

REMADE IN OUR IMAGE: GENDER, MELODRAMA, AND CONSERVATISM
IN POST-9/11 SLASHER REMAKES

by

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of English
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

March 2014

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Title: Remade in Our Image: Gender, Melodrama, and Conservatism in Post-9/11
Slasher Remakes

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Doctor of Philosophy

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March 2014

Title: Remade in Our Image: Gender, Melodrama, and Conservatism in Post-9/11 Slasher Remakes

This project details the ways in which the classic slasher films of the 1970s, and their post-9/11 remakes, are representative of the individual and complex world views out of which each set of films were borne. The remakes manipulate gender roles including those of the Final Girl and the mother; genre conventions, including increases in domestic melodrama and pathos; production models, including the use of star actors, directors, and producers; sexuality and presentation of the sexualized female body; and race, especially in fine differences between white and non-white characters. In doing so, the post-9/11 films reveal a conservative cultural climate that strives to show recovery of the nuclear family unit after trauma, unlike the originals which are more nihilistic in tone and portray families as either absent or deeply flawed and unrecoverable.

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For my parents, grandparents, and future wife – thank you for teaching me the value of hard work, and for the love, support, and encouragement, through the good and the bad.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Horror movies were not a part of my childhood. In fact, movies in general were not a huge part of my early entertainment experiences. Born in 1982, I came along after the classic 1970s slashers and was too young for all the sequels throughout the 80s. I never had a deep desire to see scary movies, and neither the classics of the Universal era nor the 50s monster flicks were a huge draw for me, much less the blood-and-guts slashers of more recent decades. All of this changed; however, I don't know when or why. In fact, of the five 'classics' on which I will focus in this dissertation, the only one that I remember viewing for the first time is Wes Craven's *Last House on the Left* (1972), and that is only because my first viewing was in the last two years. At least part of why I don't remember any of the other viewings is because I don't know that I liked any of the films very much the first time through. Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) lacked the kind of plot I was used to and seemed cheaply made (probably because it cost all of \$83,500!). John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) was cheesy and slow (*Halloween 2* [1981] stays true to form in many ways). Sean Cunningham's *Friday the 13th* (1980) picked up where *Halloween* left off, and cut out the small bits of story and character development that holds Carpenter's work together.

But times change, and so do tastes. After these initial, partially forgotten reactions, I came back to these films with an added interest. I had begun to study film in grad school, and began to see more in these films. I also began to notice that all of these films were being remade. Upon revisiting the original films, it started to become clear why these films were classics. These were not just shallow, blood- and sex-filled romps.

These were films that pushed standards, broke records, and provided social commentary in both subtle and brutal ways. I have since come to appreciate various aspects of each of these movies, and even though I still find parts of *Halloween* boring and often find it hard to explain to many why *The Last House on the Left* is a must-see film, I am happy to watch them all over and over again.

But, as I mentioned, times change, and with them so do tastes. And it is the changes in times and tastes on which this dissertation focuses. I examine several post 9/11 era horror remakes from the 2000s in relation to their now-classic 1970s originals. The film pairs I consider are those of *The Last House on the Left* (1972/2008), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974/2003),¹ *Halloween* (1978/2007), *Friday the 13th* (1980/2009) and *Halloween II* (1981/2009). This multifaceted project considers genre theory, race theory, star texts, and production models through a lens of feminist inflected gender theory. I compare how these facets represent the complex worldviews defined by each time period. In terms of their historical moment, the early films typify the nihilism of the post-Vietnam, post-Watergate era in which the U.S. was no longer assured of the inherent goodness of a foreign policy based on Manifest Destiny. Domestically, social roles based on gender and race had begun to shift in the continued ripples following the feminist and civil rights movements, changes that left traditional social codes and behaviors in flux. These films were also products of a post-studio-era production period, another traditional structural system that was crumbling during the era. These independently produced films captured the attention of surprising and unprecedented numbers of viewers. They continue as canonical classics of their time

and genre, offer up plots that manipulate traditional social myths, and work to ignore the past or the future through three main narrative trends:

- Ignoring traditionally feminine traits for heroines, such as complacency, inaction, or romanticized visions of courtly love;
- Complicating, distorting, or dismissing the sex drives of male and female characters;
- And presenting very non-traditional versions of motherhood so as to deny both birth (the past), and death (the future).²

Through these three main facets, the films challenge the traditional American melodramatic mode by creating evil that is amorphous and hard to define, providing no romantic narrative around which to build easily-identifiable character types, and showing no interest in generational progress through the typical triumph of youth over old age. The original films also challenge the traditional models of American storytelling by highlighting young female characters in positions of resistance to misogynist violence, a short-lived trope that is a product of the 1970's feminist movement.

The remakes of these films tell a very different story about our current cultural moment, which is most clearly defined as the post 9/11 era. With the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, America was able to redefine its domestic image in terms of a foreign policy that became structured around an us/them dichotomy that had not been as tangible since WWI and the Cold War era. This realignment of patriotic values superseded the post-Vietnam era emotions that had carried through the 1990s with the disillusionment of Generation-X, and allowed America to once again be the

‘Good Guys’ reeling from an unprovoked attack (or so the rhetoric of time would suggest). This repositioning was felt across the board in our culture and the remakes of the classic 1970s slashers provide a crystalline view of the ways in which the shift in the narrative of ‘America’ influenced the narrative of cultural products of the time. While the original films eschewed melodrama (the traditional mode of American storytelling), the new films are steeped in family melodrama that highlights recovery from trauma via the recuperation of the family unit. The narratives do so through foregrounding generational tension, appointing the mother to a prominent (if flawed and always-to-blame) position, undercutting the autonomy of the Final Girl (the female hero who fights back against the killer), basking in the glory of male heroes, and celebrating the figure of the psycho-killer. All of these changes to the original stories help to realign the films’ narratives with more traditional story-telling modes, traditional gender norms, and traditional social myths than the originals, revolving around mothers and sons, sex and violence, and a sense of history or time. The films are not nihilistic like their predecessors, and instead all push toward a vision of America that can suffer from violent tragedy and move on to greatness, as long as faith in the ideological norms of our nuclear-family past can be recalled and relied upon.

Since the 1970s, horror films have developed into a genre that has cultural caché for being subversive, dangerous, and taboo. Indeed, the ways in which the use, manipulation, views, and transgressions of the body cross the lines of cultural standards can certainly fall into all of these categories. And the remakes transgress with even more detail, realism, and precision than their 70’s predecessors could ever hope to do thanks to increased CGI and special effects technology. But for all this visual

transgression of boundary and limits, the remakes have lost much of their subversive bite when it comes to their overall ideological messages. The non-traditional quality of the mothers in the originals is made more apparent when seen in contrast to the remakes, in which mothers abound to help unify the family and also provide a scapegoat on whom blame can be heaped for the killer's actions. Similarly, the masculine-coded women seen in the character of the Final Girl are no longer the heroes for whom we cheer.³ Instead, in a move to reclaim a position of dominance for men whom 'postfeminist' society often seems to worry have gone soft, these remakes place men in the position of the hero, reasserting a tenuous hold on the ever-precarious presence of white masculinity. This takes away from the original films' subversive nature, and simply supports the status quo that has been a part of Hollywood films (and filmmaking itself) from the beginning of the studio system. With men in the driver's seat both behind and in front of the camera, women are left little place except to go along for the ride.

These shifts are reminiscent of two other time periods in which the national concern over the domestic space and social roles increased the visibility of conservative gender roles in American popular culture. We need only think back to the post-WWII era's *Leave It to Beaver* for a perfect example of the desire to show women as the domestic leader of the home, happier nowhere but in the kitchen. This image is in direct contrast to the 'Rosie the Riveter' posters urging women out of the home and into the factories during the war. But with the return of men and the need for their reintegration into a social world in which women had begun to make their own money, choices, and lives, an idealized and all-too-happy Mrs. Cleaver working away in the domestic sphere

became an iconic vision of the post-WWII era. Here, the image of the mother becomes the key to the moment. Similarly, the 1980's Reagan-era return to conservative social codes (after the combination of Vietnam, the feminist movement, and continued race-centered civil rights movements) had its own return to 'tradition'. As Yvonne Tasker notes in *Spectacular Bodies* and Susan Jeffords argues in *Hard Bodies*, the 1980s saw a new character type break into the popular psyche of the American Cinema: the muscle-bound action hero. With a body that was larger than life and an ability to be knocked down, dragged out, and come back for more, the bodies of Bruce Willis, Sylvester Stallone, and Arnold Schwarzenegger, among others, wowed American audiences with a new type of masculinity that screamed, 'I am American, and I am invincible.' Without focusing too much on overcompensation, it is clear that with America's first loss in a war, coupled with changes in social codes concerning gender and race that developed throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, a new type of exaggeratedly (white) male hero perfectly captured the conservative era of the Reagan White House on the big screen. Thus, the post WWII era needed a reification of motherhood to solidify the conservative moment; the post-Vietnam era needed a reification of masculinity.

The post 9/11 era showcases both of these trends, a fact that I believe speaks volumes about how deeply the trauma of 9/11 has affected our culture. More so than any other historical event, the violence on mainland home soil perpetrated by an enemy that is vague and amorphous (a fact not helped by the rhetoric surrounding the simplicity of the us/them language used to cope with the trauma) has brought the need for comfort to an all-time high. For America, this comfort has been found in a return to traditional roles that recall an idealized and long-lost past in which we were the

superpower of the globe; these needs are played out in the remakes of the classic horror films from the 1970s.

This project answers the call for political feminism in horror theory made by Cynthia Freeland in her 1996 essay ‘Feminist Frameworks for Horror Films’ by considering the political ramifications of horror films and considering how historical changes impact those politics. Most of the critical work on horror is disappointing in this aspect, because it either works to define what horror is,⁴ or relies only on psychoanalytic frameworks to discuss the killer/victim relationship. While the former is apolitical, the latter often makes moves to distance films from the specific cultural moment out of which they grow and to which they are marketed.⁵ It is for these reasons that I prefer to return to a multifaceted approach of cultural criticism to consider ways that genre, plot, and star texts – all aspects of filmmaking that form a polysemic relationship between producers and viewers – impact how these films reflect social mores from their respective time periods. Thus, the project updates the critical research on horror films by considering the here-and-now of popular Hollywood horror from a feminist perspective.⁶

The rest of this chapter works to outline the most relevant critical and theoretical concepts that structure the rest of this project. While not every subsequent chapter will include or highlight each facet introduced below, it will become clear throughout the accumulated examinations of each set of films that the overall socio-political aspects of the post-Vietnam and post-9/11 eras are represented in these classic slashers and their remakes. The topic of motherhood looms large in a huge number of films, and in a large amount of feminist literature. For this reason, I will begin with this topic and explore

the ways in which motherhood is variously represented in the films considered in this project. Because the Final Girl is a telltale fixture of slashers, and was borne out of the 1970's social milieu and its direct influence by the feminist movement, and because the Final Girl is so often *not* an obvious choice for a young mother, I will continue by examining her character type, especially in relation to Carol Clover's seminal work in *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* (1993). That horror has traditionally been a white genre is an understatement. Generally, any signs of non-whiteness signal 'the other' (read 'the monster'). The remakes of these classic (and wholly white) slashers do little to nothing to change this trend, but by considering shades of difference in appropriate 'white' behavior, and following the lead of Richard Dyer's *White*, we can begin to see that the codes of whiteness represent as powerful and as strictly defined race lines as those that separate all racial categories. This becomes especially important when considering the remakes' concern for representing white masculinity as the hero. From here, I will consider genre and mode, discussing horror while highlighting domestic melodrama, as the latter is such a defining aspect of the newer films. I will also consider the idea of the remake itself, and consider how research on the remake has been lacking in the past. The aspects of genre and 'the remake' lead the discussion into the crucial realm of production, and I continue to open this area by considering star texts and production costs, and their impact on the final product that audiences ultimately consume.

The Mother

As much as a horror film is about scaring the viewer, often in our culture the most fearful thing in a movie is not blood and guts, things jumping out in the dark, or ghosts from the past. Instead, the mother takes that position. *Psycho* (Hitchcock 1960) is

a perfect example of a film mother whose domination creates the fear. Mrs. Bates' control of Norman is so complete that he will do anything to please her – even after she is dead – including murdering women to deny himself pleasure and to punish himself for wanting that pleasure. Another version of fear of the mother can be seen in a film like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Kaufman 1978), in which the action of (re)generation actually removes the mother from the equation with giant uterus-like pods producing copies of citizens as the source of terror and mayhem. The slashers of the 1970s follow in the footsteps of other horror in that they confront motherhood, reproduction, and regeneration head on; however, they do so in two very disparate and complex ways that set them apart from the majority of films and pop culture.

These two treatments of the mother – either erasing her or making her the killer – mirror the ambivalent nature of motherhood in our culture. This ambivalence is also seen in the dichotomies of virgin/whore and sex object/mother into which women are constantly relegated. As virgin or sex object, a woman is valued for her body, and as an object to be obtained. Once this goal has been achieved, she is dismissed as either the whore (who can then be outcast due to her impropriety, or punished through reform by a patriarchal system including healthcare professionals, churches, and family) or as the mother, who is no longer seen as a sexualized object and is expected to fit the role of familial nurturer without non-maternal drives, be they sexual, personal, or professional. We see, then, in these very traditional dichotomies an eagerness to dismiss the fallen woman (Christianity's Eve is a perfect example of heaping blame on the 'fallen' woman after sexual congress) either by punishment (whore) or compartmentalization (mother). The Virgin Mary, one of the most beloved mothers in Western history, is a perfect

example of how to sidestep the problems of the virgin/whore dichotomy; divine conception simply allows for both while circumventing the taboo of the sexual mother. But while this nifty twist saves Mary from falling victim to the virgin/whore trap, it does not save her from the object/mother binary. Instead, it solidifies her role as an especially non-sexual mother, as she did not even have to have sex to conceive. The role of the mother becomes further complicated by the greatest dichotomy that we face as members of our culture, and as members of humanity: life and death.

With life as the only 'present' shared by all humanity, we can begin to view the past and the future as defined by the shared experiences of birth and death, respectively. This cycle of life and death, past and future, is inextricably linked to sex, and therefore to the mother. As the sex act initiates pregnancy and childbirth, it is a reminder of new life represented through motherhood; birth and new life, however, are also reminders of the inevitability of death. As the nexus of the past and future, the image of the mother becomes loaded as a cultural signal both revered and reviled as a symbol of fertility and demise. We see this played out in the story of Eden, as the sex act with Eve initiates a new knowledge of life, but also triggers the fall toward death that the generation of Cain and Able signify. The anxiety of death brought forth is also seen in the taboos surrounding the Virgin Mary, as that myth is about the desire for life without sex wherein Mary becomes a mother only in a surrogate form, with life passed from the male God to the male Christ with Mary's womb used only as a short stop on the road to everlasting life (represented through the resurrection and the promise of the afterlife). Thus Mary becomes the focus of taboos around sexualized mothers *and* around the inevitability of sex as a reminder of life; if she never had sex, then the birth of Jesus

does not have to precede death (at least not for Joseph), but can instead usher in everlasting life. By (attempting) to ignore Mary's role as an object of sexual desire, the Christian mythos also attempts to ignore the threat – and power – that women have come to embody through motherhood.⁷ These same fears are represented throughout much of Freud's influential work on sex (and men's relationships with sex and their mothers), especially in terms of his work trying to understand the relationship between the Pleasure Principle and the Death Drive.⁸

No matter in what regard one holds psychoanalytic theory, one thing that is unmistakably true about the body of work popularized by Freud is that it allows us to trace the cultural fears of the Western world throughout history. By examining the rules and taboos that have reoccurred throughout disparate historical moments, we see that a fear of the mother and her sexuality, and fear of her ability to represent, both literally and figuratively, life and death, were the common threads with which Freud created a whole lifetime's worth of work that attempted to work out the puzzle of our cultural preoccupations. Without turning to psychoanalysis, though, we can see the ambivalence toward the mother as an embodiment of life and death defined quite simply by her ability to nurture, or not. With the cultural assumption that with motherhood a woman must give up any other drives except to nurture (specifically denying any further association with sex) comes the inherent fear that she could not nurture. Instead of giving birth (life) and caring for the child, she could just as easily not care for the child and let it wither (death). We hear all too often about animal babies born in zoos where the mother is uninterested in caring for the child, a reminder that the ability to give life is also linked to the ability to choose to care for that life. While the cultural standards of

motherhood have all but removed that choice for ‘good’ mothers, the reason why we have these standards is linked directly to the fact that our cultural rules are not inherent; they are created as part of the fabric of our psychosocial identity.⁹ With this in mind, we do not need to scour the literature of the Western world to realize that motherhood is a precariously constructed cultural practice whereby the assumption that a woman will give up everything to nurture her child is intrinsic. We simply need to consider how the fear that motherhood (as defined by a patriarchal culture) is also a fear that our cultural institutions could change. Since these types of changes could impact every aspect of our patriarchal world, it is important to remember that for every fear, there are a multitude of cultural rules, taboos, and practices in place that are meant to uphold the status quo. The 1970s films discussed in this project tend to follow two main trends – that of removing the mother completely, or turning her into a killer – to deal with the ambivalence created by the fear of the mother’s ability to give life and her constant reminder that life can be taken away.

The first of the two ways the 70s classic films confront the mother is, in fact, to simply erase all traces of her. Interestingly, these films are also conflicted in terms of how they deal with sexuality – they do not conflate sex and violence like *Psycho* does, but instead replace all sex with violence (at least as far as the killers are concerned). The two films that typify this trend are *Chainsaw* and *Halloween*. In *Chainsaw*, the only hint of a mother (or any female presence at all in the killers’ house) is the desiccated corpse of ‘Gran’ma’, still dressed, sitting in a rocking chair in an upstairs room.¹⁰ ‘Gran’pa’ apparently whiles away his days sitting across from her in his wheelchair while the other men of the house go about their days killing, robbing graves, and making human

BBQ to sell at the gas station. The three men in the group also appear to be devoid of any sexual drive; they seem genuinely baffled and laugh hysterically at Sally's offer to 'do anything' if they let her go. They are clearly uninterested in sex even when it is offered, and their dismissal is part of what makes their crimes so baffling. In a culture where male violence and the sexualization of women are so often intertwined, it is strange to see a group of men employ systematic violence that is divorced from a sexual aim. This ambivalence carries forward in *Halloween* when Michael, as a young boy, kills his oldest sister after she has a brief sexual encounter with her boyfriend. Moments after her murder, we see Michael's mother for mere seconds, and she stands motionless and speechless. We never see her again. It is implied by this scene that the young child, left alone with an inattentive sister while his parents were gone, in effect has no mother. Unlike the *Chainsaw* men, Michael's violent outburst seems linked to his sister's sexual act, but there is no clear motivation for why he reacts the way he does. Throughout the film the others that Michael kills are also engaged in sex (or are planning an encounter), but his drive to kill Laurie, the chaste and innocent Final Girl, throws the idea that he is only punishing the sexually active out the window. Instead, the connection between sex and Michael's violence seems to be incidental.¹¹ It would seem, then, that two movies with no mother characters are also two movies wherein the killers have no specific sexual aims. Compared to *Psycho*, in which Norman's violence is directly tied to his sexuality, which is directly tied to his overbearing mother, these movies are devoid of two main tenets that make up the deep seated cultural myth of Oedipus: sex and the mother.

With sex and the mother so closely connected in the Western social mythos of the Oedipal process it is surprising to find stories that have an absence of both. But just as the Oedipal process has become a cultural touchstone in the Western world, it has also been used as a way of scapegoating the mother in order to blame myriad male issues (psychological, social, sexual, physical) on her. But in these two films, there is no mother for these men to blame – their actions are their own, and there is no bad upbringing or bad mothering to be used as an out. With these basic elements of the family drama missing, it is important to note that these films are nearly devoid of domestic. This is especially true in *Chainsaw*. While melodrama's characteristic of boiling characters down to good and evil is certainly present (Chainsaw family is evil, everyone else is good) the lack of character development, motivation, or resolution make the evil uncontained, and give a clinical air to the events, devoid of the emotion attached to melodrama. We don't even know the 'good' characters well enough to know if they are in fact good; they are only good by comparison. Melodrama may boil cultural trauma down to a personal struggle of good versus evil, but since there is no personality in the characters, it is difficult to find the proper depth of emotion to classify the film as melodramatic. Even the classic melodramatic trope of creating rather flat characters is absent here because generally, those flat characters in melodrama are still culturally recognizable (mother, father, good girl, trouble maker, etc.) so that we can identify with them quickly and easily; here, that trend is absent. In *Halloween*, this same lack of motivation and character depth provides for a sense of the pornographic as opposed to the melodramatic; the murders are simply 'numbers' with some thin plot connecting them together. This lack of sexual drive, lack of domestic melodrama, and

lack of a mother figure all lead to films that are alienating because they are devoid of the common cultural anchors used for popular narrative – a style especially noticeable in *Massacre* and *Last House*.

If we are to believe the Oedipal myth, the mother defines the sexuality of the characters we see on the screen more often than not. This is especially true for men, as they are either trying to please their mothers, forget their mothers, or find a replacement for them in a love interest. But in these movies, the lack of a mother figure brings a strange twist to the table. It is as though *Leatherface* (*Texas Chainsaw*) and Michael Meyers (*Halloween*) have no sex drives because they have no mothers. Furthermore, instead of the mother's absence being caused by a dismissal by the younger generation for her being in the way either physically, socially, or psycho-sexually (think of how the children try to get rid of the mothers in Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* (1955) or *Imitation of Life* (1959) as perfect examples of this dismissal), the male killers in *Halloween* and *Texas Chainsaw* have no mother hanging over their heads and, in a rarely seen trait in film, a mother is not to blame for the sins of her son. Instead, these men are terrifying figures on their own. The lack of a mother figure also makes these killers seem nearly spontaneous in their being – they seem to come from nowhere. In *Texas Chainsaw*, the clan of men has no connection to a mother, except for the desiccated corpse of the grandmother. The men make no mention of women or female relations, and seem to have appeared from the earth, chthonic beings assembled from the blood of the slaughterhouse floor as asexual amalgamations of prolonged and systemic violence. So too Michael Meyers, a killer that Dr. Sam Loomis (Michael's doctor) tells us repeatedly is pure evil. Even though we get a brief glimpse of his mother

at the beginning of the film, by the time we catch up with Michael twenty years later, he is simply a shape, a hulking mass of evil, not born as a human, but as a beast with only the drive to kill.

With no sense of birth, the films also have no sense of past. The killers come from no mother, and seemingly from nowhere. Similarly, they are going nowhere. The nihilism of the 1970s is translated into a world in which violent outbursts can happen at anytime and to anyone. This mirrors the trauma of the spontaneity of violence in the jungles of Vietnam (the televised broadcasts of which were a huge impact on Wes Craven as he worked on the script for *Last House*). Death is not part of a natural lifecycle of birth/sex/death, but instead becomes a way of denying the future any existence. This mirrors the disconnect of sex with the cycle of birth and death that we see in *Leatherface* and Michael Meyers's disinterest in sex; by channeling all of their aggression into violence (a Death Drive or *Thanatos*) with no balance of sex (a Pleasure Principle or *Eros*) the characters and the films aim to circumvent regeneration, and mothers. Even in *Friday the 13th*, where a mother *is* the killer, her goal is to deny sex to the younger generation, and thus to deny them offspring or a future, just as her son was denied a future. Death is the inevitable future, but without a possibility of regeneration or birth, it becomes the present, and so becomes the all-consuming force that drives the killers and the plots of the films.¹²

Mrs. Voorhees, the surprise killer in *Friday*, brings us to the second way in which mothers in the 1970s slashers are uncharacteristically treated: they become the killer. This extremely rare trait for mothers is seen in two very different ways in two films covered in this project. In *Friday the 13th*, Mrs. Voorhees takes on a fairly

traditional role of the blamed mother, in some ways showing ties to *Psycho*'s (Hitchcock 1960) Mrs. Bates in that her love for her son (in a word, her motherhood) is so powerful that it develops into unrelenting violence when the mother-son relationship is threatened (in *Psycho* by another woman, in *Friday* by death). However, we must remember that any blame heaped on Mrs. Bates via Norman's actions is filtered through Norman's psychoses; we never meet the dead Mrs. Bates, and never know who she actually was. In fact, our ability to blame her comes from a 1960 pop-psychoanalytic¹³ reading of Norman's assumed motivations by a police psychiatrist, not through any first-hand knowledge of the character. On the other hand, Mrs. Voorhees is unashamed of her killing spree, and takes great pride in telling her story. Thus, the common fate of motherhood, wherein a mother takes the blame for the sins of her family via *their* interpretation of *her* language, actions, or motivations, is turned on its head when we hear Mrs. Voorhees give testimony of her own.

Wes Craven's 1972 *The Last House on the Left* also presents a mother driven to murder. After her daughter is raped and killed by a band of psychopathic thugs, Estelle Collingwood and her husband find themselves face-to-face with the killers in their own home. What follows is a series of rape-revenge type killings (a subgenre of its own that is different from the slasher, a fact that will be addressed in Chapter II). What marks these events as so striking is that Mrs. Collingwood takes an active role in the death of two of the clan members, and one of her murders is tied directly to her sexuality. This second fact is of particular interest, because of the traditional Western cultural binary noted above whereby a woman can occupy only one of two mutually exclusive positions: she is either a sexual object, or she is a mother. The sexuality of the mother is

a taboo subject tied closely, once again, to the Oedipal myth that is the basis for so much sexual stricture in our Western world. But *Last House* breaks with that tradition and shows Mrs. Collingwood seducing one of the killers only to castrate him. Both Mrs. Collingwood and Mrs. Voorhees, then, represent a version of the overprotective mother who responds to the death of her child through violence. This violence ensures that no one else can procreate (Mrs. Voorhees kills teens having sex, Mrs. Collingwood kills a man by castrating him) and mimics the trend seen in *Chainsaw* and *Halloween* by which an absence of traditional motherhood is directly linked to a nihilistic vision of the world in which progress, specifically generational progress, is unattainable.

The remakes of these films variously change these 1970s characteristics by creating mothers where there were none, or by giving those that did exist a much more traditional role. ‘Tradition’, in some cases, means that they are presented as scapegoats for their killer sons; in other cases, they are placed within the domestic sphere and charged with reconciling the family. The subsequent chapters will lay bare these changes in detail, but suffice it to say that the non-traditional roles of the 1970s are gone. Instead, in the wake of 9/11, it is clear that a cultural need for a halcyon past in which Mrs. Cleaver (despite her name) was the poster-woman for safety, has turned what were once raw and outlandish films into escapist entertainment in which murder is wrapped up not in a BBQ bag, but in a pretty bow of traditional motherhood.

The Final Girl

Realigning with tradition does not, however, stop at motherhood. In fact, all forms of femininity are brought back in line with a more traditional standard in the new films. This also goes for the ever-important character of the Final Girl, a character type

first identified by Carol Clover in her book *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*. The feminism of the 1970s did not *cause* the Final Girl per se; but, looking back through the lens of the recent remakes, it is clear that these strong female leads were influenced by a social world in which feminism was a prominent political movement. The remakes, on the other hand, are inspired by a neo-conservative, post-feminist social milieu in which powerful female leads are considered un-needed and/or unwanted. In his essay ‘Trying to Survive on the Darker Side: 1980s Family Horror’, Tony Williams suggests that the trend in the 80s was to minimize the role of women and glorify the killer through the sequels of the 70s films. In contrast to Clover, he argues that the Final Girl was only vaguely present in many of the original 70s films and that by the time any of their sequels came out in the early 80s, all traces of this character was gone. I do not agree with this reading of the original films (although his comments about the sequels are very true), and argue that while Clover may overstate her case and tie it too closely to awkward psychoanalytic theories at times, she is correct in noting that the lead female characters in 1970s horror were strong women who defended themselves against monstrous sexual killers. Clover does not make excuses for these sexual killers, but instead reveals the ways in which their hyper-masculinity belies the faults within their masculine façade and how the Final Girl exploits her non-sex-object position to best the killer’s advances. Similarly, I am not arguing that just because Laurie Strode fights back and escapes Michael Meyers in *Halloween*, the film is a feminist text. Instead, this dissertation will show that the rather isolated trend of having women as that final fighter was a fleeting one, and that this trend when seen collectively highlights, as Clover

rightly explores, a character type that is indicative of a brief cultural moment that *could* imagine the hero as a woman, no matter how masculine she might be.¹⁴

Williams's argument regarding the disappearance of the Final Girl in the 1980s does not undermine the thesis of this project for two main reasons. First, as mentioned above, he dismisses the Final Girl character type that Clover identifies as having very little power to begin with. I disagree with this point and, given the caveat that a young woman defending herself does not excuse or erase an hour and a half of sexual brutality, the fact that this character type stands out in this short period of time is indicative of a paradigm shift in the thought about a woman's role in film, and society, during the 1970s. Second, while the shift in tone that horror movies took in the 80's is similar to what I am arguing is taking place in the 2000's, the political climate was far less polarized in the 80s. Today's polarization, in which liberal movements like LGBT rights come head-to-head with Tea Party conservatism, is indicative of a social milieu that harbors the ambivalence directed toward today's women.

Today, the term 'feminism' is diverse, divided, and so often, misused. Indeed, *post-feminism* has become a catch-all phrase that applies to so many different goals, causes, and ideas as to what feminism could and should be that the 'post' could almost be replaced with 'contra.' While the realization that class, race, place, religion, and sexual preferences differentiate women and how they are seen and want to see themselves defined is a positive thing, that difference does not have to lead to a fracturing of the cause.¹⁵ Angela McRobbie's 2004 essay 'Post-feminism and Popular Culture' and Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker's 'In Focus: Postfeminism and Contemporary Media Culture' concisely and clearly explicate the pervasive nature, and

negative cultural ramifications, of post-feminism as it manifests itself by ‘absorbing’ women’s freedoms into the hegemonic norm by continuing to show social and public freedoms linked to consumerism, heterosexual love, and the home. Feminism, therefore, is remolded as a social mechanism that continues to show women as part of a system that allows for freedom only within the traditional structures of patriarchy. This, then, is different from the purely conservative backlash of the 1980s; it is subtler and more invasive. Instead of a broadly conceived conservative movement epitomized during the Reagan years that simply demanded less progressive thinking across the board, the conservatism seen during the early 2000’s is based on the false notion that ‘liberal movements’ like feminism and civil rights achieved their goals in the past. Terms like ‘post-feminism’ and ‘post-racial’ work to falsely convince people that we are in some halcyon age of equality. This has been perfectly displayed through the election of Barack Obama as president, not only in attacks on his policy that are turned into personal attacks based on his race and supposed religion, but also in high-profile court cases like that of George Zimmerman who was acquitted after picking a fight with a young black man and then killing him, apparently in self defense.¹⁶ Similarly high profile cases from around the world have detailed the horrors of gang-rape in India,¹⁷ religious oppression, and, domestically, pop-stars who are all but forgiven after beating their girlfriends.¹⁸ This thinking is dangerous because it is covert: The message is not that women or people of color should be second rate; it is that they are no longer second rate and so no one needs to worry about inequality. The end result – oppression – is the same, but the tack has changed.

Though my argument is that the 2000s are significantly different from the 70s in many ways (differences which will be illustrated throughout this project), there are similarities between the 70s and today that impact how we consider post-feminism's role today. These similarities comprise another aspect that differentiates the conservatism in the 2000s from that seen in the 80s. In fact, like the exception that proves the rule, these similarities only highlight how differently today's political climate manifests its conservative nature compared to the 1980s. 1980s Hollywood ushered in action films like the *Rambo* and *Terminator* franchises in an era of conservative Reagan politics. These films responded to films like the 70s slashers by minimizing female presence on screen, celebrating violent defense of ideals of liberty, and glorifying the white, muscle-bound male body that was able to withstand assault after assault and still win the day.¹⁹ This 80s backlash achieved these goals through a celebration of masculine physicality and clearly signaled a different political climate from the 1970s. But the political climates of the 1970s and the early 2000s are similar in some ways. Both time periods are characterized by a deep-seated distrust of government (linked to Vietnam and Iraq/Afghanistan) and changes in gender dynamics (the women's movement and the LGBTQ and Third Wave movements, including the rise of 'Girl Power' in the 1990s).²⁰ Both time periods' generate stories like horror films (more than the 1960s or the 1990s) that allow us to map our social fears concerning gender, foreign policy, and domestic anxieties onto the bodies of individuals. However, instead of exposing dynamic and culturally transgressive mothers, highlighting the decline of the American family, revealing a disinterest in the past or the future through nihilistic ennui, and embracing a powerful female character who could point out the

flaws in the white, middle class nuclear family like the 70's films did, the remakes focus on ways in which men attempt to reclaim a sense of power and superiority over their situations while re-positioning women (mothers or otherwise) to traditional, family-oriented roles. This male superiority and female traditionalism often brings with it a heterosexual pairing (in contrast to a lone woman standing in defiance to patriarchal heterosexuality) and/or a glorification of the male hero, left to revel in his own bodily pain and moral victory. It also celebrates or excuses the killers' actions, often heaping that blame on their mothers or their victims.

Race

This conservatism on the part of these remakes is carried over into the fact that, much like the original films, racial difference is all but erased in a sea of whiteness. Richard Dyer's *White* is an important text to consider in relation to these films, not only as a guide for reading how different types of whiteness are constructed on screen (the antagonists of the original *Last House* [1972] are clearly marked as Italian, whereas the protagonists are much more WASP-y), but also in thinking about why non-white bodies are absent from these films' versions of America. Indeed, only the remake of *Friday the 13th* (2009) includes non-whites as vaguely 'main' characters, but they become nothing more than feminized stereotypes that form a homosocial pair until they die. The new *Halloween* (2007) has a Hispanic male nurse who befriends the killer, Michael Meyers, but he is given few lines and seems to act only as a slightly updated version of the "magic Negro" archetype. Thus, while the racial profiles in the remakes are slightly more varied than those in the originals, the same overall conservative trend can be seen: Racial difference is seen, but it is far from progressive as the racialized characters are

either ‘bad’ like in the new *Last House* or are simply stereotypes made into fodder for the killer.

‘Types’ of whiteness are also important for discussions of class that are crucial to any conversation of both new and old versions of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *Last House*, as well as the new version of *Friday the 13th*. By types of whiteness, I mean that the films construct a sliding scale that reflects ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ ways to enact whiteness. Richard Dyer’s work is important here, again, because whiteness becomes not simply about skin color, but about the ways in which racial superiority is enacted. As Dyer, Clover, and many others have pointed out, whiteness become synonymous with middle-upper class, able-bodied, heteronormative, educated suburbia. Taking this narrow definition of socially-constructed racial superiority into account, the ‘redneck’ killers in the *Texas Chain Saw Massacre(s)*, the uneducated (and dark haired) criminals in *The Last House(s)*, and the physically grotesque and animalistic Jason in the new *Friday the 13th* all become racially coded outcasts (read non-white).²¹ The fact that they are psycho-killers only adds to their ‘inappropriate whiteness’; it is not the sole cause of it. Indeed, as Dyer notes, one of the most important skills for enacting a form of white masculinity that is socially acceptable is the ability to rise above an animal instinct toward violence and to live as an intellectual being (14-40). The killers in slashers, no matter how deviously intellectual they are in their plotting and scheming, still live in a world defined by the visceral, not the cerebral or spiritual.

Genre Conventions

Separation of mind and body, and in how the bodies and minds of both on-screen victims and audience members are manipulated, is also integral to analyzing the

differences in the way the films from these two time periods function in terms of genre. What gave the original 70s slashers much of their impact was that there was so little place for emotion or empathy. The viewer's experience was wholly visceral. Emotional excess on the other hand, even while maintaining a visceral quality about its manifestations, is more cerebral. The processing of emotion requires thought, memories, and consideration; the processing of physical pain is more immediate and wholly visceral. If one returns to Linda Williams's work on melodrama, horror, and porn in 'Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess' it is clear that both melodrama and horror films impact characters *and* viewers viscerally. Through sobbing tears and bloody terror, the characters of these films deal with the realities of their situations with what Williams calls 'emotional excess' with bodily signs of stress; as viewers, we too sob, breath harder, clench our fists, sweat, or scream when watching these films. But for both characters and viewers, the original films fed almost wholly on physical pain, while any emotional stress was derived from the terror of the physical threat. The new films contain corporeal pain, but instead of being wholly about the physicality, they use the threat to the body to highlight or extend the underlying emotional pain that is built into the films' narrative pathos. Thus, they change the basic structure of the horror genre by undercutting physical terror with emotional tension.

Part of the way the remakes change how they represent characters and their roles within their respective diegetic worlds is by changing the genre conventions that helped define the original films. Instead of the traditional, episodic conventions of the 70s slasher horror, the remakes utilize melodrama, specifically family melodrama, to highlight male pain and struggle, erase and depoliticize female power, and dynamically

shift the narrative structures. For example, Wes Craven's 1972 *The Last House on the Left* was originally conceived of as hard-core horror-porn. This is still evident in much of the film we see today since the porn 'vignette' style is present throughout.²² The remake, however, turns the films into a family melodrama about the loss of a son and the reformation of the nuclear family unit. The vignette-style slasher film, in which we are shown a murder, followed by a brief lull in the 'story' just to get us to the next murder (the same formula that pornography employs with sex instead of violence), became a staple of the slasher formula epitomized in *Halloween* (Carpenter 1978) and *Friday the 13th* (Cunningham 1980). But the remakes of both of these two films challenge genre expectations by creating an intensely melodramatic child abuse narrative for the killer in Rob Zombie's 2007 *Halloween*, and a lost-sister/dead-mother story for the newly conceived of male hero in Marcus Nispel's 2009 *Friday the 13th* that eschews the vignette style for much of each film.

Linda Williams has, quite convincingly, led a crusade over the past twenty years to rethink the use of melodrama not as a generic signifier, but as a *mode* of storytelling. This mode often (but not always) works in conjunction with realism, but has different aims, including emotional manipulation. I support Williams's claims, but we cannot dismiss the myriad films that fall under a *genre* of melodrama. These are films that, no matter what else is happening, rely in large part on emotional manipulation to form characters and plots, and thus rely on emotions to actually create narrative. In short, they are *about* emotion. These films, historically focused on female characters, have been called 'weepies' or 'women's films' as Williams, Christine Gledhill, and E. Ann Kaplan have discussed.²³ Nearly all of Sirk's library could be cited as examples, such as

Imitation of Life (1959) or *All That Heaven Allows* (1955), while his film *Written on the Wind* (1956) is a perfect example of male melodrama and proves that weepies are not only about women. In contrast to these films, which are considered melodramas in genre, the melodramatic *mode* can be seen as an underlying structure in many genres that do not necessarily rely on excess emotion as the driving force behind the plot. They are not specifically *about* emotion, but instead have common emotional anchors that help us relate to familiar narrative tropes and character types. An example is *Die Hard* (McTiernan 1988) in which the action-adventure that drives the film's plot is precipitated by a family trauma and the emotional desire to remedy the fractured family unit.

Given the dual role of the term 'melodrama', it is important to be clear that when I talk about the remakes as utilizing melodrama, it is as both a mode *and* a genre. This is not the easy way out, or a way to play both sides of the field. On the contrary, this dissertation will show that while the remakes of these classic horror films retain all the markers of the horror genre, including episodic murders by a psycho killer (or killers) who primarily focuses on a group of teens, they manipulate the stories so completely as to fundamentally change the genre's conventions, and reimagine the films in such a way that they are driven, in large part, by melodramatic emotion (usually linked to a lost family member). Again, the visceral torture is fully present, but it is merely used to highlight the emotional trauma of the main characters.

