

- 12 While the presence of surveillance footage has helped to reclaim the realist claims of all Hollywood images, in horror it is important to remember that the handheld camera never experienced the same destabilizing effect as the rest of cinema. The big difference that does happen, though, is severing the handheld from needing to be associated with individual characters, whether victims or monsters.
- 13 On the television show *Ghost Adventures* (Travel Channel, 2008–present), the hosts actually spend most of their time trying to anger ghosts so as to find evidence that they are real (which they inevitably do through rewinding and replaying after the fact), though it is equally clear that documenting the ghostly presence does not equate to dissipating it.
- 14 Relevant here is not only Snowden-era revelations and mainstreaming distrust of Facebook privacy settings, for example, but also discussions of the militarization of American police forces and the ways that they are mobilized in the war on drugs (see *Last Week Tonight* [HBO, 2014–present] from 17 August 2014 for discussion of college students rightly being paranoid about smoking marijuana in dorms because of SWAT teams).
- 15 Indeed, this frustration also occurs just a couple of scenes earlier when the male characters at headquarters line up to watch Jules disrobe and have sex yet are denied their sexualized looking and sent back to their work stations with an audible disappointed groan.

*In Style and Form in the Hollywood
Slasher Film, ed. Wickham Clayton N.
14 Houndsmills, England: Palgrave Macmillan,
2015. Pp. 213–28.*

The Slasher, the Final Girl and the Anti-Denouement

Janet Staiger

Wes Craven's 1994 film *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* presents a Bettelheimian thesis about why children desire to keep hearing horrible fairy tales. Telling the stories staves off their realization. A fantasy of anxiety prevents actual anxiety and its consequences. Moreover, the successful resolution of the tale reassures the child that he or she can securely progress through the surrounding violence.

Although I agree with the thesis of *New Nightmare*, the purpose of this paper is not to justify a fascination with horror, terror or images of violence. Rather, it is first of all to focus on what the stories are in these horrible fairy tales, in this case, *New Nightmare's* formula – the 'slasher film'. Before we can consider the effects of texts (especially ones that are involved with repetitive reception behaviour such as occurs for devotees of violent fairy tales and slasher movies), we must have a fairly accurate description of those texts. Then we are in a better position to speculate about the cultural functions of that represented violence. Moreover, in discussing cultural violence, I want to underscore the point that effects of representations of violence in fictional narratives are not equivalent to effects of experiencing violence in the real world. All indications are that watching violence in movies is an extremely complex cognitive and affective event. Additionally, the connections between watching violence and any subsequent behaviour are even more uncertain. But assuming some relations might exist is one reason to consider what exactly it is that we are watching.

Many scholars have discussed the slasher film, providing important observations about the functions of these films within our culture (Tudor 1989; Dika 1990; Carroll 1990; Paul 1994). However, I want to investigate a highly influential analysis: Carol Clover's description in *Men*,

Women, and Chain Saws (1992, also see Tudor 1989, 197). Clover has provided a remarkably strong argument about how young men relate to one of this era's most powerful cultural rituals – the enjoyment of representations of violence and terror.¹ As I shall suggest below, fundamentally I will not be disagreeing with some of her major theses. Clover writes that what she wants to suggest is that 'male viewers are quite prepared to identify not just with screen females, but with screen females in the horror film world, screen females in fear and pain' (1992, 5). This masochistic aesthetic, Clover argues, is connected with transitional fantasies about childhood and adulthood, femininity and masculinity. Although I shall be discussing problems with Clover's description of this formula, my revisionist observations will actually provide support for her basic thesis of a much more complicated identification and desire pattern than earlier critics using psychoanalytical theory presumed about these films. Clover's important contribution is her opening up of possibilities of theorizing cross-gender identification and same-sex desire among the audience members, and, thus, I will be appreciatively revising her work.²

The problem

Clover places much emphasis on *Halloween* (1978; dir John Carpenter) as the prototypical slasher film. In fact, Clover sets up her slasher formula based on *Halloween* as a revision of two earlier and influential horror films: *Psycho* (1960; dir Alfred Hitchcock) and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974; dir Tobe Hooper). Unfortunately, Clover's description of the standard slasher formula is arguably not accurate for *Halloween*. This is Clover's formula:

