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Macabre Fascination and Moral Propriety: The Attraction of Horror

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Abstract

Why does the horror genre serve as a source of pleasure, given its aim to induce fear in the audience? I examine two general solutions to this phenomenon, referred to as the paradox of horror, which differ based upon their position regarding the possibility of deriving pleasure from fear. Each of the possible solutions contains significant flaws. I argue that, by adjusting a meta-theory originally proposed by Susan Feagin, it is possible to craft a solution that addresses the paradox while preserving the idea that, at times, fear can be enjoyed. The article concludes by considering the moral status of macabre fascination, which is often subject to recrimination. Given that such fascination is a driving force behind the willingness to engage with horror, does it follow that these works ought to be viewed as morally problematic? Drawing upon the concept of a moral saint, I argue the lack of macabre fascination is problematic. Exercising this fascination is beneficial to the development of character traits. Thus such indulgences are, within reason, morally acceptable.

Key Words

ethics, horror, macabre, meta-response, pleasurable fear, reactive attitudes

1. Introducing the paradox

The macabre is often regarded as a source of significant fear and anxiety. Events and objects belonging to the macabre contain elements of violence, decay, and, notably, death. Typically, these are seen as undesirable, horrific, and disturbing occurrences that one should avoid whenever possible. Although seemingly straightforward, this brings to light an intriguing question. If the macabre is viewed with such trepidation, why is its artistic representation a popular source of entertainment? Why seek out in the arts what are otherwise terrifying, real-world occurrences, and how can we explain such pleasurable fear? This phenomenon most clearly manifests in our interaction with works of horror. A genre designed around provoking fear, horror nonetheless enjoys a sizable audience, and notable success.^[1]

I consider horror art as delineated by Andrea Sauchelli, "a work is a sample of art-horror if it is designed to evoke a specific H-mood using the artistic means peculiar to the form of art to which it belongs...generally marked by a morbid attention toward (principally) death, murder, and evil through the artistic means appropriate to the specific art form."^[2] I will open by examining prior solutions offered within the philosophical study of horror, a juncture of aesthetics and philosophical psychology that explores this phenomenon with the greatest depth.

I consider two distinct tactics utilized to dissolve this seeming paradox. The first asserts that pleasure does not stem from the sensation of fear but from a separate intellectual satisfaction. The opposing viewpoint contests fear can be enjoyed, thus negating any paradox. I propose that both fail to offer a wholly comprehensive explanation, and will present an account of my own design inspired by Susan Feagin's often-overlooked

account of horror.[3] If successful, this new account raises an additional question regarding the moral status of macabre fascination. Namely, is indulgence morally acceptable, given that it is often met with recrimination? I argue indulging macabre fascination is acceptable given its value in cultivating vital character traits.

2. Fear as universally abhorrent

One method of addressing the paradox is to deny that fear can serve as a source of pleasure. Noël Carroll offers perhaps the most widely-known formulation of this account. He asserts pleasure found through engaging with macabre works is not due to fear. Such emotional states are intrinsically unpleasant, and therefore impossible to enjoy.[4] Macabre fictional objects are unnatural, as their existence implies a kind of categorical violation. For example, Dracula is simultaneously alive and dead.[5] This interstitial quality arouses fear, but also transforms the object of horror into a source of curiosity, which can only be sated by continued narrative engagement. It is this revelation of details that causes pleasure, as it sates our intrigue.[6] Fear is not enjoyed for its own sake. Rather, it is the price to pay for the satisfaction of narrative curiosity.

Carroll's account, while valuable as a contribution to the philosophy of horror, has faced many objections. It relies too heavily upon satisfaction of narrative curiosity as the sole source of pleasure from horror. Pleasurable fear can persist even in the near or total absence of such curiosity. Carroll maintains different horror fictions will contain enough variance in subject matter or content to pique sufficient intrigue.[7] However, this fails to explain how identical, or largely similar works of horror can still produce pleasurable fear. Two such specific instances come readily to mind. It is not uncommon for an individual to engage with a narrative and, finding it enjoyable, reengage with it at another time.[8] Furthermore, doing so continues to produce pleasurable fear, for example, making a tradition of watching *Hellraiser* every Halloween. The horror franchise presents a similar obstacle. Franchises consist of multiple installments featuring a similar, if not identical, object. Oftentimes, the narrative of each successive work is also similar. Given Carroll's theory, audiences should find continued installments uninteresting, given the dearth of mystery with which to pique curiosity. Nonetheless, many retain interest, engaging with each installment despite the lack of significant variation.