It is important to consider, also, that melodrama is not just one thing with one meaning.²⁴ While throughout this project I use melodrama to refer to plots that foreground emotions and pathos, nearly always linked to the family sphere as domestic

melodrama, there is also a tradition of melodrama that calls on action to illicit an emotional response (e.g. *The Perils of Pauline*), and a branch that presents the excesses, follies, and navigations of class status (e.g. Dickens, James, et al).²⁵ It seems odd that, with action being a tool used to create an emotional response, I argue that the films of the 1970s that this project considers are not melodramatic. After all, what is horror but a series of nearly uninterrupted action sequences design to make us shriek, jump, cringe, or cry? But we must remember that the action-emotion link has been historically linked to action that threatens some aspect of a traditional (i.e. heterosexual) domestic or pre-domestic relationship. Most often, this has come in the form of a damsel in distress, but can also show men caught out, say, behind enemy lines. In any case, even though the action takes place outside the domestic sphere, we can see traces of a family plot related to the story lines. After all, what is the damsel in distress but the beloved of some young man's courtly love dream, or the new wife of an earnest man who never thought he would have to risk life and limb to retrieve his betrothed. Indeed, as Linda Williams points out in 'Melodrama Revised', 'action-centered melodrama is never without pathos, and pathos-centered melodrama is never without at least some action' (58). To take this a step further, it is important to remember that popular American narratives are rarely devoid of some form of heteronormative family unit. Even in *First Blood* (Kotcheff 1982), John Rambo's first interaction in the film is with the mother of one of his dead compatriots. My goal here is not to argue that all melodrama, even action melodrama, is automatically domestic melodrama; although many action stories rely on a familial connection to create identification with the characters and motivate the action that brings about the emotional response, it is unnecessary and unwise to argue that the

two categories are the same or undifferentiated. Instead, I bring up the common link to the familial even in action melodrama as a way of once again highlighting that in 1970s slashers, the family unit is corrupt or absent, and therefore while the films are full of action and certainly trigger a physical response, the lack of emotional connection to a recognizable character (most often a connection fostered by positioning a character in relation to others in a family group of some sort) makes the action lead not to a traditional emotional response, but to a type of ungrounded terror evocative of the nihilism of the decade. Considering the remakes in comparison to the originals, we can see a vast difference, since the remakes simultaneously highlight the domestic space as a way of garnering pathos, and tie the action directly to the family's anguish and recovery, bringing action and domestic melodrama together.

Many authors have argued that melodrama is not a depoliticizing tool, but instead one that gives viewers a way to use politicized viewing methods to read films in myriad ways. One argument is that the melodramatic mode allows certain audience members (usually women) a way of connecting to films (and an industry) that are traditionally created by and for men. One needs only to look in Christine Gledhill's collection *Home Is Where the Heart Is* to find this argument in different forms from Mary Ann Doane, Linda Williams, Laura Mulvey, and Gledhill.²⁶ This argument is sound, since making women the assumed audience undermines the tradition of the male gaze famously discussed by Mulvey, and therefore changes the gender politics of viewership and consumption that drives the film industry at large. Alternatively, Thomas Elsaesser has considered the politics of how the excesses of melodrama mirror the excesses of capitalism, especially as it concerns the family. Sets, costumes, and

music overwhelm the atmosphere, becoming commodity reminders of the emotional excesses of the upper-class family turmoil around which the plot centers. Meanwhile, Chuck Kleinhans considers the division of public and private spaces as they are divided by the work and leisure system inherent in capitalism, and considers the play of the social and political that melodramas come to represent as they mirror our struggles to navigate the family under capitalism.

None of these arguments is wrong, but they do not tell the whole story, either. The melodramatic mode, which Williams argues underlies nearly all American film²⁷ can also be used to depoliticize a film by taking the audience's attention from subtle (or obvious) political commentary that a film displays and redirecting that concern to an individual's (or an individual family's) problems, as opposed to those of the state or large-scale political groups. This is not to say that simply because a film employs melodramatic devices its commentary is unrecognizable. If this were the case, those who believe in cultural studies would not be able to mine films for the meaning we do. But the fact that we think about *Now, Voyager* as a story about one mother and one daughter first, and maybe only later begin to think about it in terms of generational hostilities amongst women, or an exploration of the stability that a man (in the form of a husband or a doctor) can bring to a 'hysterical' woman, is an example of the abilities of melodrama to reduce the macrocosm to the microcosm without ever reconnecting it to the larger picture. While the film certainly does open up progressive ways to identify with Bette Davis's character, the film also works to situate her story within a singular family's setting and not in relation to a broader population of women, thus minimizing the political impact of her role.

To be clear, the genre characteristics of horror and melodrama were very different in the 70s. While they both used stylistic devices to highlight various types of pain and the excesses of the body, they went about this project in very different ways. This is no longer the case; instead of the visceral torture of horror existing in a different world than the emotional pain of melodrama, now the physical is like the frosting (or Hitchcockian chocolate syrup) on the emotional cake, working to highlight the lengths to which the characters in 2000s horror will go to work through the emotional traumas surrounding their lives. In this shift, the raw grit of the 1970s films that allowed for characters inspired by the political mores of the time was lost. Instead, the grit is subsumed by an emotional drive that, while it retains the texture of the originals in some ways, has pushed the new films away from the visceral and to the melodramatic.

The Remake

An under-analyzed critical conversation is that of remake theory. Partly a genre of its own, partly a mode that has been able to cannibalize previous stories and regurgitate them in a pastiche of various traditional genres, and more than partly a way of capitalizing on the audience's familiarity with an earlier version of a story, the cinematic remake has been around since the earliest moments of movie making. Indeed, horror has been a genre that has, from the beginning, been highly reliant on remakes. In the 1930's nearly every studio released a vampire film. More recently, nearly every slasher film ever made has paid homage to Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), including the original *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Hooper 1974)²⁸ and *Halloween* (Carpenter 1978), both of which have, in turn, been two of the most imitated slasher horror films ever made (not to mention Van Sant's 1998 shot-for-shot *Psycho* remake). Further,

Mark Kermode makes a revealing comment in his essay ‘What a Carve Up!’ when he notes that the horror films seem to be on a 30-year cycle as evidenced by the last set of sci-fi horror remakes that saw a revisiting of 1950s films in the 80s. This cycle corresponds to a one-and-a-half generation timeframe that would allow for the pendulum swing of conservative/liberal reactionary politics to take effect. This cycle also overlaps, then, with the generational gaps between mothers and their children, a gap that feminism has seen in the 2nd and 3rd waves that sit in such stark contrast to each other. Clearly, the remaking of film is also linked to the remaking of cultural movements themselves as we reimagine the past and reconfigure it to suit our own needs. Like in all movies, revisiting certain plots and themes is inevitable; but horror seems especially fond of the remake itself.

Unfortunately, though, most of the critical work on remakes focuses on ways in which trans-national remakes can be conceptualized as an indication of cultural difference. Much of this scholarship centers on American remakes of French films, focusing on the Hollywood greed, dull vision, and imperial propaganda techniques that this practice involves (critiques voiced loudly by Bazin in the 1950’s and still cited today). In Jennifer Forrest and Leonard R. Koos’s anthology *Dead Ringers*, their complete history of this Franco-American rivalry makes it clear that a huge part of the ideological difference lies in a ‘high-class/cinema-as-art/Euro-centric originality’ theme that is opposed to a ‘low-class/movies-as-moneymaker/American-imperialist propaganda’. While the editors and authors do work to move beyond this view, they are most interested in the inter-cultural impacts of remakes. By conceding immediately that the films I consider in this project are all low culture (a concession that I would argue

makes them all the more worth exploring as symptomatic of our cultural climate), I turn the focus of the remake conversation on our own homegrown form of pain and pleasure to explore our own shifts in cultural myths, fears, and desires in the decades since these underground hits slashed their way onto the popular culture scene and into our collective social oeuvre.

Only very recently has remake scholarship begun to change. In *Fear, Cultural Anxiety, and Transformation* (2009), Scott Lukas and John Marmysz (eds.) present a collection of essays that focus specifically on horror, sci-fi, and fantasy film remakes. While some of these works focus on cross-cultural concerns, or even fall into past traps that focus on a concern for ‘quality’ between films, a number of authors present works that take into account concerns over cultural anxieties between time periods. The editors’ introduction to the book offers a concise overview of some pertinent ways of thinking about remakes: as nihilistic ‘self-evidently reprehensible’ (3); as postmodern palimpsests in which the defining features of ‘original’ and ‘remake’ are often blurred; the remake as repetition, aiming to gain a cultural-iconographic mastery of a narrative; remakes as dialogues between time periods, between film creators, and between viewing audiences. Of particular interest from *Fear, Cultural Anxiety, and Transformation*, and in an effort akin to my project here, is Shane Borrowman’s ‘Remaking Romero’. While I do not fully agree with all of his commentary on the lead female character in *Dawn of the Dead* (Romero 1978), his project is worthy of consideration for its concerns regarding gender, race, and class changes between two sets of zombie films and their remakes (four films in total). It is this vein, along with Anat Zanger’s *Film Remakes as Ritual and Disguise* (2007) which not only looks at

remakes as illuminating cultural myths in relation to other nations, but within our own nation, that I work to follow in aiming to push the discussion of film remakes in a direction that considers these texts as representations of their cultural moments using complex and politically responsible analysis.

The most exhaustive critical work on the theory of the remake has been done by Constantine Verevis in his book *Film Remakes* (2005). He describes the division of his book as follows:

‘The first [category], *Remaking as Industrial Category*, deals with issues of production, including commerce and authors; the second, *Remaking as Textual Category*, considers genre, plots and structures; and the third, *Remaking as Critical Category*, investigates issues of reception, including audiences and institutions.’ (vii)

His book is the consummate guide for reviewing these divisions, and I do not wish to rehash his work here; but exploring a few selections will help to focus the ways in which the remakes covered in this dissertation relate to remake theory in general.

Verevis does a wonderful job of outlining the myriad examples of how problematic the term can be for film critics. He notes, ‘the identification of exactly which elements shall count as the fundamental units of narrative in the determination of the similar or the same ... becomes ... a theoretical construct’ (29). With this in mind, I treat the term ‘remake’ as a fairly narrowly defined term, with no hidden meanings or pitfalls. To lay bare my criteria, I find a film to qualify as a remake when a number of characters²⁹ (whether by actions, names, or both) are present in both films, similar plot points are used so as to make it clear that the later film is directly in conversation with the early

version, and the films have the same name. Clearly, the first two criteria can be fairly flexible; the most fluid of any of these – and the category whose fluidity is precisely the basis for my analyses – is the second category regarding the plot points. But, I would argue that the third category is the one that helps to solidify that fluidity. After all, no matter how few plot points a remake takes from an original, if the films share character names *and* a title, it is clear that the filmmakers are not just aware of the original, and that they are not simply paying homage, but instead that they are specifically reimagining the ways that the characters of the original film relate to each other and the world in which they live. This revision is through the lens of the political climate in which the remake is produced, and thus it is clear that the remake’s goal is to update both the film itself, and the audience’s perception and reaction to the film’s characters and actions.

Verevis notes, ‘In a commercial context, remakes are “pre-sold” to their audience [just as genre films are] because viewers are assumed to have some prior experience...’ (3). This point is crucial when thinking about the work these films do at the level of cultural representation. When a viewer sees a film like *Last House* (2009) in which the plot shifts focus toward the melodrama of a family’s past and the recuperation of a young man, and away from the terror of two young girls’ rapes like in the original, the viewer is made aware of the fact that important points of the original text are no longer important.³⁰ The new text’s focus is given a cultural relevance for today’s world that discounts the importance of the original. This reevaluation is precisely the shift that occurs through the works considered in this project. Because the films with which we have experience are, by virtue of a remake, the ‘old version,’ their

politics immediately seem old as well. Mark Kermode asserts that *Chainsaw* remake is a matter of Hollywood trying to make a profit by gussying-up the original film that, because of its low budget quality, young audiences would never want to watch. This is undoubtedly true, but he stops short in his analysis when he says, ‘What the new *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* “means” to its audience is anyone’s guess’ (16). The question is not unanswerable, and I will detail throughout this dissertation the ways in which the changes from the original, including the glossy Hollywood spit-shine, come to represent that this remake, and all the remakes covered here-in, are fundamentally geared toward presenting men and women in very different lights than their originals. The audience’s familiarity with the original texts only highlights these differences, making it clear that what was progressive about them then is unneeded (or worse, unwanted) in today’s social climate. And even when the young viewers are unfamiliar with or unaware of the originals, ‘remakes encourage viewers to seek out original film properties’ (Verevis, *Remakes* 17). But this approach to viewing can make the originals look only that much more dated, both aesthetically and politically.

Star Texts

Perhaps the definitive work on the theory of star texts is Richard Dyer’s *Stars*. In it, Dyer considers the complex and polysemic ways in which stars are both normal and bigger-than-life. They inhabit another world, yet reflect back to us everyday troubles. Stars also carry with them the baggage of both their ‘real lives’ (a construct of their handlers, tabloids, studios, and interviews) and their past characters. All of these various texts make up the ‘star text’ as we know it, and we relate to them with the

memories of all these various (and often conflicting) memories of their past performances both on and off the screen.

Interestingly, the 1970s films under consideration here are relatively free from any of the baggage that star texts bring with them because none of them really have any stars in their casts. In fact the only actor with any sort of public persona was Donald Pleasance in *Halloween* (1978). By 1981's *Halloween II*, Jamie Lee Curtis had become famous from her role in the first *Halloween* as well her 1980 roles in *The Fog* (Carpenter) and *Prom Night* (Lynch). Even Carpenter had a growing star status as a horror/thriller director with the success of *Halloween* and *The Fog* so close together. But while Curtis and Carpenter had their careers jumpstarted with *Halloween*, and Pleasance continued to be a known face (more so in England than here in the US) their very young star texts were really the only true texts to speak of in the run of the original movies, and even these are really only relevant when discussing the sequel. Thus, for all intents and purposes, the conversation of a star text concerning the original films is moot.

The remakes, however, are a different case. I will discuss each film's stars in more detail in their chapters, but I would like for a moment to return to the idea of *intertextuality* introduced by Verevis in *Film Remakes*. His discussion begins by way of the importance of realizing that the film-going public can make use of the short and well-documented history of film culture to put two films (remakes, homages, genre films, etc.) in conversation with each other and see them as part of an ongoing discourse that puts nearly all films into a coherent discourse.³¹ But Verevis continues and introduces the term '*celebrity intertextuality*' which he describes as 'those situations in

which that presence of a film or television star or celebrity evokes an earlier version of a film property' (20). This definition works in tandem with that of the star text to help define the impact that Jared Padalecki's star text has on *Friday the 13th*'s melodramatic charge, or that rock-n-roll star-turned-director Rob Zombie has on his versions of *Halloween* and *Halloween II*. In fact, the changes in genre, plot, and characters go hand-in-hand with the fact that Zombie's star text can be equated with that of the killer's, making for a moment of intertextuality that spans not just films (the originals and the remakes) but also artistic genres. It also expands the concept of star text from one that applies to actors alone, to one that includes directors as well. Alfred Hitchcock and Clint Eastwood would fall into this category. I will explore this concept more in each individual chapter to which the theories of star text and intertextuality apply, but suffice it to say the way that I read the remakes is strongly impacted by the star texts of their actors/directors, an influence that did not affect the original films.

Production

One aspect of the originals that the absence of stars indicates is their low budgets.³² These lower budgets – clear in the actors chosen, the film stock, the shooting schedules – are directly related to the plots, content, and underlying political commentary present in these early films. As Geoff King details in *American Independent Cinema*, indie films often have freedom to explore subject matter that is too sensitive – that is, too non-normative – for Hollywood to deal with. John Carpenter sums this up by saying,

In independent studio work, often you're out for a different purpose, and you can take more chances because you have less money at risk. Whereas, when

you're making a big studio film, even a medium one, you're talking about 12 to 15 million dollars – well, the risks have to stop because you need to make money back. It's just a fact of life in Hollywood. (from Robert C. Cumbow's *The Order of the Universe*, 194)

But King also notes that the term 'independent' has not had the same meaning since the 1990's Sundance boom, when all of Hollywood wanted to get their hands on the fresh meat of the indie circuit. This is important for considering the remakes, as the movement of studio money to Utah for independent productions shifted how indie films could be thought of in the US. Most studios that are still under what might be considered an independent budget are often tied to much larger Hollywood companies (King). One case in point is *Last House* (2009): while the production company, Rogue Pictures, is certainly a relatively small firm (compared to, say, Disney), it has made a name for itself recently as a leader in horror, and has production/distribution credits for eighteen films since 2000. It is not an indie company like those of the 1970s simply by virtue of the fact that one production company has produced more than one film. Simply looking at the bottom line of the two *Texas Chain Saws* can make another poignant example: the 1974 film had an estimated budget of \$83,500; the 2003 film is marked at \$9.2 million. New Line and Focus Features together produced the remake, two companies who market themselves as 'indie' while still being connected to films with money and star power (in this case Jessica Biel). In today's film world, \$9.2 million is still a very small budget, but it is not a micro budget film like the original, and it has a star attached to the project as well as the weight of production credits for powerhouse director Michael Bay to help sales. Thinking about this model in a cynical

way, we can imagine that the film is produced for a relatively low budget (again, comparatively speaking) but because of the built-in cache from the original and the star powers of the lead role and the producer, the studios can hedge their bets: if it fails, they will probably still recoup nearly all the cost, and if it succeeds, it is butter on the popcorn.

This tie to larger production companies and budgets is characteristic of all the remakes of 1970s horror and this tie to bigger bucks is one cause of the conservative turn that contemporary horror films take, especially when compared to their predecessors, which, ostensibly, are built around the same plot lines. Because the early films were made free of high expectations for profit return, they were also freer to show dysfunctional or obliterated family units, non-traditional gender roles, and counter-hegemonic politics. Contrary to this, studios like Rogue Pictures which often are equated with edgy and more daring content, still hope that films bring in high returns on investment dollars, a requirement fulfilled by larger, often more mainstream (conservative) audiences. This demand leads them to fall into line with traditional storytelling modes like melodrama, to focus on familial units as a way to ensure sympathy and audience identification, and to end films in ways that often support hegemonic cultural norms in myriad ways. These moves all bring films like the remake of *Last House* into line with contemporary conservative social politics that eschew the progressive politics and counter-cultural social codes of the 70s indies for profitable formulas and the conservative politics of the 2000's New Right.

The reason for reading these films as stylistic products of their historical place and production histories is to highlight how the Hollywood model of production has

incorporated the outliers in a move to appropriate, mute, and profit from the extremity of independent 70s horror. This move is not just economic. As Janet Wasko notes in her argument regarding political economy, ‘Because historical analysis is mandatory, the approach is able to provide important insight into social change and movement.’ She continues, stating that ‘Understanding interrelationships between media and communication industries and sites of power in society is necessary for the complete analysis of communication’ (9). While her book spends little time discussing the extra-Hollywood film industry, Wasko’s comments solidify why works such as King’s, or Eric Schaefer’s *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True: A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959*, are so invaluable as ways of understanding the cultural work of non-mainstream cinematic works. This scholarship is directly tied to the economics of production, distribution, and exhibition that impacts content, and the population (both in numbers and demographics) that sees any given film. For example, a film like *Last House* (1972) can be seen as the same type of morality tale that many exploitation films were touted as, a similarity that ties it to the low budget films seen in grind houses during the 1950s and 60s. Looking forward from the 1970s, it is not hard to imagine that many an independent filmmaker during the 1990s (the time period highlighted by King and by John Pierson in *Spike, Mike, Slackers & Dykes*) were influenced if not by style or content, then simply by the gross profits turned by these 70s horror classics. Thus, the importance of considering how these films (both new and old) fit into a cinematic *and* economic history that is in relation to the Hollywood norm is important for considering the shifting cultural meaning that these, or any films, have.

Chapters

All of the above critical areas will be considered throughout each of the following chapters. While some chapters will focus more heavily on some areas than others, the overall pattern of change between these two time periods will become apparent throughout the close readings for film pairs that make up the rest of this dissertation.

The second chapter focuses specifically on the pair of *The Last House on the Left* (1972/2008) films for several reasons, not least of which is because chronologically, Wes Craven's original begins this series of films on which I have chosen to focus. Craven's film is also perhaps the most truly 'independent,' eschewing traditional narrative structures through editing techniques, explicit depictions of rape and genital mutilation, juxtaposition of comedy and torment, the use of extremely grainy film stock, and other production values shaped by the shoestring budget that it could attract, as it was originally conceived of as a hard-core porn film. Its very strange mixture of horror and comedy is one of the main points that differentiates it from the 2008 remake. While both films focus on two young girls' kidnapping and rape by a group of cons, and the cons' capture and punishment by one of the girl's parents, the remake is a glossy film that changes several major plot points. While still showing rape in an extremely realistic and de-eroticized way, focusing on the pain and violence of the act more than on mythologizing some sort of sexual pleasure in the victim, the 2008 Iliadis version allows the young man from the 'bad' family of killers to survive, a move that plays out to make the story as much about him as about the girl and her family. With this change, along with allowing more screen time for the boy than the original

and giving him a more sympathetic back-story, Iliadis's remake leaves behind the darkly humorous horror of the original, descended from the exploitation and sexploitation genres, to become a family melodrama that is about healing the nuclear family that is fractured at the beginning of the film. The remake also reimagines the mother as a woman comfortable only within the home, in need of her husband's help, and whose main focus is to ensure the viability of the next generation of children in her home.

The third chapter discusses the pair of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974/2003) films, focusing on both plot changes and technical aspects. Filmed two years after *Last House*, *Chain Saw* is perhaps the most notorious of the films I will study because it combines the sheer terror and repulsion of the most horrific sections of *Last House* with an artful touch that was absent in the earlier film. It also acts as a stylistic bridge from *Last House* and later slashers, because it makes a move toward the group of teens who are killed by a killer in a rural setting. The most obvious change that occurs in the remake is the visual representation of the Final Girl character. While she is still present in the 2003 version, her wardrobe is pared down to nothing but skin-tight jeans and a midriff-baring undershirt, while lighting is constantly used to highlight her stomach and breasts. These stylistic changes have the effect of sexualizing the violence done to her in a way that was specifically avoided in the original film. The men in the original actually make it clear that her imprisonment is not sexual, but instead is linked to their demented take on their socio-economic position as out-of-work slaughterhouse workers.

But the stylistic changes also contribute to important changes in the plot of the remake. The remake indicates a level of sexual activity in the ‘bad family’ that was never present in the original, mostly by actually including women who represent violent, neglectful, or perverted forms of motherhood. While the 1974 film focuses on a family of men who are connected in unclear ways, and have as the only acknowledged female in the family unit a dead and desiccated grandmother, the remake works harder to create distinct generational family units while implicating perverse forms of motherhood as a root of the family’s violence, a change which does double duty to blame mothers and to recreate a focus on generational family structures absent from the original. This plot change is coupled with the fact that the slaughterhouse is still functioning, and that the family seems to have little if anything to do with its operations. Thus, the socio-economic tension of the original, a tension played out on the body of the final girl who manages to overcome her captors in her escape, is erased into an irrational indictment of motherhood that forgives the male violence against the overly sexualized heroine. The plot also challenges the heroine’s place as such because, like the ‘bad son’ in the remake of *Last House* and Michael Myers in the remakes of *Halloween* and *Halloween II*, the main monster in *Chainsaw* is given a sympathetic backstory to help the audience forgive his violence.

Chapter IV covers the pair of *Friday the 13th* (1980/2009) films, and also the original sequel *Friday the 13th Part II* (Miner 1981). It picks up on a lead begun in Chapter III regarding mothers; however, while the remake of *Texas Chainsaw* creates mothers where once there were none, the new *Friday the 13th* erases the mother who is at the heart of the first film: Mrs. Voorhees. In the 1980 film, audiences assume that the

killer is male. Made just two years after John Carpenter's *Halloween*, the group of five teens killed for having sex (it seems) sets the audience up to equate the killer with the earlier film's killer because it follows the same formula. However, the killer in *Friday the 13th* turns out to be the mother of a boy (Jason) who supposedly drowned while camp counselors were having sex instead of watching as lifeguards. The remake erases Mrs. Voorhees from all but a few minutes of the beginning of the film, and makes the killer Jason Voorhees (Jason would be the killer star of the many sequels to the original *Friday the 13th*, having been resurrected somehow each and every time). This erasure of Mrs. Voorhees effectively silences the voice of one of film history's few mothers who is a killer, is allowed to tell her story with one else's interpretation, and is proud of her strength and conviction. Her erasure is coupled with the creation of a new male lead character who is living in the shadow of his mother's death (like Jason, we find out) and searching for his sister who has been imprisoned by Jason because she looks like his dead mother. This pits two motherless sons against each other, and instead of the final girl (the sister) beheading Mrs. Voorhees to save herself, she must embody the dead Mrs. Voorhees long enough for her brother to save her by killing Jason himself. The film's dynamic changes because of this, and the aesthetic becomes almost like the 80's action films that Yvonne Tasker details in terms of their ability to show the bodies of men taking a beating and coming back for more. The remake also centers on solidifying the fractured family unit (a link to the remake of *Last House*), a trend found nowhere in the original.

Chapter V includes two pairs of films: *Halloween* and *Halloween II* both co-written and directed by John Carpenter in 1978 and 1982, respectively, and the remakes

both written and directed by Rob Zombie in 2007 and 2009, respectively. I have chosen to tackle these two pairs together because unlike many horror sequels, both pairs have the same writer/director and diegetically, both pairs work to create a fluid timeframe from one film to the next (the sequels literally pick up where the first left off to help make the sequel more like a second chapter than a separate film). Instead of focusing on the directors as auteurs, I will instead examine their roles as stars. John Carpenter was an unknown filmmaker before the release of *Halloween*, but was launched to horror stardom with his freshman effort; his *Halloween II* was the first in a long line of sequels in a two-decade franchise, but the only one that he directed. Rob Zombie on the other hand is a famous musician-turn-director who had two well-known horror films under his belt before tackling the *Halloween* remake. Through a major re-writing of the original film's plot, Zombie uses his fan's sympathy toward his own singer persona to help bolster the sympathy felt toward Michael Myers, the film's psychopathic killer. This manipulation of star texts and problematic sympathies is mirrored within the diegetic world as Dr. Loomis (Myers' psychiatrist) becomes famous for writing a book that details the terrors that Michael endured as a child, and the terrors that he inflicts on the main character, Laurie. This move works in unison with that of the sympathetic backstory that Zombie gives Myers by simultaneously erasing the focus on her as the Final Girl by both the monster and a male hero figure (a move reminiscent of the 2009 *Friday the 13th*). It also mirrors the fact that Loomis uses the sexualized violence perpetrated against Laurie for his own profit, just as Zombie uses the violent sexuality of his musician persona to proffer sympathies for the Myers character, thus exploiting his star text to sell the movie to a new audience. Through his star text, Zombie sells a

new movie and new sympathies for Meyers while shifting the focus from Laurie as the Final Girl to the struggle between Meyers and his abusive past, and between Loomis and his capitalist future. Furthermore, the role of the mother, completely absent in Carpenter's films, is central to the melodramatic framing of Michael in the remakes. Meyer's mother, played by Zombie's real-life wife Sherri Moon Zombie, refocuses the horror of Michael's violence on the broken home from which he came, essentially giving his acts a scapegoat relating to his mother and the family unit of which it is made clear that she is the leader.

The final chapter will cover a number of films, including *Wrong Turn* (Schmidt 2003), the *Scream* series (Craven 1996, 1997, 2000, 2011), *I Spit on Your Grave* (Zarchi 1978, Monroe 2010), and *Carrie* (De Palma 1976, Carson 2002, Peirce 2013). These films either fall outside the specific scope of the rest of the project because of the original production dates (*Nightmare*, *Scream*), genre (*I Spit*), or because they fall outside of my definition of a remake (*Wrong Turn*). However, all of these films are relevant to considering the trends of gender representation in popular horror films over the past several decades. In a way, this chapter considers exceptions to my thesis by discussing the ways that several of these films in fact retain strong female characters from their originals (or in the case of *Scream* create new strong women) they stand apart from the films discussed throughout the rest of this project. But it is the very ambivalence of the post-feminist culture of the 2000s that both proves my thesis in terms of the films covered in the preceding chapters, and also allows room for these divergent films. While some of these films stay true to the trend of the 2000s (most notably *Wrong Turn*), *Nightmare* is actually reimagined around a more powerful central

female lead than the original, as is the *Scream* series. But a focus on emotional resolve, family structure, and the healing process necessary for a post 9/11 audience is still markedly present. Thus, even while a few films eschew the cultural conservatism of a post-feminism that ignores the need for strong women, the over-arching cultural need for hope squarely sets the new films in line with the melodramatic mode and traditional values.

Notes

¹ The original film's spelling is 'chain saw', while the remake is spelled 'chainsaw'.

² I will expand on this in the 'Mother' section, below in this chapter.

³ Clover highlights the ways in which the final girl is coded as masculine and the killer as feminized throughout *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, and especially in the first chapter 'Her Body, Himself.'

⁴ See Noel Carroll's *Philosophy of Horror* and Matt Hills' *The Pleasures of Horror* for work that typifies the search for a definition of horror.

⁵ Freeland's 'Feminist Frameworks for Horror Films' directly challenges these problematic aspects of feminist horror scholarship and indicates that they are dead ends for any meaningful work in the genre.

⁶ While many critics do very good cultural work on one set of films – often tied to one specific time period – few look at the ways in which cultural representation changes between two time periods, and no one has published a project that considers how a close comparison of a set of original/remake pairs can be read as symptoms of change in our cultural prerogatives. The best work that attempts to trace horror's cultural meaning across time periods is Kendall R. Phillips's *Projected Fears* (2005).

⁷ Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993) offers a comprehensive look at the ways in which mothers are represented in popular culture, offering insight into the unique and complicated position of that women navigate as the representative nexus of life and death.

⁸ See Freud's first discussion of this is in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), and later works including *The Ego and the Id* (1923) and *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). Concise considerations of the links between the female body, threat, and disavowal can be found in 'The Taboo of Virginity' (1918), 'Medusa's Head' (1922), and 'Fetishism' (1927).

⁹ An early and concise presentation of this idea can be found in Betty Rollin's 'Motherhood: Who Needs It?' from the popular *Look* magazine in 1970.

¹⁰ This seems to be one of many allusions to *Psycho*, which Robin Wood (in his chapter 'Return of the Repressed') and Janet Staiger (in her chapter 'Hitchcock in Texas') have discussed quite effectively in terms of the family comedy and intertextuality, respectively.

¹¹ The slasher trend of violent men killing young sexually active women is of concern, and can never be called 'asexual'. Clearly, these films are portraits of misogynist violence against the women in the film. *Halloween* is a particularly easy target for this argument because of the clearly sexual aim of his first two victims in Haddonfield. The fact that both girls are choked, making them writhe and gasp for air as if mid-orgasm, is also a particularly damning point. Even still, Michael's specific aim seems unclear; he is not specifically motivated by sex, and the fact that the women (and men, a point often forgotten) he kills are sexually active seem unimportant to him specifically (as opposed to the narrative). Michael himself is not a sexual creature, and instead is driven by violence and a sense of family (a point introduced in the original sequel).

¹² This is most evident in *Chain Saw*, which is completely devoid of melodramatic framework, and barely clings to standards of plot structure and character development as it details the utter terror of a family that is timeless, devoid of clear generational demarcation, mothers, or sex drives.

¹³ In 1946, Dr. Benjamin Spock published *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, which instantly caught on as *the* book for new and expectant mothers. Based on his foundations in psychoanalytic training, the book not only revolutionized childcare, but also provided a national baseline knowledge of some basic psychoanalytic terms and ideas. Hitchcock's films seemed, for many years before *Psycho*, to be informed by a knowledge of psychoanalysis (see Tania Modleski's tour-de-force *The Women Who Knew Too Much* (1988) for more on these tropes), but the psychologist who diagnoses Norman is the most outright display of an everyday familiarity with psychoanalysis in popular horror up to that point. It was a fair assumption for Hitchcock to assume the film doctor's analysis sixteen years (and two editions) after Dr. Spock introduced psychoanalysis to an ever increasing number of American households.

¹⁴ Clover argues that the young women is masculinized variously through clothing, academic smarts, asexuality, choices of weapon, and even in name.

¹⁵ See Deborah L. Siegel, Carolyn Sorisio, Dianne Negra and Yvonne Tasker, Angela McRobbie, Ann Brooks, and Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake for a comprehensive overview of the fracturing of feminism and the problems with the social ideals of the newly-wrought post-feminism.

¹⁶ CNN's Greg Botelho and Holly Yan's provide a comprehensive summary of the trial. <http://www.cnn.com/2013/07/13/justice/zimmerman-trial/>.

¹⁷ *The Guardian's* Jason Burke has written a comprehensive exploration of the rape-permissive Indian culture that led to the widely publicized 2012 rape and murder of a 23-year-old woman, and a list of the most visible gang rape occurrences to hit the headlines, including the most recent case (January 23, 2014) whereby a young woman was ordered by the tribal counsel to be raped by twelve men as punishment for an unsanctioned relationship.

¹⁸ A very quick survey of the internet can produce an almost infinite amount of coverage of the 1994 O.J. Simpson murder of his ex-wife Nichole Brown Simpson and her husband, Ron Goldman; R. Kelly's 2002 affairs with under-age girls and 2013 child-porn allegations; or Chris Brown's abuse against then-girlfriend Rihanna. The Simpson coverage ranges from law schools (see Douglas O. Linder) to CNN to TruTV (see Thomas L. Jones). A concise summary of the original R. Kelly scandal can be found in Jessica Hopper's piece for the *Village Voice*, and the old and new allegations are covered by *Time's* Lily Rothman. Chris Brown's assault was reported early on by *Billboard* magazine, and detailed pictures of Rihanna's bloodied face were published by *TMZ*, while *The Huffington Post* has compiled a series of articles detailing the fallout in Hollywood after the attack, for which Brown garnered only community service.

¹⁹ See Yvonne Tasker's *Spectacular Bodies* and Susan Jeffords' *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*.

²⁰ For a concise history of the 'Girl Power' and Riot Grrls movements, see Kathleen Rowe Karlyn's article, 'Scream, Popular Culture, and Feminism's Third Wave: "I'm Not My Mother."'

²¹ Clover includes an excellent reading of *Chain Saw* and rape revenge films like *I Spit on Your Grave* (Zarchi 1978) by pointing out the 'Urbanoia' present in many films that creates a rural/urban dichotomy. While Clover does mention 'redneck' as becoming synonymous with 'redskin' as a way of linking the rural inhabitants with stereotyped 'animalism', the language that Dyer brings to the discussion of the combination of physical appearance *and* mental/emotional attitude adds to the discussion in terms of how to define whiteness in culture, and how whiteness is 'correctly' enacted/coded on the screen. Perhaps the most mainstream film to do this in an overt way is *Deliverance* (Boorman 1972), a film that becomes a meditation not on the only

rural/urban dichotomy, but also on the ability of white men (again, read urban, educated, middle-class, etc.) to navigate a situation that puts them face to face with choosing to ‘go native’ or ‘stay white.’ Interestingly enough, Burt Reynolds’ character, with his dark hair and eyes, is chosen as the representation of a white masculinity that slips into the mindset of the ‘rural,’ while John Voight’s blue eyes and fair hair remain unsure about choosing violence instead of seeking the authorities.

²² It is important to think about the close relationship between the horror and porn genres that Linda Williams highlights in ‘Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess’ in which she argues that both genres (along with melodrama) all involve bodily excess, which by definition subverts any realism that the films may have presented, and are also the least respected genres in American cinema. Williams believes that these genres have been devalued because this excess spills out from the screen, and affects the spectator with the same emotions – sexual excitation, screaming fear, or weeping sorrow – that the characters on the screen are exhibiting. The easy change from porn to horror that Craven was able to make in *Last House* seems to support this argument, and the re-envisioning of the film as a melodrama in the remake seems to solidify Williams’s argument more completely.

²³ See *Home is Where the Heart Is* (Christine Gledhill, ed. 1987) for the most comprehensive collection of early work on the melodramatic form and conventions.

²⁴ See Steve Neale’s ‘Melo Talk: On the Meaning and Use of the Word “Melodrama”’ for an account of the range of meanings given to the word during the whole of the classical era that runs counter to the narrow, emotionally saturated meaning that is most often given to the word today.

²⁵ For a comprehensive history on melodrama in all its forms – on the stage, in novels, and on the screen – see Steve Neale’s chapter ‘Melodrama and the Woman’s Film’ in *Genre and Hollywood* (2000) and ‘Melo Talk: On the Meaning and Use of the Word “Melodrama”’ in *Velvet Light Trap*; Marica Landy’s ‘Introduction’, John G. Cawelti’s ‘The Evolution of Social Melodrama’, and Peter Brooks’s ‘The Melodramatic Imagination’ in *Imitations of Life* (Landy, ed. 1991); Christine Gledhill’s ‘The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation’ in *Home Is Where the Heart Is* (Gledhill, ed. 1990); and Linda Williams’s ‘Melodrama Revised’ from *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory* (Nick Browne, ed. 1998)

²⁶ See also Linda Williams’s ‘Melodrama Revised’ from *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory* (Nick Browne, ed. 1998).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ See Robin Wood’s work in *Hollywood: From Vietnam to Reagan* (1986) for his discussion of how *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* updates aesthetics and family

dynamics found in *Psycho*. Janet Staiger also picks up this thread in *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception* (2000).

²⁹ I value characters over other highly recognizable aspects like iconography, music, and cinematography because within any genre, and especially within horror, the reuse (whether in homage, plagiarism, or jest) of these aspects is so common. The kitchen knife used in *Psycho* is the same weapon of choice for Michael in *Halloween*, but this does not make the latter a remake of the former. Likewise, every film with a shot of a showerhead or a drain is not a remake of *Psycho* just like every film with a chainsaw is not a remake of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. In fact, *Last House on the Left* actually had a death by chainsaw two years before Hooper's Leatherface would make the power tool the epitome of blood-splattering choice for the discerning maniac. These lines between shared iconography and character as a defining point for remakes can be blurred, as in the excellent French film *High Tension* (Aja 2003). It includes a male character who is vaguely reminiscent of Hooper's Leatherface, shots of an isolated house that are strikingly similar to the low-angle shots of the *Massacre* house (including being shot from under a swing set), an old decrepit truck (another staple of slashers since *Massacre*, also seen recently in *Wrong Turn* (Schmidt 2003) among others), and the alarming use of power tools. But even with all of these moments that make it clear that Aja is in direct conversation with *Massacre*, the film is not a remake because none of the characters correlate with each other.

³⁰ See Verevis's discussion of *intertextuality*, pages 18-20.

³¹ Ibid.

³² See the Appendix for a chart of the new and old films' claimed productions costs, production companies, distribution companies, and revenue numbers.

