



Living the Mystery: Inside the Mind of Anton Grasso

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For decades, **Anton Grasso**, Malta's Master of Horror, has thrilled and terrified readers with stories of the supernatural. With over 40 years of writing experience to his name, why are fear and mystery such compelling topics for Grasso? **THINK** sits with Grasso to find out how fear has shaped his art.

Known as Malta's literary master of horror, Anton Grasso has spent more than 40 years exploring fear, the supernatural, and the limits of the unknown. But this raises a deeper question at the heart of his work: what kind of mind spends a lifetime chasing mystery? Beyond the printed page, Grasso's fascination with fear found one of its most recognisable expressions in *Enigma*, the paranormal programme that once held Maltese audiences firmly in its grip.

For many horror fans in the 1990s, *Enigma* was a familiar Monday night ritual, tuning in to see stories of apparitions, uncanny encounters, or the notorious White Lady – tales that sit at the edge of belief and linger long after the episode ends. These stories have a way of creeping into your subconscious, making even the most hardened sceptic nervous once the lights go out.

Why are fear and mystery so compelling, not just for Grasso, but for us as well? 'Fear isn't what you can see really, but what you can't see, that which is mysterious,' Grasso explains. And that philosophy is precisely at the heart of *Enigma*.

ENIGMA'S HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Although *Enigma* later became a successful television series, its origins were modest. The project began as a radio programme built around interviews with individuals willing to share experiences they could not explain. From the outset, Grasso was careful not to frame these narratives as evidence or spectacle; instead, the programme allowed them to exist in a space of uncertainty. While occasionally juxtaposed with perspectives from experts such as priests and psychiatrists, the aim was not to solve the mystery, but to sit with it. As Grasso would insist, 'a mystery doesn't remain a mystery once you discover it.'

The atmosphere surrounding *Enigma* seemed, at times, to echo its subject matter. The programme began recording on the dreaded Friday the 13th, and Grasso recalls a story about an early interviewee whose testimony had made a strong impression. An equipment malfunction resulted in this audio being lost. However, Grasso would never get the opportunity to re-record the missing interview: 'The week after, we went to see this man

again, and they told us he had died.' Such moments were not presented as proof of anything supernatural, but they contributed to the sense that the unknown could never be fully controlled or explained. For Grasso, this ambiguity was essential: 'the curtain remains black and if you open it, you find nothing, and everything is lost.' When *Enigma* transitioned to television on TVM, its popularity revealed a widespread fascination with the paranormal among Maltese audiences – something that reflected the innate curiosity we all have when it comes to the unknown.

Enigma established Grasso as a public identity distinct from his literary career, becoming a cultural reference point in its own right. Yet for him, the programme's success confirmed something more fundamental: that fear and mystery are not anomalies, but universal and permanent features of human life. 'Believe it or not, accept it or not, fear is part of our lives.'

Grasso's book *Enigma* would go on to become his favourite work. Unlike many of his horror stories, which he approaches with relentless self-criticism, *Enigma* represents a convergence of his interests as a writer and thinker, a worldview in which



Top: Anton Grasso at his home office.

Bottom: An evening with Anton Grasso – the acclaimed author in conversation, sharing insights into his craft together with a selection of his published works on display during the event.

Photos by Kristov Scicluna



the supernatural is not reduced to explanation, and fear is not something to be overcome. But behind the measured voice and calm presence associated with the author lies a figure shaped by fear from an early age.

THE CHILD WITHIN

'From when I was young, I was always, always, fearful but curious.' Recalling his early encounters with horror imagery, Grasso speaks of being drawn to stories that unsettled him while simultaneously demanding his attention. 'In Birzebbuga, we stayed in a house opposite the movie theatre called 'Lido'. And I heard screaming from it. I was just a small boy hearing this scream, wanting to know what was happening in there, but at the same time being scared,' he explains. This tension between the known and the unknowable would later form the philosophical backbone of *Enigma* and his horror writing more broadly.

Grasso resists the idea that writing horror was a deliberate or strategic choice. He insists that he never set out to write horror stories, nor did he see writing as a way to purge himself of fear. 'My fears have never left me,' he states plainly, rejecting the notion that storytelling functioned as a form of release. Instead, fear remained constant, shaping his imagination without ever being resolved.

Central to Grasso's self-understanding is the idea that the



child within him – the ‘inner boy’ – never disappeared. This emotional openness, he suggests, is not something he outgrew, nor something he wishes to lose. ‘The boy never dies,’ he muses, ‘This boy that never grew up, that still chases butterflies, that still blows bubbles and pops them – a child. He stayed there, you know, and he will stay there. So, that’s the dichotomy, the great divide between the author and the human.’ It is this same vulnerability that makes him acutely responsive to stories of loss, illness, and death, and that distinguishes between his authorial persona and his real life.

THE ULTIMATE ENIGMA: DEATH

Grasso’s lifelong engagement with the paranormal ultimately leads to a far more intimate and disturbing preoccupation: death itself, and more specifically, burial. Grasso is explicit in distinguishing between a general fear of dying and his own particular obsession. Death, for him, is inseparable from what follows it. ‘When someone dies,’ he reflects, ‘nobody stays with the dead continuously. The irony is, when someone dear to you dies, you do everything you can to get rid of them and bury them as quickly as possible.’

Having suffered the loss of his father as a child, and more recently the loss of his younger brother,



Anton Grasso signing copies of his books
Photo by Kristov Scicluna

Grasso is intimately familiar with the grieving process and the fear and uncertainty death brings with it. What terrifies him is not only death’s inevitability, but the silence and abandonment that surround it.

‘The sealing of the coffin is the sealing of life,’ he suggests, marking the point at which separation becomes absolute. Grasso’s fascination with the supernatural gradually narrows into an intense focus on death as the ultimate mystery. Whereas *Enigma* dealt with moving curtains and unanswered questions, death confronts the immobility of the grave. Yet even here, Grasso resists consolation. He rejects the idea that fear can be resolved through belief, ritual, or explanation. Religion, he acknowledges, is itself

a mystery – one that offers meaning without certainty of what lies beyond. What matters, instead, is learning how to live in the shadow of death. ‘The secret of living,’ he recalls reading, ‘is knowing how to die.’

A life lived in constant awareness of mystery sharpens the present rather than diminishes it. As he reflects, ‘life is so short. What you want to do with your life, you should do it now, whoever you want to love, love them now,’ because the future, like all things that matter most, remains unknowable. ‘You need to do something in life. You have to leave your mark. And it is important that you leave this mark. No matter what you discover, nobody will ever know – that is life’s enigma. And that is life’s mystery.’ 