An additional, frequently critiqued aspect of Carroll's theory is that the source of pleasurable fear does not need to be interstitial.[9] Construed as such, the genre of horror and resulting pleasurable fear will apply only to works of art that include a monster.[10] Critics have drawn attention to the fact that this places problematic limitations on what constitutes horror and, by extension, the phenomenon itself. Horror fans "clearly expect monstrosity, though in quite what form is open to question. The genre encompasses monsters present only through suggestion or inference through to graphic portrayals and the excesses of their depredations, while audience reactions run the gamut... "[11] Monsters need not be revealed, nor necessarily be interstitial. Objects based in reality are perfectly capable sources of pleasurable fear.[12] Norman Bates is not an interstitial object. His actions and insanity are monstrous, yet such individuals exist. The experience of watching his actions throughout *Psycho* still produces both fascination and fear. It is hard to distinguish how this differs from the intrigue and disgust found in an interstitial object such as Leatherface of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. [13]

Contemporary theorists sympathetic to Carroll have offered alternative explanations that share the premise that the pleasure of horror is not rooted in terror. Feminist film philosopher Cynthia Freeland proposes that pleasure stems not from fear or narrative curiosity but from intellectual intrigue towards evil.^[14] The concept of evil is disturbing, yet compelling enough to arouse a desire for investigation. While "Ellen" may consider *Aliens* a frightening film, she derives pleasure from analyzing evil, which the narrative explores through themes such as rape, corporate greed, prejudice, and murder. While Freeland's theory is structurally similar to Carroll's, it does not require the object to be interstitial, nor does it discount that pleasurable fear can be found via repeated engagements. However, it still encounters a similar objection. Simply put, there are many instances in which pleasurable fear is not the result of deep, detached, academic meditation on an abstract concept. The audience at a midnight slasher film, eager for the visceral thrill of watching the killer enact horrors upon a victim, are unlikely dissecting thematic intricacies. Instances of self-testing, where individuals engage with horror simply to discern their capacity for tolerance, also lack such a component.^[15] While some approach horror academically, claiming all fans of horror do so at all times is problematic.

A further explanation posits that horror evokes pleasure by reinforcing or reaffirming a status quo. Proponents of this account interpret the object of horror as representing a threat to predominantly held values, causing fear. When this deviant object is defeated by the heroic protagonists, normalcy is restored, creating comfort and security.^[16] For instance, the vampires of Stoker's *Dracula* embody the unchecked libertine sexuality and communicable foreign illnesses commonly feared in eighteenth century England.^[17] The creatures are eventually defeated by members of proper society, triumphing over the foreign and the repellent unknown, restoring mainstream societal ideals. Again, fear is not the source of pleasure, which instead stems from reaffirming social and cultural identity. As with the previous arguments, this explanation encounters a problem of scope. The argument necessitates that works of horror reinforce a predominant ideology. However, many works of horror serve to critique social norms. It is also worth noting that, contrary to what the argument implies, individuals who prescribe to supposedly predominant ideologies will not necessarily find a horror narrative enjoyable. Conversely, many who find such norms disagreeable may count themselves horror fans. Additionally, too many works of horror conclude with the object of horror still present, if not triumphant. *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* concludes with all but one of the protagonists murdered, while the cannibalistic family responsible remains free to continue butchering the innocent. According to the proposed theory, such a work should give viewers less pleasure, if any, as the predominant ideology is undermined. However, the work remains a well-received staple of the genre.