CHAPTER II

RECOVERING THE FAMILY, DOMESTICATING THE MOTHER:

THE LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT

Beginning a project that focuses on slashers with a discussion of the pair of *The Last House on the Left* films (Craven 1972/ Iliadis 2009) will undoubtedly confuse many. The original film has as many or more characteristics of other genres than it does traces of the slasher genre as we have come to know it since *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Hooper 1974) and (especially) *Halloween* (Carpenter 1978) solidified the genre's motifs. For example, the genealogy of the film, with its conflated violence and sex, low production values, and documentary feel can be traced to the exploitation films of the late '50s and '60s. So too its overt warning of what happens when innocent girls go in to the city alone, as exploitation films were often touted as legitimate by focusing on their moral lessons.¹ This aspect is, no doubt, due to the fact that the overall story arc is based on a medieval ballad that became the basis for Ingmar Bergman's *The Virgin Spring* (making it the only film in this project without an original story).² Out of this exploitation background comes *Last House*'s link to later films in the rape-revenge genre like *I Spit on Your Grave* a.k.a. *Day of the Woman* (Zarchi 1978) or *Ms. 45* (Ferrara 1981). The production's documentary-like aesthetic, which can also be traced to the film's budget (estimated at \$90,000) and the fact that a documentary crew was used both for stylistic and monetary reasons, makes the film look very different from later slashers, especially *Halloween* and *Friday*. Furthermore, the writing (especially early in the film) has clear ties to the original concept for *Last House* as hardcore porn that integrated violence as a motif.³ The production crew (including writer, director, and

editor Wes Craven) and actors realized near the beginning of shooting they did not need the sex to sell the film, as they believed the story was strong enough on its own (this is detailed in the special features on the 2011 Blu-Ray Special Edition re-release).

Nonetheless, an early scene with the two young female stars begins with a walk through the forest and eventually the discussion that over the winter Mari's (Sandra Peabody – credited as Sandra Cassell) 'breasts filled out' and how she 'feels like a woman for the first time in [her] life.' Instead of the sapphic love scene between the two friends that the editing and script lead viewers to expect, we get a dissolve to the girls' car trip into the city; clearly, though, the scene was originally the beginning of a number⁴ in the original porn script. *Last House* vacillates wildly between brutal rape and comedic interludes in which the local sheriffs bumble about in constant ineptitude, all set to a soundtrack that switches from disillusioned psychedelic rock to hokey country music (to accompany the sheriffs). The film is frank and unapologetic, roughly hewn yet surprisingly composed. It is a confused movie, but still wholly apropos in terms of introducing the 1970s' approach to horror, gender, and the annihilation of the American family.

In many ways, *Last House* is a proto-slasher, but for all the ways that Craven's film seems outside the general purview of the slasher genre, including the accidental (not hunted) position of the girls as victims, many killers and few victims, and a would-be Final Girl who is mortally wounded shortly after the halfway mark (indeed Mari cannot be called a Final Girl in any way – another problem for the film's inclusion here), the film retains much of what fundamentally defines 1970's American horror, and the slasher genre specifically. Indeed, one of the main projects of the film (and similar

to *The Hills Have Eyes* [1977], Craven's second horror film) is to completely annihilate the idea of the family. Indeed, both Mari Collingwood's traditional nuclear family and the clan-like unit of antagonists including Krug, Sadie, Weasel, and 'Junior' completely degrade over the course of the film; the latter group dies while the former loses all sense of social restraint and becomes murderers.

This theme of family destruction comes up over and over in various forms in all the original films that this project considers (and is a significant part of dozens of films from the era, including most 'New Hollywood' films including titles as varied as *Harold and Maude* [Ashby 1971], *Bonnie and Clyde* [Penn 1967], and *A Woman Under the Influence* [Cassavetes 1974]), but no films depict it with such frankness as slashers, and almost none as brutally as *Last House*. The film is also like later slashers in that sex is effectively replaced by violence, as sexuality is subsumed by the violence of rape and humiliation.⁵ In *Last House* this is shown through portraying rape as a singularly violent, degrading, and dehumanizing act (not sexual in any way); in *Chain Saw* the offer of sex is all by scoffed at by the killers; in *Halloween* Michael's violence seems linked to sexuality, but with absolutely no aim or clear reasoning; and in *Friday the 13th* the victims die after or during sexual encounters, but with their deaths coming at the hands of a woman the sexual politics change once the killer is revealed.

Furthermore, the film becomes a crystallization of an angst-ridden political climate. Here, again, one might argue that most films in the 1970s did this. But few did it with the openly visceral gusto of these early slasher films. Craven has stated in multiple interviews that the film was, for him, a way of bringing the televised violence of Vietnam home and showing what the chaos of that war would be like in the domestic

sphere. Out of this vision of war-inspired domestic chaos, the original *Last House* is the point in film history at which the pastoral is decimated and the rural space is no longer safe. As the country home, set in the woods highlighted by a small creek and a pond with ducks, becomes the site of rape, torture, and death, the traditional purity of the pastoral is extinguished, a theme revisited in Craven's *The Hills Have Eyes* in 1977, and even in his much more recent *Scream* franchise in which the small-town life of Sidney Prescott is shattered by violence (this is especially prevalent in the original *Scream* (1996) where the small town is featured, and in *Scream III* (2000) in which Sidney's backwoods peace is broken when her past comes back in the form of a movie about her ordeal). *Chain Saw* would pick up on this aspect, again making the country the point of terror, but there the danger comes from disenfranchised people who have been forced into poverty because of urbanization, as opposed to the Collingwoods who live in the country, are introduced to violence from the city, and in turn retaliate with an even more gruesome violence. The degradation of the pastoral archetype that happens in Craven's film leads to a rural landscape that becomes barren of safe zones, and mirrors the unsettling of US ideologies surrounding the Vietnam War with the unsettling of a traditional American narrative trope. Finally, the nihilistic political view of the 1970s is borne out in the figure of the mother. As noted in my introduction, *Last House* is a film that falls under the category of 70s films that portray the mother as a killer. To do so she must exit the home, flaunt her sexuality, and take an active role in pursuing her prey. This non-traditional role is clearly a link to the later films considered in this project. It is for these reasons, then, that *Last House*'s proto-slasher status makes it ideal for launching the discussion at hand.

Still more confusing for those familiar with Iliads's 2009 remake will be how this pair of films fits into a pattern that, as I argue, erases the Final Girl. It is true that the 1972 Mari Collinwood is mortally wounded at the end of the second act, and plays no role in the third act except to be found and die. It is also true that 2009's Mari (Sara Paxton) instigates the crash that maroons her and her captors in the woods, deals the blow that allows her to run away, swims home to help alert her parents of their house guests' identities, and lives to the end of the film. These are all acts that the 1972 character does not initiate. Even though she is more-or-less inactive in the third act of the film, 2009 Mari certainly has the fight and the drive of a Final Girl, and she does live to the finale, unlike her predecessor. However, for all of the 2009 Mari's fortitude, she is, oddly enough, not the center of the film's attention. By detailing changes in plot and characters, as well as analyzing the aesthetic differences of similar scenes from the original and remake, this chapter shows how the remake constantly reframes the story by sexualizing Mari in ways not seen in the original, restructuring the family unit to support its recovery after the trauma, emphasizing the young male co-lead and his convalescence, focusing on a traditional narrative arc based around melodrama, and placing the mother into the center of the domestic sphere. The remake perfectly encapsulates the post 9/11 era's need for a return to a traditional America while eschewing the chaos of the original. It also reimagines the city/country split constructed in the original, which has implications for both class and race. These narrative and aesthetic shifts overshadow the 'progress' of the 2009 Mari living to the end and fighting back throughout the beginning of the film, and make it a persuasive example of the trends seen throughout all the 2000's remakes.

The plot of the original *Last House* involves 17-year-old Mari Collingwood meeting a girlfriend, Phyllis (Lucy Grantham), near the Collingwood house in upstate New York to drive to the city for a concert by a band called Bloodlust. After arriving in New York City, they look for some marijuana and see a young man standing on a stoop outside a boarding house. He invites them up to get the drugs, but as soon as they are inside, he locks the door behind them as the boy's father Krug, partner Weasel, and girlfriend-of-sorts, Sadie, descend on the pair of young girls. Krug, who along with Weasel has just escaped from federal prison, then pays the boy (never referred to as more than 'Junior' or 'Junkie') in heroin for his entrapment work. The group proceeds to rape Phyllis as Mari is forced to watch. The next morning, the girls are loaded in the trunk of the criminals' car while the cohort takes them on the road in their escape from the city. The car breaks down right in front of Mari's house in the country, and after the group rapes and kills Phyllis and Mari in the woods behind the house, they look for a place to sleep at the Collingwood house. The parents are tipped off to the killer's deeds because Junior has Mari's necklace. Dr. and Mrs. Collingwood then proceed to kill each member of the party (except for Junior, who is convinced to shoot himself through the mouth by his father after a half-hearted attempt to stop Krug from killing Dr. Collingwood). The 2009 remake is more or less the same in its overall plot, but as noted above, significant changes in character development and some story details make the film very different in its execution, aesthetic, and overall cultural meaning.

This chapter is organized mainly around several of the main characters from the two films, and uses the changes in their roles as a method for illuminating the social changes on which this project focuses. The first section discusses Mari, and considers

how the technical presentation of her character, and the plot trajectory seen for each film, changes how we can think of her place within the family unit as a focus of political representation for each time period. The formal analysis continues in the next section on Sadie, in which I consider the original character's nods to the feminist movement that are erased in the remake, changes accompanied by reimagined costuming choices. Next, I look at Mrs. Collingwood and the re-domestication of the mother in the original, a move linked directly to the increased melodrama that typifies the remakes. This is followed by a discussion of the Justin character in the remake, and how he represents a codification of the nuclear family unit when is saved from the 'bad family' and brought in to the safety of the 'good' Collingwood family. Last, I examine the intersection of race/class/location in terms of white/non-white, rich/poor, and city/country.

Mari

Key scenes near the beginning of each film show clear stylistic choices that highlight how each film portrays the bodies of the main female characters. The documentary style of Craven's film helps to make images of the body matter-of-fact; the remake uses intricate lighting, angles, and close-up shots to sexualize Mari's body from the early moments of the film. The first clip of Mari in the 1972 version is of her just before a shower. It is a cross-cut scene over the dialogue of the local mailman who is dropping off a load of birthday cards for Mari's 17th birthday. She is in extreme close up, her eyes and hairline seen in profile. After another cross cut of this same shot of the mail carrier, we get a set of medium and close-up shots of Mari through her shower door, then out of the shower. She is nude, and the camera makes no attempts to hide her

body, showing her breasts and torso. It does not, however, linger on her unnecessarily – it simply shows her getting out of the shower.⁶ Indeed, when the shot does cut back to an extreme close-up, it is again of her eyes and hairline. Similarly, the lighting is flat and creates no dramatic effects with shadows to accentuate her curves. This is contrary to the shower scene in the remake.

The shower scene in the remake is not the scene that introduces us to Mari. Instead, the 2009 Mari's shower is after we have been shown that she is a swimmer for her high school team, that she drives her parents out to the family's summer house, and that she wants to live in the guest house for the length of their stay. After entering the guesthouse and walking upstairs with the camera following in an almost up-skirt low angle shot, we follow Mari around her room, learning that she has a recently deceased brother. Finally, the camera follows her into the bathroom for the shower scene that began the original. Instead of the flat light and medium shot of Mari getting out of the shower, though, we get voyeuristic and fetishized low angle shots of the curtain with her clouded silhouette behind and then a very slow-paced series of close-ups and extreme close-ups that utilize dramatic shadowing from side light to sexualize her body. The matter-of-fact nature of the original is gone (the 1972 crew was actually a documentary crew chosen for exactly the reason shown in the shower scene); instead, the 2009 Mari is broken down into pieces, her body highlighted by both camera angle, lighting, and lingering shots of her collar bone and navel with water droplets still on them, while she pulls her tank top over her head to re-dress. We also get glimpses a reverse strip-tease with eroticized shots of Mari's bra and panties, and a shot of her slowly zipping the fly on her shorts.

I read this scene as indicative of the post-feminism that McRobbie indicts in ‘Post-Feminism and Popular Culture’, because even though the nudity is gone in *Iliadis*’s remake, a voyeuristic pleasure is indulged that was never apparent in the 1972 film. Indeed the 2009 *Sadie* takes off her top for no reason, while the 1972 *Sadie* is never seen nude, a point to which I will return later. McRobbie articulates that the ‘well-informed and even well-intentioned’ representations of feminism that make up our media landscape have a dubious endgame whereby feminism becomes a dated and passé thing of the past with no importance (except perhaps when approached with an appropriate level of snark, irony, or even derision) in today’s cultural landscape. The implications are that any remaining sexism is dealt with through irony and the weight of misogyny is lessened to the point of unimportance. It seems clear from the stylistic choices that Craven made in the original that he consciously chose not to focus unnecessarily on the nude female body; while there is plenty of horrific torture and rape in the original, the camera works to record the pain of these moments in an emotionally flat way, similar to the early scene of Mari in the shower. This does not specifically mean that Craven was crafting a statement about feminism, but it shows a certain restraint and respect in terms of the female body that is absent in 2009. Instead, *Iliadis* turns up the gloss and indulges nearly every cinematic effect in the book to help sexualize Mari, even while never showing her nude at any time. These effects manipulate the shower scene into a tantalizing peep show that cuts Mari’s body into pieces and beg the question ‘What didn’t we see?’ – a move that sutures the viewer to the position of a lascivious voyeur and uses cinematography as yet another technique

that undercuts the power of women in the remakes (a method to which I will return in the next chapter when discussing Erin in the new *Chainsaw*).

The scene that follows the 1972 shower sequence moves from an uninterested glimpse at Mari's body to very direct confrontation with her choice to not wear a bra. This scene does not sexualize her body, but instead turns toward a political discussion between Mari and her parents of the significance of a bra as both a piece of clothing and a political statement. This move brings the feminist politics of the era to the forefront of the film, and also complicates how we read the family unit. These points are all contradictory to the 2009 film in which the shower scene gives eroticized glimpses of Mari's bra as she dresses and the political conversation is completely erased. The 1972 shower scene ends when the camera cuts to Mari's parents sitting comfortably in their living room waiting for her to join them. As Mari enters the room, it is clear that she is not wearing a bra under her sweater, a fact that both her mother (Cynthia Carr) and father (Richard Towers, credited as Gaylord St. James) call to attention. Her father asks, 'Hey, no bra?' and she responds, 'Of course not. Nobody wears those anymore.' When her mother implores, 'When I was your age...', Mari interrupts and points out that when her mother was her age, women all wore excessively restrictive bras that 'made your tits stick out like torpedoes.' It is clear from this scene that Mari sees herself as a 'liberated' woman who has no need for conforming to a restricting form of femininity that requires a bra. It is also clear that the film portrays a tension within the family spirit caused by a political issue. If the film were firmly grounded within a melodramatic space concerned with bringing the family together as we see in the remake, the political would be reformulated within terms of the family. Instead, a rather insignificant family discussion

about clothing is extrapolated into a political issue in which the family unit is forced to come to terms with the daughter's acting out of feminist politics.⁷

In the remake, the scene that follows is only about Mari wanting to leave. While the original weaves Mari's desire to leave through the discussion of bras, it is hardly the portion that stands out. In the remake, however, the bra conversation is lost, along with its political gravity. In Iliadis's film, Mari wants to borrow the family car to go visit a friend who lives in the small lake town near her family's summer home. Her mother seems extremely hesitant (even though Mari drove the family to the house and seems both trustworthy and safe), a reaction that is linked to the death of her son, Mari's brother. Mari's independence is clearly at the center of both films. But the original makes no issue of her leaving; it is the braless outfit that becomes an issue: the political breaks into the family's peace. In the remake, politics are nowhere to be found, and the family trauma of losing her son is the only thing on Mrs. Collingwood's mind. Tragedy has rocked their nuclear family at its core (the first-born son has died) and it is the fear of a melodramatic repetition with their daughter that creates tension within the family, not external political forces. Even if one strains to read Mari's desire to leave as a push against her mother's conservative family values and a nod to feminism, the politics of that feminism are completely reframed in terms of the family's drama.⁸

A final point that is important to consider about the Maris is that in the original, as evidenced above during her discussion with her mother about bras, the performance of Sandra Peabody is sarcastic, spirited, and sassy; Sara Paxton's 2009 Mari is emotional, melodramatic, and vulnerable. In the original film, Mari is a smart girl with a sharp tongue and eyes that are as often as not squinted with disdain, thought, or anger.

She does not ever come across as emotional, even staying stoic during her rape and humiliation as she attempts to placate her attackers and find a way out of the situation. 2009's Mari, in contrast, is vulnerable, and exudes the type of melodramatic victimhood that necessitates a (male) savior. It is true that she gets tough in the middle of the film by burning Sadie, kicking the car door open, and eventually escaping by swimming across a lake even after being shot. But just as the cinematography undercuts her strength by sexualizing her body in a way that exposes the rape culture myth of rape being about sex and not about violence and power, so too the lingering close-ups of Paxton's troubled and emotional eyes throughout the film show a vulnerability and sense of the melodramatic. The plots of each film may tell a different story, with Craven's Mari dying as she runs from her captors and Iliadis's heroine living to see her parents and warn them of her assault, but the acting styles and cinematography reveal that the two women are meant to project significantly different personae. It is no wonder, then, that while the early Mari died in her escape while her parents devolved into violence to avenge her death, the latter girl ends up spending the second half of the film huddled under blankets while her parents save first her life, then Justin's life, and ultimately the family unit to which they so vehemently cling.

Sadie

The character of Sadie is complicated. In the original (played by Jeramie Rain), a police report heard over a radio describes her as 'animalistic', a vague characteristic never played out in the diegesis. She does seem somewhat immature in her joys, but this may also be due to her psychopathic tendencies, which manifest themselves as her enjoyment of the humiliation of the two captive girls. Her teasing and joy in their

degradation seems childish, but this characteristic is complicated by her affection for 'Junior' in a (somewhat incestuous) sisterly role, her position as sometimes-willing concubine to both Krug and Weasel, her apparent sexual attraction to Mari, and her claim later in the movie when she whispers to Phyllis, 'I can save you.' She is also self-possessed and self-confident, effectively denying Krug's advances and calling him a 'male chauvinist dog,' and demanding that their group have more women in it (sadly it seems this request is at least partly what makes Mari and Phyllis perfect targets when they ask 'Junior' for some marijuana moments later in the cross-cut scene). The remake keeps Sadie's (Riki Lindhome) attraction to the young women and her relationship with Krug intact in a general way, but changes the dynamics of these desires through changes in the character's personality and acting style. It also erases the many nods to feminist politics attributed to Sadie in the original, thus enacting the same diminished political awareness carried out by the changes to Mari's character and portrayal.

As mentioned above, the Sadie of 1972 is strong and confident, comes across as sexually self-assured, and demands respect from her male compatriots. She is hardly a feminist role model, given her joy in seeing other women beaten and raped. But she is a strong female character who introduces aspects of feminist politics into the film. While these two characteristics are hard to parse, I believe that for all of Sadie's sadistic tendencies, her character proves that Craven was fully aware of the political climate of his day and specifically wrote dialogue to bring attention to that fact. Like Mari's diatribe against bras, Sadie has a few moments that indicate her awareness of the feminist movement and her personal use of these politics. The first of these moments happens right after we've seen her in the bathtub. We see nothing of her body but her

head, shoulders, upper chest, and a knee while she and 'Junior' enjoy a beer and a laugh. After a cutaway to the girls buying ice cream, we see Krug pull Sadie onto a mattress to have sex (she still has a robe on, he is fully clothed) as Weasel joins. Krug tells Weasel that Sadie is his woman, and is corrected when Sadie says she is no one's woman until they get a few more women in their group. As she pushes him away, Krug asks if she has been reading 'creep women's lib' pamphlets and tells Sadie to just, 'Lay back and enjoy being inferior.' She then calls him a 'male chauvinist dog.' Weasel corrects her by noting that the phrase ends with 'pig'. Sadie then says that she wants 'equal representation' while Krug grumbles to himself, but drops his advances. She effectively halts the advances of two rapists using (clichéd) language of the second wave.

The second of these scenes happens after the group has kidnapped the girls, loaded them in the trunk of their car, and are driving out of town. Junior is driving while Weasel relaxes in the passenger-side backseat. Krug sits behind his son with Sadie on his lap while they have sex. Again, they are both fully dressed, and Sadie seems to be enjoying herself and the conversation amongst the four of them until Weasel wonders aloud what the 'sex crime of the century was', which seems to ruin the mood for both Krug and Sadie. (This is ironic given that the group has already raped Phyllis and will rape both girls again soon after.) Krug suggests the Boston Strangler, and mentions that he always admired him. Sadie, however, says with enthusiasm that she knows who committed the greatest sex crime of century: 'Frood!' she declares, 'Sigmund Frood!' She continues, explaining to her companions that a telephone pole is no longer a

telephone pole, but a giant ‘puh-HAY-lis’ (her pronunciation of phallus) and that she can’t look at a picture of the Grand Canyon without crossing her legs.

Craven’s Sadie is, then, a perfect example of the writer/director’s desire to reflect the feminist politics of the day. Sadie might be a bit confused about the terms, but she is clearly ready and excited to experience the benefits of feminism, including choosing her partners, asking for equal representation, and openly desiring lesbian sex with the girls. The acknowledgement of Freud’s misogynistic and phallogocentric theories prompts her to offer him as the greatest sex criminal of the century. And while many strong women are often outcast as bad because of their social savvy, power, or convictions (Hillary Clinton, Martha Stewart, or Ke\$ha to name a diverse few) I would argue that we can’t simply say that Sadie’s ‘feminism’ labels her as the ‘bad girl’. In other words, Sadie’s feminist convictions are not to be dismissed because of her often detestable behavior. In the end, the problematic way that the film asks us to identify with many of the characters makes it hard to simply write off these moments of feminist politics as ‘punishable and wrong’. After all, we clearly identify with Dr. and Mrs. Collingwood even though they become vigilante murderers in a frenzy that, by the end, turns to blood lust as Dr. Collingwood pauses a moment, chainsaw revving, before proceeding to kill Krug as the deputies tell him to stop at gunpoint. Also, Mrs. Collingwood is a strong female character, and although her dialogue is not infused with feminist themes like her daughter’s or Sadie’s, she sees trouble and enacts revenge in a swift and calculated manner. I will return to her later, but first we must explore the complete erasure of explicit feminist politics from *Iliadis*’s remake through the changes enacted in Sadie’s character.

I have detailed above how the character of Mari from 2009 is stylistically represented in a way that sexualizes her body while her dialogue is stripped of key clues to progressive politics. This also happens to the Sadie figure from the remake. Within five seconds of meeting Sadie in Iliadis's film, she takes her shirt off to reveal her naked torso to Mari and Paige (the Phyllis character played by Martha MacIsaac), Justin (the 'Junior' character played by Spencer Treat Clark), Francis (the Weasel character played by Aaron Paul), Krug (Garret Dillahunt), and to the audience, in a full-body long shot. This action, while perhaps vaguely linked to Mari's braless style in the original, is completely devoid of the politically grounded speech that accompanies 1972 Mari's choice. Instead, it comes off as Sadie flaunting her body and sexuality for absolutely no reason at all, something that Craven never directs his characters to do. Even though we meet 1972's Sadie in a bathtub, we never see more of her than her shoulders and upper chest. We also see the 2009 Sadie topless again when, at the end of the film, Mrs. Collinwood shoots her in the face. While this may add to the realism of the scene in some way (she has just gotten out of the shower when the Collingwoods attack) it also seems gratuitous simply for its being written as it is.

These script changes seem to match the way Lindhome plays Sadie in the remake. Her flaunting of her body is matched throughout the film by the fact that she seems to constantly be seeking approval from Krug. After the group has kidnapped the girls, Mari offers Krug much-needed driving directions in their retreat along forest roads. Sadie seems both happy with Mari's help and threatened by her possible role in the group, asking Krug if he thinks Mari might make a nice addition to their crew. Her tone is hostile toward Mari, yet hopeful the Krug will agree with her assessment of the

situation. In contrast, the 2009 Sadie is unsure of herself and demands reassurance from her lover and leader – qualities never seen in 1972’s Sadie. This petulance surfaces again when, moments later, Mari uses the car’s cigarette light to burn Sadie’s temple in an attempt to escape the moving vehicle. After the attempt fails and the crew emerges from the crashed car, Sadie begins whining hysterically that the burn will scar. This reaction mirrors the emphasis on appearance seen in 1972 from Sadie, but its motivation seems to be less about self-presentation than it is about her fears that Krug may find her undesirable with the new wound. Again, Sadie’s lack of self-possession shines through in 2009.

These changes in the Sadie character are, for me, indicative of a post-feminist mindset that mirrors the naive proposal that if a woman’s naked body is shown in a ‘matter of fact’ way that it is acceptable. My argument is not that nudity is automatically objectifying; however, Sadie’s topless introduction seems pointless as far as the story and script go. Coupled with her petulant behavior begging for acceptance from Krug, and the complete erasure of her commitment to feminist concerns compared to her predecessor, it seems as though the new Sadie’s nudity is not savvy and frank. Nor is this an example of ‘different times’ in which an older movie that couldn’t show nudity is simply being ‘brought up to date,’ as it were, to meet today’s more lax standards. After all, with the original intent of Craven’s film as a porn, and with the boundary-pushing content that already included nudity, rape, self-urination, and castration-via-fellatio, one can hardly argue that the original film was hiding behind any moral standards or production codes that would limit Sadie’s exposure. Instead the new Sadie’s nudity is simply a poor attempt at trying to eschew the complex politics of the

female body on screen by being seemingly nonchalant about it. This nonchalance is a postfeminist symptom that highlights McRobbie's indications that many believe that feminism is unneeded because it already did its job. In this context, we don't need to acknowledge the implications of the nude female figure on screen because we are, after all, just showing her change her shirt. The fact that Sadie has absolutely no reason to change her shirt in the scene seems unimportant, as the post-feminist hipness of showing her topless smacks of a flippant attitude that approaches feminism with an ironic dismissal of the weight of a choice for nudity.

Mrs. Collingwood

As mentioned above, 1972 *Mari* is hardly a Final Girl in the sense that we have come to know that character type in later slashers, or as Carol Clover defines her in *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*. She barely fights back, is mortally wounded halfway through the film, and takes up no camera time after that except for a few seconds to die near the end. 2009's *Mari* does better: she tries to escape multiple times and, after she endures a horrific rape, has the wherewithal to bash Krug's head with a rock that she picked up while on the ground and make a run for her parents' summer home. She is shot, but manages to swim across a lake, return to help warn her parents of their violent houseguests, and live through the closing credits. She does not, however, successfully fight off her attackers – much less kill them – or help in the defense of the home. She, then, is also not a final girl.

Craven's Mrs. Collingwood is, however strange it may seem, somewhat of a proto-figure for the Final Girl; that is to say, she displays many of the traits that we come to expect from the character type later in the decade. But while she is a strong

female figure, she is much more; and despite being a mother, she is one who stands out in stark contrast to a long line of film mothers. She is sexual, and she uses her sexuality to lure one of her foes to his death. She is proactive in fighting and killing Sadie, chasing her from her home and slitting her throat with a knife. She knows the guests are killers before anyone else because of her investigation into 'Junior's' illness (which is actually the DTs), and prompts her husband to join her in action. For these reasons, Mrs. Collingwood's character is an important place to explore the ways in which the unique roles of 1970s horror mothers are so illustrative of their time. Mrs. Collingwood is subversive in her open display of sexuality (sexuality that actually implies a willingness to cheat on her husband, if only for a utilitarian purpose), in her active readiness to violently avenge her daughter, and in her direct assault on reproduction. As I will detail below, 2009's Mrs. Collingwood has none of the wherewithal, motivation, and (literal) insight of the original mother.

In the remake, the character of Weasel is replaced with that of Francis. Just like in the original, he believes that Mrs. Collingwood finds him attractive and, in the middle of the night, attempts a seduction in the kitchen. Mrs. Collingwood, knowing that he was involved in her daughter's rape and attempted murder, takes this opportunity to flirt, draw him off guard, and attempt to dispatch him. She does this first by striking him over the head with a wine bottle. In a rage, Francis rushes her and impales himself on a chef's knife that she points toward him. Francis pulls the knife out of his chest and attacks the now disarmed housewife (I use this term calculatedly, and will return to it below) pinning her on the dining table. She delivers a swift knee to the groin and runs back into the kitchen. There, she meets her husband, hammer in hand,

and the two of them proceed to drown Francis in the sink, glancing at each other as a silent consent that they will kill this man together. When Francis manages to get the drain plug open, the husband-wife team force his hand down the sink and turn on the garbage disposal. After all this, Dr. Collingwood must still pick up his hammer and sink it into Francis's skull, finally ending the exactly three minute long fight.

The death of Weasel plays out very differently in the original film. It starts the same, with the houseguest approaching Mrs. Collingwood in the kitchen. The flirtations are less subtle, and he boasts that he could 'make love to a looker like [her]' with his hands tied behind his back. She takes him up on the offer and asks to go outside, so that she doesn't wake her husband (who is actually in the basement finding his own murder tools for later scenes). Once outside, she prompts him about having his hands tied behind his back, and he pompously repeats his offer, telling her to use his tie as a rope for his hands. Once he is bound, she kneels down and proceeds to undo his pants, fellate him, and bite off his penis as he climaxes (in only a few seconds, in a sadly comedic contrast to all his bravado). He falls over, screaming, and the scene cuts away with him writhing on the ground screaming. In 1972 Mrs. Collingwood's objectified and subservient sexual position is turned into one of vengeful empowerment. This method of death-by-dismemberment is also indicative of the trend of nihilistic ennui that ties motherhood to death instead of birth, and denying a future by making sex about castration and death, seen throughout the 70s horror films.⁹ With a series of mothers who are either completely absent or killers themselves, and with films that deny heterosexual couples and revel in the death of sexualized couples, reproduction and motherhood are both taken out of a natural sequence of sex-birth-death for both men

and women. For women, this sequence also comes laden with the weight of cultural constructions like the virgin/whore and sex object/mother dichotomies, and the duality of sex as a necessity for life, as well as a harbinger of death. But by flaunting her sexuality only to engage Weasel in a non-reproductive form of sex, the film rejects these dichotomies while simultaneously highlighting the fact that with Mari's death, Mrs. Collingwood is no longer a mother to her daughter; the product of her sex is no longer the life of her daughter, but death to Weasel. With this, her character breaks both cultural taboo and generational progression. In fact, she even destroys Weasel's ability to procreate by using fellatio as a castration technique and enacting a graphic form of poetic justice upon her daughter's rapist. The remake doubly changes the stark sexualized violence of the original by taking away the sexual act that Mrs. Collingwood uses to murder her daughter's killer, and by showing that the 2009 Mrs. Collingwood needs her husband's help to carry out the deed. Furthermore, the remake's later reincorporation of Justin into the family unit highlights the hope for the future that the original Mrs. Collingwood's sexualized assault makes moot.

Besides the obvious change in how the Francis/Weasel character dies, there are several, more subtle changes in the ways these scenes (and others mentioned below) play out that exemplify how the 2009 Mrs. Collingwood character is less aggressive, more domestic, and more reliant on her husband, all of which lead to her character being less empowered. The first of these is the fact that in 2009 the fight takes place completely within the kitchen/dining area. Throughout the beginning of *Iliadis's* film, Mrs. Collingwood makes coffee and cocoa, acts as a nurse for her husband, and is constantly concerned about Mari leaving the house. She is a timid woman much of the

time, frustrated by her husband's ability to move on from their son's death and his acceptance of Mari's proposals to stay in the guest house and go to town with their car. To be fair, both Mrs. Collingwoods are much more concerned for their daughters than either of the husbands, an interesting link between the two which shows cultural commonality that assumes an intuitive protectiveness as part of motherhood. But even this similarity shows a discrepancy between the two films and their time periods, with the 1972 Mrs. Collingwood turning to a destructive killing spree while the 2009 mother turns to her husband for help in recuperating the family unit. She seems comfortable only in and around the home, and the first scene where she must kill one of the guests echoes this. Besides its setting, the fact that she only holds the knife onto which Francis impales himself (she does not actively stab him) and requires her husband's help to finally kill the flailing aggressor only solidify these traits. Contrary to this, Craven's Mrs. Collingwood suggests that Weasel take her outside where she swiftly dispatches him and then, later in the film and on her way back inside, she tackles Sadie, wrestles a knife from her, and slits her throat without hesitation. Thus, the 2009 Mrs. Collingwood seems less sure of herself, less willing to leave the home, and less active in the death of the aggressors.

The fact that, in the remake, Mrs. Collingwood needs help from her husband is not meant to imply that she is completely helpless; instead while it does show her as a weaker character than her predecessor, it shows more clearly how the new film reframes her and her husband in terms of a fractured family unit working to come back together through the tragedy at hand. After all, she does instigate the fight with Francis by striking him with a wine bottle, and effectively fights him off when he has her pinned

against the table. After this, however, the effort to kill Francis is a tag-team effort. While in the original, the mother kills Sadie and Weasel alone while the father dispatches Krug, the remake makes a clear bond between the two parents, solidified in both a verbal pact and the telling glance as they kill Francis, that they are a team. This highlights the family melodrama that holds this film together, and shows that even though the family is faced with an unspeakable trauma, they are dealing with it *together*. In 1972 the family degrades into chaos when faced by tragedy; in 2009, the family is brought together. This is played out twice more through the film as they attack Sadie and Krug, each battle becoming a tag-team effort, framing their violence in terms of family bonding and the action shows them working in unison to avenge the violence that threatens their nuclear unit. In comparing the post Vietnam era with that of the post 9/11 era, it is clear that the former is based on a social world that is unclear about how to move forward, and in fact seems uninterested in doing so. The family unravels, the future is forgotten, and vengeful violence has no clear aim other than payback. In the 2000s, though, the yearning for recovery after trauma becomes clear as family, hope for the next generation, and retributive violence is a means to an end, the final goal being the expulsion of outside threat from the idealized, traditional family unit which hinges on the traditional role of the mother.

Another difference between these two scenes that illustrates the change from Mrs. Collingwood's position as a dynamic and extraordinary mother to one who supports a traditional (read inactive) form of femininity is in how the respective mothers come to realize that their guests are their daughter's killers. In the original, Mrs. Collingwood finds Junior sick and vomiting from DT's in the bathroom, at which point

the camera cuts to a point-of-view shot from her perspective that finds Mari's necklace (a birthday gift from her father the previous day) around Junior's neck. She then begins to look through their guests' suitcase and find their bloody clothes at the same time overhears Krug, sick of Junior's crying, tell Junior that he should have killed him along with Mari. In 1972, Mrs. Collingwood is the active investigator who looks for and hears the horrible news of her daughter's death. It is through the first-person camera angle sutured to her that we understand her discovery, and through her ears that we hear Krug's true nature exposed just as she hears it. The remake has Justin, after *he* realizes that they are in Mari's house, place her necklace around the base of a mug that he was using as a signal to the Collingwoods. Mrs. Collingwood finds the necklace and it is only at this point that she realizes who their guests are. This plot change not only humanizes Justin (a point I will expand upon below), but it gives him the agency in when and how Mrs. Collingwood might realize what has happened to Mari. In fact, it seems as though 2009's Mrs. Collingwood is so focused on being a mother to the boy, whom she seems to sense has a poor relationship with his father, that she is blind to the fact that the group is sinister until Justin makes it clear by revealing the necklace. Her concerns over his hot chocolate, his sickness, and even where he can set his mug in the kitchen seem to take precedent over any form of questioning or investigation into the family's late-night guests. Thus, instead of an investigative point-of-view shot in 1972, we see Mrs. Collingwood in 2009 casually glance around her kitchen before getting ready to wash the dishes (another moment that places her more securely in the domestic space) and just happen to see the necklace, which Justin has placed very conspicuously. The new film, then, is a perfect presentation of the ways in which the dynamic mother

of the 1970s is lost in the originals. Set against a backdrop of family melodrama, brought inside the house and reliant on her husband, 2009's Mrs. Collingwood is the post-9/11, post-feminist mother that aims to return the family unit to the safety of traditional roles, allow the family to move forward, and presumably be a role model for her daughter and Justin as they mature into their place as the next generation.

'Junior'/Justin

One of the most significant changes that the remake enacts on the story is the fact that the Collingwood family has a deceased son. The impact of this character, who is not seen once in the film, manifests itself not through discussions about him (of which there is only one that directly addresses him, and takes place only between Mari and Paige, not the rest of the family) but in the fact that the character of Justin plays so prominently in the 2009 film. Justin becomes a replacement for the lost brother, and his integration into the family becomes a key component of the film's structure. While the plot change that introduces the dead brother to the 2009 version adds a lost male figure to heighten the family's drama in Mari's rape and possible death, the change in the character of 'Junior' in 1972 to 'Justin' in 2009 underscores the focus of the film's action and dramatic effect even more. To be clear, Justin's character not only drives the story forward in very different ways from the original, but the story of his recovery into a stable (read 'traditional') family unit from that of the criminal cohort is nearly as important to the film as revenge for Mari. This is shown not only in plot points and action, but also in camera work that constantly highlights Justin as a subject of import. We get lingering close up shots of him in fear of his father's abuse, we see him cry and protest his father's abuse of the girls (both clear critiques of patriarchal violence), and

his overall presence on camera greater in 2009, in both time and emotion, than Junior's in 1972.¹⁰ The pathos with which we are exposed to Justin allow us to be sutured to his subject position in a more fully realized way than in the original, and his distrust and dislike of his father (unlike 'Junior's' ambivalence) give the audience a clear cue to see him in the same light as Mari: ill-treated, socially and sexually humiliated, and impotent in the hands of Krug. In fact, during Mari's rape, during which Krug forces Justin's hand in fondling Mari, we get shots of Mari and Justin from either the same distance, angle, or both intercut with each other, helping to further equate the two as being similarly mistreated and equally important within the plot, and impotent to their situation. This shift in Justin's character, indicated by the very fact that he has a name in the remake – unlike 'Junior' in the original – does twofold duty in diminishing the focus on Mari and increasing the film's overall interest in re-integrating safe masculinity as part of the nuclear family.

Justin's character advances the plot in very different and important ways in the remake that not only help make him a more sympathetic character, but also help raise his worth as an acceptable substitute for Mari's dead brother within the family unit, if not even as a possible love interest for her after the diegetic time frame. The first example of this is the fact that in the remake, Justin never wants the girls to come in contact with his father and the rest of the group. Mari's friend (Paige in the remake) accompanies Justin to the group's motel room to buy some pot, and Mari joins them after Paige does not return to the car shortly. The three hang out, but Krug and his accomplices come back unexpectedly and that is when the girls are trapped. This is

different than in the original when 'Junior' purposefully traps the girls so that his father will pay him with heroin to feed his addiction.

Another plot change involving Justin in the Iliadis remake is the simple fact that he lives to the end and actively helps the Collingwoods escape. While in the original 'Junior' does point a gun at his father to try to help Dr. Collingwood in his fistfight against Krug (he shoots it but misses wildly because of the DTs), Krug is able to convince his emotionally abused and drug addicted son to turn the gun on himself and pull the trigger (all families, not just the nuclear family, disintegrate in the original). Unlike Justin, 'Junior' displays forms of masculinity that could never be rehabilitated within the idealized family unit: he is addicted (overly reliant), unable to take control, and emotionally ambivalent. Justin updates these characteristics by becoming increasingly self-reliant throughout the film, culminating in stealing his father's gun, and being clearly emotionally readable, illustrated in the scenes detailed above. At one point after retrieving his father's gun, Justin comes into the house just in time to save Dr. Collingwood from Krug. Krug muses, 'You sure picked a hell of a time to grow some balls,' and Justin pulls the trigger; however, the gun is out of ammo. While Justin is nearly as ineffective as 'Junior' in 1972, he does make the gesture to show that he has a type of masculinity that can be rehabilitated into the family unit. After Dr. and Mrs. Collingwood work together to dispatch Krug, Justin is taken into the Collingwood family, evidenced by the 'morning after' scene when Justin is escorted from the house in the Collingwood boat, wrapped in a blanket just like Mari.