- 1 The killer is a psychotic product of a sick family due to an event occurring in the killer's childhood.
- 2 The film begins with focalization around the killer's point of view (later shifting to the primary female victim/heroine).
- 3 Victims are (almost exclusively) teens/young adults and sexually active.
- 4 The locations of the killings are 'not-home'.
- 5 The weapons used are ones involving physical proximity (not guns).
- 6 The last chase/attack is registered as explicit horror.
- 7 The 'Final Girl' has specific features:
 - Not strongly feminine, not sexually active, and looks for killer
 - Either resists until rescued or kills the killer
 - Outlives any significant male

8 The killer is 'evacuated' from the narrative.

9 The community returns to normal.

In the case of *Halloween*, features 1, 7, 8 and 9 are debatable. For feature 1, no one in the film postulates that the cause of Michael Myers' slaughtering of his sister is because he views her engaged in sexual activity. If critics attribute that cause to his actions (as some have), it is because from the era of *Psycho* on, some movies have presented as the source for a serial killer's activities such a psychoanalytical thesis. The text of *Halloween*, however, does not stipulate that as the initiating reason for disorder. In fact, the major male protagonist with some cultural authority to make such a declaration explicitly rejects such a discourse. Dr Loomis, the psychiatrist treating Michael, repeatedly indicates that Michael is not psychologically disturbed. Loomis declares that 'evil' has escaped, and no one debates him.³

Features 7, 8 and 9 are equally questionable for *Halloween*. The stalked teenage babysitter, Laurie, does manage to elude Michael, finally stabbing him, and, turning, leaves him for dead. However, Michael rises, as the viewers' tensions return to high anxiety seeing that she does not see him behind her. Then Dr Loomis arrives to rescue Laurie, shooting Michael multiple times until Michael falls out of the window and onto the lawn outside. Viewers can relax; the threat is gone. Dr Loomis walks to the window and peers out, but Michael has risen again and now vanished. Images of houses and darkness down the street and sounds of Michael's breathing 'end' the text. It might be said that the killer is 'evacuated' from the narrative, but Michael is also up again to haunt and terrorize as he has been for the last hour of viewing time. The community is definitely not back to normal. Unconquerable evil and violence are out there as the audience leaves the theatre.

These problems with Clover's formula continue and amplify as I follow through the rest of the films that Clover includes in her list for the formula. Table 14.1 shows my reading of the 26 films discussed by Clover as belonging in the slasher genre against her assertions of the formula. The chart also includes an extended sample of five more films that nominally fit within the group, for a total of 31 films released between *Halloween* and the publication of Clover's argument.⁴

Much can be said about this chart, but I shall point out only three important observations as they relate to representations of violence and theories about viewers of these films. These observations involve the cause for the violence (formula feature 1), the gendering of the Final Girl (formula feature 7) and the lack of narrative resolution for these films (formula features 8 and 9).

Table 14.1 The formula

- 1) The killer is a psychotic product of a sick family due to an event occurring in killer's childhood.
- 2) The film begins with focalization around the killer's point of view (later shifting to the primary female victim/heroine).
- 3) Victims are (almost exclusively) teens/young adults and sexually active; number of victims.
- 4) The locations of the killings are 'not-home'.
- 5) The weapons used are ones involving physical proximity (not guns).
- 6) The last chase/attack is registered as explicit horror.
- 7) The 'Final Girl' has specific features:
 - a) Not strongly feminine
 - b) Not sexually active
 - c) Looks for killer
 - d) Resists until rescued
 - e) Kills the killer
 - f) Outlives any significant male
- 8) The killer is apparently 'evacuated' from the narrative; number of times rises after seemingly vanquished.
- 9) The community returns to normal.

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Date	Film	Victims						The Final Girl's Characteristics							Killer Rises		
		1	2	3	#	4	5	6	7a	7b	7c	7d	7e	7f	8	#	9
1960	Psycho	y	n	n	2	y	y	y	-	-	-	-	-	-	y	-	y
1974	Texas Chain Saw Massacre 1	y	n	y	4	y	y	y	n	n	y	y	n	y	n	-	n
1979	Alien	-	n	n	5	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	1	y
1980	*Terror Train	y	y	n	9	y	y	y	n	y	y	y	n	n	y	3	y
	*Silent Scream	y	n	y	4	y	y	y	n	n	y	y	y	n	y	1	y
	*Prom Night	y	n	y	6	y	y	y	n	n	n	y	y	n	y	-	y
1981	Hell Night	y	n	y	6	y	y	y	n	y	n	y	y	y	y	-	y
	The Burning	n	n	y	9	y	y	y		[no final girl]					y	1	y
	He Knows You're Alone	y	n	y	9	y	y	y	n	y	n	y	n	n	y	2	n
1982	Slumber Party Massacre 1	?	n	y	11	y	y	y	n	n	n	y	y	y	y	3	y
1986	Texas Chain Saw Massacre 2	y	n	y	4	y	y	y	n	n	y	y	y	y	y	-	n