Solutions based around the premise that pleasure lies external to the sense of fear are problematic. The resulting explanation will be too narrow in scope. At best, it may plausibly explain a minority of specific occurrences. More importantly, these solutions cannot overcome the notion that most individuals drawn to horror want to be frightened, a position that possesses intuitive appeal, alongside substantial supporting evidence. The physiological symptoms that accompany successfully engaging with horror, such as alertness, increased

heartbeat, muscle tension, and adrenaline, are not intrinsically unpleasant.^[18] Rather, positive or negative evaluation is dependent on context. Furthermore, those who appreciate horror self-report that these sensations are pleasurable. Fright is a crucial component of the genre, so much so that a work that fails to elicit sufficient fear will likely be deemed unsuccessful. It is not uncommon for an audience member to suggest he or she did not enjoy a work of horror because it was not scary enough. If so much of horror's success is judged by its ability to evoke terror, does it not seem that audiences are eager to be frightened?

3. Feagin's solution

In direct opposition to the previous theorists, Susan Feagin proposes those who take pleasure in macabre works do so because they enjoy a good scare. If this were not the case, fear and disgust would be accidental to the narrative, while common sense suggests they are not only central to such fictions but also vital for their enjoyment. Fear is not a price one is willing to pay for alternative complex cognitive rewards but, rather, the source of pleasure.^[19]

Feagin further asserts that the pleasures of horror derive from meta-responses, second-order emotional reactions that stem from analyzing one's initial emotional response towards a work. When engaging with horror, individuals often feel fear. If a work provokes such reactions, it means the individual has the capacity to respond appropriately to the stimulus.^[20] Recognizing this causes the individual to positively evaluate his or her initial reaction. Conversely, if one believes taking pleasure in horror is appropriate, then one positively evaluates the pleasure, creating a second tier of enjoyment. The third type of meta-response occurs when an individual recognizes they have become psychologically flexible enough to enjoy horror when they previously could not.^[21]

There is significant inconsistency between Feagin's initial claim and subsequent emphasis on the explanatory power of meta-responses.^[22] Feagin begins by arguing that fear is enjoyable but abruptly shifts focus onto the role of meta-response. In two of the cases Feagin describes, the pleasure is not due to the sensations of fear. Rather, it is what the presence of fear indicates about the individual. In her first meta-response, pleasure results from positively evaluating one's reaction of disdain for terror. This does not require that one enjoys fear but necessitates that one does not. The third meta-response derives pleasure from becoming comfortable with the work. Pleasurable responses only come from learning to overcome distasteful feelings of fear. If, given Feagin's initial premise, fear itself is enjoyable, there would be no flexibility involved.^[23] We would simply enjoy the display, and the second level evaluation would never come to pass. When "James" decides to play an installment of the *Silent Hill* video game series, he finds the artful use of graphics and sound produce a terror that is enjoyable on a visceral, first-order level.^[24] He acts as Feagin first proposes, simply enjoying the way the work makes him feel. He does not overcome any initial distaste and thus never alters his psychological state.

Perhaps Feagin is arguing that the horror consumer enjoys both: sensations of fear alongside their second-order response. This would be a dubious assumption regarding her first and third meta-responses, as they require that fear be undesirable. Nonetheless, it is presented as the second possible meta-response. The individual engages with horror and enjoys the fear brought forth. Upon reflection, he or she believes they

have reacted appropriately, arriving at a pleasurable second-order evaluation. For Feagin's characterization to be successful, it would assume we categorize enjoyment of horror as appropriate. However, this claim is frequently contested.

Works of horror necessarily encompass disturbing subject matter including disgusting constructs, threatening acts, and displays of violence. Many object to horror as entertainment and argue against such media practices. Notably, the argument from reactive attitudes is that consuming horror for pleasure will gradually skew what one takes to be morally repugnant.^[25] Indulging to a sufficient degree will go so far as to degrade one's perspective on right and wrong.^[26] Thus, deriving pleasure from horror presents a threat to the individual moral mindset.^[27] Such arguments demonstrate the controversial nature of Feagin's unsubstantiated assumption and may cast aspersions on the viability of this meta-response.