Race/Class/Location

A facet of the original *Last House* that I have yet to discuss is the film's race and class dynamics. Craven works hard to make it clear that the idyllic country home of the Collingwoods is seen as a pastoral space. Here, tragedy is only relevant in the pages of the newspaper Dr. Collingwood is reading when the camera first shows him. On the other hand, the city is dangerous and dark, and one can imagine the Collingwoods, if they ever spent an evening to watch *Taxi Driver*, agreeing whole-heartedly with Travis Bickle's disgust at the state of urban America. Mari's mother and father have their concerns about Mari going to the city, and about going with Phyllis who apparently grew up in the neighborhood where the concert is to take place. What the Collingwoods know about Phyllis comes from the local rumor mill, and they are certain that she is sexually active and up to no good at all times. They are, perhaps, right at least on the first count, but otherwise Phyllis seems very much like Mari in personality, interests, and activities. Their fear of the city space itself, though, is not lost on Mari, and once the girls are there, the country-raised young woman insists that her mother was right about the streets and repeats over and over again that she cannot believe how dirty everything is. The Collingwoods do not have a large home, but they seem to have a large piece of land, no neighbors, and live comfortably. They have nice clothes, disposable income for both them and their daughter, and a comfortable life by all accounts. This country life is set in stark contrast to the Krug Clan guests that show up later.

Krug and his group represent the dangers of the city. They also represent a class of white urban poor. They are not indigent, but with Krug and Weasel having just

gotten out of prison, 'Junior' having just returned from reform school, and Sadie having no backstory at all, they are all forced to live in a run-down one-room apartment sleeping on a mattress on the floor. Their accents are much more noticeably 'New York' than any of the Collingwoods (except for Sadie's, which has a southern inflection); they sound less educated than the Collingwoods do, and this along with their car, criminal histories, living quarters, and lifestyle are coded as poorer. They are also coded as not properly white, according to Richard Dyer's account of the social parameters that have been constructed for 'proper' whiteness.¹¹ Their violence and sexuality are linked to lives lived through the body, whereas the social standards for proper whiteness have been constructed to deny the body and support the mind. Thus we see Dr. Collingwood, with house and land, as a figure of proper whiteness in his role as a doctor, a profession that turns knowledge of the body into a mental discipline. He is set in stark contrast to Krug and Weasel whose knowledge of the body is wholly corporeal, and is linked to socially transgressive sex (sharing a lover, having sex with Sadie in the open) and violence. But even for the stark differences in profession and action, the phenotypic codes are subtle. In fact, all of the characters have nearly the same dark hair, varying but indistinct tans, and a variety of eye colors. Thus, their whiteness is not made an overt topic for the film by appearance, even though the social markers are there that make class and place obvious and related.

The ways in which these social divisions work is different than in many other horror films of the era, and in fact subverts the norm. Carol Clover discusses class, place, and race in *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* in her chapter on rape revenge films (a genre that *Last House* would influence). She parses the nuances of these films by

considering that nearly across the board, the threat of rape comes from country people (coded as dirty, poor, and uneducated) and is enacted against a woman from the city. Clover calls this mix of fear and guilt (for being rich) that fills the inhabitants of the city who come to the country ‘urbanoia’, a fear that is translated to viewers who live out their fear of the rural space and vicariously enact their revenge on it by rooting for the victim of rape as she redresses the wrongs against her. By identifying these country folks as rednecks, and equating them with Native Americans, she makes the same logical connections about race that Dyer does: even if one is physically white, class, wealth, education, and actions can code one as socially inferior in a system that has been constructed to value a high level of those traits as markers of whiteness. Clover notes, ‘The city approaches the country guilty in the same way that the whites approach Indians guilty, and ... the urbanoia plot works to resolve that guilt by justifying the annihilation of the guilt-inducing party’ (164). But in *Last House*, the fear of rape comes from the city, not the country, and the dynamic of the animal-like rural folk is simply not present. I believe this is rather singular in a film of this type (Clover lists an extensive list that fit the norm), and is perhaps connected to the fact that the film’s story comes from a medieval ballad by way of the Bergman film *The Virgin Spring* (1959). Craven seems to keep the centuries-old classic ideals of the pastoral in his film, and thus it stands out from the many rape-revenge and slasher films that came after it in which the rural space embodies danger for the urban visitor.

Craven’s film is the turning point between this pastoral memory and the urbanoia trend of future films, though. As Krug and his crew are found out, the Collingwoods begin to lose their cool, collected presence of mind that, along with their

education and wealth, codes them as fully white. At first, Dr. Collingwood goes about his house methodically, setting various booby-traps and preparing himself with a gun to help defeat Krug. After only grazing Krug and finding himself overmatched by the criminal's strength, his tactics begin to change. Dr. Collingwood is less and less able to rely on planning and wit, and must rely more and more on instinct. This leads to him finally grabbing a chainsaw from his basement and attacking Krug. This raw, visceral tool ends up spraying blood around his living room, the furniture broken, cut, and mangled from the fight. Mrs Collingwood must similarly rely on the promise of her body as a weapon, effectively stepping outside of her 'proper' role as a demure white mother.

It is unclear whether Craven was aware of the way that his classed characters were also subtly raced as well, but *Iliadis*'s remake loses the subtlety. It does keep the clear distinction of class, as Sadie has a short rant about Mari being a princess 'born with a silver spoon up [her] ass' as well as a few comments about the fact that the Collingwoods have both a home and a guesthouse. In fact, and a point that is different from the original, the 2009 Collingwoods's house is not even their everyday home. It is actually just their summer vacation home (a large, two-story home with three bedrooms set next to a two story guest house) in the country. The Collingwoods, then, are rich and from the city. Even though the film takes place in the country, there is still the urbania that Clover details, especially when Krug's group comes to their door in the middle of the night. The new Collingwoods are city folks, and out of their element in the woods.

Besides their wealth, their normal city life, and the doctor's education, the 2009 Collingwoods also have another new trait absent in the original: they are all fair-haired

and blue eyed. In addition to carrying over the subtle, non-physical racializing markers of the original, the remake makes it clear this family is white, in both socially constructed parameters and in appearance. This in direct contrast to Krug's gang, all of whom have dark hair. We can read this physical trait as the 'off-white' that Diane Negra details in *Off-White Hollywood*: physical markers that can signal an otherwise white body as a racial other, set apart from whiter bodies on the screen. The important exception to this is Justin with his blonde hair and blue eyes, which get a number of direct close-ups. What Iliadis manages to do with his casting and makeup effects is to give the audience a clear visual marker of Justin's place as an outsider in relation to his father's group, and prepare the audience to accept him as a recuperated part of the Collingwood family. As detailed above, this integration into the family is an important part of the film's melodramatic shift, and Justin's physical appearance, as well as his soft-spoken nature and empathetic demeanor, signal his masculinity as safe to integrate into this nuclear unit.

It is clear the cultural work being done by these two movies is very different. While Craven's film is a commentary on the state of the nation and the political powers that were influential at the time, Iliadis's film seems to be completely devoid of explicit political markers. Ironically, the depoliticizing use of melodrama throughout the remake is almost made political, especially in the remake of a film that was so poignant in and about its time. In the void of overt politics, though, we see the telltale signs of the post 9/11 mindset: Refocus on family melodrama, highlight recovery after trauma, reduce the strength of women, and foreground hope in the future through generational progression. By erasing the feminist politics in the new film, Iliadis has effectively

mirrored the position of post-feminism by showing that strong female role models are unnecessary since women no longer need to make political gains. Furthermore, we see a return to an idealized 1950s mindset in which women occupy the domestic space and will be saved by men if the sanctity of that space is threatened from outside the family. The younger generation will confidently carry us forward, and the pain of the past will manifest itself in a drive toward the future.

Notes

¹ See Eric Schaefer's *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!* (1999).

² Clover discusses the film and its origin briefly in *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* (137).

³ It should be noted that although most credit *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977) as Craven's second film, he directed and co-wrote *The Fireworks Woman* in 1975, which was a pornographic film with a limited release in the United States and Sweden.

⁴ I borrow the term 'number' from Linda Williams' *Hard Core* (1989) in which the sex number is likened to the number in a musical, a moment of escapism from the plot, such as it may be.

⁵ The girl's discussion of sex, and Dr. And Mrs. Collingwood's flirtations, are 'sex' of sorts, but these moments are turned into brief parodies of the terrible scenes to follow; each of these moments of innocent sexual banter is completely perverted by the violence seen later in the film. After all, Mari and Phyllis are brutally raped several times. The first attack begins only minutes after their discussion about going into the city to see the band Bloodlust and what it might be like to have sex with a member of the band. In elapsed time, it is several hours later, but because of the multiple ellipses of the editing, it condenses the duration of the film to make it an almost linear connection between the discussion of sex and their kidnapping, with only a desire to buy pot as the only major middle-point between the two episodes. Similarly, Mrs. Collingwood's

flirtations with her husband become sinister when, later in the film, she must flirt with Weasel to lure him outside only to kill him by biting off his penis after offering to fellate him.

⁶ It is difficult to argue that any depiction of a young, naked woman on screen is simply ‘matter-of-fact’. If we take heed of Laura Mulvey’s work it becomes clear that any view of the female body is problematic. This is even more evident when we consider that this film was originally supposed to be pornography. However, the film is not a skin flick, and in fact shows very little nudity. This scene illustrates no penchant for lingering on Peabody’s naked figure, and the shots do not seem overly extended. The angle is straight on with no lighting or camera tricks to highlight her body or her nudity. Thus, while any scene like this may be politically charged and read as voyeuristic misogyny, I believe Craven’s choices show a conscious choice to minimize this aspect of shots.

⁷ It is interesting to note that even in a film of this genre from 1972, the contentious generational rift between pre-2nd-wave-feminism-mother and 2nd-wave-feminism-daughter is evident.

⁸ See Chuck Kleinhans’s ‘Notes on Melodrama and the Family Under Capitalism’, Thomas Elsaesser’s ‘Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama’, and Thomas Schatz’s ‘The Family Melodrama’ for more on the family in Melodrama.

⁹ For Weasel, *le petit mort* of orgasm becomes *le grand sommeil*, with his anticipated sex act turning into his real death.

¹⁰ By count of my own stopwatch over numerous viewings, Justin is on screen 14.4% of the film’s time in 2009, while ‘Junior’ is on screen for 13.4% of the film’s time from 1972. This is not a huge increase, but the significance of shots given to Justin is much greater. For much of ‘Junior’s’ time he is only partially in shots, lingering in the background. While some of these background appearances are important to his character’s development (especially in the forest when he is unsure of his father’s violence against the girl) much of his ‘screen time’ only includes incidental shots. In contrast, the majority of Justin’s shots focus on him, often in close-ups or medium shots, and convey a deeper connection to the character than the 1972 offers of ‘Junior’.

¹¹ See Richard Dyer’s *White* (1997).

CHAPTER III

SEXUALIZED HEROES, SYMPATHETIC MONSTERS:

THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE

In 1972, *The Last House on the Left* showed the American family disintegrate over the course of an hour and a half. By the time Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* came out in 1974, the family was barely recognizable as such, and the remnants were so perverted, depraved, and violent that the film has come to be one of the single most well-known, referenced, and imitated horror movies ever made. The cannibalistic, nameless, all-male family that plays the collective monster of the film is a representation of the social upheaval that typified American culture in the late 1960s and 1970s. But for all its brutality and raw, unrelenting violence there is something undeniably artistic about the film. Indeed, if *Last House* is a stone club of rape and violence, bludgeoning the viewer with the disintegration of the American family unit, *Chain Saw* is a finely crafted mace: no less blunt in its shock, but overall more beautifully constructed in its delivery. The remake, however, loses the nuances of the original, casting aside the disquieting distance from the melodramatic mode, economic implications, and bizarre familial structures – all aspects that strike at deep-seated American fears – in favor of more clichéd scare tactics and misplaced, melodramatic sympathies.

While a driving argument of this dissertation involves the fact that many female characters from the original 1970s films are rewritten as less powerful or absent in the 2000's remakes, this chapter will detail how in many ways it is the addition of women

into Marcus Nispel's 2003 version that makes it symptomatic of the post 9/11 era. As noted in the introduction to this project, the slashers of the 1970s treat mothers in two disparate ways: killer or absentee. *Last House* put a sexualized mother into a position to kill. *Chain Saw*, on the other hand, has no mother to speak of. In the remake, though, mothers abound, introducing a method for shifting blame from male characters onto maternal women. This move simultaneously introduces family melodrama absent from the original – but necessary in the post 9/11 era – and puts mothers into a traditional role situated in the domestic space; they are at once welcome and demonized. And while the Final Girl remains intact in the remake (and is even quite active in her own escape) there are many other narrative changes that completely undercut the strength of her character. On the contrary, her body is more overtly sexualized than that of the final girl in the original, several female characters are added who help the men kill the group of young adults, and one female victim (herself a mother) is blamed for the death of the group. The original makes it clear that the group of murderous men, left jobless after the slaughterhouse they worked at becomes automated, and left to their own devices for caring for house and home, has taken to bringing their former work home by killing travellers and eating them. The remake, on the other hand, reflects its conservative social moment as women are demonized and blamed for the sins of the men, and for their own victimization.

I will begin this chapter with a consideration of the genre tropes that *Chain Saw* created and how those tropes are both carried over and changed in the new film. This includes both plot and character types, and involves a discussion of how right from the

beginning of the new film, it is clear that the tone and outcome of the film will be different, especially as far as sex is concerned. These same topics are at the center of the second section, in which I examine in detail the character of ‘Hitchhiker’ and how the new film’s revision changes the physical sex of the character, and what sex/sexualization means for the overall plot of the film. Following that, the discussion of motherhood in this chapter is directly related to the creation of pathos for Leatherface as we see that, instead of the absent mother of 1974, the remake highlights several mother characters as a way of both domesticating the killer’s family and creating sympathy for him. From here, I will consider that technical qualities that are utilized in each film and how the cinematography and mise-en-scène undercut Erin’s strength as a Final Girl. Finally, I will consider the production of each film, and how we can make sense, in terms of business strategy, of the hugely different products that each film represents.

Tropes and Trollops

Tobe Hooper’s 1974 film is the first film of the 1970’s horror cycle that embodies what would become staple elements of the slasher. These tropes include:

1. A group of young men and women who venture away from home, stumble upon a place where they do not belong, enter that place, and are punished for doing so. This trope encompasses issues of class and race, as usually the privileged suburban friends enter a rural space with a sense of superiority and entitlement.
2. One young heterosexual pair who are clearly marked as sexually

promiscuous, a virginal girl who may or not be in a relationship with another young man in the group, and a fifth friend who can be male or female. This trope indicates the punishment for sexual activity, as the promiscuous female almost always dies first, and the virginal young woman becomes the surviving Final Girl. Many argue that the punishment of the promiscuous teens is a conservative move meant to show a policing of such activity. But this pattern also celebrates the young woman who is self-possessed without resorting to sex as a way of garnering attention. The Final girl is smart, independent, and strong; it seems to me that the films celebrate these characteristics as much as they denigrate the sexuality of the final girl's friends.

3. A masked killer who uses a phallic object to murder members of the group, often during or right after two of the group have sex. This trope is obviously closely tied to the second trope above, but can also be closely related to the first, especially as it pertains to the men. Oftentimes the first male death (or all male deaths) will be linked to a trespassing offence tied to the sense of entitlement carried from the city to the country. This male killer is often present in the form of just a shadow for much of the film (e.g. *Halloween*) and often has no dialogue, but speaks only through his violence.

In *Chain Saw* (1974), Sally Hardesty (Marilyn Burns) plays the final girl. She is on a road trip with her boyfriend, Jerry (Allen Danziger), her brother Franklin (Paul A. Partain), her friend Pam (Teri McMinn), and Pam's boyfriend Kirk (William Vail).

After parting ways with a strange hitchhiker (more on him in the next section), the group travels in their van to the dilapidated house on the former Hardesty family ranch. Pam and Kirk wander off to find the old swimming hole (and/or perhaps have sex), hear a generator at a nearby house, and go to investigate in hopes of finding gas. Kirk enters the house uninvited and is bludgeoned by Leatherface (Gunnar Hansen). When Pam enters the house to investigate her boyfriend's disappearance, Leatherface snatches her too, hangs her on a meat hook, and later puts her in a chest freezer. As the other three wait, Jerry tires of Franklin's whining and the fact that Sally cannot help but react to her brother, and ventures off to look for the two lovers. He too enters the home and is dispatched by Leatherface. Sally and Franklin wander the woods, where a roaming Leatherface kills Franklin. Sally escapes this attack and runs to a gas station. Sadly, though, the attendant is (what seems to be)¹ the father of Leatherface; he ties Sally in a bag, brings her back to the family house, and attempts to use her as a human slaughter for the family's grandfather. Sally manages to escape a second time and get to a truck on the highway.

The remake keeps the three tropes of the slasher mentioned above, and even amplifies them in many ways – if the remake is anything, it is not subtle. The unwarranted entry into the forbidden house is made more obvious in this film, including a verbal warning from an unnamed resident of the Hewitt family's home for the young people to stay out. The Chainsaw family has a name in the remake (Hewitt), while the young people are no longer part of a cohesive family, even though Erin and Kemper are looking to get married. This subtle but important move helps to humanize the Hewitts, a

move linked to the reclamation of a more traditional family structure that I will explore later in this chapter. The young visitors ignore the warning to stay out of the Hewitt house repeatedly, and pay with their lives. The promiscuous couple is highlighted more in the remake as well. The characters of Teri and Kirk, who in the original seem to have known each other for an extended period of time, are changed to Pepper (Erica Leerhsen) and Andy (Mike Vogel) who have known each other for only a few hours when we meet them, and are introduced to us making out and grinding against each other in the back seat of the van. A sheriff and his gun also join Leatherface and his phallic chainsaw as dual monsters. The sheriff also terrorizes through sex, even though the original was extremely asexual in its treatment violence; this change complicates blame that we assess by actually making the sheriff more unlikable than Leatherface in many ways, and works in tandem with other changes that help to humanize and excuse Leatherface's violence (a topic to which I will return later).

In the remake, the five friends are travelling to a Lynyrd Skynyrd concert after having traveled to Mexico to buy 20lbs of marijuana (a venture the girls were unaware of), and have no connection to the land on which they are travelling. Unlike the Hardesty kids in the original whose family was once from the Texas ranch land, this group is completely alienated from the land on which they spend their last days. The main couple is comprised of Erin (Jessica Biel) and Kemper (Eric Balfour), and their friends Andy and Morgan (Jonathan Tucker). Pepper has joined the crew less than a day before the story begins, and she and Andy make a couple, leaving Morgan as the odd man out. We also find out that Kemper has been scheming to sell the marijuana to make

money to buy Erin a wedding ring (we find out later he has already bought the ring, a point that makes no sense in terms of his given motivations for going to Mexico and puts his trustworthiness in question even more than his lie to Erin about the marijuana). The other changes in the 2003 remake will be detailed below, but one last point about how out of place this group is should be mentioned here. As if the fact that this group is not in their element were not clear enough, a throwaway line early in the film poignantly highlights that this group is more privileged than the rural Hewitts. After a young hitchhiking woman kills herself in the van in front of all the kids, Morgan exclaims that he has never seen a dead body. Kemper retorts that most people have not. I find this interesting because a group containing three men in their early-to-mid 20s in 1973 would very likely have included at least one person who had been drafted into the Vietnam War and witnessed death. This suggests that this group was able to get a student deferment, and adds to the fact that they have the disposable income to buy concert tickets and take road trips to Mexico.

After the young woman kills herself, the group stops by a gas station to call a sheriff. Little do they know, the woman who owns the gas station is related to the Hewitt family and the sheriff (R. Lee Ermey) that she calls is her husband, a man whose sadism and ability to inflict terror match that of Leatherface. While waiting for the sheriff, the group splits up, stumbles upon the Hewitt house, and one-by-one are killed by Leatherface, often with the help of the sheriff, either directly or indirectly. Erin manages to escape from Leatherface's basement workshop with the help of a young boy (a new character who is part of the Hewitt family but seems unconvinced of their

sadistic ways) and leads Leatherface to a slaughterhouse. She manages to chop his arm off with a cleaver, return to the gas station, save a baby who is the kidnapped daughter of the hitchhiking woman, and escape with the baby in the sheriff's car. Obviously, this multitude of narrative changes has a huge impact on how the film is read, and the rest of this chapter will explicate how problematic this re-envisioned *Chain Saw* is.

Hitchhiker

The most startling difference between the two *Chain Saw* movies is the hitchhiker scene that begins each of the films. The change from a male hitchhiker who is part of the slaughterhouse family to a young mother who is a victim of the Hewitt family and has escaped sets the mood for the entire 2003 film: women are dangerous and not to be trusted, and the victim is to blame for the protagonists' deaths.

In the original film, Hitchhiker (Edwin Neal) is the brother of Leatherface and his hobbies include grave robbing, photography (of corpses, mostly), and making sculptures and furniture from human and animal remains. We are introduced to Hitchhiker just a few moments after meeting the group of five young protagonists of the film. The young friends stop to pick up Hitchhiker and immediately he is seen as an outsider. His speech is strange – halting and fractured – and he is isolated in the frame from the young friends. They point out that he smells (a comparison to the stinking slaughter house at which his family used to work) and that he seems either mentally ill, developmentally challenged, or both. Immediately, then, Hitchhiker is constructed as poor, dirty, and uneducated, all markers of non-whiteness outlined by Richard Dyer in his book *White*. Furthermore, he displays a red birthmark (or possibly a scar from being

burned) and carries a small animal-skin satchel, visual markers reminiscent of the 'red skin' Native American that Carol Clover likens to the rural 'red neck' that has become so important in American horror. Indeed, the only character that seems to have any connection to Hitchhiker is Franklin Hardesty, the handicapped member of the five-person group of friends in the van. Franklin's position as an outsider from his friends, due to his petulant personality and handicap, seems to allow him to be the only one who can relate, even remotely, to Hitchhiker. In fact Franklin seems genuinely intrigued by Hitchhiker's ability to kill at the slaughterhouse.

Their relationship is indicative of more than just their position as outsiders; it is also indicative of the subtle class commentary that runs under the surface of the film. The camaraderie between Franklin and Hitchhiker turns sour very quickly when the former refuses to pay the later for the Polaroid picture that he has just taken of the well-meaning invalid. To retaliate, Hitchhiker performs an odd ceremony that burns up the picture in a puff of gunpowder and then steals Franklin's knife and cuts his own hand. When the group of friends kicks him out of the van, he runs alongside and smears what looks like some sort of odd symbol on the rear quarter panel. These actions reinforce the red-skin-as-red-neck simile that Clover presents, as the whole sequence seems like some kind of hex ritual. But the events that unfold are about much more than just Hitchhiker being a weirdo and the kids being scared. They are a manifestation of the class difference between the Hitchhiker and his family of slaughterhouse workers, and the Hardesty family who used to own the cattle that were sent to the killing floor. Franklin and his sister Sally (the Final Girl) are the grandchildren of man who used to

own several hundred head of cattle that were sent to the slaughterhouse.² In fact part of the reason that they are visiting the area is to see their family's former (and now dilapidated) house. The other reason is because Hitchhiker desecrated the graveyard where their grandfather was buried and they are making sure that his grave was not disturbed. The implications are that the Hardesty family was wealthier than the slaughterhouse clan when they still lived on their ranch, and that they made enough money to move from the country to the city, which can be read as a migration toward civilization. Hitchhiker embodies the terrifying: he is non-white, poor, unclean, and uncivilized (not to mention psychopathic, necrophilic, and cannibalistic); with his hex ritual he becomes the harbinger of death who appears to the out-of-place city kids to foreshadow their deaths.

The hitchhiker character in the remake is also the speaker of truths and warns the group of their impending doom; however, she is also a raped and beaten victim of the slaughterhouse family and is blamed by the young men in the van for their downfall. Her treatment by the men of the slaughterhouse and the van sets the tone for the film, and is indicative of the tremendously problematic stance toward women that the new film takes. Nispel's hitchhiker is a young woman who warns the group of friends that pick her up off the side of the road that they are going the wrong way and that 'Everyone is dead.' This phrase, we learn, refers to both her family and the group that she has met; it is a memory and a warning of the future. The two women in the group of friends show compassion for the young hitchhiker, while the three men seem confused and scared by her presence and her condition. Their fear turns out to be well founded

when the hitchhiking woman realizes that the group is unwittingly driving back toward the demented family she has just escaped. Rather than risk this return, she pulls a small revolver from her vagina – a bloody phallus that had been used by the sheriff to rape and terrorize the young woman – and shoots herself through the mouth. The audience relives this second, symbolic rape as a combination of special and digital effects tracks backward from the dashboard of the van, past the terrified group of friends, and through the young hitchhiker’s head wound to an external shot of the van. From this moment on, the group becomes divided along gender lines; the men blame the young girl for ‘choosing to blow her head off in [their] van’ and want to simply dump the body and leave, while the two young women in the group demand that they make a proper report to the sheriff and help return the body to the girl’s family. It is clear that the hitchhiker character in both films plays a similar narrative role. The character is meant to warn the young urban group that they are in danger, and that if they continue down the road they are on (figuratively and literally) they will be punished. But while 1974’s *Hitchhiker* is a medium for critique of class and race set in direct comparison to the group, 2003’s *Hitchhiker* is one that becomes a vessel for division, pitting the women against the men. She also introduces the rape theme that becomes a focus of the later film.

It is imperative to note that the young woman is, as we find out later, the mother of an infant girl who had been taken in as the next generation of the Hewitt family. One of several mothers added to the new film, her short time on screen is a crystalline example of the shift in the post 9/11 era to focus on time and generation in a way never seen in the original. As mentioned above, her statement that, ‘Everyone is dead,’ is both

a recollection and a warning. Just as her words give credence to a past and a future, so too does her presence embody the past and future, as she is the member of a family whose photographs we see later, and the mother of a child kidnapped to be raised by the insane family. While the original film's clan seems to have simply appeared from the blood of the slaughterhouse, weaned on the violence of their trade and never birthed or raised by a mother, the 2003 Hitchhiker and her daughter bring a sense of generational development to the film, even if it is through the evil family. The nihilism of the original film in which evil seemingly appears from nowhere and subsumes any sense of past or future is gone here. Concern over generational progress is at the center of the film from the beginning, as a mother becomes the catalyst for the events, allowing the men in the van and the audience alike a reason to blame the young woman for the group's deadly detour.

Dis/Figuring the Mother and Child

As indicated above, the chainsaw family from the 1974 *Chain Saw* included only four members, all of whom were men. Grandpa, Cook, Hitchhiker, and Leatherface make up an insular clan of men who are so warped by a lost past and isolated life that they lack any sort of sympathy or compassion. These traditionally feminine traits are as desiccated and removed from their lives as their grandmother who sits in an upstairs bedroom, mummified in the clothes and chair in which she died. The remake dramatically changes this aspect of the film, adding three new women (and a young boy and infant girl) to the cast of characters. This could have created an opportunity for an interesting feminist dimension, but in true post-feminist form, that

hope is lost. Instead, subsumed by post 9/11 trends that seek to place women in more traditional roles, all of the women are put in roles that align them with motherhood and/or domestic life at some point in the film; however, this motherhood is so perverted that its role in the film seems to be little more than a tag-team effort at introducing the ‘terrible (both morally and physically) mother’ trope into the script. This trope can manifest itself in many ways, and is in fact an archetypal character in diverse mythology from around the world. The mothers who pose a threat to their children through violence, to men through their sexuality, and to society through their power of generation can all be terrible, imagined as witches, beasts, or simply socially irresponsible (Shelly Winters’ portrayal of Charlotte Haze in Kubrick’s *Lolita* is a perfect example of this last manifestation).³ In this movie, the mothers are grotesque parodies of culturally idealized motherhood, one a young woman who resembles the sickly Mia Farrow in *Rosemary’s Baby* and the other reminiscent of an ancient fertility idol, but who is in her 60s and so unable to procreate any longer (see Figures 1 and 2). The addition of mothers also adds a melodramatic aspect to the film that was never a part of the original. In fact, the 1974 film is so striking and terrifying precisely because it goes against Linda Williams’s claim that the predominant mode of storytelling in America is that of melodrama. The utter annihilation of the family unit seen in the original is part of what makes it so disorienting; instead of providing the familiar melodramatic narrative that underlies so much of American storytelling, the film is brutally flat in its unrelenting emotional isolation. The remake, on the other hand, reconstitutes a relatively normalized family structure, which attempts to create empathy



Figure 1
*Two versions of the bad mother in The Texas Chain Saw Massacre (2003) –
the sickly mother*



Figure 2
*Two versions of the bad mother in The Texas Chain Saw Massacre (2003) –
the obese mother*

for Leatherface and his family, and also works to recast Erin in a role of the good mother toward the end of the film, a move that further diminishes her role as the final girl by placing her in a traditional role as caretaker.

Physical differences become standards by which difference is measured, and this becomes very obvious in the horror genre, e.g. monsters and aliens, the burned skin of Freddy Krueger, or the uncanny dead eyes of possessed persons or ghosts. Difference can also include sex (male/female), as well as physical disabilities. As Robert McRuer argues in his book *Crip Theory*, the norms of western culture go beyond just white, heterosexual and male; they also include able-bodied. These differences are compounded with the more subtle difference in whiteness indicated by Richard Dyer in *White* wherein those who are poor, dirty, and uneducated are also often disabled, morbidly obese, and/or visibly disfigured. This becomes apparent with two of the added female characters in the new *Chainsaw*. After Erin escapes from Leatherface the first time, she stumbles across a small trailer home in the woods occupied by a gaunt, sickly looking young woman and a morbidly obese older woman. Erin begs them for help, only to find out that they have drugged her tea and helped facilitate her return to the Hewett house with a phone call. Before she passes out, Erin learns that the women are caring for a baby whom she (and the audience) saw earlier in a photo of the young female hitchhiker and her family; the baby is the stolen daughter of the hitchhiker. The gaunt young woman in the trailer contends that the baby is hers, but this is clearly not the case. Instead, the baby is a surrogate child that the woman intends to raise as her own. The fact that the women have stolen the baby is bad enough, but their deplorable

living conditions and physical appearance also help confine them to the ‘terrible mother’ character trope. With jaundiced skin, sunken eyes, and a weak voice, the young woman in the trailer is hardly the picture of the conventionally idealized vibrant mother – the other side of the coin of the terrible mother – and her somewhat forced affection for the kidnapped child only adds to the fact that her physical appearance makes her seem like an unfit caretaker. What is more, she is coupled with a matronly, morbidly obese woman who seems to care very little for the baby, and it is clear that the audience is supposed to be as appalled by the women’s appearances as they are by the squalor in which they live and the fact that they have kidnapped a child. Quite simply, the film plays on the centuries-old equation of physical deformity with moral indecency, as modeled most famously by Shakespeare in *King Richard III*.⁴ The end of the film models Erin into a good mother because she risks her life to save the kidnapped child. Her body, highlighted throughout the film as an ideal of normalized beauty, becomes the counterpoint to these other terrible women, and her moral character is thus aligned with that body.

The influence of physical difference is used not just to create revulsion, but also as a way of building sympathy for other characters within the film. This is problematic, though, because the moments are intimately linked to the problematic mothers in the film, and so the sympathy is undercut by their own physicality that is meant to create revulsion, and also by their un-maternal characteristics. The most problematic example of this ill-conceived pathos comes when Erin is in the trailer with the two unnamed women. Before she realizes that they are part of the Hewitt clan, Erin begins to describe

to the women what has happened to her friends. The gaunt woman interrupts her to tell her that the poor boy (Leatherface) had his face disfigured by disease when he was a young boy (a fact corroborated by a profile shot of Leatherface taking off his mask elsewhere in the film). She and the other woman in the trailer seem convinced that Leatherface's need to kill people to wear their faces as masks is justified by his disfigurement; the scene's reference to the pained look on Leatherface's face as he removes his mask earlier in the film makes it clear that the audience is supposed to fall for this line of logic also, and sympathize with the killer. This detail is nowhere to be found in the original, where the only glimpse of Leatherface's real countenance is an image of his crooked and missing teeth through his mask's mouth. In the original, the implication is that whatever his genes are, they are to blame for his appearance and his desire to cover his face with a mask. But because we have no emotional attachment to him, and because the disfigurement seems to come from within the terrible family unit alone, there is no desire to sympathize. The remake makes his disease come from outside the family (a disease, only vaguely identified, might come from any number of places), and the news is delivered to us with the melodramatic pleading of the young woman trying to placate her brother. It is clear, then, that the film is working to garner our sympathies for the monster in a way that is neither found in the original, nor is appropriate for a killer. I will talk more about sympathy for the killer in Chapter V, but it is clear that in this film there is no way for anyone to have sympathy for Leatherface and simultaneously cheer for Erin as she scrambles for her life. Instead, the ploy seems like an attempt at bringing pathos into the film where it does not belong by muddying

the horror with melodramatic overtones. The fact that this pathetic change is delivered by a pair of women whom the audience is set up to dislike both on the basis of their physical difference and their narrative function as terrible mothers only makes it harder to parse out how true sympathy for this maniac – and his family – is supposed to be taken seriously. Furthermore, sympathy for the killer comes with the cost of depictions of monstrous mothers and unpalatable – but culturally widespread – depictions of the body and its visual codes. It seems as though the true sentiment of *Leatherface*'s revealed disfigurement, even with the indication toward pathos, is still to emphasize his difference, and hence his legitimacy as a monster. Other examples throughout the film that help use grotesque physical difference as a marker of moral rejection include the fact that an elderly man (perhaps a Hewitt uncle) has had both of his legs amputated at the knee; the woman in the gas station (possibly the sheriff's wife) is overweight and has very thick glasses and heavily discolored teeth that are highlighted; and the sheriff pulls his denture out to reveal his missing front teeth to taunt Morgan, whose teeth he has just knocked out. Like *Leatherface*, his sister (the gaunt woman), and her friend (or mother), his physical difference is an outward manifestation of his class, his race, and his alienation from the norm of white heterosexual male subjectivity.

Sex and Sexualization

As already mentioned, a striking aspect of Hooper's 1974 film is the fact that the chainsaw family has no women in it. The lineage of the family seems to be Grandpa, his son the Cook, and his two sons Hitchhiker and *Leatherface*, but the because Cook and Hitchhiker both call the patriarch Grandpa, they may be siblings and not father and son.

The family does keep their mummified grandmother in an upstairs bedroom with Grandpa, and Leatherface does don a woman's hair and face (complete with rouge and eye shadow) as he prepares for dinner, but these are just awkward reminders of the women who are absent from the cannibalistic family unit. This all-male unit can be read a number of ways: as a reflection of the male-dominated violence of Vietnam; as a commentary about the need for women as a stabilizing part of the family unit; as an illustration of the disintegration of the nuclear family. All of these readings culminate in a general sense that uninhibited masculinity devolves into depravity and violence.

One interesting aspect about this depravity is that it is portrayed as completely asexual. While Leatherface's chainsaw is certainly a phallic object, Cook pokes Sally repeatedly with a stick, and Hitchhiker pokes at Sally's face and shoulder with his finger, a moment at the infamous dinner scene near the end of the film makes it clear that the terror these men want to inflict is not about sex. At one point, terrified and pleading for her life, Sally says, 'I'll do anything you want.' Her meaning is perfectly clear: she is willing to give herself over to these men sexually if only they will let her go.⁵ Hitchhiker and Cook stop their taunting and look at each other in disbelief – not that she would offer this to them, but that she would think that they would want her sexually at all. They both burst into fits of laughter at the thought. For me this is one of the most iconic moments of the long and tortuous dinner scene because, as mentioned above, it crystalizes the fact that terror inflicted upon Sally is not about sex, but about a continued and sustained act of revenge against higher-class people who, for the chainsaw family, represent their loss of their positions at the slaughterhouse.

The clear rebuttal of a statement like ‘the terror is not about sex’ is to point out that rape is also not about sex, but anger, violence, and fear. This is absolutely true, and my argument is not meant to downplay the physical violence nor emotional torture inflicted upon the female body throughout the film. However, we must look at the formal techniques used throughout the movie to consider how the filmmakers minimize the sexualization of the female body, a characteristic that is unlike nearly all other slashers made since. We must also consider that even before ‘rape culture’ was defined as such, the link between violence toward women and sex has been an inherent part of patriarchal misogyny for centuries. And for film, even though slashers did not yet have conventions of their own by 1974, the overall cultural conventions of male antagonism manifested in sexual threat can be traced in film history to early melodrama serials like the *Perils of Pauline* (Gasnier and MacKenzie 1914) and *Hazards of Helen* (Davis and McGowan, et al. 1914-1917) serials, to early horror like *Dracula* (Browning 1931) and *White Zombie* (Halperin 1932). To begin, we can simply note the fact that both *The Last House on the Left* (1972) and *Halloween* (1978) present their female victims topless; *Chain Saw* does not. Similarly, while I argued in Chapter II that the sexuality of the rape in the original *Last House* is undercut by the documentary style cinematography, part of the spectacle of the film, especially later, is prolonged sexual violence. The same can be said for *Halloween*, which many argue draws out the deaths of the women through eroticized strangulations while the men die quickly by the blade of a knife. Because of these techniques, the argument can be made that the sexualized suffering of the women in the films validates the male spectator’s voyeuristic desire. But *Chain Saw*

does not follow this trend. Instead, the men and women all die quickly, with the exception of Sally who runs, is chased, is caught, and runs again throughout the entire third act. Both Pam and Sally are both seen suffering for a prolonged period, but in Pam's case she is alone in a room full of chicken feathers and bone furniture. The terror comes from the house and its macabre decoration scheme, with no one else even near her. Similarly, the elapsed time in the film is multiplied by complicated overlapping editing techniques. While this does prolong the spectacle of her suffering for the viewer, that suffering is not by the hand of a male surrogate, and is much shorter within the diegesis.

Sally's 'death' scenes are much more complicated. Sally is tied to a chair at a dinner table with the three men staying at the other end of the room most of the time. When they do finally untie her (after they laugh at her offer of sexual favors in return for her release) they lead her to a bucket so that Grandpa can club her head like he used to do to the cattle. This scene could be read as a gang-rape, and it could be argued that the socio-economic nostalgia that drives their cannibalistic male bonding is simply a cover for their mock rape via the sledgehammer. After all, why couldn't the filmmakers simply use one of the men from the film in this role instead of Sally? I believe that this reading undercuts the real weight of the social commentary made by the film regarding the slaughterhouse. Also, while the scene may be read as a mock gang-rape, the fact that grandpa cannot complete the task and that the other men simply end up yelling at each other while Sally escapes points both to their utter impotence in the situation, and highlights Sally's strength through the end of the film. She literally keeps her head

while surrounded by a band of degenerates, and becomes the mother of all Final Girls that would eventually follow in her footsteps. She does everything she can to escape, and as the men become obsessed with their own dysfunctional bickering, she makes her move. And so, the narrative works to minimize any focus on Sally as a sexual object. She is never stripped of her white bell-bottoms and purple shirt, she is never lit in a sexually suggestive way, and she is never shot from angles that highlight her body in a sexualized way. Together these aspects set her apart from other slasher women, and distance her from her counterpart in the remake, who, while perhaps being more virulent about fighting back against her assailants, is so overly sexualized throughout that it undercuts her strength as a final girl.