	*April Fool's Day	y	n	y	7	y	y	y	n	n	y	y	n	n	y	-	y
1987	Slumber Party Massacre 2	n	n	y	6	y	y	y	n	n	n	y	y	y	n	3	n
1988	*Sleepaway Camp 2	y	n	y	18	y	y	y	n	n	n	y	n	n	n	-	n
1991	Silence of the Lambs	y	n	n	4	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	-	y,n	-	n

*additional slasher film beyond Clover's list

Date	Film	Victims						The Final Girl's Characteristics							Killer Rises		
		1	2	3	#	4	5	6	7a	7b	7c	7d	7e	7f	8	#	9
Halloween																	
1978	Halloween 1	n	y	y	5	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	n	n	n	3	n
1981	Halloween 2	n	y	n	10	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	n	n	y	1	y
1988	Halloween 4	n	y	n	13	y	y	y	n	n	n	y	n	y	y	1	n
1989	Halloween 5	n	n	n	10	n	y	y	n	y	y	y	n	n	n	3	n
Friday The 13 th																	
1980	Friday the 13 th 1	y	n	y	9	y	y	y	y	y	n	y	y	y	y	3	n
1981	Friday the 13 th 2	n	n	y	9	y	y	y	n	y	y	y	n	?	n	3	n
1982	Friday the 13 th 3	n	n	y	12	y	y	y	n	n	y	y	y	y	y	2	n
1984	Friday the 13 th 4	n	n	y	13	n	y	y	n	n	y	y	y	y	y	2	n
1985	Friday the 13 th 5	y	n	y	20	n	y	y	n	n	n	y	y	n	y	3	n
1986	Friday the 13 th 6	n	n	y	18	y	y	y	n	n	y	y	y	n	n	3	n
1988	Friday the 13 th 7	n	n	y	15	y	y	y	n	n	y	y	y	n	y	6	y
1989	Friday the 13 th 8	n	n	y	17	y	y	y	n	n	y	y	y	n	y	2	y
A Nightmare On Elm Street																	
1984	A Nightmare on Elm St 1	n	n	y	17	y	y	y	n	n	y	y	y	n	y	2	y
1985	A Nightmare on Elm St 2	n	n	n	2	n	y	y	n	n	y	y	y	n	n	3	n
1986	A Nightmare on Elm St 3	n	n	y	7	y	y	y	n	n	y	y	n	n	n	1	n
1988	A Nightmare on Elm St 4	n	n	y	6	n	y	y	n	n	y	y	y	n	y	-	n
1989	A Nightmare on Elm St 5	n	n	y	3	y	y	y	n	n	y	y	y	n	y	2	n
1991	Freddy's Dead (Night 6)	n	n	y	3	y	y	y	n	n	y	y	y	n	y	-	y?

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The slasher

Neither Michael Myers in *Halloween* nor Freddy Krueger in *Nightmare on Elm Street* is postulated by the texts as created by a childhood trauma. No rational explanation of Michael has been provided by the series up through *Halloween 5*. Dr Loomis keeps insisting he is 'evil', the 'bogeyman', the 'devil'; he also displays superhuman abilities. For *Nightmare*, Freddy is revealed in Part 3 to be the bastard child of a nun raped by a hundred maniacs. As the series continues, the solution to Freddy is not psychoanalytical therapy but to be sent either to hell or back into his mother's womb. This is probably because Freddy is already dead, having been burned by the parents of children he killed prior to the start of Part 1.

