

Noël Carroll, "Why Horror?"

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Answering the question: "Why would anyone *want* to be ... art-horrified?" [p33t] This is the **Paradox of Horror**. How can what is *repulsive* be *pleasurable*?

NC's view has been that *repulsion* or *disgust* are the key emotional elements of art-horror.

NC announces that while his account of Art-Horror is meant to capture what all Art-Horror instances have in common, and hence to be a fully general account, his account will not preclude supplementary accounts that explain how/why a particular instance of Art-Horror "has some special levers of attraction" over and above those generic ones he thinks he has uncovered.

He will consider one particular case of this kind toward the end of the piece.

[break]

NC remains committed to his view that Art-Horror turns on a *monster* and the associated *narrative style* revolves around "proving, disclosing, discovering, and confirming the existence of something that is impossible, something that defies standing conceptual schemes." [p34b]

This puts the audience in a position of curiosity about the putative *monster* and makes their expectations revolve around what amounts to a narrative 'secret'.

"Horror stories are often protracted series of discoveries." [p35t]

Upshot: "...the horror story is driven explicitly by curiosity." [p35t/m]

For NC, *monsters* are the perfect vehicle for generating this curiosity since they are *impossible beings*.

Upshot: Art-Horror that works with *monster/monsters* is, then, a species of *mystery narrative*. But in this case, the question is not "Who done it?" but "Does the monster exist, and if so, **What is it?**"

JP: while it is certainly true that many monster narratives *are* stimulating because the monster seems to be *impossible*, NC seems too wedded to the idea that what grips us is the violation of our existing cultural/conceptual scheme. That surely is part of the attraction and basis for our curiosity, but I don't think what makes the monster seem *impossible* is nearly so frightening and curiosity-inducing as those monsters that represent *the utterly unknown (perhaps even unknowable)*. See later notes.

NC's key claim: the pleasure in Art-Horror is **cognitive**: we enjoy trying to figure out whether the monster exists, then if it exists, how it exists, how it can be fit into our existing cultural/conceptual scheme, etc.

JP's alternate view: that this investigation is also pleasurable because it relieves us of the disquieting feeling of vulnerability that something that lies outside the familiar world produces. Thus, the monster is not just *impossible*, but their existence stands as something **chaotic** in what was an ordered and orderly world before they appear. The narrative is pulled forward in part by not simple *curiosity*, but the related *need to find order in chaos*. This does a better job of explaining the **fear** of the monster (while, perhaps, the **disgust** is more to do with its violation of our ethical norms).

NC thinks that the driver of disgust and fear is that the monster 'violates our classificatory scheme'. But I would just add that **disgust** suggests that the monster doesn't just lie *outside* our conceptual scheme, but moreso, lies *in a particular position in our existing scheme (it murders the innocent, etc., and does it*

**in a way that is disgusting if WE WERE TO DO IT).** And I don't think this covers the only source of our **fear** of the monster. It is also its status as lying *outside what makes sense to us*.

JP: In a way, my modification of the NC account of disgust and fear could be seen as a deeper way of understanding what is central to his account of Art-Horror: we are deeply curious about and want to *understand* the monster that until now we thought would be impossible as a way to restore our sense of control and of what was lost on its discovery: our orderly world with its predictable elements.

NC adds that to function as the locus/stimulant for the pleasurable pursuit of our natural curiosity about an *impossible being*, they must **add features that make them objects of disgust, loathing, disturbing and repulsive.**

JP: NC's point seems to be that without our repulsion, disgust, loathing and fear tied to these rejecting emotions, we would not be so caught up pleasurably in the complex cognitive process of discovery and disclosure. I would only then add that the *reason* the discovery and disclosure is *pleasurable* is **not just because it's fun to solve a puzzle, and not just because a world with a vampire in it is more disgusting than one that lacks a vampire**, but at least **ALSO, that coming to understand the vampire restore order to a world in which chaos intervened.** This is what makes the *kind* of dystopian setting of an Art-Horror pieces so disturbing. It is not just **World War, the End of a Nation, a People**, etc., but the loss of order in place of **chaos** it opens up.

NC considers objections:

1. Other genres (notably, detective stories, disaster narratives, dystopian climate change sagas, etc.) involve the same process of discovery, confirmation and associated cognitive tools of exploration/disclosure.

Reply: Yes, but these others don't involve an "evil that ... is ...impossible [or,] in principle, unknown" nor one that inspires disgust or loathing.

2. Some Art-Horror lacks any narrative at all (horror paintings) and some lack the discovery/confirmation elements of exploration & disclosure. [pg38t/m]

3. The emphasis on the puzzle about the apparently impossible and consequent interest in discovery/exploration/disclosure processes doesn't seem to **connect** all that to the **emotional of revulsion** that is the central quality that distinguishes the genre. [pg38m]

NC's Reply: these objections are good ones and show that the account/'conjecture' needs to be expanded to cover these.

Solution: curiosity is *not only* aroused by the impossibility of the Beast, but "the objects of Art-Horror in and of themselves engender curiosity as well." [pg38b]

Key to the Solution: that the impossible Beast is IMPURE/anomalous. "Anomalies are interesting...elicit interest". Upshot: what is disturbing, distressing, disgusting is **also riveting/thrilling.** [pg39m]

JP: But **notice** that what impurity does for NC, anything chaotic/disordered/utterly foreign would do also. (but maybe this is just a difference in nomenclature, and a distinction without a real difference?)

**NOTE:** NC mentions the "thought theory of fictional emotion" that he covers earlier in his book. This takes it that the audience *knows* that the Beast does not exist. They are merely reacting to the possibility that such a being MIGHT exist (and this comports well with Gaut's account of fictional emotion in terms of **making-believe**).

This gives NC a solution to the first objection to the 'conjecture': non-narrative Art-Horror evokes curiosity precisely because they "promote fascination at the same time they distress" since even without a narrative approach to the Beast, the presentation nonetheless gets us imagining that such a Beast could exist (The Unseen Monster Under the Bed can be replaced by a painting of a child looking under a bed with a terrified look on their face).