Before turning to the new film, though, it is interesting to note that the actors who played Pam (Teri McMinn) and Kirk (William Vail) developed their parts around the assumption (written nowhere in the script or notes) that their characters were involved in a committed, long-term relationship, and were in fact secretly engaged.⁶ The action of the film neither confirms nor denies these ideas, so assuming that Pam is the traditionally ‘slutty’ girl that has developed as a motif of the genre may be something we project onto the film only now as we look back on it through decades of convention. Formal elements of the film do lend credence to reading her character as the now ubiquitous ‘slut’, including a long, extremely low angle tracking shot that follows her into the house, highlighting her long legs, short shorts, and backless and braless top. This style of cinematography, and the costuming that it highlights, are very different from the style of cinematography and mise-en-scène we see with Sally’s

character (a point to which I will return below). However, these stylistic moves are set directly against the fact that we never seen Pam or Kirk have sex, or even make out. Unlike *Halloween* four years later, which shows one of the female characters having sex and topless, *Chain Saw*'s version of 'the slut' would hardly get anything more than a 'PG' rating today.

This is immediately different from the 2003 remake, since we meet Pam and Kirk's counterparts, Pepper and Andy, grinding against each other and making out in the back of the group's van. And from this early moment, the film only continues to highlight, both narratively and formally, the sexuality of the two female protagonists. To continue our look at Pepper, a trend that develops throughout the early part of the film is that of low angle, medium shots of her legs and butt in tight, revealing shorts. This is done in homage to the long tracking shot from the original that I mentioned above; but there are key differences. First, the original film uses this shot only once, and while Pam's legs and butt are certainly a focal point, the following shot of Pam walking toward the house also works to make the house (which in reality was quite small) loom above Pam and dwarf her as she enters its insanity. The remake does not get double duty out of any of its shots, unless one considers having Erin's body framed alongside Pepper's double duty. Instead, the audience gets shots of the two girls (at least Erin is in jeans, as tight and low-slung as they are) doing things like looking at an old vending machine, and exploring a putrid outhouse. None of the artfulness of the original shot is there, and instead these repeated shots of the women's bodies are there solely as eye candy.

The shots of Pepper, though, are nothing compared to those that typify Erin. Over and over again, Erin's body is highlighted through camera angles, lighting, costuming, and set design; she is so sexualized that her role as final girl is constantly overshadowed by her position as a sex object. Erin's costume for the film is a pair of very tight, low sitting jeans and a white tank top undershirt with a knot in the bottom so that her midriff is bare, and the shirt is pulled tight across her breasts (see Figure 3).⁷ To highlight this, there are several shots of her throughout the film where instead of a key light, top lighting is used as the main source for the scene. This has the effect of highlighting her breasts, obliques, and butt, while casting shadows down across her face. This is a creative way of mimicking the standard bits-and-pieces way of filming the female body. Here, instead of utilizing the frame in close up shots to highlight only part of the female form, a long shot is used in combination with low camera angles and top lighting to erase the woman's face and emphasize her erogenous zones for the spectator. As if these lighting and camera techniques weren't enough, shots from when Erin is running from Leatherface take things to absurd heights to emphasize Erin's body, especially her breasts. After being drenched in water so that all of her clothes cling to her body and her thin, white shirt becomes see-through, Erin runs into a meat locker and is forced to hide inside the cavern created by two huge sides of beef hanging from the ceiling. The imagery here turns back to the grotesquerie of motherhood that seems to run rampant in the film. In many ways the sides of beef create a set of morbid labia in which Erin must hide to escape her captor. While Erin works to become the good mother and save the kidnapped infant girl at the end of the film, an ending that



Figure 3
Sexualized cinematography and mise-es-scène in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (2003)
– Erin's costuming and top highlighting



Figure 4
Sexualized cinematography and mise-es-scène in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (2003)
– Erin's low-angle shot in the meat locker

supports the post 9/11 drive to see the family unite triumph through struggle, the film's ambivalence about the strength and role of motherhood is clear. The visual imagery combines with the iconography of death so as to highlight the dual nature of motherhood: protection and threat come in the same package, as the mother can swaddle and smother with equal ease. And just like the beef in the giant refrigerator, Erin's flesh – and especially her breasts, another nod to motherhood – is put on display as she shivers and crosses her arms in front of her, pushing her breasts together while the top lighting and low-angle camera that frames her in a close medium shot emphasizes her chest (see Figure 4). Once again, it becomes clear that even though Erin is strong, independent, and self-assured, she is most visibly a highly sexualized woman, represented in a way that was never seen throughout Hooper's 1974 original.

Finally, several moments in the film directly show the rape and molestation of female characters, something that was never part of the original film. Again, the focus on the sexualized body of the female characters in the remake is indicative of a problematic post-feminist time period typified by the idea that just because a woman happens to fight back, it is okay to objectify her throughout the film. Just like the idea that feminism is no longer needed, it seems that the first decade of the 2000s is typified by rewriting these strong women so that they are visually and narratively weakened so as to diminish their relevance as icons of female strength. An early example of this, mentioned above, is when the young hitchhiking woman pulls a blood-covered snub nose revolver from her vagina. This revolver, we see later, is that of the sheriff, who comes (supposedly) to claim the body. He takes the gun and fits it back into his ankle

holster, and this becomes the first solid proof that while he has the clothes and the car of a sheriff, his duties only involve protecting his twisted self-interests and the activities of the Hewitt family. The scene during which the sheriff recovers his gun also includes him fondling the dead woman's breasts and genitals, commenting that he used to love calls that involved dead young women because he could use them for his necrophilic enjoyment. Erin is also 'cinematically' and narratively molested in a close up, low angle shot of her butt, thighs, and crotch when she enters the Hewitt house and attempts to help an elderly amputee return to his chair. The man purposely puts himself on the floor and calls for her help to lure her into the house and distract her and Andy from Leatherface's lurking presence. When Erin bends over to help the old man get back into his chair, the camera angle switches from an overhead shot to a low angle shot that shows the man groping Erin and grinning while she struggles to help him return to his chair. This type of fondling was never a part of the original film, and, as mentioned above, the men in the 1974 *Chain Saw* never treated Sally as a sexual object. The remake, on the other hand, continually highlights women as little more than sexual objects, shifting the motivation of terror from socioeconomic politics to sexual politics, and ultimately undercutting Erin's position as a final girl by continually highlighting her body instead of her actions.

...And the Money Shall Make You Mainstream

The 2003 remake moves away from political commentary regarding class and race built on a foundation of terror that seems to have no comprehensible basis, and toward a narrative based on sexual violence and familiar tropes of motherhood and

corrupt law enforcement officials. These changes, while symptoms of their time period and the social milieu of the 2000s, on the one hand, are also symptoms of the different levels of funding that these two movies received and the expected return on that investment, on the other. The estimated budget for Hooper's 1974 film was less than \$85,000.⁸ Its domestic box office earnings to date are nearly \$31 million. We can compare this to two other films released the same year; *The Godfather Part II* (Coppola) had a \$13 million budget and has a domestic gross of \$57.3 million and *Chinatown* (Polanski) had a budget of \$6 million and has grossed \$30 million in domestic box office income. Clearly, *Chain Saw* did very well considering its extremely humble beginnings, and despite its 'R' rating. It should be pointed out that Hooper and Henkel clearly hoped that their film would make money, and even cut several minutes from the original cut of the film after the MPAA sent it back with an 'X' rating. Hooper (naively) thought that he could get a 'PG' rating because there is minimal gore, but the 'R' rating was the best he could negotiate. Despite the writer/director's hope in a profit, no one else on the production crew really thought that it would make any money. Most of the actors and crew that were interviewed for the short documentary *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre: The Shocking Truth* indicate that once they realized what the movie really was, they basically gave up on becoming rich and famous from it. The film was independent in every sense of the word – low budget, shot on location with first-time actors and newly-graduated director – and despite Hooper's hopes of grandeur for the film, it is clear that the content was simply not something that anyone looking at would ever consider a money making venture. But precisely because it was such a small crew

(only about 20 people made up the actual production crew) there was no pressure from a large production company to make a film that conformed to any standards, and thus Hooper could realize his vision without the pressures of a large studio, which, even in 1974's New Hollywood era, was still a consideration for the larger films being produced.

The same can hardly be said for the 2003 remake. Produced by New Line (*The Lord of the Rings Trilogy* [Jackson] among many others), and the brainchild of Michael Bay (who at the time had already directed and produced *Pearl Harbor* and *Armageddon*) the new *Chainsaw* was always meant to be a moneymaker. Cashing in on the 30 years of cult success and a brand name that a generation of teens would instantly recognize (even if they had never seen the original), Bay knew that his new film would have an audience base. But, as is clear from the film that we get, the project was about more than simply representing the original classic in an updated form. It was also about clearing out all of the things that made the original so polarizing for critics and audiences, that made it so poignant and repellent, that made it slyly subversive in its politics, that make it classic of American filmmaking, and the true foundation of the slasher genre. The remake eschews the stylistic and narrative quirks of the 1974 film and instead reveals what is necessary to make money today. The sex, gore, and melodrama are all turned up, giving audiences something familiar to cling to, and giving the film an all too familiar feeling of the post 9/11 era remakes. Instead of the isolation from any familiar narrative structure or character types like the original, it becomes symptomatic of a generation of films that are ready to return to an era when

the victim is blamed, the mother is terrible, the family structure is intact (if flawed), marriage is on the horizon (if only for a bit), and the good girl can be strong if she ultimately returns to a conservative role as a mother.

Notes

¹ I say ‘seems to be’ because the lineage of the family is never made perfectly clear. The gas station attendant, referred to throughout only as ‘The Cook,’ is older than Leatherface and Hitchhiker, but does not seem to have a fatherly relationship to them. This statement is itself problematic simply because the family unit in the film is so heavily distorted that a ‘fatherly relationship’ would hardly be visible as such. After all, the film is as much about the total annihilation of the family as it is about anything else. Furthermore, the entire family is made up of men, with the only female member being the mummified grandmother who sits in a chair opposite the nearly-dead grandfather in an upstairs bedroom.

² See Robin Wood’s ‘An American Nightmare’.

³ Barbara Creed’s *The Monstrous Feminine* contains a comprehensive discussion of the many iterations of the terrible mother.

⁴ Nicholas Vlahogiannis in his essay ‘Disabling Bodies’ sums up the equation of physical and moral ‘ableness’ dating back to Plato, by noting that those who stood outside the purview of cultural norms in physical and/or mental capacities were relegated to the edges of culture: ‘As undesirables, the physically and mentally imperfect functioned as metaphors or paradigms for religious and social transgressions’ (28). Philip K. Wilson succinctly sums this phenomenon up in his essay which connects the current generation of disability studies and genetic modeling, ‘Eighteenth-Century “Monsters” and Nineteenth-Century “Freaks”: Reading the Maternally Marked Child’, by writing, ‘Considerable attention has also been focused upon ways in which “the body” can be seen to express deviance through some physical, readable marking. In essence, those deemed to be socially or morally deviant are believed to carry upon them, or within their genes, some recognizable marking peculiar to their deviancy’ (1). With this history in mind, the reliance on cultural codes for race, gender, and bodily ability play startlingly well together in this film.

⁵ Robin Wood, in his comments on the displacement of sex into violence in horror notes that ‘Nowhere is this carried further than in *Texas Massacre*. Here sexuality is totally perverted from its functions, into sadism, violence, and cannibalism. It is striking that there is no suggestion anywhere that Sally is the object of an overtly sexual threat; she is to be tormented, killed, dismembered, and eaten, but not raped’ (‘Return of the Repressed’, 31)

⁶ Teri McMinn, who played Pam in 1974, discusses this character development in the bonus footage documentary *Off the Hook*, which is included in the 2008 Dark Sky Films Ultimate Edition Blu-Ray release of the film.

⁷ The knotted shirt is probably homage to ‘Slim’, the final girl from Hooper’s *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (1986). Slim was very highly sexualized throughout the film, but manages to use that sexuality in a way that ends up seducing Leatherface and saving her life. She then kills all the men in a terrific escape. This is different from Erin’s sexualization because she seems unaware of it, and the viewer is placed directly in the position of a voyeur, peeking in on someone unawares. Slim, on the other hand, is fully aware of her sexualized appearance within the film, and uses that sexuality to subdue her captors and turn their power back on them.

⁸ This figure and all those that follow are from IMDb.com. It is hard to nail down the true budget of the film, because the production was plagued throughout with monetary shortcoming that necessitated the producers selling percentages of the film in an attempt to finish the shoot. Eventually, Hooper and Kim Henkel would sell the film’s distribution rights for \$225,000 which helped pay for editing and other post production work, but all of the shooting was wrapped at around the \$85,000 mark, which was already well over the original \$60,000 budget.

CHAPTER IV

MOTHERHOOD AND MASCULINITY:

FRIDAY THE 13TH

So far my project has examined two ways in which the post-Vietnam era horror films have treated the mother. In *The Last House on the Left* (1972), the mother turns to revenge killing and is simultaneously sexualized, two very un-motherly traits rarely seen in our culture. In *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), the complete absence of a mother stands out in a film that lacks emotional connections, melodrama, and sexual aims. This chapter continues the investigation of the original films' treatments of motherhood with an examination of 1980's *Friday the 13th* (Cunningham) and 1981's *Friday the 13th Part 2* (Miner), two films which, out of all the original films of this project, are the most directly *about* motherhood. Mrs. Voorhees, the killer in the first film, is driven by her sense of motherhood to exact revenge, much like Mrs. Collingwood in *Last House*. Mrs. Voorhees is given cinematic treatments that suture the audience to her, given monologues through which she is able to explain herself, and given narrative thrust, which provides the catalyst for the film's action. In a word, she is empowered – and in a way that women in cinema, much less *mothers*, rarely are. But she is also a killer; she is blamed, abjected, and psychologically unstable. These three characteristics are very familiar terrain for mothers, and demonstrate how a film that is so dynamic and empowering in some ways must also temper that progressive aspect of the mother by demonizing her. After all, even in an era of progressive politics, and in a film that seems eager to play with audience expectations, mothers still evoke the terrifying specter of death, and reinforce their power (biologically if not culturally)

which must always be held in check. This polysemic trend continues in *Part 2* by repeating Mrs. Voorhees' words in posthumous flashback and allowing the main female character to identify with her story, while also making her son the killer and placing blame on her for his bloodlust.

The fact that the 2009 Nispel remake of *Friday the 13th* is actually a remake of *Friday the 13th Part 2* and not the original film from 1980 makes it interesting to consider in terms of my work. After all, the title sells itself as a remake of one film when, in fact, it is the remake of another. Hence, this chapter will detail how the film changes the story of *Part 2* to craft the new film, and also how eschewing the original *Friday* for the sequel has ramifications for how the role of the mother and definitions of motherhood are manipulated for the 2000s. In the remake, Mrs. Voorhees' role is minimized to only a few moments of screen time at the beginning of the film, and she is all but forgotten by the time the story proper begins. Symptomatic of the post 9/11 era described previously, the story is built around a broken family, including a mother who has died of cancer, and the work of the son to rescue his sister in a move bring their family back together. This new male hero is also linked directly to the male killer, as both of them are considered lost sons acting out in the shadow of their dead mothers, setting the films squarely in the mode of family melodrama with a focus on recovery. Thus, masculinity is framed in terms of motherhood, and the violence inherent in the men we see is blamed on their mothers' absences. Once again, we see a troubling role for motherhood that has lost much of the dynamic flair given to her in the post-Vietnam era films and a turn to traditionally confining roles for the mother: she is at once completely absent *and* completely to blame.¹ The dual move that erases Mrs. Voorhees

and creates a male figure as the hero also acts to remove the Final Girl characters that stand out in the original films, and reframes the young women of the new film in a position of weakness that relies on the new male hero. These changes are, like the other films in this dissertation, brought about through changes to narrative, characters, and cinematic effects.

After a brief plot summary of the three films, I will begin with a consideration of the mother and motherhood, a topic central to the *Friday* films. I will explore how, while in the new film, Mrs. Voorhees is all but absent visually – in stark contrast to the original two films – the idea of the mother, and the angst over not one but two *dead* mothers, becomes the driving force behind the narrative. From here, it is only natural to turn to the topic of the two sons, around whom the new plot centers, and consider how they display a form of masculinity that conforms to traditional gender norms and leaves little room for a final girl. Last, I will consider the only Black and Asian characters in any of the films this project covers, and discuss their roles as token representatives of ethnic racial difference. I will also consider distinction of race between white and non-white, a discussion informed by Richard Dyer's work in *White* (1997).

Plot Summaries

The first *Friday the 13th* is not a particularly complicated film in terms of plot. The film opens with a young girl hitching a ride to a summer camp that we learn has been closed after a child drowned and a number of campers were killed. The camp is being reopened, and our would-be heroine is on her way to her summer job. After being driven part way by a trucker, she hitches another ride from an unknown person in a small green jeep. We do not see the driver because all of the shots are POV from the

driver's position. The unknown driver will not let the girl out, and forces her to jump out of the moving car and run, injured, through the woods. She is followed by the first-person camera of the killer, and dispatched. Toying with audience expectations, she is not, like the first girl we meet in previous slashers, the final girl. The rest of the film details the killing of the other teens who have arrived to work at the camp. The town's local 'weirdo'/truth-teller is given as a red-herring killer, as is the man who owns the camp (he also drives a green jeep). The stalking and killing of the teens, who all enjoy the freedom of the forest and take every opportunity to variously drink, smoke pot, and have sex, is all seen from a handheld, POV-style shot from the vantage of an unknown character. Alice (Adrienne King), the girlfriend of the camp's owner (reluctant to stay in the relationship and sexually conservative) ends up as the only one of her coworkers alive, and comes to find that a woman named Mrs. Voorhees is the killer. The motivation for the killing spree, as the mother tells us in a monologue interspersed with chases and fights, is that her son, Jason, was a young boy spending his summer at the camp when he drowned. The counselors who were supposed to be watching him had snuck off to have sex, and because of their mistake Mrs. Voorhees has taken it upon herself to punish all the counselors who ever set foot on the camp. She ends up killing most of them when they are having sex, or are on their way to or from a sexual encounter, because it seems that in the world of the film all camp counselors use summer camp as a sexual retreat of sorts. Alice (being pure of body and fit to take on the role of the Final Girl) is not distracted by sex, and ends up fighting Mrs. Voorhees for the last 20 minutes of the film. When the two finally come to blows at the edge of the lake, Alice turns Mrs. Voorhees' machete against her and decapitates her. The final

moment of the film includes Alice floating peacefully on Crystal Lake in a canoe, awaiting the police. Suddenly, a deformed boy leaps from the water and pulls her overboard. She awakens from a dream, asks the sheriff about the boy, and is told that there was no boy. The boy is apparently Jason, but it seems his random appearance was simply a figment of Alice's imagination after her trauma. This sets the stage for 1981's sequel.

Friday the 13th Part 2 begins with a recap of most of the last 20 minutes of the first film, including Mrs. Voorhees' monologue regarding her motives, the beheading, the boy in the lake, Alice waking in the hospital confused about the boy, and the sheriff's reassuring comment that there was no boy. This is crosscut with a present-day Alice in bed whimpering from a bad dream, reliving the horror of past events as she sleeps. After she awakens, an unknown figure steps behind her and stabs her with an icepick to the temple. Thus begins the sequel that would introduce Jason Voorhees as one of the most notorious killers in American film history. The rest of the film mimics the original in that it is set at a camp right next to Crystal Lake, involves a group of teens bent on enjoying the carnal pleasures of the summer forest, and a stalking killer who dispatches the teens in many ways, but most often with a machete. The deaths all seem to revolve around sex, again because all the teens treat their camp counseling training session as a Club Med for adolescents. The killer is Jason, who never actually drowned as a child, but instead lived his life in the woods, saw his mother die, and now takes vengeance on campers for her death, just as she did for his supposed death. The film retains the strong Final Girl seen in Alice from the first film (despite her quick and undefended demise at the beginning of the sequel) in the character of Ginny (Amy

Steel). After Jason has killed everyone else at the camp, Ginny stumbles across his small home in the woods and the shrine that Jason has made to his mother, which includes her sweater and head. Ginny shows a strong identification with Mrs. Voorhees earlier in the film (a point I will return to below), and ends up donning her sweater. Cornered, she commands Jason to stop, tells him that she is his mother, and that he has done enough to avenge her. After much struggling in which Ginny's boyfriend, Paul, tries to save her but fails, the couple escapes briefly to safety. Jason follows them, of course, and the last we see of the attack is him crashing through a window to tackle Ginny while Paul is at the door waiting to ambush the assailant. After a fade to white, we see Ginny on a gurney being loaded into an ambulance, calling for Paul. When no one answers her question of where Paul is, it is implied that he did not survive. How Paul died and Ginny survived is unknown, but clearly the Final Girl was the victor, a point that highlights her primacy in the story. The film then cuts to a slowly zooming tracking shot of Mrs. Voorhees' head, surrounded by candles, in Jason's shrine; it leaves us with the memory of the mother.

The 2009 remake, directed by Marcus Nispel, much more closely follows the plot of *Part 2*, in that Jason is the killer and not his mother. The film actually has three parts, perhaps best described as a foreword, an introduction, and the main portion of the film. The foreword is less than two minutes and shows broken action between blinding lightning strikes and solid black title screens. We meet a young woman running through the woods from an older woman. The woman tells the girl to stop fighting, and that her death will be easier than those of the others (campers, we presume – but only if we have seen the original film) and of Jason (words taken from the original Mrs.

Voorhees in *Friday*). The girl then calls her a bitch and decapitates her. As the brief scene ends, we see a young, physically handicapped boy venture out from the woods, and take a locket from the ground containing his own picture and that of his now-dead mother. This is a reimagining of the final moments of the original 1980 *Friday*, and apparently takes place roughly twenty years before the present day.

The introduction moves us forward in time to the present day (technically six weeks before the present day) where we are met by five teens wandering through the woods in search of a rumored marijuana field. This search typifies the idyllic nature of a pastoral setting, where anti-drug laws don't reach out from the city and the 1960s mantra of 'sex, drugs, and rock'n'roll' is the group's way of life; little do the characters know that the pastoral is no longer peaceful, a trend started in *Massacre*. Over the next few minutes of film (which details the first night of the group in the woods), all the characters are brutally slaughtered, and the scene ends on a POV shot from Whitney Miller's (Amanda Righetti) position on the ground, just as Jason's machete is about to contact her head, at which point the screen goes black.

With Whitney presumed dead and Jason clearly defined as the killer, the main body of the film finally begins. We are introduced to a group of friends, piled in to a Cadillac Escalade, stocking up on provisions for a week's retreat at the driver's (Trent) family summer home. Trent (Travis Van Winkle) is clearly well to do, driving his companions to his family's retreat with an air of forced condescension mixed with indignation at their lack of respect for his family's possessions. Among the group is Trent's girlfriend, Jenna (Danielle Panabaker). Unrelated to the group, we also meet Clay Miller, Whitney's (from the introduction) brother who is posting flyers and doing

his best to try to track down his sister, who has been missing for six weeks. At a small roadside gas station Clay meets the group when Trent heckles Clay for taking too much time with the gas station's attendant. The two groups leave the small gas station separately, but end up coming together in the woods as they both venture around Crystal Lake. Jason begins to kill the teens in various ways, leaving Jenna and Clay to fend for themselves. They eventually find Jason's underground home and, surprisingly, Whitney, Clay's sister. Jenna ends up dying and, in a finale like *Part 2*, Whitney uses the locket of Jason's mother to command him to stop, giving Clay enough time to strike a critical blow. The siblings then work together to finally send Jason headfirst into a massive wood chipper.

Motherhood

While motherhood is treated with ambivalence in the two original *Fridays*, it is a driving presence in both. The remake, however, does its best to erase motherhood's presence, and only includes nods to the institution in ways that are tied directly to masculinity, and the healing of men's loss. The fact the original film is not 'about' masculinity, especially when compared to *Halloween* or *Chainsaw*, is something that very clearly sets it apart; that the institution of motherhood becomes the focus of *Friday*, and consequently *Part 2*, also sets them apart from other slashers. These two films, coming fresh out of the 1970s and continuing the trends developed in horror films during that post-Vietnam era confront us with a dynamic mother and force us to engage her in ways rarely seen in film. Mrs. Voorhees' character can be read as a defining moment in cinema history in which a mother is able to tell us her story, show us her story, and impose her will on the story. Her agency is simultaneously undercut, though,

as it becomes clear that Mrs. Voorhees' story becomes a way to highlight that otherwise good characteristics can be taken too far. In this case, Mrs. Voorhees' drive to protect her son leads to her killing young women and men who had nothing to do with Jason's supposed death.

Mrs. Voorhees is intricately linked to the Final Girl of each of the original films in a move that toys with the constantly problematic inter-generational relationships of women with their mothers seen throughout Hollywood history.² I will return to the details of Ginny in *Part 2* below, but the connections between Alice and Mrs. Voorhees are important to understanding the second film. In the first film, Mrs. Voorhees reveals her identity to Alice and it is through this relationship that we hear the older woman's story and are asked to sympathize with her position. Whether we are able to sympathize with her or not is difficult to say. After all, as an audience culturally conditioned to blame the mother, it is hard to sympathize with a woman who is chasing people through the woods with a machete while mimicking the voice of her dead son as 'he' tells her to kill people. But there is a pleading in Mrs. Voorhees' voice that asks for another listen, quite literally. Her drive for revenge is an extension of her drive to protect her son. It is implied from her monologue that Jason was mentally and/or physically handicapped, and that her trust in the camp to protect him was violated. Her anger stems – at least partly – from that violation of her trust, and in turn she has taken it upon herself to violate the role of mother that shifts her from the giver of life to the taker. By this point in the film, the audience is sutured with Alice and her sympathy for the story comes through the terror that she feels. This Final Girl has been chosen as the key to revealing Mrs. Voorhees' pain, both as a surrogate for the audience (as we are re-sutured to

Alice's point of view through the final few minutes of the film), but also as a daughter figure. Mrs. Voorhees senses a sympathetic ear in the young girl and, though hell bent on killing her, still feels the need to explain herself.

In Mrs. Voorhees's explanation, there an accusatory tone stemming from her anger, but also one of confession, and one must wonder if at least part of her speech is not motivated by guilt for having failed as a mother. With Jason having died in the mid 1950's, Mrs. Voorhees would have raised her son under the strict expectations of the time. Again, Mrs. Cleaver from *Leave it to Beaver* comes to mind as the contemporary media's example of a perfect mother. And we all know Mrs. Cleaver never sent her sons to a summer camp where they were attended to poorly by horny teens, and the Beaver never drowned because of his camp counselors' lust. It seems then, that part of the twenty year mission to which Mrs. Voorhees dedicates her life is caused, at least in part, by her adoption of culturally imposed guilt of having failed Jason as a mother. Even though she was not at the camp when he died, and could have done nothing personally to save his life, the strain of culturally accepted motherhood is such that she is always already to blame for anything that might happen to the child. It is in her speech then that we hear not only a justification for her actions, but also a confession for her inability to act, and her inability to be the mother that she felt was expected to be. The confession to Alice becomes a point in the film in which the relationship between mother and (surrogate) daughter crystallizes the duality of sympathy and mistrust. In the end, of course, Alice is forced to choose her own life, or that of the mother. As typically happens to mothers, the younger generation punishes them for

overstepping the bounds of decency, and so Alice must ignore the brief moment of sympathy she feels as she turns Mrs. Voorhees' own machete against her.

Utilizing the term 'the bounds of decency' in regards to the generational punishment of mothers is in many ways to use a pun where it is scarcely proper to do so. The idea of boundaries is of course close to scholarship on motherhood, with a history from Freud through Lacan, to Julia Kristeva's work on the boundaries of the body, the self, and death as perhaps the most prominent examples.³ Bound by social stricture, the mother's body is repressed and made taboo, especially in industrialized countries shaped by puritanism, with both sexuality and breastfeeding falling outside the socially defined boundaries of decency. With this in mind, we must consider how Mrs. Voorhees' drive to protect Jason (or at least his memory) is also an overstepping of boundaries, in which she is unable to define (her)self and other, as indicated by the fact that she mimics his voice in a dialogue sequence) and the past (the fact that he is dead). In short, her love is too much. We also get a sense of her over-wrought connection with Jason while he was still alive in her insistence that he was a special boy who needed constant attention. If Jason had lived, there is a feeling that he may have ended up like *Psycho*'s (1960) Norman Bates, tangled up in a life too closely tied to his mother's watchful eye. The socially normalized dichotomy which strips mothers of desire (sexual or otherwise) and safely compartmentalizes their bodies from social interaction that borders on the unacceptable (i.e. any in which the body or its fluids might come in contact with others), manifests itself in Mrs. Voorhees in a twisted and macabre expression whereby she kills to fulfill repressed desires. Bound by social strictures of motherhood yet without a child to care for, Mrs. Voorhees' actions can be seen as a

dismantling of the boundaries of self and death: she is unable separate from her son and unable to allow younger generations move forward.⁴

Friday the 13th also employs camera work that does more to visually suture the audience to a mother than most films. For example, every victim that is seen throughout the film is shot, for at least part of the time they are stalked, from a POV angle of the killer. When that killer eventually turns out to be Mrs. Voorhees, we realize that we have been identifying with her throughout the whole film. While many have pointed out that slashers do nothing but titillate teenage boys by allowing them to live vicariously through the eyes of a male killer, *Friday* in fact does the exact opposite, allowing for a psychological and emotional identifications that the audience is unprepared for, both because of the surprise nature of film's revelation of Mrs. Voorhees, and because historically speaking, we are not prepared by film to identify with women, let alone mothers.⁵ Cinematically, then, Mrs. Voorhees is a rare mother, given the power of sight and empowered with the suturing of the audience to her perspective.

So too, Alice; by the end of the film, it is she who first comes face-to-face with the woman who has terrorized her summer holiday, and in doing so reveals Mrs. Voorhees to the audience. If it were not for Alice, and the camera work that shifts our identification to her from Mrs. Voorhees, we would not know the identity of the killer. This is taken to its extreme in the final moments of the chase, when we see Alice kill her attacker from Alice's point of view. By the end of the film, then, Mrs. Voorhees and Alice are victims of the ambivalence that surrounds women, both mothers and Final Girls alike. They both are given the power of sight,⁶ a power that allows for audience identification, but they are also figures linked to negative social constructions. This

duality makes it clear that, even in a film era that seems more willing to place women in roles that highlight strength, including dynamic mothers and Final Girls, female characters are still defined against long-standing cultural tropes. Alice is a stand-in for all her sexually-liberated friends who have been methodically killed throughout the film, and Mrs. Voorhees is the mother whose love goes too far, and whose instinct to protect drives her to kill, even 20 years after she believes her son has died. Especially for Mrs. Voorhees, though she is given agency, she is still defined by traditions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ motherhood. Despite the drawbacks to this ambivalence, though, these post-Vietnam era women are still given a level of sight (and insight) in the filmic world that outshines anything seen in the 2009 remake, where the only POV shot is of a helpless Whitney on the ground, about to be decapitated by Jason. I will return to Whitney and the clear lack of identification with Mrs. Voorhees later, but suffice it to say here that none of the connections between Alice and the mother are present in the 2009 film.

The cinematic trends detailed above are echoed in the narrative choices for both of the original films whereby Mrs. Voorhees has a voice to tell her story. As noted in the plot summaries, the final chase scene for *Friday* begins with Mrs. Voorhees explaining to Alice who Jason was, who she is, and why she is bent on killing any counselor that comes to Camp Crystal Lake. This is mirrored in *Part 2* when the film opens with nearly all of the final moments of *Friday* replayed in flashback, simultaneously catching the viewer up on the plot of the original film, and giving voice, once again, to the distraught mother. Thus, much like the POV cinematography seen in the original *Friday*, which gives Mrs. Voorhees knowledge through sight, and power

through viewer identification, her speech gives her power in both original films in that she gets to tell her story and be heard by the audience. And even though only the audience gets to actually hear her words repeated at the beginning of the film, Ginny identifies with the story of Mrs. Voorhees that she hears and gives the dead mother a voice once more when she says, 'Isn't that what her [Mrs. Voorhees'] revenge was all about? Her sense of loss – her rage at what she thought happened? Her love for him [Jason]?'⁷ Thus in both films, characters and audience alike are given the opportunity to identify with Mrs. Voorhees's story through her own words. This identification, however, is offset by the fact that story has become the foundation for a life's work based on delusion and murder. Mrs. Voorhees' story is interspersed with her mimicking of her dead son's voice in a high-pitched ventriloquist act during which she says things like, 'Kill her, Mommy, kill her!' Thus, a protective mother, longing for her son and working to be understood through her story, is turned into a corrupt parody of motherhood.⁸ In a fun-house-mirror sort of way, this voice mimicry is reminiscent of Norman Bates' giving voice to his deceased mother in *Psycho*, another film about an overbearing mother whose son kills to please her ghost. But even in this comparison, it is unfair to forget that while Mrs. Voorhees may suffer similar delusions as Norman, in *Friday* it is the mother who has her own voice, unlike Mrs. Bates who is only given a voice through her son. And even when, in *Part 2*, the story is picked up by Ginny, it is still told by a woman and another surrogate daughter figure.

Historically in Hollywood film, the generational divide between mothers and daughters (or mother- and daughter-figures) has been hard to bridge. We need only to think about *Carrie* (1976), *Mildred Pierce* (1945), or *Imitation of Life* (1934 or 1959) to

realize the extremes that all-too-often characterize inter-generational female relationships on film. Whether a ‘women’s weepy’ like the latter three examples, or a horror film like *Carrie*, it is easy to see a trend that defines a huge percentage of Hollywood films that depict mother-daughter relationships. In these films, well-meaning (but often overbearing) mothers drive their children to hate them. The daughters react by lashing out, often by engaging in social acts that are directly contrary to their mothers’ wishes. In *Carrie*, Carrie goes to the prom; in *Mildred Pierce*, Laurel seeks her mother’s lover as her own; and in *Imitation*, Peola (1934)/Sarah Jane (1959) passes as white. These social moves defy their respective mothers and drive a wedge between the generations. In the end, the mothers can only redeem themselves in one way – they must be removed from their daughters’ lives. For Mildred, this means that she ‘simply’ relinquishes her love life, her daughter, and her desire to own a successful business; for the other mothers, it means that they die.⁹ But as mentioned above, the *Friday the 13th* films complicate this trend of distancing female generations. *Part 2* takes the ambivalence seen in the identification between Alice and Mrs. Voorhees in the original film a step further, directly challenging the generational gap by highlighting Ginny’s identification with Mrs. Voorhees. This is verbally illustrated when she makes it clear to two of the young men at the camp that they are out of line when simply dismissing the fabled actions of Mrs. Voorhees as crazy. Instead, as mentioned above, she points out that the love of a mother is not, in fact, crazy, no matter to what extreme it might push her behavior. This sympathy bridges the gap between the two generations, and later in the movie, she truly embodies the connection to the dead mother when, after stumbling upon Jason’s cabin, she takes Mrs. Voorhees’ sweater off the shrine and puts

it on. She then pulls her hair back to further mimic the dead woman's appearance. Once her physical transformation is complete, Ginny turns to face Jason, and uses the power that his mother holds over him. Even though this ruse is motivated by a ploy for survival, the visual similarity is as striking to the audience as it is to Jason. If the first film asks us to read between the lines and quickly sense Alice's sympathies for the mother before being forced to defend herself, *Part 2* explicitly demands respect for Mrs. Voorhees through visual cues and Ginny's clearly stated sympathy for the older woman. Because we identify with Ginny as the Final Girl, the empowering status of her character gives credence to the dead mother's pain, highlighting a rare inter-generational bond between the two women.

The physical likeness displayed between Ginny and Mrs. Voorhees in *Part 2* is mirrored in the 2009 remake, but that is where the connection between Whitney and the dead mother ends. There is no sympathy or emotional connection shared between the generations. After all, Whitney has voiced no understanding of Mrs. Voorhees' supposed actions, nor does she even realize her physical similarity to the woman herself. Instead, her boyfriend sees the resemblance in a locket they find together in the Camp's old cabin, and suggests that Whitney keep the trinket simply as a farce. Similarly, Jason seems to recognize their similarity because he does not kill her, and instead keeps her prisoner. While these plot changes clearly suggest a reduced lack of narrative initiative on Whitney's behalf, they also indicate that the only reason that Whitney finally embraces the power that Jason's mother still holds over him is simply for survival, not because she identifies with the woman or the actions that both got her killed and created the monster that is Jason Voorhees. While intergenerational

identification and sympathy were strained throughout the 1970s second wave of feminism, as many women blamed their mothers for bequeathing them troubled gender politics, the dialogue surrounding this generational interaction was abundant and was typified in the original films' mother/daughter dialogue between Mrs. Voorhees and Alice/Ginny. While these interactions are fraught with violence, fear, and anger, they show concern for female characters' placement in relation to the narrative and to each other. In the remake, this is gone. Instead, the post-9/11 film is concerned only with hinting at a legend of crazy woman and showing how distant the younger generation is from her; Whitney may look similar, but even the younger girl does not identify this relationship, and there is certainly no sympathy or understanding because there is no Mrs. Voorhees with whom to sympathize.

The remake puts forth no effort to guide the audience to sympathize with the mother. In fact, the 'prologue' reenacts the detrimental post-feminism that is a focus of this project: It makes a brief nod to the past, showing that indeed there was a mother who was angry about her son, but the context of her anger is lost, and it really is of no interest anyway, because a man is telling her story, and the future stories will be about men. So too, post-feminism's inherent dismissal of the importance of feminism; after all, feminism is a dated thing that came and went, did what it could, and is no longer necessary. To begin with, Mrs. Voorhees is given almost no screen time at all. The twenty-minute chase scene that begins the 1980 film (and is replayed in the 1981 sequel) is cut to a mere few minutes in the remake. The mother's explanations are cut to only a few sentences and it becomes clear that, as the rest of the film has nothing to do with her, the foreword portion is only there to give a brief nod to the original film, and

to give the audience a heads up that the film is not a direct remake of that original film. Furthermore, the girl who beheads the mother in the remake has no sympathy for her antagonist. Instead, she says nothing throughout the short scene and simply beheads her attacker before running off into the woods. Thus, with limited dialogue and time, the audience sees Mrs. Voorhees as nothing other than an insane woman chasing a young girl through the woods, furthering a trope in popular culture to portray women, especially older women with any desire, as crazy.¹⁰ In fact, if a viewer had not seen the 1980 film, I am not sure that the opening few minutes would even make sense until Wade mentions the 'legend' later. When we do finally get the story from Wade, the characterization of Mrs. Voorhees (she is actually nameless – yet another erasure of her identity – but I will call her such out of respect) as a mad woman continues. And so here, much like in *Psycho*, a male character gives voice to the supposedly insane mother who has taken her duties too far. The film bestows on Wade the power of voice denied to Mrs. Voorhees, and unlike Alice and Ginny who hear and/or understand the woman and her motivations, the characters in the remake dismiss her as either a legend, or as someone who was tied to a different Crystal Lake. Either she does not exist at all, or if she does she is unrelated to them. In any case, though, the voice of the mother is disregarded for both characters and audience, effectively removing any chance for either one to sympathize with her.

