to be found lurking there (Wagner 475).

*The Face That Must Die* touches sensibly to readers as it opens a new and nearest door of horror and it also underlies the fact that serial killers can be found as a next-door neighbor. Like other modern horror novelist, Ramsey Campbell has brought serial killers in his fictional world and they have effectively been utilized as icons of mundane horror or non-supernatural horror. In his some novels Campbell focuses on a serial killer and it shows his concern for mankind as well as society. Campbell is a poet of disturbed and diseased human mind. His home town Liverpool abounds with haunted and dilapidated houses, ghosts; it is also an abode of serial killers. Amid crowded city these serial killers secretly carry out their heinous acts of killing. *The Face That Must Die* very effectively introduces a serial killer exposing the 'other' that exists in human being. The earlier horror fiction writer including gothic novelist demonstrated their interest in the external 'other' like ghost, witches and demons.

To sum up, *The Face That Must Die* with its surreal quality of prose, the unsettling atmosphere, the 'other' in quite ordinary character, the urban world of horror, a chilling portrayal of paranoid personality make the novel to remain at the top position in horror fiction. It is creditable that the novel is- in spite of its struggle for publication, its absorption of bitter comments, its negligence of scholars and critics (there are very few scholars and critics who have devoted to study Campbell's oeuvre; Campbell is



more read but less studied)- much popular in the world of horror fiction. Thus, Ramsey Campbell, the greatest living exponent of subtle horrors, has presented one of the most truly disturbing horror novels of all time. *The Face That Must Die*, which tackled social ills in Ramsey Campbell's home city of Liverpool and more than any other novel of its time, climbed successfully into the head of a mad man. Firstly, *The Face That Must Die* can be looked upon as a stepping-stone to the same kind of non-supernatural work that flourished at the hands of Campbell in his latter career of writing. Secondly, *The Face That Must Die* compared to *The Doll Who Ate His Mother* is innovative in its icon of horror, its theme and prose style. Thirdly, its presentation of a disturbed human mind is powerful and noteworthy; a disturbed human mind is as dangerous as a haunted castle or house. Finally, the novel is a fine presentation of dormant evil that lurks beneath the surface of everyday life. In short, diseased and disturbed minded characters have started appearing in Campbell's fictional world. *The Face That Must Die* is a compact and effective work, skillful in its implementation and subtle in its portrayal of a disturbed personality. Campbell places many things together in the novel; a paranoid serial killer protagonist against the background of the modern setting, a double narrative technique, a loathsome and cheerless atmosphere, an unresolved ending focusing on the message of everlasting horror. All this mixture makes *The Face That Must Die* a superb horror novel. Moreover, Campbell's presentation of a paranoid serial killer, the reasons behind his actions, and his reasons of getting afraid of everything he encounters force readers to live in the shadow of horror forever.

#### **Works Cited:**

Campbell, Ramsey. *The Face That Must Die*. New York: A Tom Doherty Associates Book, 1979. Print.

Joshi, S. T. *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001. Print.

Wagner, Hank. "The Serial Killer". *Icons of Horror and the Supernatural: Encyclopedia of Our Worst Nightmares*. Ed. S. T. Joshi. Vol.2. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007. 473-506. Print