Jason Voorhees in *Friday the 13th* might fit the formula if I count that the reason he murders is because of the trauma of the death of his mother. Mrs Voorhees is killed because she is the killer terrorizing the teens in Part 1. Her motive is revenge for Jason's earlier death. When Jason was a child at Camp Crystal Lake, teen counsellors were engaged in sex instead of watching Jason swim, and he drowned. When his mother is killed at the end of the first *Friday* movie, Jason rises out of the lake as an adult male to revenge her and begin his reign of terror. The solution to stopping Jason, like Freddy, becomes more and more occult as the series continues, reasonably so since both killers are undead. These supernatural solutions include, in the *Friday* series, one girl 'raising' her own dead father whom she accidentally caused to drown in the lake. Her dead father then pulls Jason back into the lake to save her. In a couple other parts, Jason rises like Frankenstein's monster because of electrical currents reviving him.

In fact, in the three archetypical (and highly financially successful) slasher series, psychoanalytical discourse does not operate as the textual discourse for the disorder present. Although the events causing disorder relate to family kinships, the monster is created as doubly unnatural – a serial killer and unearthly. A typical psychoanalytical causation is postulated in most of the other slasher films but even then not uniformly.

Clover separates the slasher formula from the occult formula in her book. I would argue that the separation she suggests needs reconsideration.⁵ Moreover, a supernatural metaphysical discourse thus justifies the invincibility of the monster, which is, as I will suggest below, exceptionally important in the affective experiences operating for the viewer of the film. Masochistic repetition of surprise and terror is part of the game, and the fantasy of perpetual threat functions well for the viewer. For now, I

Table 14.2 Textual explanations for causes of disorder

Date	Film	Sex of Killer(S)	R/O	R O	Rational Explanation Occult Explanation
				Cause for Disorder	
1960	Psycho	M	R		Son's abnormal relation with mom
1974	Texas Chain Saw Massacre	M, M, M	R		Family
1978+	Halloween (1, 2, 4, 5)	M	O		Dr Loomis: Michael is 'pure evil'
1980+	Friday the 13th (1–8)	F, M	O		Revenge (except for 5 which is R)
1984+	Nightmare on Elm Street (1–6)	M	O		Revenge
1979	Alien	n.a.	R		Need to reproduce
1980	*Terror Train	M	R		Trauma at first sex experience
	*Silent Scream	F	R		Pregnant girl jilted by boyfriend
	*Prom Night	M	R		Brother sees sister killed, revenge
1981	Hell Night	M, M	R		Family dynamics
	The Burning	M	R		Camp caretaker burned by campers
	He Knows You're Alone	M	R?		Unclear
1982	Slumber Party Massacre 1	M	R		Rapist turned violent
1986	Texas Chain Saw Massacre 2	M, M, M	R		Family
	*April Fool's Day	F	R		Practical joke
1987	Slumber Party Massacre 2	M	O?		Maybe male juvenile delinquent or maybe girl hallucinating
1988	*Sleepaway Camp 2	M	R		Aunt dressed boy as a girl
1991	Silence of the Lambs	M	R		Cross-dresser needs skins

* Additional slasher film beyond Clover's list

Table 14.3 Heroes/heroines and endings

Date	Film	Sex Of Surviving Final Victim(S)	Is/Are The Killer(S) Dead?	How (Try To) Stop
1960	Psycho	F, M	N	Police capture
1974	Texas Chain Saw Massacre 1	F	N	Sally resists and flees
1979	Alien	F	Y	Ripley shoots out of ship
1980	*Terror Train	F, M	Y	Girl kisses so conductor can hit
	*Silent Scream	F, M	Y	Stabbed by self when female pushes him
	*Prom Night	F, M	Y	Hit by hatchet
1981	Hell Night	F	Y	Car runs him into spokes
	The Burning	M, M	N	Stabbed, burned
	He Knows You're Alone	F, M	Y	Fight, rescued by cops
1982	Slumber Party Massacre 1	F, F, F	Y	Three girls fight off
1986	Texas Chain Saw Massacre 2	F	Y	Seduces with sexuality, fights off and flees
	*April Fool's Day	F, M	Y	Runs (but just a practical joke)
1987	Slumber Party Massacre 2	F	N	Burns him with a torch
1988	*Sleepaway Camp 2	none	N	Only killer remains
1991	Silence of the Lambs	F	Y, N	Gunshot; Lector escapes
1978+	Halloween 1	F, M	N	
	Halloween 2	F, M	Y	(But retracts in #4)
	Halloween 4	F, F, M	N	
	Halloween 5	F, M	N	
1980+	Friday the 13 th 1	F	Y, N	Mother dead, but Jason rises
	Friday the 13 th 2	F, M?	N	
	Friday the 13 th 3	F	Y, N	Jason may be, but mother rises
	Friday the 13 th 4	F, M	Y	But Tommy seems traumatized
	Friday the 13 th 5	F, M, M	Y, N	Jason is still alive via Tommy
	Friday the 13 th 6	F, M	N	
	Friday the 13 th 7	F, M	Y	
	Friday the 13 th 8	F, M	Y	
1984+	A Nightmare on Elm Street 1	F	N	
	A Nightmare on Elm Street 2	F, M	N	
	A Nightmare on Elm Street 3	F, M	N	
	A Nightmare on Elm Street 4	F, M	N	
	A Nightmare on Elm Street 5	F, M, F	N	
	Freddy's Dead (Nightmare 6)	F, F, M	Y	(But retracts in #7)