If the original films are complicated in their treatment of the mother, as explicated above, the remake seems terrified of her and does everything it can to remove motherhood. While none of the films knows how to deal with the mother in a way that does not put in her a place of blame in some way, at least the original films

make moves to give credence to her troubling position and even instill sympathy. The remake, on the other hand, is much more comfortable with an invisible mother. While her force is still felt throughout the film in myriad ways, it is always refracted through the actions of men. This is copacetic with the other remakes detailed in this project, and reflects the trends of the post 9/11 era in which traditional roles for women are highlighted amongst family healing and male control over narratives. But instead of placing the mother comfortably back into the home like in *Last House* or creating multiple grotesque mother figures to blame like in *Massacre*, *Friday the 13th* simply erases mothers from a diegesis originally based on the figure of the mother and allows men to fight in her name. This mirrors the drive to return to traditional gender roles seen in the 1950s whereby Rosie the Riveter was expected to roll down her shirt sleeves except while baking, and to build her biceps only by picking up the kids. But while this demand for tradition was unmasked at the time, much of our cultural machinery now is more subtle (of course, many cultural actors, including media and politician alike, are not so subtle now, either). But no matter the method that each of these movies picks, they uphold the post 9/11 and post-feminist drive toward erasing strong women, placing mothers and Final Girls alike in more traditional roles and standing in stark contrast to the films of the 1970s.

From Motherhood to Masculinity

2009's *Friday the 13th* is a story driven by the ghost of a dead mother. The film situates the psychically powerful figure of the dead mother as a looming specter that becomes an unspoken but driving motivation for the men in the film. But while the original two films highlight motherhood and the complicated ambivalence of the institution, the

remake does everything that it can to hide motherhood and emphasize sons. Both main characters, Jason Voorhees and Clay Miller, live under the shadow of their dead mothers, and it is their shared desire to replace these women with Whitney that provides the impetus for the film. It is also this search that defines the two men's masculinity, and implies a justification for the violence that they impose on each other – a violence that also provides the action for the film and the impetus for narrative progression. Thus, we see a combination that ties together the increased reliance on family melodrama seen in the remakes with the hyper-physicality of the violent male body that Yvonne Tasker in *Spectacular Bodies* (1993), Susan Jeffords in *Hard Bodies* (1994), and Mark Gallagher in 'I Married Rambo' (1999) have linked to 1980s action films (a genre which also uses the threat to family as an excuse for violence). This combination of melodrama and male-male violence in the slasher genre leads to a situation in which the final girl is converted into a would-be mother figure over which two men can fight, show off their bruised and broken bodies (physical representations of their emotions), and eventually judge each other's worth by who gets to claim their new mother figure. Implicit in the drive for a new mother is a constant balancing act for our culture: We need mothers to move forward as a society, but if the bond between mothers and sons is too strong, those sons will become ineffectual men. That is, they will be too attached, too emotional, and thereby, too effeminate like Norman Bates; or, in an extreme, they will come too close to Oedipus' crossing of the ultimate taboo. Clay, with his brooding emotions, and Jason, with his seething anger, both display different symptoms stemming from their loss that lie outside the stoicism traditionally linked to male emotional response. While the narrative highlights these men as physically controlling,

and places them at the center of the story, their emotional vulnerability belies their strength. The construction also allows us to blame the mother for the men's violence. Finally, by centering their quests around an absent mother, the film highlights that even in a society that often wishes mothers gone, they are always still a powerful influence over our lives.

In the second scene of the movie to include Clay Miller, he is pulled over by a local sheriff and we are introduced to the emotional turmoil that has characterized Clay's life for the past month and a half. We have already learned through an earlier scene that he is looking for Whitney, and that she has been missing for six weeks. In this scene, though, the sheriff reminds Clay that his men scoured every inch of the woods and interviewed all the local people in an attempt to find his sister. The sheriff is convinced that the Miller girl eloped with her boyfriend and that Clay should look elsewhere. Clay listens to the sheriff's words patiently and then tells him, and the audience, why the theory of elopement is impossible. It turns out that Whitney did not want to go on the trip, but that her mother insisted. Whitney was her mother's sole caregiver throughout her battle with cancer, and when Mrs. Miller died, Whitney did not come home for the funeral. Clay stakes his belief in his sister's disappearance being tied to foul play on that fact that she would never purposely leave their mother to die alone, much less miss the funeral. Besides introducing us to Clay's emotional pain, this scene also acts as a way of indicating that Clay feels a sense of guilt that he was not able to care for his mother the way his sister did. That we never hear why, or where he was while his sister was doing so, not only gives credence to the guilt he seems to feel, but also highlights the gendered division of emotion/action that typifies the film. It

seems clear from Clay's unexplained absence that Whitney was apparently more able to administer emotional support than he was. Now that both Whitney and his mother are gone, though, Clay is able to translate his emotional pain into action – he is able to transform feminine trait into a masculine one. This narrative move brilliantly hides the gendered boundaries of the characters' roles, and actually paints Clay as an emotionally available young man who is motivated by a sense of duty to family and a love for his sister and lost mother. But these personal demons are really just the impetus for the young man's call to action to find his sister and replace her as the next matriarch in his family.

The placement of Whitney as a mother is not just a goal of Clay's; Jason also sees the young girl as a possible replacement of the mother he lost as a young boy. The introduction of the film makes it clear that Whitney looks like the late Mrs. Voorhees. Her boyfriend sees the likeness first in the locket, a trinket that Whitney keeps with her. Additionally, Jason clearly sees the resemblance when he massacres all of Whitney's friends but saves her. Her salvation comes as a surprise to the viewer because the last time we see Whitney in the introduction she is sitting on the ground with Jason bearing down on her. The camera switches to a low-angle POV shot from her position just in time to see the hulking man raise his machete above his head and bring it down into the lens. We assume that she has met the same fate as the rest of her friends until we see her handcuffed in Jason's tunnel system later in the film. Clearly Jason sees the resemblance of this young girl to his dead mother, and is driven to keep her alive instead of kill her. This drive to preserve Whitney as the newest part of his collection of trinkets (camp counselors' whistles, old toys, and a decapitated head are among the

hundreds of relics that Jason keeps displayed around his cabin and tunnel system) is an indication of his desire to collect things to help make his living quarters a home.

Whitney, as surrogate mother, is the newest emotional anchor that Jason has found to add to his surroundings. She functions as a surrogate mother for both Jason and Clay, linking the two men as antagonist/protagonist and highlighting their struggle over her as the main focus of the film. Where the original films would highlight Whitney's struggle to outwit, out-scurry, and eventually outlive Jason, the new film becomes a pissing match between the two hulking men whereby the winner gets a new mother in Whitney.

The story line of Clay and Jason's mutual need for a surrogate mother both drives the story forward and also reveals the type of masculinity exemplified by these two main characters. While post-Vietnam masculinity often presented itself as intellectual and/or ineffectual in the original film, the post-9/11 male is virile, strong, active, and present. The violent, repeated fights between the two men (Clay getting knocked out, then coming back for another round, getting beaten again in the barn then coming back to finally hang Jason) typifies the kind of masculinity that Tasker, Jeffords, and Gallagher detail. These critics all discuss the trend in 1980s action films for white men to bare their massive muscles, be beaten and bruised by their enemies, and then find the strength to rise up once again and win the day. While the slasher monster has always had the ability to come back from unforgiving odds to attempt one more attack, the body of the killer was never put on display. Nor were the bulging muscles of the protagonist, since that character was the final girl. But with Clay Miller standing in as the main character in the new *Friday*, he is able to do battle with Jason and mimic the type of violent hyper-masculinity seen in the 80s action genre while

centering the action squarely on two men. It makes sense that this type of masculinity is highlighted in the 2009 *Friday* because in many ways, the post-9/11 films have a similar cultural project to the 1980s action films. Coming out of the post-Vietnam era in which America's world-image was cracking, and still battling the bitter ends of the Cold War, Reagan-era politics ushered in a sense that the country's image must be recuperated. The projection of the American male hero as tough, muscular, able, and violent fit well as a panacea for the dying hippie movement's softened masculinity. So too, the post-9/11 is in need of a revitalized American image whereby the threat of terrorism can be minimized through the re-strengthening of traditional roles. By borrowing the type of male hero normally tied to the action genre and transplanting him into horror, the control over the narrative, over the threat, over the family, and over the women in the story can accomplish the same cultural work as those action films did in 1980s.

The psychokiller of the classic slasher is also hyper-masculine, and thus the reformulation of the genre's characteristics in terms of his character could be seen as moot; but the killers in the classic films (Weasel and Krug; Leatherface, Hitchhiker, and the Cook; Michael Meyers) are not hyper-masculine in the same ways as Clay and Jason are in the 2009 *Friday*. Instead, the classic psychos are typified by their arrested development that manifests itself in a violence based squarely on the fact that their sexuality is flawed and diminished. They are overly violent as a mask for their diminished sexual bravado, and so one aspect of traditional masculinity is used to cover for the lack of another aspect. It is clear, however, in the new *Friday*, that while Jason may kill a number of teens right after they have sex as in the originals (teens are

punished for their sexual exploits), he does not actually kill any of them *because* they are having sex (unlike Mrs. Voorhees in the first film). Instead, Jason kills indiscriminately as a coping mechanism for his grief, and happens to find a surrogate mother along the way. Likewise, Clay throws himself headlong into the search and subsequent battle for his sister as a way of coping for the loss of his mother, and eventually regains a motherly figure in the recovery of Whitney. After all, in the final scene of the film Whitney turns to Jason and holds out the locket photo of his dead mother and orders him to stop. This talisman transforms her into the mother figure for both men: for Jason she is the physical reincarnation of his mother ordering him to stop his rampage; for Clay, she is the head of the family there to comfort him in his emotional pain. Thus, the men's violence comes from a different place than that of the original films' killers, and situates their struggle in the world of maternal loss, not sexual frustration.

This turn to melodrama is a thread that runs through all of the remakes that this project has detailed. From the complete rewrite of *Last House* and the family narrative added to *Massacre*, to the unspoken motherhood fixation in *Friday*, it is clear that the 2000s are interested in creating a social milieu based on familial obligations. This shift is not in and of itself a bad thing; but, as detailed throughout this project, the way in which all of the films reintroduce melodrama into the films revolves around placing women in traditional and/or subservient roles, while highlighting men's struggle to define themselves against the films' antagonists. The shift is also ironic in that melodrama is almost always associated with a focus on women. Whether dealing with the emotional weight of the daily experience of traditional roles, including motherhood,

or the struggle of breaking out of those roles and confronting misogynistic social structures, melodramas are deeply anchored in the lives of women. Mulvey details in 'Notes on Sirk and Melodrama', male melodrama is not completely unheard of;¹¹ but, she goes on to explain that in these narratives, 'after a dramatic rendering of women's frustrations' it is revealed that 'The phallogentric, castration-based, more misogynistic fantasies of patriarchal culture [including attempting to control the public emotions of women] are here in contradiction with the ideology of the family, and in melodrama are sacrificed' (in Gledhill 76). This model, in which male emotional turmoil is based on Oedipal fears that drive men to soften their more aggressive gendered behaviors in favor of securing a stable wife and family sits in contrast to Clay and Jason's drive. Instead, these men (and Clay in particular) increase their aggressiveness throughout the film in a drive not to find a suitable substitute for their mothers in a new lover, but instead to actually regain their lost mothers. This absence of a romantic pairing hits home particularly hard when Jenna is killed near the end of the movie. That she left Trent for Clay, and that Clay opens up emotionally to her, are clear cues that she is the heteronormative love interest that appears in nearly every Hollywood film. With her death, the audience is more shocked than Clay. After all, while a new girlfriend may have been nice, his true goal was his sister (as surrogate mother). It is a testament to our country's difficulty with motherhood that even in a time when a shift to traditional roles is evident, a heterosexual coupling is not the end goal of this film. Instead, a complicated drama revolving around masculinity, loss, and motherhood becomes the central focus. I believe this indicates not only the need for healing that I have touched on before, but also highlights an underlying inability to cope with the shock of 9/11. In

other words, while the need for healing is obvious, the ability to do so is harder to achieve. If Clay is a surrogate for a nation struggling to comprehend trauma, what we see is a young man literally running back to his mommy.

That these new horror films heighten melodrama by highlighting male emotional pain seems to be yet one more way in which the 2000s typify post-feminist eradication of women, their stories, and examples of their strength. These highlighted male characters have been, for the most part, active participants in moving the narratives forward, both as protagonists and antagonists. This active masculinity is also defined by comparative degrees of whiteness, but has not included any other racial categories. This changes in *Friday*, with the introduction of the first non-white characters in any of the remakes covered so far. Indeed, it would seem that, as has often been the case with horror, the remakes of the classic slashers portray a world in which only whites have something to fear – something to lose – by coming face to face with a less-than-white enemy. This leaves a landscape in which the family melodrama of the slasher world is defined not (just) by men, but by *white* men.

Race

The racial interplay in the remake of *Friday* is, on one hand, old hat. It is a replay of the two types of whiteness, defined by urban and rural, that I discussed in relation to *Massacre*. Whitney and her friends, Clay, and especially Jenna and Trent's group are from the city; they bring fancy cars and GPS units into the woods, and Trent's family's cabin is more a mansion in the style of a cabin, and offers the group living conditions far above 'roughing it.' In fact, one of Trent's friends comments on the family's tool shed by exclaiming that poor people would call the shed a house. Rich,

white, and suburban nearly always define the victims of the slasher world, and *Friday* makes it clear to the viewer that Trent's entitled snobbishness is unacceptable and deserving of punishment. Like so many other films (*Massacre*, *The Hills Have Eyes* [1977], *Wrong Turn* [2003] to name a few) the White male carries with him into the country a privilege defined not just by money, but also by an entitlement of entry. In *Massacre*, Jerry and Kirk enter the farmhouse where they do not belong; in *Hills*, Bob enters the California desert; in *Wrong Turn*, a film that I will return to in the conclusion, the genre trope continues on to this day when Chris (Desmond Harrington) enters a house after knocking and receiving no answer (just like Kirk in *Massacre*). In *Friday* this sense of entitlement leads to the death of Whitney's boyfriend after he enters the old Camp Crystal Lake cabin that Jason uses as a home. It also leads to all the kids in the film entering the woods with a sense of belonging, not thinking that they may not be wanted. Even Clay is nearly attacked by locals on two separate occasions. First, he walks up behind a local redneck using a wood chipper and startles the dirty, few-toothed worker, and is given a verbal thrashing about sneaking up on people while being threatened with a bludgeoning. Later, an elderly woman in a small, dirty, cluttered house in the woods sets her dog on Clay when he tries to stuff a flyer for his missing sister in her door after knocking does nothing to gain the woman's attention or interest. For all his pitiful emotions, Clay is the entitled white city boy who thinks he can go where he pleases, demand an audience when he pleases, and garner respect from whom he pleases. Jason, on the other hand, is skilled in archery and hunts with a machete; he is dirty and lives in tunnels under the ground; he is physically disfigured, yet hulking in size and powerful beyond compare. Like the woman who sets her dog on

Clay and the local worker (who both have deep southern drawls – an aural marker of their redneckness) Jason lives in small, cluttered spaces. His home space is pushed to the extreme, made of a series of tunnels, overflowing with the detritus of broken lives and lost futures; these tunnels move Jason from the redneck-as-less-than-white-antagonist to a borderline animalistic presence, further minimizing his humanity and allowing for the righteous whiteness of city masculinity to define the norm against which all others can be defined.

On the other hand, the racial makeup of the new film includes two non-white characters. Trent's two friends, Chewie (Aaron Yoo) who is Asian and Lawrence (Arlen Escarpeta) who is Black, are brought into the story for what seems like no other reason than because the production crew thought it might be a good idea to have some non-White characters. This feeling is fostered by the fact that their place (I use the singular here on purpose) in the film is treated awkwardly. They are treated as a singular unit throughout, a choice that makes their non-white presence seem as though it must be contained. The two friends come as a package unit of 'diversity' among their sea of White friends.

Despite their connection to each other, the treatment of the two young men is very different. Lawrence's race is immediately brought to attention. As the group piles out of Trent's Cadillac Escalade in the parking lot of a small gas-station, Trent asks (tells?) Lawrence that if the latter pumps the gas, he will pay. Lawrence retorts that it is bad form to ask the only Black guy in the group to pump the gas. Trent, taken aback, turns to another friend and offers to give him the money while he pumps, instead. Lawrence, free from his obligation to fill the gas tank, takes out his phone and

complains that he has no service, a hindrance to his expected phone call regarding his music production career. One of the girls asks him if the record he is producing is rap, to which Lawrence asks why just because he is Black he has to produce a rap album. Again, the girl is taken aback by being called out for her (what seems to be) unintentional racism, and asks him what kind of record it is. He responds, with a smile on his face: 'Rap.' The film is not shy about highlighting Lawrence as the non-white friend, defining his first two interactions by his race alone. In fact, it is as though the writers of the film enjoy playing with W.E.B. DuBois's idea of double consciousness – whereby people of color must always view themselves as both American *and* Black, two irreconcilable identities – in an attempt at 'post-racial', sarcastic, too-hip-for-derision racial obviousness. If the only Black character in the film is savvy in using his awareness of occupying a position of difference to his advantage in clever and comical ways, then perhaps his difference as outsider is not defined by racism. Just like in the rhetoric of post-feminism that allows for dismissal of misogyny via irony or sarcasm, so too does *Friday* attempt to downplay the inherent racism of Lawrence's tokenism through clever quips. Those quips, though, are based on racist assumptions that Lawrence himself presents, displaying his attendance to double consciousness and his awareness of his position of difference.

But if Lawrence is overly identified as Black, Chewie's race is almost completely forgotten in the dialogue. Instead, while putting nothing in words that would give recognition to his status as a racial outsider amongst his peers, subtle interactions allude to racial difference. The first of these is the simple fact that he and Lawrence comprise a couple aligned through racial difference, as opposed to the heterosexual

couples of all the white characters. (The only character who does not comprise part of a heterosexual pair is Wade in the introduction portion; Wade is characterized as a nerd and seemingly uninterested in sex, which paints him as an outsider for the few minutes of screen time that he is alive.) The two non-white characters bond over their love of marijuana and the specialty bong that Chewie brought to the vacation home. Together they devise a plan to help Chewie work up the courage to talk to Bree. They play beer pong on the same team. And when Chewie does not return from the work shed, Lawrence arms himself with a wok-as-shield (the wok perhaps representing a subtle joke about Chewie's race) and a fireplace poker to go save his friend, even though he knows there is a killer on the loose. While the homoerotics are subtler than in buddy films, these two non-white characters are the sincerest friends in the film, and seemingly the only two in the group who truly enjoy each other's company. The fact that they are the only two non-white characters gives the effect that at least one reason why they are so close is precisely because out of all of their friends, they are the only two to stand out based on race. Furthermore, if we consider race to be, as Richard Dyer notes in *White*, a constant comparison between 'white' and 'others', Chewie can be seen to stand out further. He is unsuccessful when he tries to talk to Bree, and ends up falling over and breaking a family heirloom table in Trent's house. This is opposite of Trent, the blond-haired/blue-eyed man who comes on vacation dating Jenna, but ends up sleeping with Bree after she seduces him. Comparatively, not only is Trent taller, more muscular, and phenotypically white, but he is also successful in attracting two women. Trent's friend Nolan looks just like Trent, thus making Chewie (and Lawrence) stand out even more based on their races. And Chewie's tripping over the table is only one

instance of his character's role as the buffoon. Reminiscent of Andy Rooney's Mr. Yukioshi in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, Chewie is the slapstick comic relief (most of which falls completely flat). He drinks warm beer out of a dirty old shoe in a game of beer pong. He tumbles out of the back of Trent's SUV after being forced to sit in the cargo area between the suitcases and the tail gate, exclaiming, 'Babies have more room in the womb!' He also manages to break a lamp in the tool shed when he finds a hockey stick and begins to play with it. This comes after he muses that hockey is a man's game, with his inability to control the stick making it clear that he is not really a man. Adding these episodes to his strike-out with Bree makes the message clear: Chewie is an outsider to Trent and Nolan's whiteness, not masculine, and a laughing stock, relegated to his friendship with the only other non-white character in the group. 2009s *Friday the 13th* tries to retain some of horror's subversive/progressive origins by including some of the few non-white main roles seen in the genre, but fails to make these characters anything but straw men which the audience can compare to the white characters.

Conclusions

The choice to make Jason the antagonist in the remake of *Friday* is not surprising. After all, even since the original sequels of all the classic slashers, the killer has been the highlighted character, gathering a cult following that built with every film's release. This is true from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre II* (Hooper 1986) to the myriad sequels of *Friday the 13th* and *Halloween*. But the choice to eschew Mrs. Voorhees is also not surprising given the trends seen across the board in the remakes of the classic 1970s films. These films erase female characters' agency and narrative control, increase the focus on men and their recuperation within the family unit, and

move toward an overall conservatism that dismisses the nods toward feminism found in the originals. Gone is the camera work that sutures the audience to the female characters. Lost is the rare understanding and compassion between women of different generations. So few films display a female psycho killer, and instead place women's destructive power in a son or husband who they have scared into being a killer instead of picking up a weapon themselves. The original *Friday* took up this challenge, and gave Mrs. Voorhees a machete, a story, and a voice. But the remake is too scared of the power of the mother, and dispatches her within the first two minutes. Instead, the ghost of the mother is relegated to a psychic mechanism that motivates Jason and Clay, and gives her story a voice only through a male character that dismisses her motivations.

Notes

¹ This theme of the absent mother also being to blame is prominent in Wes Craven's 1996 remake of every slasher ever made, *Scream*, in which a deceased mother is blamed for making a killer out of one young man, and casting a shadow of death over her daughter's life. I will return to this in more detail in the conclusion to this project.

² Again we can return to the classic melodramas that have been the basis of so much excellent scholarship by Mulvey, Doane, Linda Williams, and Elsaesser: *Imitation of Life* (Stahl 1934 or Sirk 1959, despite their differing plots), *Stella Dallas* (Vidor 1937), *Mildred Pierce* (Curtiz 1945), and *All That Heaven Allows* (1955).

³ See Jacques Lacan's *Écrits* (1970) Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* (1980).

⁴ Mrs. Voorhees' path is similar to that of Mrs. Collingwood from the original *Last House* in that the death of the child invites a change of tack for the expression of passion, from that of the heavy stricture of motherhood focused on the child, family, and home, to an unleashed rage culminating in death.

⁵ Carol Clover makes much of the cross-gender identification seen in most slashers in *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, navigating psychoanalytic terrain to detail the ways in which men must shift their psycho-sexual alliance from an identification with the male killer (e.g. the POV shots in *Halloween*) to an identification with the Final Girl as she fights back against her would-be killer. She does not, however, consider the way that this film simply surprises the audience, who assumes the killer's sex, with a female killer, forcing any identifications and assumptions to be complicated.

⁶ Laura Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* famously ties the power of sight to the male gaze of classic cinema, making the act of looking a powerful signifier of male authority. When women have this power, then, it makes for a startling moment in which traditional gender dynamics are challenged as women take over the act that so often defines male subjects.

⁷ The fact that Ginny brings up Mrs. Voorhees' rage is just one more example of a female taboo being broken in these films, as no matter how emotional women are traditionally said to be, anger is one emotion that is expected to be suppressed. As Mrs. Voorhees demonstrates, anger is often linked to action, either as an outlet or a solution, and as action has been a traditionally masculine endeavor it makes sense that it has also been one of the most traditionally unladylike emotions.

⁸ The parody of this scene extends to the falsetto voice, in which the mother grotesquely embodies the son-as-castrato, forever desexualizing him as a prepubescent child.

⁹ For comprehensive discussions of these and other classic melodramas and the mothers in them, see Christine Gledhill's (editor) *Home is Where the Heart Is* (1987), especially the editor's own essay and those by Christian, E. Ann, David Rodowick, Mary Ann Doane, Linda Williams, and Tania Modleski.

¹⁰ Mrs. Bates (*Psycho* 1960) falls into this category, as do Stella Dallas, and Cary Scott (*All That Heaven Allows* 1955).

¹¹ See Linda Williams's "Melodrama Revised" for her important discussion of male melodrama, especially in context of a broad understanding of melodrama as underlying most American storytelling.

CHAPTER V

MONEY, MISOGYNY, AND FAILED MOTHERHOOD:

HALLOWEEN AND HALLOWEEN II

The unprecedented success in 1974 of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* was a watershed moment for independent films and horror films alike. Up until that point, only George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) had successfully represented both of those categories in a way that made significant and widespread cultural impact. In 1978, John Carpenter and Debra Hill wrote *Halloween* and took the independent horror model to yet another new high, turning a \$325,000 budget into a \$47,000,000 domestic box office run, with an additional \$23,000,000 from international box offices (www.the-numbers.com). The sequel, *Halloween II* (1981) was also written by Carpenter and Hill, and turned a \$2,500,000 studio budget (the movie was signed by Universal) into a \$25,500,000 box office run (www.the-numbers.com). While not as successful as the original, the support for the second film would cement the *Halloween* series as a cash cow for the horror industry, eventually prompting a total of seven sequels, and a remake of each of the two original films, both made by Rob Zombie (2007 and 2009, respectively). Despite the relatively short time between the original film and its sequel, the move from independent film to studio film, and the move from a true 1970s aesthetic to one more representative of the burgeoning 80s, is clear in *Halloween II*. That is, a shift from a post-Vietnam era sensibility to a reactionary conservatism seen in the 1980s Reagan era that I noted in previous chapters is discernable in the two movies¹; however, the second film is still predominantly rooted in the trends that ground the argument of this project. I will address specific aspects of

the original films later, but for now it is important to note that for a genre like horror, often a bigger budget is not a blessing. Indeed, as Geoff King notes in *American Independent Cinema* (2005), the pressure to recover the costs of a larger budget from studios is often at odds with films that push the limits in terms of social acceptance. In other words, films must play it safe when playing with larger sums of money, and therefore do not test boundaries in ways that independent films do. Still, the two films showed an unprecedented success in terms of recovered revenue and popularity despite their grisly subject matter.

The original films' production is also important in ways not quantifiable by box office records. The freedom found when small budgets need little in return is mirrored when directors, producers, and actors are largely unknown. At the time, writer/director/producer John Carpenter was little known, with only two unpopular feature-length directorial jobs under his belt. For writer/producer Debra Hill, *Halloween* marked her first foray into film. The film's female lead, Jamie Lee Curtis, had done some TV work, but *Halloween* was her big screen debut. In fact the only name or face that anyone who went to see *Halloween* would have had a chance of recognizing (unless they knew Curtis from some of her TV roles) was that of Donald Pleasence, a British character actor who already had nearly 139 film and TV credits by the time *Halloween* was released. But even that recognition was not a given for an American audience. In short, what this means is that *Halloween* was created, marketed, and viewed with only the slightest hint of star texts attached to it. As such, and combined with the small budget, the film could break free from standard Hollywood expectations. Namely, Curtis's character Laurie is unattached to a romantic male lead, defends herself without

reliance on a male counterpart, and the killer is not glorified. By the time the sequel came out, the dynamic had shifted a bit: audiences expected more of what they had come to love from the original film, but with the production now linked to more money and known stars/creators some of the ‘indie’ aspects were lost. Many of their expectations were met, but differences are clear, especially in Laurie’s agency and the introduction of a male romantic interest. Taking these differences between the films into consideration, it is clear that nearly insignificant budgets and star texts can produce films that more easily play outside the limits of expectation; conversely, more money and familiar star texts tend to bring films back toward the hegemonic.

I’ve begun this chapter differently than the previous chapters in that the others have focused on social aspects that are at the core of this project, while this chapter has begun mostly with a list of numbers and names linked to the original films’ production. This is because the social concerns raised by *Zombie’s* two new *Halloween* films that include – like the other pairs considered in this project – motherhood, the Final Girl, the family, and masculinity, are inseparably linked to the picture of capitalism painted in the 2007 and 2009 films that was not a narrative factor of the originals. Thus, painting a brief picture of the original films’ production is important for understanding the dynamics of the new films. The previous chapters have considered films that portray a world that is, in many ways, only distantly related to our own because of the seeming absurdity of locations and characters. And though my close textual analysis has revealed a rich subtext of these genre-defined characters that push limits and are dynamic in terms of how they represent the culture of the 1970s, they are still archetypal and somewhat stiff. Even the final girl, when seen through nearly forty years

of slashers that have rehashed that character trope, seems to us, now, fairly banal. The remakes of most of the films I've detailed in this project follow suit in this respect, and by going away from the 'dynamic' character of the Final Girl, or the mother who lies outside the norm, are even blander. It is no wonder that people generally consider horror one of the most repetitive and uninteresting of genres. In his remakes, however, Rob Zombie works hard to present characters with depth and history, and who seem relevant to, and part of, a realistic world (barring Michael Meyer's superhuman strength and ability to live through several fatal wounds, a point I will return to later!). Most strikingly, Zombie creates a world in which capitalist greed is painted in its worst light as victims become the fodder of the media, and Dr. Sam Loomis uses his intimate knowledge of the killer for book deals and a shot at fame. Dollars and cents, then, become a way to consider how a film's producers can present/challenge social codes and measure expectations of revenue; they also impact how masculinity, narrative agency, and star texts influence the text within the diegetic world and in the real world.

In this chapter, I will first explore the difference between an auteur and a star, and consider how Rob Zombie's status as the latter, and the corresponding star text that is connected to his work, impacts our reading of the films. The fact that this star text can, in many ways, be as much about marketing and the literal dollars and cents of production and sales leads naturally into a consideration of capitalism, and the connection between that system and misogyny. From there, I will consider how the relationship between Michael and his mother puts domestic melodrama front-and-center, and consider both Mrs. Meyer's guilt for having failed Michael (at least in her eyes), and Michael's drive to give his mother the family that she always wanted (at least

in his eyes). Finally, I will consider Laurie's status as the final girl, the ways in which she is manipulated by the text, and her final place as yet another piece in the story of reconciling the family unit in post-9/11 slasher remakes. I will also consider how the theatrical and un-rated endings change our understanding her character, and the story writ large.

Star Text, Capitalism, and Misogyny

In his 1980 book *Stars*, Richard Dyer redefined how we think of stars' roles within the industry. Stars have always been larger-than-life: not normal people, but enough like us to foster identification. Stars are also products that can be marketed by studios, and which are defined by their past roles, their 'real life' media appearances, their magazine/newspaper/internet interviews, their tabloid coverage, and their press releases. Traditionally, a star text does not apply to directors, who instead are often described as *auteurs*, the French term for a director whose work is singular enough to have a visible pattern or signature. Although famous, we would hardly consider Hitchcock, Spielberg, or Tarantino *stars*, even though the term *auteur* would be an easily assignable moniker. John Carpenter will probably never be known as an *auteur*, and was certainly not a star from his music career when *Halloween* opened in 1978. Conversely, Rob Zombie was already a star when he directed his version of *Halloween* in 2007, and I believe is on his way (if he isn't already) to being considered the first horror *auteur* of the 21st century. He brings to his films a rich tapestry of meaning that greatly impacts how we read his films, especially in terms of marketing, fan base, and intertextual meaning.

Rob Zombie's star text begins in the mid 1980s with his first band, White Zombie, named after the 1932 Victor Halperin film of the same name (starring Bela Lugosi, an actor who, along with Boris Karloff, was nearly synonymous with the early years of horror). White Zombie gained commercial and critical success after their third and fourth studio albums (*La Sexorcisto: Devil Music Vol. 1* and *Astro-Creep 2000 – Songs of Love, Destruction, and Other Synthetic Delusions of the Electric Head*, respectively), and showed off many of the lead singer's non-musical interests that would eventually become staples of nearly all his work, including film. These included Zombie's nearly encyclopedic knowledge of classic horror, grindhouse, and exploitation films exemplified by audio samples pulled from a huge range of film. The band's first break-out hit, 'Thunder Kiss '65', uses samples from Russ Meyer's 1965 *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* and exemplifies another aspect of the singer's oeuvre: explicit sexuality intertwined with looming violence. Those not familiar with Meyer's work would take little time in noticing the sexploitation plot of three strippers in tight jumpsuits going on a crime spree in the middle of a desolate desert setting. It makes sense that Zombie would choose this film to sample, as it perfectly ties his love of film with the themes of sex and violence that characterize his work. Similar motifs can be found in the pleasure-filled moans taken from the porn-turned-midnight-movie *Café Flesh* (Sayadian 1982) that open the song 'More Human than Human', a title which references *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott 1982). In fact, a huge percentage of Zombie's songs, both from his days with White Zombie and later band just called Rob Zombie include sound bites from classic films, and/or refer to films. Furthermore, his music videos and stage shows exemplify a similar attention to filmic details from the past.

With this in mind and a star text in tow, Zombie's departure from full-time musician to director may have been a foreseeable change. In 2000 he filmed *House of 1000 Corpses* but was unable to find distribution until 2003. The film enacts a quasi-remake of Tobe Hooper's *A Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, but employs various non-diegetic transition scenes with cinematography that includes inverted colors, distorted perspective, and temporal shifts that make it clear the director knows his horror history and likes to play with film as a medium. The film stars Sheri Moon (in her first feature-length acting role, despite several appearances in music videos for both of Zombie's bands), Zombie's long-time girlfriend who has since starred in all of his films.² *1000 Corpses* had a budget of \$7,000,000 and had grossed \$12.6m domestically by the end of its opening summer run. On Halloween 2002, Moon and Zombie eloped, helping to seal their star texts together even more than was already evident. In 2003, *The Devil's Rejects* was released as Zombie's second feature film and the sequel to *1000 Corpses*. Conjuring images reminiscent of *Bonnie and Clyde* (Penn 1967), *Easy Rider* (Hopper 1969), and the much later *Thelma and Louise* (Scott 1991), Zombie showed a less playful approach to filmmaking in his second outing and turned a \$7,000,000 budget into a domestic gross of \$17,000,000 while recovering the whole budget on opening weekend (all box office figures from IMDb.com). Clearly, Zombie's popularity as a musician, his marriage, and his filmmaking prowess were making a star text that helped grow his ability to sell films to a fan base that he had been cultivating for well over a decade.

I've given a lot of detail to Zombie's history as way of illustrating how a musician-turned-filmmaker can foster a fan base when the line between the two

mediums is permeable, as the subject matter, style, and cache of both are so similar. Furthermore, it is clear that *Zombie* is one of the first writer/directors to fully embody both the *auteur* status as well as a star text. Audiences go to see his films because he has a signature style, but they also go because they are fans of the star-image of Rob *Zombie*, and want to see what his next creation holds in store. But I don't do all of this to simply gush about a filmmaker who I see as a fresh and much-needed person in the horror genre. I also bring this up as a way of opening up a discussion about how the depiction of the killer in the new *Halloween* films is tied directly to *Zombie's* star persona.

The original 1978 *Halloween* spends no time introducing the psychotic killer, Michael Myers; the remake changes this. The first six and a half minutes of the original film are shot POV through the eyes of an unknown character as he sees his sister make out with her boyfriend, picks up a knife, stabs his nude sister to death, and exits his house. We only learn that the character (and us by extension of the POV handheld shot) is a six-year-old boy as he walks out of the house and his parents, returning from a party, say his name to match a reverse shot. The boy is clean, the house is typical suburbia, and the parents are well dressed and truly concerned. While this introduction is striking and very early in the film, this is all we ever learn about Michael's past. His parents do not appear again, and his mother never even says a word (a point in stark contrast to the *Zombie* films).

In the remake, Michael and his family are given a lot of time. As the boy's doctor, Sam Loomis, later mentions, Michael's upbringing was a perfect storm; we are given full access to this storm throughout the first act of the movie. His divorced (and

lovingly devoted) mother (played by Sheri Moon Zombie) works as a stripper in their small town, a fact that the children at school use to bully him. His mother's verbally, emotionally, and physically abusive boyfriend treats everyone around him like trash, including calling Michael a fag and ogling Michael's sister while making sexual comments about her body out loud to the kids' mother. He screams at the baby when she cries and blames it for doing nothing else but crying and defecating (this while he sits at home all day collecting disability after hurting himself, presumably while drunk). Michael, meanwhile, has a secret life of killing his pet rats, finding stray and dead animals to torture and photograph, fending off bullies, and trying to mediate among his sexually rebellious sister, his mother, and his mother's boyfriend. On Halloween he snaps: he bludgeons a bully on his way home from school, duct tapes his mother's passed-out boyfriend to a chair to slit his throat, bludgeons his sister's boyfriend with a baseball bat in the kitchen, and then stabs his sister repeatedly. While we see an increase in the sexual content (sister *and* mother) and the number of dead in his first attack (from one to four), what is most jarring about the beginning of the remake is the fact that we spend so much time with Michael and his family. Over the first 20 minutes, we begin to see *why* Michael is the way he is, and begin to think, 'No wonder the kid turned into a mass murderer.' Throughout the movie, we also spend time with him in the mental facility to which he is sentenced including time with Dr. Loomis (Malcolm McDowell) and watch his slow descent into a mute monster.

Essentially, this time spent with Michael and his family is the foregrounding of melodrama that I have traced throughout this project; but it is also the groundwork for forgiveness of the monster. In this case, the melodrama can be characterized as family

and male melodrama since at its core, the beginning of the film concerns itself with the development of a young man in a family setting that does nothing to teach him normative social skills. As an audience, we are asked to identify with Michael and to forgive the monster he becomes based on the family from which he comes. Much like the sympathy fostered for Justin in the new *Last House*, for Leatherface in the new *Massacre*, and for Jason (through his conflation with Clay) in the new *Friday*, *Zombie's* version of *Halloween* is determined to paint a picture of Michael Meyers that utilizes the focus on melodrama to garner sympathy for the killer. In a post-9/11 world in which the focus of our media has a resounding undercurrent of recovery, it seems as though even a mass-murdering monster with no regard for life must be afforded a level of understanding and hope. One wonders if the xenophobia of the current social milieu would allow the same sympathies to a foreign character, or if part of the reason why these characters are afforded a melodramatic backstory is because they are home-grown psychos. Similarly, we must consider how rape culture's everlasting project of victim blaming plays into these films. Even though the victims are not specifically blamed in many of these films (*Halloween* is even less focused on equating teen sex to death than many of the films), the sympathetic views of the killers is the opposite side of the victim-blaming coin; yes, Michael may be a monster, but because we understand why (at least partly) we are expected to temper our judgment.

One change that is very apparent from the original film to the remakes that impacts how we relate to Michael – and Mrs. Meyers – is the position of class held by the Meyers family. In the original, it is very clear the Michael and his family are suburban – they are white, upper-middle class, have a comfortably large house in a safe

neighborhood. Michael's eruption from this world is a commentary on the myth that the nuclear family was a healthy institution in 1978, but still respects the idea that this institution was both a goal and a norm for much of America. *Zombie's* film, on the other hand, places Michael in a broken home with an abusive stepfather, with a more-or-less single mother who is a stripper, and amidst bullies at school. While it may seem as though the original Meyers family is more normalized, in hindsight it is only true that they are more idealized. The current Meyers family is a much more realistic view of American life, especially by today's standards. With *Zombie's* Laurie being taken from the Meyer's family social milieu and transplanted into a true suburban family (reminiscent of the 1978 family's picket fence world) the new film gives audiences a sense that Michael is the product of a real-life situation, while Laurie is the product of a fairytale in which she neither remembers her horrific past, nor has want for anything because of her adopted family's comfortable class status. It may be overreaching to say that Michael is some kind of glorified class warrior, looking to return his sister to her rightful place in the social scale, but it is clear that we can identify with *Zombie's* version of the Meyer's family if only because they are not a cookie cutter idealization of the dream of the nuclear family.