Feagin's attempt to address the horror paradox occupies a unique position. While others have argued that fear can be pleasurable, Feagin is one of the few to combine this premise alongside a meta-response explanation. Despite the unique style of her approach, it has received comparably little significant scholarly recognition or analysis since its publication nearly a quarter-century ago. While Feagin's use of meta-response has been discussed at length, most have emphasized only its capacity to address the paradox of tragedy. Given the differences between the emotions of fear and sadness, such discussions cannot adequately address the phenomenon of pleasurable fear.

Admittedly, Feagin's proposal is not without flaws. The proposition that it is possible to enjoy fear promisingly characterizes the horror experience. Yet, while Feagin claims to embrace this premise, it is contradicted by her chosen meta-responses. For her solution, fear is *instrumental* to one's experience of pleasure but not the source. It only serves as a means of furthering self-awareness, producing self-satisfaction that is a step removed from feelings of terror. Despite these limitations, it would be unwise to simply dismiss the meta-response structure in its entirety. If one were able to reconcile Feagin's initial premise of fear as pleasurable within a meta-theoretical framework, the end result could present a promising explanation of the horror paradox.

4. An alternative account

Through some minor modifications, it is, in fact, possible to preserve the meta-response structure alongside the premise that individuals enjoy fear. It is not, as Feagin proposes, that pleasure is found in the second-order evaluation. This fails to capture the horror experience so promisingly detailed in her initial premise, that the enjoyment of being scared motivates the appeal and willingness to engage with the genre. I propose that, in contrast to Feagin's theory, the initial emotional state is met with pleasure, while the second-order evaluation produces apprehension.

An intriguing, overlooked facet of the individual is his or her fascination with the macabre.^[28] The macabre, while viewed as disturbing or horrifying, nonetheless has an uniquely intriguing appeal. The initial pleasure found in engaging with disquieting art stems from a general, widely held sense of fascination with the macabre. Monsters, death, and fright have a hold over many, if not, to some extent, all individuals. This causes a desire to encounter them in their fear-inducing

entirety. This is particularly true from the relative safety of distance afforded us through the medium(s) of art and fiction.[29] I suggest that macabre fascination ought to be defined as follows: an intrinsic desire in the imaginative exploration of the phenomenology of death, dying, or preceding states of fright, pain, and suffering. Genuine macabre fascination must contain these specific hallmarks. One must be interested in the experience of the themes of mortality and suffering. Furthermore, an individual's desire must be intrinsic, rather than utilized as a means to attain some further, extrinsic end, such as self-knowledge. This intrigue drives individuals to seek out and explore the macabre themes and subject matter so effectively conveyed within horror art.

The pleasure found in engaging with horror fiction stems from indulging macabre fascination. A good horror narrative allows those engaging in it to experience and explore fear, confront depictions of death, face down nightmarish imaginings, and engage with the foreboding unknown. The work in question presents the engaging individual with an object that threatens and arouses fear.[30] If successful, this piques macabre fascination, making sensations of fear something that can be enjoyed.[31] In this sense, it differs from instances in which the fear felt is entirely negative and cannot be met with any degree of pleasure, for instance, finding oneself at the mercy of an actual masked serial killer. The successful work of horror fulfills a desire and, in doing so, provides us with satisfaction and pleasurable feelings. Assuming these or similar conditions are met, the emotion of fear can be positively valenced.[32],[33]

How, then, does a work of horror evoke further discomfort? It is the very pleasure taken in watching the horrific displays that presents unease. This disquiet stems from a second-order evaluation of the morbid pleasure that occurs at the first-order level. While morbid subject matter, such as death and suffering, can be appealing, this enjoyment also produces anxiety. Such attraction is a facet of character, but this does not mean it is accepted without resistance. The macabre is not typically seen as something in which one ought to take pleasure. Exhibiting, if not possessing, such a trait is often met with recrimination and is seen as improper. Should one assume that emotions are morally evaluable, it follows that one ought to respond to suffering with sympathy. If an individual were to derive pleasure via the indulgence of his or her fascination with the macabre by any means, including interaction with macabre art or narrative, it would violate the appropriate moral valence of how one ought to respond emotionally. Thus, it will count against his or her moral character.[34] Someone might instead adopt a more practical concern and worry that happily giving over to the macabre could act as a sort of corrupting influence, infiltrating the way he or she regards the world. Due to these notions of impropriety, the pleasure felt when exploring the macabre evokes a second-order meta-evaluation of discomfort.