*Additional slasher film beyond Clover's list

will also point to the formula's feature 8 in which I have listed the number of times the killer 'rises' or 'reappears' after having apparently been 'evacuated'. As any viewer of this subgenre knows, the grand moments of the film occur through anticipating where, when and how the killer will kill (Dika 1990, 22). Not only can death come from anywhere, but during the concluding confrontation, the monsters will not stay 'down'. Why should they? They are incapable of being defeated by the normal methods.

The Final Girl

Laurie in *Halloween* is Clover's Final Girl, but she is saved by the significant, rather feminine male, Dr Loomis, who is, admittedly, equally unsuccessful in putting Michael to rest.⁶ In reviewing the 31 slasher films, I found that usually a woman is placed in the position of being a final victim.⁷

However, these women are not uniformly 'masculinely feminine' nor are they virgins or uninterested in sex. Often they are the direct cause of the temporary cessation of attacks, but they are occasionally rewarded with a co-surviving male for heterosexual coupling or other male (or female) helper.

The conclusion? Women are usually the victims and the heroines, but they are not always 'Final Girls' in the strong sense that Clover implies. They may be quite feminine. Boyfriends, fathers or father figures, even other women and children, often support and aid them. They learn from those people so that they do take control of their battle with the killer. And they are rewarded not just with survival but also with romance. Clover's thesis is that the Final Girl may be a source of safe male identification to avoid an explicit homosexual scenario if the final protagonist were a male. This thesis still likely holds, but the Final Girl learns much from masculine authority/parental figures, occasionally is saved by them and is often rewarded with apparently heterosexual coupling.⁸ Still, the ambidextrous male viewer may just as easily move away from his identification with the Final Girl in the moments of closure when she 'returns' to her gender and sexual orientation assignment of normative heterosexual female.

The anti-denouement

The impact on horror films of *Carrie's* surprise ending is now being recognized.⁹ In *Carrie* (1976; dir Brian De Palma), the sudden shocking

appearance of Carrie's hand rising from her grave is the image from the film that I retain most powerfully and which I will label 'the anti-denouement'. As William Paul (1994, 409–30) points out, this device has precedents. For example, at the end of *Psycho*, the face of Norman's mother reappears over his, mocking the psychological discourse surrounding the protagonist, querying (and queering) the classical distinctions of gender for this male. Like the conclusion of *Psycho*, Carrie's hand undermines the resolution of the movie, as Paul puts it, keeping 'anarchy in a suspended state' (1994, 419).

Yet *Carrie's* tactic deviates from *Psycho*. The smash success of *Jaws* (1975; dir Steven Spielberg) the year prior to *Carrie* created what James Monaco calls the 'Bruce esthetic': 'a well-timed series of technical frissons' (1979, 50).¹⁰ Indeed, the slasher formula as a whole owes as much to *Jaws* as to *Psycho* or *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. Slasher movie violence is not a spectacle of gore but of shock. This is an aesthetic of heart attacks, not the visual investigation of the demolished body.¹¹ The killer kills, surprisingly often off-screen, and the plot moves rapidly to the next 'setup'. Such a 'pounding' on the spectator, but expectation of repetition, is critical in the affective tension of the slasher movies. But it is not just for affective reasons that the anti-denouement seems so 'right' for these movies. In a generation of cynicism or rebellion, a 'paranoid' time as Andrew Tudor puts it, or a 'resistant' time as Paul has it, to create closure, to adopt any discourse as final, seems impossible. Closure is also just not quite as psychically useful, as I shall argue below.

