Voyeurism and Audience Implication in Prologue

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Voyeurism in Hitchcock's Rear Window

The excerpt below is from the film:

"I'll bet you that nine out of ten people, if they see a woman across the courtyard undressing for bed, or even a man puttering around in his room, will stay and look; no one turns away and says, 'It's none of my business.' They could pull down their blinds, but they never do; they stand there and look out."

Hitchcock's View of Voyeurism

More so, this is an excerpt from an interview that featured Francois Truffaut. In this scene, Hitchcock expresses his view on voyeurism, representing it as a universal attachment. Throughout the entire text, Hitchcock tries to express his opinion on voyeurism. To efficiently do this, he has always involved the audience, giving implications on how the audience forms part of the victim. This is evident from the way he states that 90% of those in attendance would not resist the temptation to look at a woman undressing across a courtyard or a man puttering in a room (Milani et al. 2010).

Audience Participation and Moral Identification

It is Hitchcock's nature never to allow part of the audience to be passive in his films. In this case, he asks the audience to identify themselves as heroes or as villains. By giving such a statistic as nine out of ten people, he gets the audience brainstorming as to whether they are among the 90% or 10%. To strengthen this, Hitchcock uses a moral standard as the base to gauge the audience. With him, as much as the victims are within the film, he engages the audience in a way that allows them to feel involved in it. The above excerpt was an interview, but suddenly, he got the audience thinking about whether they, too, are part of the less right large part of society that is interested in voyeurism.

Jefferies and the Position of the Viewer

Rear Window is a film about a photographer, L.B. Jefferies, on whose side the audience is due to Hitchcock's creativity. However, this is despite their having a gut reaction about Jefferies, to whom the audience becomes emotionally attached. To the audience, it is a question of logic versus emotion. There are those within the audience who naturally assume that logic should always be triumphant over excitement, while others believe that to be human is to, at times, let emotion have the upper hand over philosophy. This way, Hitchcock has managed to split the audience into two parts by using the story of one character. However, we see much of the audience taking Jefferies's side in the long run. He does this by applying psychology. We witness both sides being captivated by the murder that is looming, and at the same time, both sides want to watch more of it (Howe, 2008). The audience has been given a sense of wanting to experience more of Jefferies' character, and Hitchcock uses this to his advantage. It is at this point that he comments on the voyeuristic nature of the audience as he comments on the live voyeurism that is going on. This comment is made at the time when Jefferies is genuinely into the act of watching his neighbor, which gives the audience more incentive to be keen on what Jefferies is watching. Ultimately, one can conclude that the audience is the ultimate voyeur. Hitchcock has manipulated them and made it insanely difficult for them to stop practicing voyeurism despite it being an immoral act according to the nature of humanity (Howe, 2008).

Lisa's Critique of Voyeuristic Behaviour

Jefferies' girlfriend, Lisa, delivers what is probably the most condemning line when she brings up the question of how voyeurs should be held accountable for their immorality (Boyd & Palmer, 2010). This question quickly condemns the characters in the film and also makes the audience question whether they were right to support the act of voyeurism subconsciously. The topic of cinematic voyeurism that the audience loves has been critiqued among the murder mysteries in the film. We see Lisa and her boyfriend, Jefferies, being given a solid reason to doubt the murder of Mrs Thornwald. Upon this realization, Jefferies and Lisa get away from the window, and it is in this instance that Lisa states:

Jeff, you know, if someone came in here, they wouldn't believe what they'd see. You and I, with long faces, plunged into despair because we found out a man didn't kill his wife. We're two of the most frightening ghouls I've ever known. You'd think we could be a little bit happier that the poor woman is alive and well (Milani et al. 2010).

Audience Guilt and Cinematic Engagement

The fact that Hitchcock uses the audience's guilt to capture their attention as well as make them feel as though they were part of the film is quite surprising. He not only exploits the excellent part of a human being but also makes them question whether they are right to be on the side of Jefferies, to whom, at a certain point, they became overly attached as a character.

References

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