We cannot feel pleasure exclusively as a result of indulging in macabre art but also a degree of disquiet towards the depictions, creating the complex pleasurable fear. Should an individual feel *exclusively* pleasure or fright, it will produce only enjoyment or terror, respectively. If an individual were to do so, they might be accused of not getting the work or engaging in a manner distinct from its intended aim. If "Jamie" watches *Halloween* and feels nothing but abject terror, a friend might suggest she has overreacted. After all, it is an outlandish work of fiction. Yet, if she responds to Michael Meyer's horrific acts

of homicide with pure joy, with no trace of fear or discomfort, said friend may fret over her moral or psychological character. Enjoying horror requires push-and-pull between attraction and repulsion. Darkly pleasurable, yet frighteningly improper, oscillation is integral to its appeal. We are meant to enjoy a work, yet ask ourselves, why do I enjoy this? Is it something I ought to find entertaining? Engaging with horror as it is intended necessitates such layers. The very pleasure taken in the indulgence of macabre fascination and fear itself causes discomfort. One enjoys the experience of horror, yet feels reproach towards their pleasurable emotional state, creating strong hedonic ambivalence.^[35] Thus the experience remains one of layered evaluations.

Adopting this formulation of meta-response to horror has a number of advantages. Perhaps most importantly, it preserves the well-substantiated idea that the allure of horror stems from the fact that fear can, in some circumstances, be enjoyable. The appeal of this premise is made particularly salient when juxtaposed against less intuitive solutions, such as those proposed by Carroll and Freeland. Arguing that fear is intrinsically negative requires accounting for the pleasure by alternative means, resulting in the critiques previously detailed. Assuming that one derives pleasure from experiencing the macabre, it does not require narrative disclosure be present. One can find an object of horror morbidly fascinating and frightening, regardless. For instance, "Nancy" might find Freddy Krueger horrifying and fascinating, and enjoy said fascination, even if, or possibly because, she already knows his properties will ensure a good scare. Additionally, the proposed account does not require that pleasurable fear be bound to the quality of being interstitial, necessitate academic interest, or rely upon the complex and debatable interpretations required to propose all objects of horror must serve as a threat to mainstream values.

5. Morality and macabre fascination

Assuming this proposal provides a compelling explanation behind pleasurable fear and its bearing on the appeal of horror, it brings out an additional question. Specifically, is it proper to indulge our macabre fascination? The proposed solution relies upon a complex ambivalence between enjoyment in indulging morbid fascination and apprehension towards the fact that one is taking pleasure in macabre depictions of monsters, death, and suffering. From a moral perspective, this is typically viewed as problematic. Is there not something unsettling about the individual who enthusiastically describes, in detail, the events of a horrific story on the news or finds themselves rubbernecking at the site of a ghastly automobile accident? Clearly, the macabre carries with it some measure of recrimination. This raises the questions, what is the moral status of macabre fascination, and when, if ever, ought we allow ourselves to indulge?

I propose that indulging is acceptable, if not suggested, as engaging with the macabre proves beneficial to developing important traits. Although this may appear unintuitive, it can be clarified through a helpful thought experiment. Picture a hypothetical individual completely devoid of all traces of macabre fascination. How would such a person behave? Assuming this individual genuinely possessed no fascination with the macabre, he or she would possess a variety of damaging character flaws. The absence of macabre fascination would make this person foreign to important aspects of humanity and, ultimately, unable to pursue an array of projects necessary for a healthy character.^[36] With regards to

personality, one could surmise he or she would be painfully naïve, if not largely ignorant of reality. It is also probable that they would possess an indefatigable sense of cheeriness. Such exaggerated naiveté and optimism would likely make for an individual most would find intolerable, hindering an ability to develop meaningful relationships. Such intense degrees of unceasing optimism would bring forth additional shortcomings, as research suggests that excessive degrees of happiness can lead to undesirable outcomes in healthy populations, alongside psychological dysfunction, for instance, increased risk-taking behavior, excessively rigid demeanors, and a general lack of sensitivity towards others.[\[37\]](#)