The sympathies that we afford Michael are also linked to our abilities to see him as an extension of *Zombie*, and since many viewers are fans of the director, his similarities to Michael give us yet another way to err on the sympathetic side of ambivalence. A portion of the remake that *Zombie* takes directly from Carpenter's original is when Laurie (Scout Taylor-Compton in the new film, Jamie Lee Curtis in the original) babysits Tommy Doyle, a young neighborhood boy who is concerned with the

'Boogieman'. Laurie assures Tommy that the Boogieman is not real, despite the boy's insistence that his classmates who have teased him at school must be right about the monster's reality. Laurie's story changes, though, after her ordeal with Michael; she ends up asking Loomis much later in the film, 'Was that the Boogieman?' to which Loomis responds in the affirmative. While this works well in both films and helps to give *Zombie's* film a bit of nostalgia for the fans of the original, the new director's music career is what completely changes the meaning of these two conversations in the remake.

In 1996, White Zombie recorded a cover of the KC and the Sunshine Band's song 'I'm Your Boogieman' for *The Crow: City of Angels of Angels Soundtrack*. That same year, the band released the album *Supersexy Swinging Sounds*, which also featured the track. While the original song was an upbeat disco song about boogie dancing (and presumably sex, also) *Zombie's* cover updated the song to fit into the band's heavy metal-influenced genre. With *Zombie's* signature growl, the song sounds aggressive, as if the offer of being someone's boogiemán is no longer an offer of dancing and sex, but an ominous threat of sex with a monster. (This sexualized threat is further entrenched when we consider that album's title and the cover with a nude model posing in a hammock.) This reading of the song is reinforced by the audio samples of two young boys chanting, 'He's gonna get you!' and 'The Boogieman is coming!' both taken from the scene in Carpenter's *Halloween* in which Tommy is being teased by the boys at school. Given this history in the star text of *Zombie*, we begin to see how Michael and *Zombie* can become intertwined in the viewer's mind. If *Zombie* has already declared himself the Boogieman, and in doing so linked himself to past images

of the Michael Meyers character, seeing a new version of Michael whose life has been re-written and directed by *Zombie* gives us all we need to understand the new, more sympathetic Michael as an extension of the horror loving, creep-show inspired star persona of the writer/director.

This conflation is carried to its limits in *Zombie's Halloween II*. In that film, the star who plays Michael as an adult (former professional wrestler Big Sky, aka Tyler Mane) no longer wears the masks that typify his visage throughout most of the first film. After wandering the Midwest for an unspecified amount of time, Michael's hair is long, his dreadlocks matting heavily into his full beard, hiding all but his deep-set eyes. Similarly, his clothes are ragged and the many layers hang off his hulking body. These costuming choices work to humanize Michael by removing the visual barrier that kept his face hidden through most of the first film, and also because he looks like Rob *Zombie* (See Figures 5 and 6). And so while Michael's aim in the second film becomes more clearly about his search for Laurie (whom we learn is his sister), an act that reveals a complicated family psychodrama involving hallucinations of himself as a child having conversations with his dead mother (more on this later), we can also read the second film as a continuation of at least one project of the first film: *Zombie* has recreated Michael in his own (star) image.

To say that the star text of an actor is tied directly to capitalism should be moot; the star text acts a way of turning the person into a commodity so as to sell the persona, the idea of the star built through grooming, press, and roles, to audiences. *Zombie* plays with this self-commodification in real life by crossing the lines between media, and rebranding himself as a director. As I have shown, his star text plays an impactful role



Figure 5
Actor Tyler 'Big Sky' Mane as Michael Meyers in Halloween II (2009).



Figure 6
A publicity still of director Rob Zombie before a tour with his band in May, 2005.³

in how the film is marketed as an extension of the rocker's canon. It also impacts how we read the film, especially when it comes to the killer and our perception of his guilt. But *Zombie* also plays with the idea of commodification and star text within the movie, a creative choice that I believe reinforces the attention we must afford this aspect of critical analysis.

The role of Dr. Sam Loomis is greatly increased in *Zombie's* two films compared to Carpenter's originals. In the originals, Loomis is little more than a bumbling buffoon, running around the suburban Haddonfield neighborhoods in which the film is set with a snub-nose revolver thinking that every shadow he sees is Michael, his escaped patient, while never actually finding him. In one shot, Michael even drives behind Loomis as the doctor stands on the sidewalk looking around as if he had just landed on the planet. In the remakes, our increased time with Michael in the mental facility to which he is sentenced also increases the screen time of Dr. Loomis. We learn about Loomis's treatment methods, see private tapes that he has recorded, and even follow him on a lecture tour for a book that he has written about Michael. By the second of *Zombie's* films, Loomis has written a second book about Michael, his family, and his victims. As we follow Loomis around on his book tour, which includes signings, lectures, and talk shows, we see two trends emerge. The first is that everyone but Loomis sees his book as being written in bad taste. A victim's father confronts Loomis with a gun (albeit unloaded), a supposedly friendly talk show host ambushes him, and even his publicist voices her concern over the book's timing. The second trend is that Loomis is focused on using what wealth and fame he has garnered from his book deals to turn misogyny into sport. He gawks at every woman he sees, he gives women who

want a book signed his hotel room and phone numbers, he flirts with news reporters, he hurls epithets at his publicist and accuses her of being a ‘carpet muncher’ because she isn’t interested in him, and to top it off, he tells the world that Laurie, the final girl survivor from the first film and heroine of the second, is actually Michael’s baby sister who was adopted by another family after Mrs. Meyers killed herself.

It is in this new Loomis that we see the conflation of star text (Loomis as pompous star who no one likes and who sustains himself on a cloud of his own ego) with the ability of capitalism provide both the tool and the justification, especially by men, for ruining a young woman’s life. In the film, this is played out in Loomis’ publication of Laurie’s real identity as Michael’s sister. As Laurie is already the victim of male violence as seen in the first film, this act by Loomis in effect blames Laurie for being the target of Michael’s continued anger; because she fought back, and because she did not willingly go with Michael when he first came for her, she has extended his reign of terror. By naming Laurie as Michael’s motivation for returning to Haddonfield, Loomis perpetuates rape culture’s victim blaming by implying that if she had succumbed to her brother’s violence, others would have been spared. Loomis’s publication essentially robs Laurie of her name and her identity, and forces her to confront her real history with no regard for the psychological and physical impact this would have on the girl. For the second time, then, Loomis makes her the victim of male violence; only this time it is driven by a capitalism that legitimizes impulses to greed, narcissism, and inhumanity that Loomis embodies. This drives Laurie over the edge and precipitates a psychic break that sees her accept her fate as victim. In this state of double victimhood, Laurie develops a sort of Stockholm Syndrome and identifies with

Michael's desire to see her, his dead mother, and himself together again. She picks up Michael's knife and walks towards a police line in a state of psychotic shock, prompting officers to open fire. The message against Loomis's capitalistic drive is made even more clear when we consider that Laurie was able to fight back, again and again, in an effort to fight Michael off during the first film. It is only after the attack on her personhood motivated by money that she is unable to respond, breaks with reality, and is eventually killed by her would-be saviors in the police. In an ode to Marxist theory, Laurie's death at the hands of the state (both the police and Loomis, a state-appointed psychiatrist) comes to symbolize the diegetic and non-diegetic systemic violence against women that exploits them as victims of capitalism. With bodies sexualized and brutalized, identities manipulated by force, and institutional/legal dynamics that target women, Laurie represents the body politic of rape and abuse victims who are forgotten in an effort to make a dollar.

Motherhood – Absence, Failure, and Recuperation

As noted in the Introduction to this project, the original *Halloween* is a film that, for all intents and purposes, is devoid of a mother. Michael Meyer's mother is seen at the beginning of the film for only a few seconds, and says nothing while standing, mouth agape, staring at her 6-year-old son covered in his sister's blood. Twenty years later, when Michael returns to Haddonfield to terrorize Laurie and her friends, little has changed: the parents seem to be busy with parties, and the children are happy not to be under a watchful eye. Even Annie's father, the town sheriff whom we meet several times, is much more focused on dealing with the bumbling of Dr. Loomis than he is being a father. In fact, in *Halloween II*, when he comes across his daughter's slain body,

it is in the capacity of sheriff, not as a father. Likewise, Laurie's father is seen only briefly at the beginning of the first film, outside the family home, reminding Laurie to put a key under the door of the Meyer's house, an errand necessary for his real estate business. The world we enter, then, is one in which parents are virtually absent except in fleeting moments where their focus is their job and not their children. And even then, it is only father that we see, not mothers.

I have detailed the ways in which the other 70s films considered in this project are, amongst other things, about the annihilation of the nuclear family. From the two 'families' of *Last House* and the men of *Chain Saw* to the vengeful Mrs. Voorhees, these films all paint a shocking and brutal picture of the downfall of the family. As detailed in Chapter III, Robin Wood goes so far as to link the cannibalism in *Chain Saw* to a cannibalism of the family structure itself.⁴ But if 1974 saw the utter disintegration of the family in rural Texas, *Halloween* seems to take another approach. There is hardly any family of which to speak, and the implication throughout the film is that by 1978, the family was already gone. There is talk of parents, but few are seen, and the nuclear family as a whole is not seen anywhere. The houses imply family unity, but we never actually experience it. Children roam the streets of suburban Haddonfield in scenes that conjure Norman Rockwell, but behind closed doors a killer – whose parents were absent from his childhood – is terrorizing babysitters and their charges. In short, the suburbia we see and the suburbia we experience are incongruous. The rural-to-suburban shift that occurs between *Chain Saw* and *Halloween* is crucial because, along with the different models of the family that each of these films represents, they also display a different setting for the disintegration of the family. While in 1974 we had to wander the road

less travelled through the Texas heat to find a family that mocked the idealized nuclear unit, in 1978 we only had to go next door. Haddonfield is not the boonies or the sticks; it is not full of rednecks and hicks. Haddonfield is not home to an immediately dismissible 'other' that can be cast out because of class or race. Instead, despite its apparent lack of parents, Haddonfield is still aspiring to a Beaver Cleaver past where children play in the streets. It is white, it is middle class, and it is home. So too, Michael. He comes from within the home, and the film's message is clear: the family has failed. Michael is the new product of white, middle-class suburbia.

While in the original films the failure of the family is presented as violent and grotesque perversions of the nuclear unit either led by men or with no real structure at all, the remakes map the failure directly onto the character of the mother. Sheri Moon Zombie, Rob Zombie's real-life wife takes up the role of the beleaguered Mrs. Meyers. As noted above, she is a single mother with an abusive boyfriend. And the beginning of the film is very much a commentary on failed masculinity with boyfriend Ronnie's emotional, mental, and sexual abuse toward all in the family becoming even harder to watch than Michael's beating of bullies or killing of rats. In fact I doubt I am alone in being quite satisfied when Ronnie becomes one of Michael's first victims. But once Ronnie is out of the picture, it becomes clear that Mrs. Meyers is the center of the family. After all, Ronnie is nothing but a poor surrogate for a father figure. But Mrs. Meyer's role as the family lynchpin is clear: she works; she cooks; she attends meetings with the principal. After the death of her oldest daughter and Ronnie, she visits Michael in the mental institution religiously. She does everything that one could expect of a mother, and it is clear that she takes her job as a mother very seriously. But her attempts

at being a good mother also break social taboos, and ultimately she is painted as a failure. Most glaringly, traditional social standards dictate that a mother should not be sexualized (classic examples like in *All That Heaven Allows* (1955) or *Mildred Pierce* (1945) paint this picture vividly), and this combined with Michael's descent into psychosis condemn her as a failed mother. Interestingly though, and perhaps in one of the most true-to-life aspects of the film, no one holds Mrs. Meyers more responsible for the outcome of her family than herself. Internalizing the intense pressure that motherhood demands of women, Sheri Moon Zombie excellently portrays a woman who places all blame on herself. In a telling scene set in the family home that takes place after it becomes clear that Michael will never be better, Mrs. Meyers sobs on the couch while watching home movies of her now-lost son. In this moment we see that the social stress of being a mother has led Mrs. Meyers to blaming herself for not having been the right kind of mother. She views herself as a failure for allowing Michael to do what he did, and for not being able to recover him. While the film never implies that she is to blame for Michael's psychopathology, it is very clear that the Mrs. Meyers character holds herself fully responsible. With the weight of this blame resting on shoulders, and Dr. Loomis' diagnosis indicating that Michael is unrecoverable, Mrs. Meyers shoots herself through the mouth with a revolver. After the gunshot, the soundtrack to the scene is the sound of her youngest daughter screaming, one final reminder of failed motherhood before the narrative moves forward.

But moving on from such a powerfully emotional scene of a mother's tortured love and self-loathing is much easier said than done, and Zombie knows this. Throughout the rest of the first film and extensively through the second film, Mrs.

Meyer's ghost becomes a recurring hallucination of Michael's. The first indication we get of this is when we see him rip her headstone from the ground to use as a prop in staging one of his first female victim's corpses. But the lengths to which Michael tries to connect to his dead mother run so much deeper than his first, strange homage in which a young, sexualized victim becomes linked to his mother via the headstone. From here, the film links Michael's goal and his mother via his hallucinations in which he imagines her prompting him to find his long lost sister, the same sister who cried out from the cradle when Mrs. Meyers killed herself (see Figure 7) This goal becomes even clearer throughout the second film, in which we see Michael's perception of Mrs. Meyers prodding him on over and over. By the time we get to the final scene in which Michael has cornered Laurie, the film even depicts the young Michael, as he was on Halloween night decades before, holding Laurie while the adult Michael presents her to Mrs. Meyers in a final bid to earn his dead mother's approval. And because Laurie knows that she is Michael's sister because of Loomis' book, her emotionally fragile state has her sharing her brother's hallucination. She in fact believes that the young Michael is holding her, and she sees her dead mother as clearly as Michael can. Laurie's concerns that nature, and not nurture, is the most important role in one's development, has her terrified that she is bound to end up like Michael. Her first step in going down that road is earlier in the film when she dreams that she and her birth mother change places within a glass coffin, both shrouded in black lace. At this point, the ghost of the mother becomes the all-powerful entity. Similarly, this final moment brings the mother back to life as Michael and his sister share the hallucination of their mother standing in the shed with them. Just as Michael has envisioned his mother as proud of him killing

anyone along the path to finding his sister, so too does Laurie begin to envision her birth mother proud that Laurie has finally accepted her role within the family dynamic.



Figure 7
Michael and his (hallucinated) mother in Halloween II (2009)

The cinematography and mise-en-scène surrounding Michael and Laurie's hallucinations of Mrs. Meyers in this final scene and those throughout both films are very stylized, and send a clear message that mother>equals-death. For Michael, he sees his mother dressed in white, top-lit with bright light, leading a white horse, in reference to the Biblical image of Death described in the Book of Revelations as a figure riding a pale horse (see Figure 8).⁵ For Laurie, nightmares of her mother include a black lace-clad Mrs. Meyers watching Laurie struggle to escape from a glass coffin (see Figure 9). Thus, whether angelic or demonic, the hallucinations of the mother are synonymous with images of death. For Laurie, the images are terrifying until the final moments of the film (a point I will return to later). For Michael, the image of his mother seems to



Figure 8
Michael's vision of his mother from Halloween II (2009)



Figure 9
Laurie's vision of her mother from Halloween II (2009)

reflect a freedom, a desire that is in line with his glorification and fetishisation of her as both a savior, and the only person for whom he has a desire to please.⁶

In Michael's attempt to fulfill his fantasies and please his mother, the family melodrama of the new films becomes evident in a way that was never present in the originals. It is clear from the beginning of the first film that Mrs. Meyer dotes on Michael, and asks for nothing in return other than his commitment to the family. For Michael, though, that commitment meant killing his sister, her boyfriend, and Ronnie, while leaving his baby sister and mother unharmed, creating an Oedipal scenario in which Michael's vision for control and order leaves only himself and his mother, with his baby sister as their child (he is seen throughout the early parts of the first film cooing over the baby in uncharacteristically gentle moments). At times it even seems as though his mother is the only thing that sustains him as partly human; as she becomes more tormented by his lack of psychological convalescence and lack of accountability for his actions, her withdrawal from him mirrors his own withdrawal from the world. Eventually, she kills herself while Michael recedes into muteness, hiding behind masks and silently waiting out his days in the sanitarium. For years, Loomis is the only company to Michael's recession, and the man becomes a sort of surrogate father to silently growing boy; this fits into the Oedipal arc as Michael finally kills his former doctor at the end of the second film in a scene in which the killer imagines his mother by his side while Laurie stands by. In this moment, then Michael kills the father and wins his mother's love. Of course, paradoxically, Michael's original murderous rampage with the aim of 'restoring' the family and pleasing the mother in fact tears the group apart, and make Mrs. Meyers blame herself for the whole thing. But Michael's

dedication to the family is such that he recreates his mother in a way that aligns with how he interacts with the world, and thus she is proud of him for tracking down his sister and reuniting the family, even if it is in death (a point to which I will return). While the original *Halloween II* did reveal that Laurie was Michael's sister to help provide motivation for the killer's increasingly focused search for her, there seemed to be no real reason why he would ever focus on her as a victim. This lack of plausible (character) motivation may well add to the sense of irrational evil associated with Michael in the originals – and thus a nihilistic horror associated with the decade. As there was no family unit depicted in the film, there was no real meaning behind Michael's search for his sister other than some vague memory of a past acquaintance. But just as in all the other post-9/11 remakes, the recovery of the family is clear throughout. As demented as it is, Michael's hunt for Laurie is a quest to rebuild the family, similar to Jason's search for a replacement mother in the new *Friday the 13th*. Another parallel with the new *Friday* is that both Clay and Michael's search for their sisters is conjoined with a drive to reconcile a lost relationship with their mothers. The two characters differ in that Michael resorts to hallucinatory fantasies, which he is unable to discern from reality. But the idea of fantasy and drive for power is key to understanding how Loomis and Michael navigate their world.

Both Loomis and Michael become driven by self-aggrandizing fantasies of ownership wherein their victims are vehicles for each to control his world. Loomis wants control over the market, vying for power in the media world by fantasizing that his actions have no impact on Laurie, and Michael wants control over his relationships, struggling to reconcile his distorted ideas of family, peers, and his own feelings with the

reality of the world in which his wake of victims is reimagined as proof of his love for his mother. The fetishized images of his mother dressed all in white, bathed in nearly blinding white light that make her angelic, idealized, and more beautiful than she was in life speak to a complex intertwining of sexual and maternal fantasy. But these fantasies are buried under the violent method by which he interacts with his world, and one which mirrors Loomis' capitalistic drive. These fictional character fantasies that downplay the damage done to victims by men seeking power (monetary, personal, social, or all of the above) are reflections of today's rape culture which manifests itself through real life, high-profile incidences like those involving O.J. Simpson, R. Kelly, or Chris Brown/Rihanna that all illustrate the ability of men to escape punishment (legal and/or social) for crimes against women. But much like the violence of capitalism, the violence perpetrated by Michael in his pursuit of his fantasies is subsumed throughout the film in a sea of family melodrama. While we are aware of the trauma he causes, especially as we see Laurie begin to break down, the story is driven by the increasing curiosity of whether the family (Michael, Laurie, and their mother) will be reconciled in life or death. As happens so often in American film, and as we have seen performed over and over the remakes presented in the previous chapters, the family is the ultimate focus, while other concerns slowly fade into the background.

Keeping with the trend, Laurie's family life is shown several times in the first film. Before Michael killed her adoptive parents, we see Laurie joking with her folks around the breakfast table, and helping her mother put up Halloween decorations around the house. With Michael's return to Haddonfield, this picture of the family is fractured, and over the course of the first film and the whole of the second film, we see

Laurie descend into the chaos of being a victim, and then a survivor. In the second film, Laurie works to counteract her post-traumatic symptoms through counseling, prescriptions drugs, and – after Loomis exposes her as Michael’s sister – alcohol. During this time, she lives with her friend Annie (also a survivor of Michael’s wrath, played by Danielle Harris) and her father, the town’s sheriff, Lee Bracket (Brad Dourif). They act as her surrogate family, but it is clear that she does not fit well with them. As we see her struggle with her own recovery and the lack of a true family, it becomes clear that she and Michael are bound together in a search for a lost familial past. Much like Clay and Jason in the remake of *Friday*, a lost family and a seemingly hopeless search for recovery bind hero and hunter. It is not until the final scene, when Michael has cornered Laurie in a small tool shed and they share a hallucination of their mother beckoning Laurie back to the fold while congratulating Michael for finding her, that we see Laurie once again ‘belong’ to a family unit. (Indeed, Mrs. Meyer’s final words of the film are when she tells Michael, ‘It is time; bring us home,’ by which she means to kill Loomis and Laurie.) With Michael surrounded by police with no chance to escape, his own death would immediately follow Laurie’s, and they would once again be a family, together in death.

It may seem incongruous to argue that the new *Halloween* films are about a quest to reassemble a family unit only to then base that argument on the family members all dying. Afterall, the other films in this dissertation all climax with an escape from death. First and foremost, I think that this development speaks volumes about who these two films are about. It can be argued that the first film does show an escape from death as Laurie does overcome her attacker; however, seen as a pair the series is much

more about Michael, as evidenced above. Michael's desire, therefore, is put to the forefront. From our first introduction to him, petting his pet rat and then slaughtering it before joining his family for breakfast, we understand that Michael is a psychopath, and that like his relationship to morals, his relationship to death not our own. It is also important to remember that, as I have shown throughout this chapter, *Zombie's Halloween* films are much more complex and demanding of their audience than are the other films I have considered. It is this complexity that pushes us to consider the films' project on a more intricate level than the other films. While *Last House*, *Chainsaw*, and *Friday* are fairly straightforward slashers with stock characters and plots, *Zombie* pushes *Halloween* further. Thus, it makes sense that while the other films stay true to a traditional ending of life-over-death, *Zombie's* films take a different tack. While one response to the tragedy of 9/11 is to holdout an unflinching hope for a brighter future, based largely on a fantasy of halcyon days gone by, another response is to embrace the possibility that this ending may not be entirely possible. This shift certainly makes the *Halloween* films the darkest of the remakes, but it also reveals that even in a film that sees to fully embrace a pessimistic worldview, the main structuring mechanism, and the force that drives the main characters' motivations, is the family. Because this motivation is absent in the original films, it is clear that even for *Zombie's* grit, gore, and grimness the post-9/11 landscape of American is contoured by a family unit bound for reclamation, even if it is in a grisly final death scene.⁷ How this final encounter ultimately plays out, though, is complicated by the vast differences in the theatrical and home-release versions of the film.

Throughout this project, I have used the unrated blu-ray versions of all the remakes when available. While these versions often differ in inconsequential ways from the theatrical versions by including some small scene or a few shots that add nothing to the overall meaning of the film, I have chosen them for several reasons. These versions of the films are what distribution companies, and possibly the producers and directors, imagine will sell best. And it is precisely the fact that these home-owned copies are unrated that attract many fans to purchase them. As Matt Lasorsa, exec VP-marketing at New Line Home Entertainment puts it, ‘The unrated version [of a given movie] will outperform the regular one, sometimes making up 70% to 90% of the total volume [...] It has tremendous appeal for the consumer.’⁸ With the promise of more guts and gore than were allowed in the theater by the MPAA, the draw for fans of an already visceral genre to see a version of each film that promises even more gore is a compelling selling point, from both the production and the consumption side of the equation. Furthermore, purposely editing out footage in the theatrical version that the producers know they will include in the home video release ensures a certain amount of advertising cache when it comes time to sell the film to the consumer. In the case of *Zombie’s Halloween II*, the theatrical and unrated versions of the film actually have vastly different endings (indeed, they are quite different in many aspects) that impact entirely how we read the characters, and ultimately make meaning out of their trajectories. Rob Zombie made it clear that the two versions were very different, especially in how they treat Laurie’s character, and has indicated that the unrated cut is much closer to his original vision of the film (www.iconsoffright.com).⁹ It is beyond the scope of this project to cover all the

differences between the two films¹⁰, but I will look closely at the endings of each because they have important implications for how we can read Mrs. Meyers and Laurie.

In both versions of the film, Michael corners Laurie in the wood shed where the hallucination of their mother stands watching and the hallucination of the young Michael holds Laurie down. In this moment, Laurie shares for the first time the visions that Michael has had for years of his mother and his young self guiding him through his search for his sister. This vision is so strong for Laurie that even when Dr. Loomis comes in to try to save the young girl, she screams that she cannot get up because 'he' is holding her, even though the adult Michael is on the opposite side of the room. The family's past is literally holding her down, even if it is only in her mind, as Loomis tries to tell her. Mrs. Meyers is angelic, as she always is in Michael's view, standing in stark white light that literally glows off her white robes and platinum blonde hair. It is at this point, however, that the versions of the film diverge.

In the theatrical version, Michael kills Loomis inside the shed and after standing back, is shot through a window by a sniper. He falls into some decrepit farm equipment and is impaled by some metal. Mrs. Meyers looks down at him as Laurie gets up and goes to him tenderly. As she kneels before him and strokes his masked face, she says, 'I love you, brother,' as we see Michael lift his knife behind her. Before killing her, though, his strength fails and his arm falls. Laurie then picks up the knife, stabs the hulking body a dozen or more times, and finally emerges from the shed with Michael's mask on her head and his blood on her clothes, the giant headwear dwarfing her diminutive frame. She pulls the mask off, and the scene dissolves to a stark white shot of a mental hospital. The soundtrack plays an instrumental piece known simply as

‘Laurie’s Theme’, a piece written specifically for the film and used throughout the narrative as a sound motif. She then looks up grins slightly, with empty dark eyes, and the reverse shot shows us her vision of her mother with a white horse, a signal to us that she is delusional and has been institutionalized. I will return to how this ending impacts our reading of Laurie as the final girl in the next section, but in terms of the conservative family dynamics that strive for recuperation, this ending seems to be the most like its 1970s predecessors in that the family has been all but destroyed. But melodrama is still the organizing factor around which Zombie’s films are built, and while familial recuperation is not a possibility with this ending, the focus on motherhood as an ever-present force in the film indicates a stark difference from the original 1978 film.

In the unrated version of *Halloween II*, the strength of the family unit is brought to the forefront and shows that the past, represented by the mother, is utterly inescapable. But instead of this being a negative thing, we get the sense at the end of this version of the film that Laurie is finally whole again, as is the family. In this version, the moment when Laurie, Michael, Loomis, Mrs. Meyers, and the young Michael are in the shed together is interrupted when Michael lunges at Loomis and the two break out of the small structure and into the open field. Michael strikes Loomis, who falls, and is prone to the police surrounding the small group. They open fire, and the hulking mass finally falls. With a cut back to the interior of the shed, we join Laurie as she looks to the ghost of her mother. It is clear from this shot that the image of an angelic mother is not just one in Michael’s mind. With the killer dead, and us sutured to Laurie through the shot/reverse shot, we understand that she now sees her mother not as

the harbinger of death from her earlier dream, but as a savior waiting to bring the lost home. Mrs. Meyers then turns, silently beckoning her daughter to follow, and walks out of the shed. Laurie emerges into the field and glances at Michael, now shown as the adult and the child lying side-by-side, and picks up his knife. She walks slowly toward the prone Loomis and stands over his body before raising the knife. The silence of the soundtrack is broken with the crack of a rifle and Laurie is struck once in the shoulder, then again and again as the cinematography turns to still shots and the editing jump cuts as she falls in increments backwards. The final still shot of the scene is an overhead tracking zooming shot of her lying on the ground, on her back, dead. With a slow dissolve into the next scene, we rejoin the theatrical trailer in a sense, but several differences are apparent – both technically and in meaning. We track slowly down a sterile white hallway toward a hunched Laurie on the end of a hospital gurney. The soundtrack plays a cover of the Everly Brothers', 'Love Hurts' a song used a motif throughout the film, with the lyrics, 'Love hurts, love scars. Love wounds and mars.' Finally, the shot ends in an extreme close up of Laurie's sickly face, complete with disheveled hair and deep black circles under her eyes, as her blank expression slowly turns to a sardonic grin. The reverse shot cuts to Mrs. Meyers, draped in white, leading a white horse toward the young girl, greeting her into the afterlife (see Figures 10 and 11).

This unrated ending falls in line with the argument of this project by placing the emphasis on family togetherness and truly embracing the melodramatic narrative of the film. With Laurie's choice to pick up Michael's knife, she turns her back on self-preservation and chooses to focus on the familial goal of togetherness. In death, we see



Figure 10
The final shot of Laurie from Halloween II (2009)



Figure 11
The reverse shot of Mrs. Meyers from Halloween II (2009)

her fulfill the desire of her brother and her mother to reunite the family after the trauma of Michael's initial murders cut to the heart of the family, and Mrs. Meyers. While their recuperation is certainly darker and more depressing than that of the other films, it functions similarly in that family togetherness is highlighted and the family struggles to work through a trauma and regain composure. Furthermore, if we see Laurie's choice to pick up the knife as one to follow Michael's path and administer violence where s/he sees fit, as opposed to live by socially acceptable laws, then we can consider Laurie as an evil entity as far as society is concerned. This has the result, once again, of making her accomplice to her own victimhood by becoming complicit with the violence of her brother and in turn carrying forward that violence upon others. Furthermore, her death works to mirror the simplified good/evil dichotomy often seen in melodrama, and places the bad family all in their graves, while the good world goes on to function and, ostensibly, recover as Laurie was unable to do.

The unrated ending also works to take blame from Michael and place it on the mother in a way that the theatrical version does not. After all, when Michael dies in the theatrical version, the ghost of Mrs. Meyers ceases to exist. In the unrated version, however, Mrs. Meyer's presence is not simply part of Michael's psychosis, but instead is a permeating force driving both of her children toward death. It becomes harder to discern where Michael's drive to kill his sister for his hallucinated version of his mother ends, and where Mrs. Meyer's overarching, posthumous psychological influence begins. When the reverse shot of Laurie smirking emptily down the hallway after her death reveals this image of mother and horse, the metaphor becomes mother-equals-death. But because Laurie finally sees her mother in white, and not in black throughout

the rest of the film, we are aware that at least for Laurie, this vision is finally one of escape and not of terror. But just as Laurie's understanding of her mother is complicated in this moment (from being tied exclusively to nightmarish visions of death or one of an angelic freedom shared by her brother), the historical view of mothers and their relationship to death has always been complicated. We have to look no further than the two fictional men who have had the most written about them, Oedipus and Hamlet, to find perfect examples of mothers who at once represent a complicated ambivalence where freedom (emotional, social, sexual) and death are inextricably linked. And so, in a story line that began when her guilt of having failed at the most strictly controlled social role drove Mrs. Meyers to suicide, the film's unrated ending paints a singularly clear picture of motherhood as a systematic part of the family melodrama: to follow the mother is to choose death.

The Final Girl

John Carpenter's two original *Halloween* films represent a transitional period from the true aesthetic of the 1970s slasher, wherein the Final Girl was a recognizable character type and families were either non-existent or demented caricatures of the nuclear unit, to the aesthetic of the 1980s, wherein the Final Girl all but disappeared and the family unit regained some of its semblance. This shift mirrors the conservative political shift ushered in by the Reagan Era.¹¹ When considering 1978's *Halloween*, we can see that Laurie is basically the quintessential Final Girl. She is nearly asexual, with a shy interest in dating cultivated more by her friends than by her own desires; she is motherly toward her babysitting charges, and really represents the only true parent-like figure in the whole film; and she wastes little time realizing that she and her charges are

under attack and begins to position herself strategically to hide, run, and fight almost instantly. In fact, she is the only one of her friends to see Michael stalking around town throughout the day leading up to his attacks, and is on guard from early on in the film. She uses one of her knitting needles to stab Michael in the neck, she bends a coat hanger and stabs him in the eye, and turns his own knife back on him. All of these weapons brilliantly turn the safety of domestic chores into painful weapons that allow her to escape Michael. Indeed, if Michael is the monster borne from within the suburban home, Laurie is the hero who turns the domesticity of that home into weapons to defend it. Even Michael's weapon of choice is a kitchen knife, as opposed to a hunting knife or machete, and Laurie manages to get this from him and turn it against him. The only fault one could find with Laurie is that, ultimately, her pursuer corners her and it is Loomis who happens upon them at the last moment to shoot Michael. One could argue, then, that Laurie is saved by a male figure and that her power is therefore undercut. But Loomis is seen throughout the film as an impotent figure, bumbling about the town in pursuit of Michael with little luck and no skill. In fact, it is not his prowess in tracking that leads him to Laurie and Michael, but instead Laurie's young charges who escape the house after a well timed prompting from Laurie, and tell Loomis where 'The Boogiemans' is. Additionally, Loomis unloads his revolver into Michael, and yet the massive killer disappears before the sheriff can show up, proving that his saving power is only partially effective. Lastly, because Loomis is not a romantic interest for Laurie, by the end of the film she remains a singularly powerful young woman, able to fight back against the assault without the help of a heterosexual partner.

By the time Carpenter released *Halloween II* in 1981, though, this dynamic had shifted and the Final Girl was hobbled, both literally and figuratively. When *Halloween II* picks up the events of the first film, Laurie is on her way to the hospital and the town is setting in to search for Michael. Loomis is out and about with the sheriff and his crew, while Laurie is bandaged and left to recover in her hospital room. It is during this period that Laurie has a dream in which she remembers seeing Michael at the institution when they were both little, and we learn along with Laurie that the two are siblings.¹² At the hospital we meet Jimmy (Lance Guest) who seems to have a crush on Laurie, and vows to defend her. As he is off doing things around the hospital, Michael finds Laurie and we see her hobbling around from her wounds and the sleeping drugs, unable to run and walk, or defend herself actively. Instead, she must hide and wait. In essence, then, she is stripped of her power to be autonomous and active, and instead must survive only through passivity, a major change to the strength of her Final Girl persona from the first film. By the end of the film, Laurie and Loomis are trapped in a hospital supply room with Michael, surrounded by oxygen tanks, and Laurie even refuses to take the gun that Loomis offers her. She simply sits in the corner with the gun at her feet, staring blankly at the door. Eventually, Michael shows up and Laurie tries the same tactic that Ginny uses on Jason in the original *Friday the 13th* – she says his name in an effort to get him to stop. But unlike Ginny whose commanding voice conjures Jason’s mother, Laurie’s voice is meek, and has no emotional past to back it up. He advances, and she finally picks up the gun and shoots him in the head twice, hitting both eyes and blinding him but not killing him. Laurie and Loomis then work together to evade the killer, and eventually the doctor helps Laurie escape while he sacrifices himself to blow up

Michael using the oxygen tanks. Throughout the sequel, then, the filmmakers take Laurie away from the Final Girl tropes that defined her in the first film, and move her into the role of the helpless victim, focusing on a heterosexual coupling and her overall impotence. It would not be until Tobe Hooper filmed *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* in 1986 and introduced the character of ‘Stretch’ that we would see a Final Girl as clearly identifiable and self-sufficient as Laurie from the first *Halloween*.

The remakes are altogether more complex, as I have shown, and overall Laurie is as much a kick-ass hero as the original Laurie. Scout Taylor-Compton is small in build and stature, but big in heart and ability throughout the film. She is more sexualized than the original Laurie, even going so far as to joke with her mother about having sex with an older man, but her sexuality seems limited to this play-acting. Her girlfriends make a point of questioning her virginity, and so in many ways she is still very much the modern-day evolution of her 1979 counterpart. Perhaps the most defining moment of *Zombie’s* first film in terms of Laurie’s role as a Final Girl is the final scene in which Loomis comes to her rescue only to be ambushed and incapacitated by Michael. Alone on the balcony of the sibling’s childhood home, Laurie has run out of places to hide or ways to fight, and Michael has run out of patience. He rushes her and tackles her, taking both of them over the balcony and onto the ground below. Laurie comes to straddling her tormenter’s chest, while the latter is knocked out. She gathers her wits, sees Loomis’s gun on the ground next to her, and shoots Michael in the head. Here we see the ending changed from the original in an effort to keep the final girl in control while Loomis proves an ineffective hero. All in all, then, the new *Halloween* does an effective job of staying true to the roots of the 1970s aesthetic, allowing the

young female hero to stay single, smart, and alive to the end. In this way, it is perhaps the least conservative of all the films, at least on this front.

As I've noted above, the ending of *Zombie's Halloween 2* complicates this matter simply because the two endings offered for the film are so different. In the theatrical ending, Loomis again appears at the end of the film and ends up dying at Michael's hands inside the small shed. Laurie then kills her brother, walks out of the shed, and is institutionalized. Again, this ending seems to be fairly faithful to the 1970s aesthetic, as Laurie eventually does deliver the final blows to her brother. We could argue, then, that this ending maintains a less conservative view of the hero's gender roles. But Loomis does distract Michael when Laurie is completely trapped and defenseless, both physically and psychologically (remember that she has begun to hallucinate that she is being held by a young version of Michael), and the police are the ones who shoot Michael causing him to fall into the farm equipment upon which he is impaled. Furthermore, the fact that she is unable to function at the end of the film and sits, confined in a mental hospital, hallucinating that she sees her mother, is none too hopeful in terms of her strength and power. At best, the ending is ambiguous, allowing us to glimpse the power of the Final Girl character type, but undercutting that strength as the final showdown dissolves into the final scene.

In the unrated ending, the police kill Michael, and Laurie walks out to him in order to take up his knife and kill Loomis. It is at this point that the police kill Laurie. In this ending I see a more poetic and realistic conclusion to the film's work, especially as we begin to reconsider Loomis as the second monster in the film. After all, his revelation is what drove Laurie to all but give up on her fight for recovery, choosing

instead to self medicate with alcohol and claim several times that she may as well give up because she will just turn out like Michael. Without Loomis's prompting, it is clear that Laurie would have been in a much better position both psychologically (not disturbed by hallucinations of her family) and physically (sober) when it came to dealing with Michael's return. The choice to have her go after Loomis with Michael's knife is fitting, as it puts into relief Laurie's awareness of Loomis's culpability in her victimization as she sets her sights on the man who exploited her history for his own advantage. Furthermore, the fact that the police kill Laurie demonstrates the film's preoccupation with victim blaming. Just as Mrs. Meyer's blames herself for her family's demise, Laurie blames herself for her victimization as she begins to learn the truth about her past. Her death at the hands of police takes this one step further, demonstrating the perpetual systematic attitude toward victims of domestic violence and rape whereby their needs are dismissed in preference for the defense of the men who have assaulted them. While in the theatrical ending, this same drama is played out with Laurie being confined in the mental hospital, the unrated ending takes this problem to its end sum by killing the victim as she confronts her attacker. Just as her mother received no psychological counseling while Michael received over a decade of intense counseling, Laurie's needs for retribution and closure were thwarted by a patriarchal legal system designed to protect men and punish women.

Notes

¹ See Yvonne Tasker's *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre, and the Action Cinema*, Susan Jefford's *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*, and Mark Gallagher's 'I Married Rambo' for more on this shift, especially in regards to action films, and Tony William's essay 'Trying to Survive on the Darker Side: 1980s Family Horror' for development of family horror throughout the decade.

² Sheri Moon also appears nude on the cover of the Rob Zombie albums *American Made Music to Strip By* (1999) and one version of *Mondo Sex Head* (2012).

³ Posted on Rob Zombies' official website (<http://robzombie.com/2012/05/stay-thirsty-interviews-rob-zombie-an-american-nightmare/#comments>), along with an interview from *Stay Thirsty* online magazine which also displays the photo (<http://www.staythirstymedia.com/201205-069/html/201205-rob-zombie.html>).

