

Analysis of *The Nature of Horror*

In American philosopher Noël Carroll's written piece *The Nature of Horror*, he sets out to define a subgenre of films known as art-horror. Carroll does this by setting forth a general formula he has created that is used in the creation of these archetypal films. The author argues that these films would not be as successful if they did not take the physical appearance of a monster, the impurity and horror factors of a monster, and the emotions of the audience into consideration.

The author states that the first rule of art-horror is that the monster in question must be physically repulsive to the human characters in the film. He substantiates this claim using examples of monsters from famous stories, such as the Shoggoth from H.P. Lovecraft's "At the Mountains of Madness." Carroll argues that the reactions of the human characters in these stories - nausea, shuddering, screaming - pulls the audience into the story and makes the monster seem more realistic. This argument brings up an interesting point: people are in some way attracted to the things that repulse them. It suggests that we, as humans, tend not to deviate from our innate desire to categorize things we do not yet comprehend.

According to Carroll, the second rule of art-horror is that the monster must be both scary and impure. He emphasizes the monster being viewed as impure in one form or another, stressing that this is the most crucial aspect of the subgenre. It is interesting that *impure* in this definition does not necessarily relate to religion or moral values. Instead, it relies on the abnormal: creatures that do not fit neatly into social categories. This is exemplified in monstrous characters such as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde who effectively combine the normal and abnormal. Once again, this suggests that art-horror films are successful in part because they appeal to the simplicity of human nature and our instincts.

Carroll argues that the third staple of the art-horror genre is the emotions and reactions of the human characters in a film. In some ways, this ties in with the first rule of physical repulsiveness. The way characters react in a movie sets the tone of each scene, just like an author's word choice in a written piece. If a character is tense or scared, this is portrayed in their facial expressions, body language, and actions. Audiences pick up on these nonverbal cues and subconsciously internalize them, making them their own. Not only does this keep the thread of the human need to categorize and make sense of things, but it reflects the urge to conform to society and connects with the audience on a deeper, less conscious level.

While Noël Carroll makes a compelling argument towards the formula of art-horror and creates an intriguing conversation surrounding the effectiveness of tapping into human nature when creating films, it is important to note that his work is not based on any empirical research. The basis of Carroll's argument resides in the evidence he has derived from famous art-horror films and stories. This makes for a thought provoking analytical piece on art-horror, but does not necessarily prove any of his theories. In my opinion, the most interesting part of this text is the human psychology that lingers in the background. My question is: how has this psychology changed over time as people, civilizations, and monsters have progressed?

References

Carroll, N. (2012). The Nature of Horror. In 941256167 735561218 T. R. Fahy (Author), *The philosophy of horror* (pp. 29-36). Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.