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Brandon West

Revulsion

The Paradox of Disgust in the Rape-Revenge Narrative

SERIES IN CRITICAL MEDIA STUDIES

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About the author

Brandon West is an Assistant Professor of Humanities and Communication at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, where he teaches film studies and composition. West's research primarily focuses on horror films and American gothic literature. His work on rape-revenge films started when he was earning his Master's of English at Virginia Tech. That paper formed the basis for the current manuscript, whose composition has, therefore, been a cathartic exercise. From that initial paper, he followed the genre through a series of conference presentations and additional essays, each of which has contributed to the current work in its own way. In addition to this project, West has a book, an exploration of liminality in horror films, published with McFarland and an article on Werner Herzog's films published with 'The New Review of Film and Television.'

Summary

The extant scholarship of the rape-revenge narrative has frequently either upheld this narrative form's feminist bonafides (Clover) or condemned it as misogynistic (Creed). In this volume, West argues that these competing camps of thought have largely elided rape-revenge's inherent ambivalence, which stems from the paradoxical role disgust plays in rape-revenge texts. That is, disgust is essential for portraying rape as the horrific act it is, but employing disgust in a rape-revenge text risk alienating audiences. To explore this issue, Brandon West first shows the strengths and pitfalls of different methods rape-revenge auteurs have used to approach this disturbing narrative form. Showing rape and revenge in graphic detail has well-documented issues in the scholarship, but the author shows how texts that eschew such graphic portrayals also have their own consequent weaknesses. Thereafter, West articulates the paradox of disgust so he can isolate this key issue hounding these texts and analyses thereof. Then, West shows how disgust plays multiple roles in these texts, roles that make the paradox more challenging to resolve. To this end, the book shows disgust not only risks alienating audiences but also forms part of the pleasure these texts offer audiences. And so, West enumerates the possible pleasures of disgust. Finally, this book pulls these threads together to examine a couple of final rape-revenge texts, one of which, 2017's 'Revenge', West argues, is the most successful anti-rape narrative discussed in this volume because of the balance it strikes between evoking disgust but avoiding alienating audiences.

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