⁴ In Wood's chapter 'The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s'

⁵ Zombie prefaces his film with a different interpretation of the white horse, a quote from a fictional book called *The Subconscious Psychosis of Dreams*, that says, 'WHITE HORSE – linked to instinct, purity and the drive of the physical body to release powerful and emotional forces, like rage with ensuing chaos and destruction.' That this seems to apply more to Mrs. Meyers more than to Michael displays the film's awareness of the problematic position of motherhood as a site of great power that is repressed, and how heavily the idea of the pure motherhood represented by the Virgin Mary creates an impossible ideal for women.

⁶ Mrs. Meyer's clothes are reminiscent of some of Marlene Detrich's clothing that Gaylyn Studlar discusses in *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (1998).

⁷ Zombie's second film, *The Devil's Rejects* (2005) ends in a similar way, combining the final moments from *Bonnie and Clyde* (Penn 1967) and *Thelma and Louise* (Scott 1991) as the three remaining members of the Firefly family drive headlong with abandon into a police roadblock, a move that kills them all in a blaze of misplaced glory.

⁸ Quoted in T.L. Stanley's 'Uninhibited, Uncut, Unrated Dvds Fly Off Shelves'.

⁹ See 'RobG' from IconsofFright.com. Here the director states: 'As far as a longer cut for the director's cut, there is another version of the movie that's very, very different that will probably be the director's cut. There were two ways we could cut the movie. The way we cut it for the theatrical, Laurie Strode's character is the main difference in the two. [In the theatrical] She's holding it together, getting her life together and it starts

spiraling downward. In the other version, she's an incredible mess and gets worse. She never has any good moments, she's just messed up, she's lashing out at everyone, she's horrible. Messed up on drugs, she's just completely spun out through the whole movie. It makes for a real challenging movie to watch and I feel like I don't know if fans would've embraced so much darkness' [sic].

¹⁰ An excellent technical breakdown between the two version can be found at Movie-Censorship.com (see author 'Muck47').

¹¹ See Tony William's 'Trying to Survive on the Darker Side' for more on this. Williams argues essay that the Final Girl was not as solid a character type as Carol Clover originally argued in *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, but I disagree with his claims in this respect. However, the detailing of the rise in the focus on the family throughout the 1980s is well argued and accurate.

¹² This works differently than the remake, in which Loomis reveals Laurie's identity. Instead, Carpenter gave Laurie the active memory of her past, which is revealed to us through her dream.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This project began with a relatively simple thesis: The remakes of classic 1970s slasher films are more conservative in the cultural politics they display than their predecessors. As I have detailed through the preceding chapters, much of this conservative shift is enacted through an increase in the use of melodrama as a storytelling device. With it, the melodramatic mode brings an increased focus on gender roles that align with traditional values, and indicates a social desire for a return to halcyon days before the tragedy of the 9/11 attacks. By displaying a cultural need for recovery after such a traumatic event, these new films move away from the nihilism of the 1970s films, which were influenced by the politics of the Vietnam/post-Vietnam era, and instead drive home a message of familial healing which simultaneously minimizes the overt, large-scale politics of each film and glorifies the safety of the heteronormative nuclear family. The sets of films I have examined closely up to this point have been limited by very strict definition surrounding genre, production dates, and style. But what of other films that fit one of these criteria but not others?

This concluding chapter addresses films that either have a high level of cultural cache, but do not fit into the criteria I used to define this project, or fit some aspect of the criteria but are not the highly influential ‘classics’ which have become canonical for even the most casual of horror fans. The best example of the former category is Wes Craven’s *Scream* series, a highly self-reflexive horror franchise made up of four films (1996, 1997, 2000, 2011). Some examples of the latter category include the original and remake of *Carrie* (De Palma 1976, Peirce 2013), *Wrong Turn* (Schimdt 2003), and the

original and remake of *I Spit on Your Grave* (Zarchi 1978, Monroe 2010)¹ By considering these films, I mean to explore ways that the assertions of this dissertation may apply to films outside my specific project, and to explore ways that while not all of the remakes are guilty of the cultural moves of their contemporaries, these exceptions are the rarities among the many.

***Scream's* Mommy and Post-Feminist Irony**

Perhaps the most meaningful addition to the slasher library in recent years has been Wes Craven's immensely popular *Scream* series. The series also shows a return to form of the director whose first film opened this project. With *Last House on the Left* (1972) a film that vacillated between being brutal and lyrical, and was nearly genre-less and broke with stylistic norms, Craven's career has always pushed limits, whether of form, content, or marketability. With the overt politics of *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977) and *The People Under the Stairs* (1991) tempered with the multi-million-dollar *A Nightmare on Elm Street* series (1984, with five sequels, a video game, and a remake adding to the count), Craven has shown a keen eye for intriguing characters and stories that also approach the limits of social commentary that is generally acceptable for popular films.² In *Scream*, Craven takes his penchant for political commentary and turns his camera's eye back on the genre on which he built a career, filmmaking itself, and Hollywood writ large. With this move, he carries forward his exploration of gender violence from *Last House*, class dynamics from *The Hills Have Eyes*, and racial dynamics from *The People Under the Stairs* to revisit the American family. But this time, instead of exploring the complete disintegration of the white nuclear family (in *People Under the Stairs*, the narrative champions the togetherness and community of a

Black family while revealing the incestuous disintegration of the white family) as these previous films had, the *Scream* series revisits the past by exploring the connection between motherhood, reproduction, and the present.³

Comprising a series of four films made between 1996 and 2011, the *Scream* franchise is composed of a complex set of hyperbolic, self-reflexive, post-modern parodies of the entire slasher genre. They simultaneously remake every slasher ever made, as they feed directly on the conventions of the genre for their plot points and characters, and dismantle the genre as the characters interact with each other as if they were in a horror film, even going so far as to recite the rules of avoiding death in slashers (e.g. do not have sex, do not drink or do drugs, and do not say, ‘I’ll be right back’). As the sequels go on, the rules change, because as the characters say, a sequel is different from an original, and the third film of a trilogy is different from a sequel. By the time *Scream 4* came out in 2011, the film’s characters didn’t know whether it was a third sequel or a remake, and eventually end up settling on somewhere in between (really, the film is a sequel for the first two acts, and then a remake for the third act, but these lines are complicated and blurred by the constant self-reflexivity and awareness of the characters to the genre’s standards). These are films that hold immense cultural cache, with the original making \$6.35 million domestically its opening weekend on December 22 of 1996, and raking in \$103 million domestically by July 20th of 1997 (and this from only a \$15 million budget).^{4,5} With this type of popularity, and the fact they are in many ways remakes of all the films I have discussed so far, it would be unfair and unwise to ignore them. Furthermore, their portrayals of motherhood and the

final girl are complex, and fruitful for considering the place of these two female character types in a pre-9/11 era that is still fraught with the problems of post-feminism.

The basic story of *Scream* (1996) is that a group of students is terrorized in a small town as their friends and classmates turn up dead, stabbed and mutilated. Sidney Prescott (Neve Campbell) is the ultimate target of the killers, and the final girl. She is strong and self-possessed, but suffers from emotional pain at the memory of her mother being out of her life. We find out this absence is directly tied to the fact that the mother cheated on Sidney's father. Sidney's sometimes-boyfriend, Billy Loomis (named after Michael Meyer's doctor, presumably, and played by Skeet Ulrich) is revealed to be the killer, along with one of his friends. The friend's motivation for helping Billy is his love of horror films and his desire to make his own, but Billy's motivation is much more compelling: Sidney's mother cheated on her husband with Billy's father, and he blames her for ruining his parents' relationship. Billy takes his vengeance out on Sidney, her father, and all of her friends as a way of traumatizing her as much as he felt he was traumatized by his family's disintegration.

What is most obvious about this story line is that just like in the new *Friday the 13th* and *Halloween* films, the absent mother who is always to blame is the center piece of the action. As a mother who has sex, Sidney's mother is a taboo breaker, killed by Billy before the beginning of the first film. But despite the fact that we don't ever see her, she is still to blame. Sidney's trust issues with Billy are traced to her mother's absence⁶, and Billy's motivations for killing everyone is linked directly to punishing the daughter of the woman who ruined his childhood (in his eyes). This plot reveals a great deal about the weakness of Billy and the destabilizing effect of women who step outside

traditional social boundaries. But the original film is not the only one that clings to the absent mother as the key to blame. *Scream 3* presents a killer who is, unbeknownst to Sidney, her illegitimate half brother, hell-bent on killing her. The brother, Roman (Scott Foley) is the son of Sidney's mother after she was raped when she had a short-lived career in Hollywood, often having sex as a way of securing roles. His anger stems from the fact that when he travelled to see their shared mother to tell her that he was her son, she rejected him. He is jealous that Sidney had their mother's love, and some semblance of a family structure, while he never did. This is reminiscent of Billy's complaint of losing his mother after Mrs. Prescott's affair, and both story lines work to blame an absentee mother for robbing a young man of a nuclear family. *Scream 4* continues this trend of blaming Sidney's absent mother, this time making the killer Sidney's niece, Jill (Emma Roberts), who is upset that Sidney was made famous for being a survivor. The implication here is that if Sidney's mother had never begun the events that preceded and motivated the action of *Scream* that Sidney would have never become famous and that Jill would not have had to live in her shadow for so many years.

We can see the problematic position of the mother in horror (and film, and culture writ large) displayed in these films across the span of fifteen years, including both pre- and post-9/11 eras, a move that demonstrates not that the remakes considered throughout this project are special or different, but that the original 1970s films are special. As I have detailed, the mothers in the 1970s films where they are present are not blamed for the sins of the son, nor are the mothers guilty in the films from which they are absent. In *Last House* and *Friday the 13th*, the mothers choose their own methods and take violence into their own hands; in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and

Halloween, the absence of the mothers is a notable plot device, but Leatherface and Michael are not guilty because of their mothers, nor are they acting out because of them. This stands in stark contrast to the *Scream* series where in fact because she *is* absent, Mrs. Prescott is made to carry the blame of all the events that transpire across the four films.⁷

The second most obvious thing about the *Scream* films is the refreshing role of Neve Campbell, who plays a strong, if beleaguered, final girl for all four films. Courteney Cox (who plays reporter Gale Weathers) is a second survivor throughout the series, and the two make a much-appreciated pair of strong, active, assertive women from different generations and with different outlooks on life, but who come together to fight the various killers of each film. Throughout the series, the two are wrestled, punched, kicked, bludgeoned, stabbed, and shot, yet always manage to survive, often with the help of the other. Gale is an unapologetically active reporter who struggles to balance her career with her personal life; Sidney is a mature and contemplative girl whose self-possession is a rare treat on the horror screen. They take to the challenges presented with a grit and determination the other girls don't have. The camera never sexualizes them, and their relationships with men happen on their terms. They both manage to have sex and survive (one of the taboos of the final girl), they choose careers/life goals over men (Sidney breaks up with boyfriends in both *Scream* and *Scream 2*, and does not find a fulfilling relationship until the end of the fourth film (with a detective that she actually worked to save after he failed to help her). Both of these women, then, are quite opposite from most of the would-be final girls seen in the remakes I have detailed so far in this project. This presentation of two final girls (I am

continuing to use this term even though they are women, both older than their teen counterparts in other films except for Campbell in the original film, when she is supposed to be in high school despite being 23 when the film was released – Cox was 32) with so much going for them is nice to see in any horror film, and especially in a series that is all in the post-feminist era. But there is another dimension to these films that should be considered before hailing Craven the present-day champion of the final girl.

My concern with regards to these films' presentation of the final girl is the level of irony with which the films are made. Because an ironic presentation of feminism is one way that post-feminist culture can undercut the need for feminism in today's culture, it is possible that the *Scream* series presents its heroines as a necessary part of the overall postmodern pastiche that the films work to create. The reason the *Scream* series is so dynamic and so beloved by many horror fans is because of the high level of self-awareness that the films carry throughout. This first film is about a group of students who cite the rules of a slasher as they enact a slasher of their own; the second film is about someone recreating the original murders while a movie based on the tragedy nears its opening date; the third film is an 'inside Hollywood' crime story surrounding the making of the fourth '*Stab*' movie, the series based on the killings that happened in the first *Scream*; the fourth is about Sidney going back to her hometown only to have her cousin try to remake the original tragedy, yet again. With plots revolving around making scary movies, one of the staples of the series is when a character recites a set of rules that define the genre (and each installment in a series). An unspoken rule that the films take for granted is that there must be a final girl. But

with all the hyperbolic insistence on following the rules of the genre, and with all the tongue-in-cheek hipness that the movies display, it can be hard to tell if the Sidney and Gale characters are present because of a cultural desire to see women in empowering roles, or if they are simply there because the genre conventions, solidified in an earlier era, dictate that they must be there. As I discussed in the chapter on *Last House*, it is this same sense of irony and hipness that allows for feminism to be simultaneously acknowledged and uncut in the post-feminist era. By placing strong final girls in the film, but then making audiences aware that they are there because of a genre trope solidified ‘way back when feminism was a thing’, the films use their own sense of sarcastic pastiche to undermine the very characters that make them such dynamic texts.

***Carrie*, and the Next Generation**

Based on Stephen King’s first novel (1974), Brian De Palma’s film version of *Carrie* (1976) is a classic of supernatural horror. It is also an ideal example of a film totally and utterly about the tensions between mothers and daughters, where the mother is made to blame for everything. Much like the other 1970s films I’ve discussed, the film ends on a negative note with the main character, Carrie White (Sissy Spacek), killing her mother and then bringing their house tumbling down upon them both. The 2002 made-for-TV movie version (David Carson), and the 2013 version (Kimberly Peirce) both follow the original film (and book) fairly closely, but include changes to the endings that leave behind the nihilism of the 1970s and reframe the films with a post-9/11 eye toward a more hopeful future. But before I discuss these endings, a few comments about the plot of the film(s).

The storyline of *Carrie* is quite simple. The high-school-aged title character is a social outcast. She suffers from shyness and inability to relate to her classmates because of her extremely religious upbringing, led by her single mother. Carrie gets by in the background of her high school's social scene until one day, in the shower after gym class, she has her first period. Because her mother never told her what menstruation was (because of her belief that if Carrie never sinned she would never get her period, a punishment only doled out by God to women who lusted after sex as Eve did), Carrie freaks out. This attracts the other girls' attention, and they throw tampons at her until the gym teacher can get things under control. The scene (in any of the versions) is awkward and painful to watch, not because of the frank depiction of menstruation, but because of the feeling of helplessness that is clearly identifiable in the main character. After this episode, one of the most popular girls in school, Sue, feels bad for Carrie, and urges her own boyfriend to take the awkward girl to prom. This has a disastrous effect, because at the end of what is to be a magical night for Carrie, one of the snubbed popular girls, Chris, conspires to pour a bucket of pig's blood on Carrie as she is crowned prom queen. This act triggers a massive emotional response from Carrie, which is accompanied by a telekinetic episode that eventually kills nearly everyone at the prom (in the 2002 version, a portion of the town is also destroyed). Carrie returns home to look for comfort from her mother, only to be stabbed in the back (literally, except for the 2002 version in which her mother tries to drown her in the bathtub) by her mother. All of the versions end with Carrie killing her mother, and their house being destroyed. In addition to this main plot line, the films also highlight the building frustration Carrie shows with the way her mother has raised her, and the increasing

strain on their relationship. This stress culminates in the confrontational scenes after Carrie has decided that she wants to go to prom, and the final scene after the prom when the two women battle to death (at least in two versions – the 2002 version has Carrie survive). Her mother's fear of men, sex, and her own body cause a rift between the women that is unable to be bridged, and eventually leads Ms. White to attempt to kill her daughter in a misguided effort to purge her of her sins.

Much like the *Scream* films, an in-depth discussion of the story of Carrie White could take its own chapter. With the complex confrontation of religious dogma, taboos surrounding the female body, and class issues (Carrie's house is smaller and dilapidated compared to her popular classmates') with popular social conventions that include bullying and jockeying for social position, the films are difficult to parse quickly. But a fact that has always struck me about *Carrie* (the remake stays true to the original in this sense) is that the taboo of menstruation is actually somewhat normalized. Carrie's first period is shown after a series of overly sexualizing shots of her in the school shower, but instead of her menstrual blood reframing her body as disgusting to the audience, it is Carrie's classmates that become disgusting as they taunt the girl for not understanding what is happening to her. In short, their teasing is the horrible thing, not Carrie's menstruation. In fact, it is this moment that actually triggers her entry into the normalized social world of her high school, sparking her inclusion into the world of fashion, school, and social activity. I bring this up not to argue that the film is completely progressive in terms of working to erase the taboos of menstruation. After all, the girls all throw tampons at her and tease her, using her publicly displayed menstruation as a point of ridicule. Furthermore, the pig's blood is then used to

humiliate Carrie making it clear that the films do still cling to deep cultural taboos around menstruation. But, there is also a sense of normalization of the bodily process, even from some of the girls who ridicule her, when they simply state what it is that she is experiencing. The P.E. teacher also tries to normalize the experience for Carrie. However, we see that the principal of the school, a man, is uncomfortable with the topic. Thus, the women and men are shown to have a different relationship to, and experience with, how to handle the situation. This, obviously, makes sense not simply from a biological view, but from a social view whereby women are expected to deal with their own issues in their own way, outside of the purview of men. Thus, the film works to engage in a complex discussion about the matter while never blaming Carrie for her public transgression. But for all this complexity surrounding a source of strong social stigma like menstruation, the film easily gives way to the normalized trend of blaming the mother.

The violence that Carrie enacts on her classmates and teachers (and in the 2002 version, a large portion of the town) can be traced back to the repression of the body that her mother enforces. If Carrie had been aware of menstruation, had been taught social rules, and had been given an outlet for her emotions, she would not have had to express all of her repressed anxiety through her telekinesis. Instead, the film makes it clear that the repression of sexuality that her mother forces upon her is the source of all the destruction that follows the prom. In both the 1970s and the 2000s versions, we can see that blaming the mother in horror is an easy and obvious move to make, and one that mirrors centuries of negative associations with mothers. But this fact just highlights the niche position the 70s slashers hold in resisting this portrait of motherhood.

Besides the blame that is often heaped on mothers, procreation is, obviously, a key component to motherhood. I have argued throughout this project that the 70s slashers negate generational progress by erasing the procreative aspect of mothers, if there are mothers shown at all. Even though *Carrie* is specifically about motherhood, the original film still falls into the trend of the 70s slashers that halts forward generational progress because at the end of the film both *Carrie* and her mother are dead, Sue is traumatized, and nearly an entire generation of the town is dead. The two *Carrie* remakes diverge from this trend, and align themselves (in different ways) with the nature of the post-9/11 era with a focus on recovery. The 2002 version has Carrie faking her death after killing her mother, and leaving town with Sue. The 2013 version has Carrie revealing that Sue is pregnant. While the former ending is partially influenced by the fact that the TV version also acted as a pilot for a failed series, both versions show a desire to move forward from a tragedy, with hope on the horizon. Whether this is driving to a new town and a new life, or carrying the next generation to be born after the tragedy has begun to fade from memory, these newer versions both show a desire to recover, and the most recent (and most well known) specifically makes recovery about the forward progress of (re)generation with Sue as mother.

I Spit on your Grave, Singularity of Strength, and Urbanoia

Moving from *Carrie* to *I Spit on Your Grave* a.k.a. *Day of the Woman* (Zarchi 1978, Monroe 2010) may seem like quite a jump, both in terms of violence, sexuality, subject matter, and overall quality of filmmaking skill. But the revenge of persecution lies at the center of these films: Carrie is socially outcast and assaulted with blood, Jennifer (Camille Keaton) is repeatedly gang raped, beaten, and left for dead. Both

stories expose social structures that allow for abuse, with *I Spit* presenting the most visceral and repulsive form.

I Spit on Your Grave is perhaps the best known film of the rape/revenge subgenre of horror films. If *Last House* can be classified as a proto-slasher, as I argued in Chapter II, then it also is a proto-rape/revenge film, and so the inclusion of *I Spit* in this discussion plays double duty, showing the other historical branch from Craven's early film as well as opening up a discussion about how the lone woman of rape revenge films presents a kind of singularly defined threat. Carol Clover's fourth chapter from *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, entitled 'Getting Even' is a thorough exploration of the rape/revenge storyline. In her attempt to understand these films in relation to a feminist worldview, she notes that these films present several conflicting messages: they present rapists as 'normal people', not as some deranged, psychopathic 'other'; they reveal men as complicit in the social structures that allow women to continually be victimized; they may present some men with the opportunity to sympathetically rethink the male social dynamic that leads to these social structures; they may present a picture of feminism as something which has given women access to methods of empowerment; they may present these new 'tough women' 'as capable as men of humiliating acts of violence' (143); they may espouse a retrenchment of misogyny whereby if these 'tough women' are just as capable of violence, then 'men are off the hook that modern feminism has put them on' (143).⁸ I agree with Clover's assessments of the films, and do not wish to restate her argument, but it is important to expand a few of the things she mentions further as a way of transitioning the discussion back to the remake and the post-feminist world of the early 2010s.

The most striking aspect of both the original and remake of *I Spit on Your Grave*, aside from the stark and unabashed portrayal of the violence of rape, are the male group dynamics at play versus the singularity of the woman. As Clover states about the men in *I Spit*, ‘they egg each other on to increasingly abhorrent behavior, and then, when they are brought to account, [...] they disavow individual responsibility’ (144). And the plot of the film is set up insure exactly this response: Jennifer (Camille Keaton in the original, Sarah Butler in the remake) is a writer and travels to a secluded cabin to work on her new book. While there, she briefly encounters a few local men at a gas station. The men find her at her cabin, and the four of them chase, beat, and rape her, then leave her for dead. She survives, recovers, and lures them all back to the cabin at various times to kill them in painful and humiliating ways (in the original, she castrates the leader of the group; in the remake, a sheriff is added to the mix of assailants who Jennifer sodomizes with a shotgun before pulling the trigger). This dynamic of the male group against the lone woman does dual duty, by highlighting the power structures of the male group dynamic within itself and against women in the form of misogyny, and highlighting the singularity of the ‘tough woman’. It is this singularity that can help mitigate the threat of feminism and female strength.

One thing that makes the final girl different from the tough woman seen in the rape revenge films is that the final girl reacts in the moment, running, hiding, and fighting off her attacker/s with no set preparation. She is dynamic and changes from the girl to the final girl in an instant. The rape revenge character of the tough woman undergoes a period of separation and isolation, whereby the assault she has endured slowly works to harden her resolve for revenge while she steels herself physically,

psychologically, and emotionally.⁹ While I personally have a deep fondness for the tough woman character type and love championing her mission to decimate her assailants, there is a distinct difference in the perceived threat between this character type and that of the final girl, especially when one considers how we might read these types of films through a feminist lens. After all, the inherent dynamics of the final girl that we see in the slashers is that she is more successful in rebuffing assault, challenging the killers while they are attacking and escaping fairly unharmed. This character type becomes strong without time to think, and could thus be considered more of a threat to perpetual male violence than the tough woman. The tough woman is characterized in *I Spit* as singular: she is alone to begin with, something different than the final girl who always starts in a group; she undergoes a period of isolation; she acts alone, and even by the end of the film is not seen returning to a social setting. This sense of singularity is also portrayed as a sense of difference from other women. Despite the final girl's character traits (chaste, sometimes bookish and/or motherly), there is a sense that any woman *could* be the final girl, finding resolve when threatened and fighting back in an instant; the tough woman is constructed as an aberration (not just in the smaller number of rape revenge films made, but in the character's need for complete remaking), and the threat she poses to the overall social structure is less spontaneous and more isolated. As Jennifer is not seen joining anyone else at the end of her ordeal, she is also perceived as no longer being part of the social fabric. While her disruption of the misogynistic system may have been spectacular, it was also isolated and completely unrecognized by the outside world. There is no sense that Jennifer ever tells anyone about her attack, or

that she even ever sees another person to tell. Thus, her threat to the social order seems less immediate.¹⁰

Because both films have the same plots and function through the same method of simultaneously championing the tough woman and partitioning her away from society as a singular aberration, it is hard to make an argument that the original film represents the post-Vietnam era, while the remake represents the post-9/11 era. And because I have structured this whole project around this difference, it may seem unclear as to why I would include these films at all. But I think that a consideration of why a film like this would ever need to be remade is an interesting question, and one that highlights some of the ambivalence and duality of our culture. While overall, the post-9/11 era has shown a remarkable trend toward the conservative, visible in all the films I have highlighted throughout this project, the remake of *I Spit on Your Grave* seems to revel in villainizing the rural men, perhaps in response to the recent rise in ultra-conservative Tea Party political movements, of which these men are a stereotype.

With this in mind, the only real difference between the two films is the much clearer separation of Jennifer from her attackers than we see in the original. Although the original Jennifer is from the city, the disdain she has for the rural men is only of their construction – in reality she does not dislike them, but they project their own dislike for her as her dislike for them. In the remake, though, Jennifer is on guard from early on, and is slightly wary of the men she meets. Furthermore, the clothes she wears and her use of technology set her apart from her attackers. Jennifer wears high quality clothing and utilizes specific running clothes for her morning workouts, and uses an iPod and a laptop, while the other men wear work clothes and camouflage jackets, and seem

overjoyed with a simple video camera that one of them owns. We see that they live in mobile homes or small, dark freestanding houses while Jennifer rents an entire well-appointed cabin just for herself. The original Jennifer also rents a large cabin, but her demeanor and clothes are much more modest, and seem more akin to a life that is not in complete opposition to a rural setting. If the original Jennifer seems like she is on retreat, the new Jennifer is a duck out of water. I am focusing on these minor differences because overall they give the new film a different tone than that of the original. By highlighting the rural men as focused solely on hunting, drinking, and rape, the new film works much harder to characterize them as ‘rednecks’ and to display this as an immediate, outward image. The men in the original are marked as working class for sure, with overalls and jumpsuits as their standard attire, but the men in the remake carry more negative connotations. By highlighting the disparity between the men and Jennifer, the film becomes focused on highlighting the men’s depravity – even adding a sheriff who is in on the rapes and kills an old man from the town when it becomes clear that he may know their secret – and reveling in their humiliation and deaths. If the original film was a condemnation of male group dynamics and the cultural of misogynistic violence, the remake is more specifically about how those social dynamics are bred in the country. The new Jennifer’s demeanor implies that she does not worry about male violence in the city, where the cosmopolitan (read: liberal) population has risen above the constant threat of rape. This is, of course, a post-feminist fantasy, once again implying that feminism did what it set out to do and that the power dynamics between men and women are equal; but it is a fantasy that works to derisively highlight

the economic and political disparity in this country between the urban and the rural in visual terms.

Wrong Turn and the Privileged White Male

Clover defines this city/country split as ‘urbanoia’, a term that she defines as the urban dweller’s guilt for having stripped the rural areas of their population and economic vibrancy, and the fear of the rural dweller’s retribution for this act. This is related, she argues, to the guilt of white Europeans for pillaging the Native Americans, whereby the ‘redskin’ of the Native peoples is replaced by the ‘redneck’ of the modern rural poor. If urbanoia can be characterized by fear of retribution, on the one hand, it can be identified as a privilege on the other. The city may approach the country guilty (Clover 164), and fear reprisal for past sins, but this often manifests itself through the city entering the country with a type of haughty bravado. This is prevalent from the 1970s through to today, and is a dynamic that Clover underappreciates in *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*. Films that portray this type of privileged entrance into the rural include the original *Chain Saw* and its remake, *Deliverance* (Boorman 1972), the original and remake of *The Hills Have Eyes* (Craven 1977, Aja 2006), and *Wrong Turn* (Schmidt 2003). These films are all characterized by at least one member of a group, always a white male, assuming that his class, gender, and wealth – all markers of social privilege – will afford him the ability to break laws of common courtesy (or common sense) when in a rural environment. This can range from entering a place uninvited (*Chain Saw, Chainsaw, Hills, Wrong Turn*), assuming knowledge of the environment (*Deliverance, Hills*), or assuming that money can be used to manipulate a situation predicated by bad manners and/or bad sense (*Deliverance, Chainsaw, Hills*).

I've chosen to end this project with the 2003 movie *Wrong Turn* because it is the loosest example of a remake out of all the films I've considered. It stands as an example, like the other films in this conclusion, as a guide for how to begin applying the concepts I've explored throughout this dissertation to films that lie outside the scope of this project. But despite the fact that *Wrong Turn* is not a direct remake of any previous movie, it is very obvious that it is a remake of two very famous films – *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *Deliverance*. The basic story involves five friends and a stranger who meet up in the woods. The friends are camping and get a blow out from a barbed wire road hazard that was purposely laid, while the stranger meets them after crashing into their broken down car with his own car. In their search for help in the hills of West Virginia, they encounter a group of three heavily disfigured, inbred men who hunt and terrorize them, killing all but the stranger (Chris, played by Desmond Harrington) and one of the friends (Jessie, played by Eliza Dushku). Once the six city dwellers come together, they make three heterosexual pairs. The two most sexually promiscuous die first, the committed pair die later and at different times, and Chris and Jessie make the last pair, surviving the ordeal as a way of idealizing the post-9/11 norm of heterosexual couples surviving that I have detailed previously. The film takes elements from *Chain Saw* (three male killers, chainsaw and other power tools, an old dilapidated truck, an indication toward cannibalism) and elements from *Deliverance* (the setting, the inbred characters) and creates a film that is fairly fun to watch, and does exactly what a genre film should – it makes viewers feel completely familiar while still wondering what will happen next.

Besides all of the homage to the well known films mentioned above, perhaps one of the most familiar things that *Wrong Turn* does is show a privileged white male entering the woods with impatience and a chip on his shoulder. Chris first shows his flair for impatience when, on his way for a job interview as a doctor, he gets stuck in traffic. He gets out of his car and walks up to a semi truck and asks the driver what is going on. When presented with the obvious answer that the road is closed, he asks the driver what he should do. The driver answers that Chris should probably head back to his car to check his hair a few hundred more times, immediately setting Chris on edge and indicating to the audience that Chris will be unable to interact positively with the local populace. Chris's next scene has him asking an old, nearly toothless service station attendant for a road around the accident. As Chris finds a road on a small map and asks the man about it, he ignores the local man's warning not to travel that way. Much like Sally and Franklin in *Chain Saw* who ignore the Cook's warning not to go to their family's old farm house, Chris rips the map off the wall and heads off down the dirt road. The final moment that typifies the privilege with which the city enters the country is when Chris (now with the friends), upon finding the small home of the killers (uninhabited at the moment, and before they know who lives there or that they are being hunted) enters the home after no one answers the door. Like Kirk and Jerry in *Chain Saw*, like Kemper and Andy in *Chainsaw*, and like Mike and Clay in *Friday the 13th* (2009), Chris's assumption of the right to enter a property uninvited gets him (and his newfound friends) into a situation from which they cannot escape unscathed. This point is driven home by the fact that the two women and the other man in the group urge him not to enter the house. It is at this moment that gender and racial codes come in to play

in a way that instantly clarifies the seemingly ever-present display of white male privilege in situations like this. The women do not assume the right to enter the home because they are women and Scott does not assume the right because he is coded as ambiguously non-white (dark hair, dark eyes, olive skin – characteristics shared by the two women), and so Chris (light hair, blue eyes, light skin) becomes starkly isolated in his willingness to transgress uninvited into a strangers home.

Final Thoughts

The ability to trace genre trends across time periods can be useful for exploring the politics of those time periods. To be able to compare remakes across time periods further increases the value of this work. That a group of films from one specific time period would all be remade in another specific time period allows for the dismissal of coincidence and demands a hard look at the dynamics that could motivate such a turn of events. Throughout this project, I have detailed the ways in which the post-9/11 era slasher remakes present us with a snapshot of a culture in dire need of hope. With recovery at the forefront of social dialogue, and a paradigm shift in how America sees the world and how the world sees America, we can see in the remakes a desire for an idealized past that included strength through structure. Whether that structure is found in traditional gender roles, the nuclear family, capitalism, or melodramatic narrative modes, the new films expose a desire to rewrite the 1970s films in our own image. This acts to make the films less terrifying, and to reframe horror as a process defined not by the unknown, but by forward progress through recovery.

* * *

The next stage of this project will build on the research and arguments herein as a way of expanding both the breadth and scope of the current investigation. I will consider more of the ‘outlier’ films like those touched on this conclusion and work to trace the patterns of post-9/11 American horror to non-remake films, and remakes of films not originally from the 70s slasher style. Nearly all of the remakes listed below in the first endnote to this chapter have aspects that change them to fit into the conservative, post-9/11 mindset I’ve explored throughout this project, and I will expand my thesis to consider those films more fully. Furthermore, a deeper study of industry dynamics, including interviews with writers, producers, and directors will prove invaluable for considering the mindset of filmmakers, the production expectations, and the financial specifics of the films, especially as it relates to the indie/studio divide. I also hope to uncover the motivation for remaking these specific films, as opposed to producing original works.

By expanding my research, I will be able to more fully answer the questions that led me to this project: Why are these movies being remade? Why are they so different, both aesthetically and in tone? What do these changes say about our current cultural desires, and what do they illuminate about the original texts and time periods from which they are taken? How do their representations of gender inform our understanding of today’s cultural norms, especially when we consider the characters of the Final Girl, the monster, and the mother? This project has answered these questions and laid a groundwork for further considering how the combination of historical consideration, cultural studies, formal interrogation, and industry study can inform our reading of the

classic 70s slashers and their recent remakes; by expanding the scope of focus, I will reveal increasingly nuanced and comprehensive answers to these questions.

Notes

¹ This is by no means an exhaustive list of horror (or even slasher) remakes that have come about recently. Other popular titles include *Black Christmas* (1974/2006), *Prom Night* (1980/2008), *My Bloody Valentine* (1981/2009 [3D]), *House of Wax* (1953/2005), *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977/2006), *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984/2010), *The Crazies* (1973/2010), *Dawn of the Dead* (1978/2004), *Night of the Living Dead* (1968/2006 [3D]), *The Fog* (1980/2005), *The Thing* (1982/2011), *The Amityville Horror* (1979/2005), and *The Omen* (1976/2006), among others.

² If, as Geoff King argues, lower budget films often have more license deal with risqué content, it is perhaps telling that Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street* is far less politically volatile, and yet infinitely more popular, than *The Hills Have Eyes* or *The People Under the Stairs*.

³ An in-depth investigation into motherhood in the *Scream* movies could easily fill an entire chapter, and perhaps even a short book, all on its own. With four films and at least six mother or surrogate mother relationships to explore, the *Scream* series is rife for commentary. While I do not have the space in this chapter to lay bare all of the complexities of these films, I will discuss some of the most troubling and enlightening relationships that reveal views toward motherhood that I have touched on throughout the rest of this project. Kathleen Rowe Karlyn's chapter 'Scream, Popular Culture, and Feminism's Third Wave: "I'm Not My Mother"' (*Genders*, 38, 2003) provides a comprehensive look at the first three *Scream* films in the context of 1990s feminism. Her work argues convincingly for the strength and resilience found in the characters of Sidney and Gail in the face of the conflicted and often faltering feminism of the 3rd Wave, and the importance of considering how the mother/daughter relationship that underlies the series helps to ground Sidney's maturation in a history that includes her mother's life, for better and for worse.

⁴ Figures provided by www.IMDb.com.

⁵ *Scream 2* opened to nearly \$33 million domestic sales, and banked \$101 million by the time it closed its US run after seven months. *Scream 3* opened to \$34.7 million, and

closed with \$89 million domestically. *Scream 4*, which came out 11 years after 3 and 15 years after the original did quite a bit worse, opening to nearly \$18.7 million and closing to only \$38 million domestically. All figures are from www.IMDb.com.

⁶ Because Sidney believes that Cotton Weary, a recurring main character throughout the films, raped and killed her mother, Sidney develops a distrust for men. It turns out that her fears are well founded, because Billy actually killed her mother and framed Cotton, with whom Mrs. Prescott was having a consensual affair.

⁷ In the third film when we find out from Roman that his mother was raped, her disconnection from him makes sense, and we get our first glimpse of her in an understanding light. This vindication is partially erased, though, in *Scream 4* when Jill blames her jealously-motivated killing spree on Sidney's fame. Despite knowing what we do about Mrs. Prescott, and the role that Roman played in making her the villain, there is still a sense that the mother is to blame. That Jill kills her own mother as a means to an end in her quest to usurp Sidney's fame reinforces that blaming the mother, even when there is no sin, always underlies the *Scream* narrative.

⁸ These conclusions are found throughout pages 143-144.

⁹ A good recent example of this plot motif is visible in Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* pair (2003,2004) in which Uma Thurman's character, 'The Bride', travels around the world to learn Kung Fu (in isolation), find the best samurai sword, and eventually track down all of her assailants.

¹⁰ *I Spit on Your Grave* reminds me in many ways of the saying, 'If a tree falls in the woods, and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?' This may seem like a bad joke, and I do not want it to come across that way, but Jennifer's spectacular display of power is the falling tree, and because there is literally no one around to see it, it is almost as if it happens in a vacuum.

APPENDIX

PRODUCTION AND INCOME DATA

	Claimed Production Cost	US Theater Revenue	Global Theater Revenue	Production Companies	Theatrical Distribution Companies
<i>The Last House on the Left</i> (1972)	\$90,000	\$3,100,000	\$10,000,000 (Excluding US)	Lobster Enterprises, Sean S. Cunningham Films, The Night Co.	Hallmark Releasing
<i>The Last House on the Left</i> (2009)	\$15,000,000	\$32,721,635	\$45,482,936	Rogue Pictures, Scion Films, Crystal Lake Entertainment, Midnight Entertainment	Rogue Pictures
<i>The Texas Chain Saw Massacre</i> (1974)	\$83,532	\$30,895,000	Not Available	Vortex	Bryanston Distributing
<i>The Texas Chainsaw Massacre</i> (2003)	\$9,200,000	\$80,184,261	\$26,500,000 (Excluding US)	New Line Cinema, Focus Features, Radar Pictures, Platinum Dunes, Next Entertainment, Chainsaw Productions LLC	Focus Features
<i>Halloween</i> (1978)	\$300,000	\$47,000,000	\$13,000,000 (Excluding US)	Compass International Pictures, Falcon International Productions	Compass International Pictures

	Claimed Production Cost	US Theater Revenue	Global Theater Revenue	Production Companies	Theatrical Distribution Companies
<i>Halloween</i> (2007)	\$15,000,000	\$58,267,261	\$21,981,879 (Excluding US)	Dimension Films, Nightfall Productions, Spectacle Entertainment Group, Trancas International Films, The Weinstein Company	Dimension Films
<i>Halloween II</i> (1981)	\$2,500,000	\$25,533,818	Not Available	De Laurentiis, Universal Pictures	Universal Pictures
<i>Halloween II</i> (2009)	\$15,000,000	\$33,335,670	Not Available	Dimension Films, Spectacle Entertainment Group, Trancas International Films	Dimension Films
<i>Friday the 13th</i> (1980)	\$550,000	\$39,754,601	\$20,000,000	Paramount Pictures, Georgetown Productions, Inc., Sean S. Cunningham Films	Paramount Pictures
<i>Friday the 13th</i> (2009)	\$19,000,000	\$64,997,188	Not Available	New Line Cinema, Paramount Pictures, Platinum Dunes, Crystal Lake Entertainment	New Line Cinema

	Claimed Production Cost	US Theater Revenue	Global Theater Revenue	Production Companies	Theatrical Distribution Companies
<i>Friday the 13th Part 2</i>	\$1,250,000	\$21,722,776	Not Available	Georgetown Productions Inc., Sean S. Cunningham Films	Paramount Pictures

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