Thus, I describe as an anti-denouement a tag-on critique by the text that rejects a brief resolution which may present the killer as 'evacuated' from the diegetic world. Such an anti-denouement occurs in the prototypical *Halloween* as the narration proceeds beyond the view and hearing of Dr Loomis to suggest Michael's continued presence somewhere (but where?) in the world. Although Dr Loomis is neither surprised nor sceptical that Michael lives, the narration makes sure that the viewer is positioned also to believe and feel the threat. These anti-denouements become formulaic in part surely to set up the possibility of a sequel. However, they also function well as continuations of the terrible fun of the slasher film, as evidenced by the escalating number of times the killer rises in these films.

The returnable slasher

A formula for the slasher movie exists, or if not as a rigid formula at least as a set of possibilities and constraints for critically characterizing

quite a few horror films produced between 1978 and 1992. Dennis Giles (1984/1996), Morris Dickstein (1980), Steve Neale (1981), James B. Twitchell (1985) and Barbara Creed (1993) have produced important work on fantasy and the film viewer, also like Clover from a psychoanalytical perspective. In analysing the horror genre, Giles focuses in on horror operating through fetishism, from the expectation but dread of what is not being seen. He writes, 'The fetish both re-presents and hides what the subject really wants to see but is also the symptom of fear of looking. . . . It is essentially a defensive vision' (1984/1996, 47).

It is worth emphasizing that Michael, Jason, Freddy and many of the other slasher killers are horribly disfigured.¹² For Jason it is due to corruption from water; for Freddy, from fire. The faces of these killers are hidden in shadows or by masks.¹³ The masks, however, are only slightly metamorphized from what they really cover. Just note how similar visually Jason's hockey mask is to that of a skeleton, to the finally corrupted body. The inside and the end are present on the surface. Part of the process of the chase and destruction is the increasing revelation *via the body* of the killer of the end process of what he is creating – death.

We do not look or look long at the bodies of the slasher victims because we do not need to. They all converge and are displaced onto the killer who is also the already killed. It is also worth emphasizing that none of these killers has been properly buried. Michael comes out on Halloween, the eve of All Saint's days when ghosts and bogeymen can roam. Jason was not laid to rest in the ground but lies unburied at the bottom of Crystal Lake. Freddy's remains, too, are not in hallowed ground. They were thrust in a sack and hidden somewhere in a junkyard of old cars.

This rising of the dead invokes more than fetishism and a fantasy in denial of castration. Here I believe the need to master the meanings of transitions in aging, and of seduction and death, is operating. As Dickstein reminds us, Freud argues in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that 'children create games around the very things they most fear, as a way of subduing those fears and gaining control. Horror films are a safe, routinized way of playing with death, like going on the roller coaster or parachute jump at an amusement park' (1980, 69). Twitchell also claims that horror films 'establish social patterns not of escape, but entry' (1985, 7). For Twitchell the entry for the classical horror film is into sexual reproduction and avoidance of incest.

Clover seems, like Twitchell, to stress the scenario of seduction through the vision of violence as actually an erotic desire. Creed's position is different. She argues that we need a fourth Freudian fantasy

beyond the three of birth, seduction, and castration, and that fourth fantasy is of death. She suggests that horror films are 'a mise-en-scène of desire – in which desire is for the object' (1993, 153–4), desire to investigate the terrible place where we are going which the monsters who have already crossed the threshold make manifest.¹⁴ Giles's earlier work reinforces Creed's theoretical view by arguing that 'fantasy is the mise-en-scène of desire, [but] also produced by the subject's defenses *against* desire', hence, the contradictory, 'compromised' text that is produced in its 'revised, "civilized" form' (1984/1996, 41). What is this threshold in these films but what adulthood represents: sexuality, yes, but also its attendant anxieties which are so often coupled with the vision of death.¹⁵ Creed's view is that we need a fourth scenario of the fantasy of death for horror films. I would suggest that in the slasher films, likely viewers conflate the fantasy of seduction with a fantasy of death, a possibility which Freud (1919/1955) in his later years attended to so fruitfully in his theories of aggression, the death principle and the uncanny.¹⁶

But beyond this game of transition and fantasy of seduction and death are the incessant repetition and refusals of closure. Why so much of this? It seems to me that Neale and Creed have part of the answer to this. Neale (1981) points out that when a child identifies with an aggressor, the child is identifying with omnipotence, with an adult assumed to be omnipotent, ideally the mother, even a mother as the phallic mother. Creed (1993, 10–11) notes, however, that some of these monsters may not be the phallic woman but the castrating woman.