Engaging with the macabre and monstrous also serves an important adaptive advantage. Horror has the ability to influence and modify somatic markers in the brain, allowing one to better understand, develop, and train emotional responses.[\[38\]](#) As such, a desire to engage with manifestations of our fears ought not be denied. Used responsibly, imaginatively confronting what we fear or do not understand can have significant positive utility. It becomes possible to develop stronger intellectual and emotional understanding of just what our fears entail. Conversely, the utter lack of willingness or ability to engage with horror will serve a disutility, as such adaptations could remain underdeveloped. If this hypothetical individual was somehow forced to encounter or endure anything macabre, they would react poorly. We learn through exploration that morbid occurrences are, to an extent, natural. In doing so, it becomes possible to learn how they can be accepted, dealt with, or overcome.[\[39\]](#) Given their refusal to see the darker side of events and emotions, it is unlikely that this individual would be able to attain such a mature perception.

Opponents might argue that these engagements weaken the capacity for sympathy. At best, it creates a sense of detachment. At worst, viewing the macabre as a source of entertainment may cause one to regard real-world atrocities as amusing. Given such outcomes, it would be better to avoid indulging altogether. It would be a mistake to accept such a perspective, as complete lack of desensitization has a marked flaw. Namely, it would leave one at the mercy of many uncontrollable, often extreme reactive attitudes. Evan Kreider objects that, without any desensitization, individuals would, in actuality, be overly sensitive to all things.[\[40\]](#) Reactive attitudes, while vital to moral health and composure, are unavoidably tempered over time. However, this does not make an individual immoral. In actuality, it allows the individual to cope with the surrounding world. Without tempering, individuals would behave as the emotional equivalent of an exposed nerve. We have no reason to think an individual devoid of the capacity to engage with the macabre would behave differently.

It is also significant to note that this individual would likely be intensely unimaginative. The use of imagination may at times require taking up a different viewpoint, construing events in such a way as to deviate from what is typically viewed as emotionally proper. Our hypothetical individual would be unable to take up such perspectives, as he or she would have to possess absolute correlation between emotional propriety and imagination. The ramifications of this flaw are more severe than they may at first appear. It would bring with it an inability to take on any alternative viewpoints, assuming said views contained even the slightest trace of supposedly improper emotional responses. For the purposes of argument, this would

mean all viewpoints that require an appreciation of anything that partakes in the macabre. This lack of perspective would give rise to intense narrow-mindedness. Perhaps most important to moral action, knowledge of these aspects and their influence on the individual can provide us with knowledge, not only of our feelings, but those of others.[41] As such, it teaches us how to sympathize with and aid our fellows in their dealings with the macabre.

Someone curious about death who chose to explore this intrigue could come to possess a well-adjusted viewpoint on its nature, become better prepared to understand the various ways as to how or why it causes others worry, and help, accordingly. One who does not possess such a capacity for adopting other perspectives would be much less capable. It is unlikely that he or she would have the ability to fully grasp the diverse effects of pain or loss, especially in those who comprehend or approach death differently. Such failures could feasibly extend to other instances where empathy requires adopting a macabre mindset. Assuming a person could not wholly comprehend how others react to pain, could they capably ease their ill child? Could they effectively discuss self-destructive behavior, bullying, or even nightmares? Performing such actions necessarily involves being able to comprehend and engage with topics categorized as macabre.