This is also the possibility with the Final Girl as responding aggressor/heroine. Thus, when Final Girls take up the battle against the killer, they offer just such a sadistic position for the spectator: an identification with the castrating woman.¹⁷ Yet, I would point out that in becoming these aggressors, the Final Girl also becomes non-normal, a monster and, while adult, contradictorily also associated with the object, the other side of 'now', a terrible place of loss and death. Ironically, the fantasy of making the original monster capable of resisting castration, sexual difference and death is ultimately reassuring.

If such a revulsion from sadistic aggression is part of the answer of why these films resist closure, another part is the masochism that Clover emphasizes, and it is that masochism that also explains the anti-denouement. It is much more pleasurable in this game to investigate but then stave off closure to the fantasy of death. It may be a mise-en-scène of desire, but it also must be defended against. As Peter Brooks suggests

about plots, to have closure is to accept death. Closure provides sadistic gratification, but it also implies aggression and the end of the pleasures of masochism. As Clover (1992, 222) mentions (and then forgets), endings sometimes are not as psychically important as middles.¹⁸

This anti-denouement strategy pairs well with what the text creates as the cause for the disorder – the supernatural. This causal thesis provides the defence for the subject. It is not just me that is not omnipotent; no mortal could control such a monster – that is its wonder. In fact, crossing over the threshold does not yield death but the undead: a monster, but one capable of continuing to roam the earth in a scenario of desire and power, displayed through violence.

Finally, the seriality of the killer overdetermines the anti-denouement. No one seems to have paid much critical attention to the fact that the killers are always *serial* killers.¹⁹ They repeat the crime. No killing is sufficient to satiate their desire. It is not just one killing, but violence (read seduction and its conflated term death) as a repetitive occupation.

Clover writes much about the ambiguity of gendering – of how the male killer is a feminine male, the Final Girl a masculine female. Moreover, Clover claims, 'The helpless child is gendered feminine; the autonomous adult or subject is gendered masculine; the passage from childhood to adulthood entails a shift from feminine to masculine' (1992, 50). I am arguing that to avoid the scenario of final death, to continue the *mise-en-scène* of desire, is to delay, to put off complete transition to adulthood, to the all-powerful, to sexual activities that then solidify sexual difference and orientation. To keep the story going is to keep in play childhood, sexual ambiguity, liminality and, for the viewer, a roller-coaster of identifications and desires. These slasher movies are not about growing up, but staying young; of not giving up the fantasies of Santa Claus, the bogeyman and the undead; of keeping the game in play; of never finally becoming the adult across the abyss who is subject to the final acts of, or effects of, violence. As long as the fantasies of desire for the undead, of passage through and beyond the ravages of violence, need to be in play, the formula will work. Thus, this is an aesthetic for young men, for *young* men, as well as young *men*, and *may* help explain its pleasures for young women as well. These films reassure that we can walk unharmed through the nightmares of violence.

Notes

I appreciate the response of the audience at the 1995 Society for Cinema Studies Conference to an earlier draft of this essay.

- 1 Clover focuses on young men, and Jody Keisner (2008) also argues that these films are for male viewers. Although at one point Clover begins to question the dynamics for women, she digresses and does not return to the topic. On problems with this presumption, see two important studies: Rhona J. Berenstein's (1996) valuable critique of the idea that spectators for horror films are mostly men and Isabel Cristina Pinedo's (1997) analysis of the pleasures of these films for women.
- 2 I would strongly emphasize that psychoanalysis is not the only way into these texts.
- 3 Robin Wood claims repression of incest is the source of Michael's psychosis and argues that Dr Loomis's explanation that Michael is evil is 'surely the most extreme instance of Hollywood's perversion of psychoanalysis into an instrument of repression' (1985, 218). James B. Twitchell (1985) goes so far as to argue that all horror films are about incest (although he considers *Halloween* a terror film, not horror). We need, I think, to distinguish between the surface claims of the text and an ideological analysis of the text's meanings. I am pointing out here what the text claims. Indeed, all the occult explanations in *Halloween* and the other films may well be reducible to repression, but, as I shall suggest below, I agree with Berenstein (1996) that incest is not the trauma behind every manifest content in the horror or terror film.
- 4 Although some value exists in looking at these chronologically (and the films do become intertextual with one another), for ease of comprehension of this essay, I have redistributed this data to group the three major series that Clover includes in the subgenre.
- 5 This seems to be the 'male' inversion of the 'female' infestation in Clover's occult formula. These are not the same formulas, however; the formulas should be relabelled to acknowledge the supernatural in both. In fact, as Tudor suggests, a 'paranoid' horror seems to dominate in this era, with scientific experts rebuked in favour of supernatural explanations for monsters (1989, 102–4, 185–224).
- 6 Kelly Connelly (2007) also discusses that Laurie does not act in a fully empowered way until *Halloween H20* (1998; dir Steve Miner).
- 7 Several content analysis studies of these films substantiate this. Gloria Cowen and Margaret O'Brien (1990) report that of the total number of men and women in 56 films coded, 51 per cent of those attacked were male; 49 per cent were female. However, 90 per cent of the males did not survive compared with 81 per cent of the females. Cowen and O'Brien conclude that neither sex was more likely to be victims, but females were more likely to survive the attack. Cowen and O'Brien's evidence also supports Clover's generalization that the surviving women are 'more androgynous'. However, surviving men, while not 'hyper masculine' (as Clover also asserts), were more attractive than male non-survivors. This research is supported in the work of James B. Weaver III (1991) and Fred Molitor and Barry S. Sapolsky (1993). Molitor and Sapolsky's work suggests that the coupling of sexual activity and (subsequent) violence is infrequent in these films, and *sexual* violence is rare.
- 8 However, it is not equally clear that Clover's (1992, 63) cultural claims about the ridiculing of masculine males and the privileging of masculinity in the female body still holds. Sarah Trencansky (2001) comes to similar conclusions about 1980s slasher films.

- 9 Tania Modleski (1986, 160) and Tudor (1989, 94) mention this shock ending. Modleski does not try to explain the phenomenon; Tudor suggests it is a result of our lack of belief in the success of human intervention (1989, 102–4).
- 10 Bruce was the crew's name for the mechanical shark. Also note that this aesthetic was part of the 3D horror film of the 1950s.
- 11 In fact, it may make more sense to divide horror between 'slasher' violence and 'gore' violence. 'Gore' violence is often (must be?) accompanied by jokes. Such a division might expand on Carroll's (1990) approach to the aesthetics of horror.
- 12 Carroll (1990, 17–22) notes the physical disfigurement of many monsters, arguing that the disfigurement constitutes the territory we fear to enter. They are also excessive linguistically: Michael and Jason as essentially non-verbal; Freddy is overly verbal, a master of the pun.
- 13 Continued by the post-early-1990s films; see 'Ghostface' in *Scream* (1996; dir Wes Craven).
- 14 This differs from Linda Williams' (1991) treatment of horror as an instance of the fantasy of castration. Giles (1984) is also asserting that horror is involved with the fantasy of castration.
- 15 Note how sexuality has been habitually tied to death: the 'petit mort'.
- 16 Here I want to particularly underline the importance of being more flexible in describing the functions of horror films for spectators. See Berenstein (1996) on this issue as well as Deirdre D. Johnston (1995), who argues horror films have at least four different psychological functions for adolescent viewers. No single fantasy scenario likely exists for all horror or terror films; no single fantasy scenario may be operating by itself in any specific formula.
- 17 Or the phallic woman, depending on how the specific text is constructing the Final Girl's aggression.
- 18 Clover notes that endings are often misremembered and generically over-determined (1992, 223n). Ironically, Clover has significantly misremembered the endings to these movies.
- 19 Moreover, killers create killers. A common conclusion to even the rational slasher films is the continuation of violence, a cycle of violence, with the killer passing on through the trauma of the event his/her compulsion to a child. See *Don't Go in the House* (1979; dir Joseph Ellison) and *Friday the 13th, Part 4* (1984; dir Joseph Zito).

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