6. Conclusion

Our interactions with aesthetic representations of the macabre are complex, marked by interwoven fear and pleasure, enjoyment and apprehension. Many find such morbid representations pleasurable, yet simultaneously regard them with a measure of anxiety and discomfort, much as we do their real-world counterparts. Prior attempts to address this phenomenon via avenues such as Carroll and Freeland's cognitivism and Feagin's meta-theory have demonstrated varying measures of promise. However, they have also been met with damaging critiques. Such objections may, to some extent, be bypassed via the proposed restructured meta-theory, which maintains that fear can be enjoyed, while simultaneously avoiding the contradictions that plague Feagin's account. If the proposed solution holds, it requires further investigation into the moral status of morbid fascination. We must necessarily refine what constitutes macabre and how it is to be differentiated from similar responses, such as disgust. Furthermore, while indulgence in the macabre may be acceptable, there must be limitations. Exploring one's fascination with the macabre through art within the genre of horror is arguably commonplace and more likely beneficial.[42] Indulging this fascination through actual acts on others is more likely morally problematic. Failure to establish such a boundary clearly presents a slippery slope. For instance, it could allow for extreme, potentially dangerous acts of investigation into the macabre in the name of desire satisfaction. However, the alternative meta-theory may serve as a solid foundation on which to formulate an account of these intriguing aesthetic phenomena.[43]

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End Notes

[1] I focus on the appeal of horror art as a whole, such as theories that discuss the appeal of horror art, and not those that focus upon a specific subgenre, for example, slashers, or artistic medium, such as, film philosophy.

[2] Andrea Sauchelli, "Horror and Mood," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 51, no.1 (2014), 39-49, ref. on 43.

[3] Susan Feagin, "Monsters, Disgust, and Fascination," *Philosophical Studies*, 65 (1992), 75-84, ref. on 77, 80.

[4] Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror: or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, Chapman, and Hall, 1990), p. 186.

[5] Noël Carroll, "Nightmare and the Horror Film: The Symbolic Biology of Fantastic Beings," *Film Quarterly*, 34, no. 3 (1981), 16-25.

[6] Carroll refers to this as gradual disclosure narrative, a tactic wherein details are strategically delayed until certain points in the narrative to keep audiences engaged. See: Noël Carroll, "The General Theory of Horrific Appeal," in *Dark Thoughts: Philosophic Reflections on Cinematic Horror*, eds., Steven Jay Schneider and Daniel Shaw (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2003), pp. 1-9.

[7] Noël Carroll, "Enjoying Horror Fictions: A Reply to Gaut," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 35, no. 1 (1995), 67-72, ref. on 69.

[8] Richard J. Gerrig, "Reexperiencing Fiction and Nonfiction," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 47, no. 3 (1989), 277-280, ref. on 278-279.

[9] Alex Neill, "On A Paradox of the Heart," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, 65, No. 1/2, 53-65, ref. on 59-60.

[10] Brian Laetz, "Two Problematic Theses in Carroll's Account of Horror," *Film and Philosophy*, 12, (2008), 67-72, ref. on 69.

[11] Andrew Tudor, "Why Horror? The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre," *Cultural Studies*, 11, Issue 3 (1997), 442-463, ref. on 457.

[12] Andrea Sauchelli, "Horror and Mood," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 51, no. 1 (2014), 39-49, ref on 42. Berys Gaut, "The Paradox of Horror," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 33, no. 4 (1993), 333-345, ref. on 336.

[13] Describing Leatherface as interstitial could be challenged, as such an individual might exist. Debating the status of Leatherface holds no special importance, save to further demonstrate the tenuous nature of Carroll's position.

[14] Cynthia Freeland, *The Naked and the Undead: Evil and the Appeal of Horror* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), ref. on p. 257.

[15] Ian Jarvie, "The Naked and the Undead: Evil and the Appeal of Horror Review," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 59, no. 4 (2001), 433-434.

[16] The argument presented is an abstraction, as numerous theorists adopt this tactic. To discuss each in detail is a sizable, separate project. Differing interpretations suggest that horror reinforces topics from traditional ideas of the family, masculinity and male dominance, and cultural anxieties to predominant sociopolitical beliefs. For specific contemporary interpretations see, among others, Carol Clover, Michael Sharrett, Eugene Thacker, and Cynthia Freeland.

[17] Mathias Clasen, "Monsters Evolve: A Biocultural Approach to Horror Stories," *Review of General Psychology*, 16, no. 2 (2012), 222-229, ref. on 226.

[18] Katerina Bantinaki, "The Paradox of Horror: Fear as Positive Emotion," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 70, no. 4 (2012), 383-392, ref. on 384.

[19] Susan Feagin, "Monsters, Disgust, and Fascination," *Philosophical Studies*, 65 (1992), 75-84, ref. on 77, 80.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 83.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 84.

[22] Noël Carroll, "Disgust or Fascination: A Response to Susan Feagin," *Philosophical Studies*, 65 (1992), 85-90, ref. on 86-87.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 87.

[24] Bernard Perron, *Silent Hill: The Terror Engine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), ref. on p. 28.

[25] The ARA uses "reactive attitude" differently than is typical in moral philosophy. Reactive attitudes typically refer to attitudes of praise, blame, admiration, or indignation. Under the ARA, they are meant to be seen as something akin to sympathy or empathy. See: Peter F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 48 (1962), 1-25. Reprinted in Fischer and Ravizza, 1993.

[26] Scott Woodcock, "Horror Films and the Argument From Reactive Attitudes," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 16, no. 2 (April 2013), 309-324, ref. on 311.

[27] Gianluca Di Muzio, "The Immorality of Horror Films," *The International Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 20, no. 2 (2006), 277-294, ref. on 281.

[28] Given the lack of formal research into macabre fascination, I cannot claim it is a universal trait. However, empirical evidence supports a strong prevalence. Individuals tour the sites of historic disasters. Children demonstrate fascination with pain and destruction when performing acts such as pulling apart insects. History suggests a preoccupation with death and decay through frightening myths, legends, and folklore. Philosophical literature contains perhaps one of the earliest examples of macabre fascination. In book four of the *Republic*, Plato introduces the story of Leontius. While traveling, Leontius happens upon a number of corpses. Against his better inclination, Leontius becomes overpowered by his desire to look upon them, declaring it a beautiful sight (*Republic* 440a), even the success of horror films serve as evidence.

[29] Julian Hanich, *Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers* (New York: Routledge, 2010), ref. on p. 88.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[31] Eric G. Wilson, *Everyone Loves a Good Train Wreck: Why We Can't Look Away* (New York: Sarah Crichton Books, 2012), ref. on p. 143.

[32] Although this theory is proposed by Jesse Prinz, he does not argue that fear has potential for positive valence. Fear is always viewed and felt negatively. See: Prinz, Jesse, *Gut Reactions: A Perceptual Theory of Emotions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), ref. on p. 135.

[33] As demonstrated by this project, such a generalization is questionable. The enjoyment of horror demonstrates that fear is a possible source of pleasure. It may predominantly be evaluated negatively, but there are cases in which it is not. For further discussion of fear and valence, see Katerina Bantinaki, "The Paradox of Horror: Fear as Positive Emotion," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 70, no. 4 (2012), 383-392.

[34] Richard Moran, "The Expression of Feeling in Imagination," *The Philosophical Review*, 103, no. 1 (1994), 75-106, ref. on 93.

[35] Matthew Strohl, "Horror and Hedonic Ambivalence," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 70, no. 2 (2012), 203-212, ref. on 205.

[36] Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 79, no. 8 (1982), 419-439, ref. on 422.

[37] June Gruber, Iris B. Mauss, and Maya Tamir, "A Dark Side of Happiness? How, When, and Why Happiness is Not Always Good," *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 6, no. 3 (2011), 222-233, ref. on 224.

[38] Stephen T. Asma, "Monsters on the Brain: An Evolutionary Epistemology of Horror," *Social Research*, 81, no. 4 (2014), 941-968, ref. on 955.

[39] Evan S. Kreider, "The Virtue of Horror Films: A Response to Di Muzio," *The International Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 22, no. 1 (2008), 149-157, ref. on 150.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 151.

[41] James Dawes, "Fictional Feeling: Philosophy, Cognitive Science, and the American Gothic," *American Literature*, 76, no. 3 (September 2004), 437-466.

[42] Stephen T. Asma, "Monsters on the Brain: An Evolutionary Epistemology of Horror," *Social Research*, 81, no. 4 (2014), 941-968, ref. on 956.

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