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## Trabajo Fin de Grado

Inescapable Hell: *It Follows* (2014) and the Inflection of  
Teen Horror in Times of Economic Crisis

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## **Abstract**

The subgenre of horror cinema known as slasher is highly formulaic and tends to fall into clichés typical of its genre. Clichés that are based on patriarchal gender conceptions. Films such as *Cabin in The Woods* (2011), *Jeniffers Body* (2009) or *It Follows* (2014), use these clichés in a subversive way to reinvent it, continuing the tradition started by *Scream* (1996). *It Follows* is the center of this analysis for the mastery in the use of the formulaic elements of the slasher and its subversion. The objective of this paper is to analyze how director David Robert Mitchell reinvents the topics of slasher and teen horror without abusing graphic violence and nudity, to illustrate a horror story in which the economic crisis and gender identity are intertwined with classic slasher elements.

## Resumen

El subgénero del cine de terror conocido como *slasher* es altamente formulista y tiende a caer en clichés propios de su género. Clichés que se basan en concepciones de género patriarcales. Películas como *Cabin in The Woods* (2011), *Jeniffers Body* (2009) o *It Follows* (2014), emplean dichos clichés de manera subversiva para reinventarlo, continuando la tradición empezada por *Scream* (1996). *It Follows* es el centro de este análisis por la maestría en el uso de los elementos formulistas del *slasher* y su subversión. El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar cómo el director David Robert Mitchell reinventa los tópicos del *slasher* y el *teen horror* sin abusar de la violencia gráfica y la desnudez, para ilustrar una historia de terror en la que la crisis económica y la identidad de género se entrelazan con los elementos clásicos del *slasher*.

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## Introduction

There is a subgenre of horror that lies in opposition to the pantheon of works that film critics have deemed as essential. Placed, according to Carol “[a]t the very bottom, down in the cinematic underbrush,” according to Carol J. Clover (187). This subgenre has been devalued for its simple narrative, one that mimics oral narratives and a fairy-tale structure. The open violence and explicit sexuality characterizing the subgenre have been both praised as high art and detracted as a vile. This genre is none other than the slasher film, also known as splatter or shocker.

Due to this lack of critical appreciation, there is a distinctive lack of academic theories of the genre itself and its origins. Sotiris Petridis identifies two main theoretical approaches regarding the slasher genre: Carol J. Clover’s theory about representation of gender and sexuality in the films of this generic category, and Vera Dika’s structuralist approach which focuses on the narrative structure of films of this genre (76). Dika stipulates that the slasher film is a type of horror in which a killer, stalks and kills a group of unsupervised teenagers as a punishment for their transgressions. This idea will be further explored in the following paragraphs, as Clover’s seminal work “Her Body, Himself” added an extra layer of gender analysis to the genre.

From a chronological point of view, there is a degree of ambiguity regarding the exact origin of the genre. In his article, Petridis refers to many film scholars, such as Dika, that consider *Halloween* (1978) as the first slasher film. Yet four years prior, two cornerstones of slasher had been released in theatres: *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Black Christmas*. Therefore, a strong case can be made to consider 1974 as the year when the slasher genre originates. Furthermore, if we desire to pinpoint the antecedents of the genre, in order to achieve a clearer definition, there is no doubt that Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960) lays the

foundation of the slasher genre. The film serves as the perfect antecedent, having Norman Bates as the blueprint of the psychosexual killer, a predominant figure of the genre.

Although Dika's structural analysis serves to identify the broad narrative and cinematic elements shared by the slasher genre, its chronological narrowness (from 1978 to 1981) limits its scope (Petridis 76-79). On the other hand, Clover offers a broader analysis stating that there are six key elements that conform the genre, those being: "killer, locale, weapons, victims and shock" (Clover 194). The sixth element being the Final Girl, the distressed female that after absorbing male features is able to defeat the killer.

Barbara Creed has offered a psychoanalytic explanation of the killer in this genre, a psychosexual killer usually created by what Barbara Creed refers as the Monstrous Feminine, taking form as a Terrible Mother. This monstrous mother is commonly the source of the killer's sexual repression and fear of castration, which causes him to lash out in an infantile, visceral tantrum towards sex, and especially women. As Creed explains "he enacts on her body the one act he most fears for himself, transforming her entire body into a bleeding wound" (46). Re-enacting his castration at the hands of the Terrible Mother, the killer mutilates the bodies of those displaying any traces of sexuality as a means of revenge. In this theory, the killer uses his weapon as an extension of his body, a surrogate phallus, to enact his revenge.

The typical victims in slasher films, unsupervised teenagers, are savagely punished for entering the sexual realm of adults, a realm that neither the infantile killer nor the teenagers can enter. The place, often referred as the Terrible Place by Clover, is marked in stark opposition to the safe spaces in which the teenagers in the films live. The appearance of the killer marks the end of those safe spaces, which he slowly turns into Terrible Places, the epitome of those places lies in the killer's lair. Another generic fixture is the shock value, a sensationalist element that contributed to the academic depreciation of the genre.

The last element in Clover's list is the Final Girl, who is "boyish, in a word. (...), she is not fully feminine" (204). The Final Girl is presented as the protagonist of the film (with the permission of the killer), she is either virginal or non-sexually available. In a sense, she rejects femininity, and by integrating masculine traits to her personality she is able to defeat, at least temporary, the killer. Obviously, this concept is quite problematic for feminist film critics, as it punishes sexually active women and deposits all the worth of the Final Girl on her boyish side.

The repetition of those elements *ad nauseam* almost parallels the oral tradition of folk tales. Yet, as it happens with folk tales, this has caused the stories in the genre to be drenched with dominant ideologies at specific historical contexts. The genre's traditional conservatism in its gender politics, with levels of violence towards women high even for the standards of the 70's American society, has not escaped the attention of feminist critics. As Brigid Cherry has noted, when women were surveyed regarding their horror-watching habits "The least well-liked horror film type by far was the slasher film (...) It was also the most disliked horror film type." (170). It was due to those controversial features, rampant sexism and formulaic plot, that the slasher genre would turn stale by the end of the millennium. In his article, Petridis remarks how although some filmmakers attempted to reinvigorate the genre with the post-slasher, it was not enough to save the genre from its decline (79-81).

In his famous article, "Hell is a Teenage Girl", Martin Fradley points out that Clover's theories caused such an impact that influenced film directors like Wes Craven (205). Clover's influence would mark his work in the film series *Scream* (1996-present), inflecting the genre by imbuing "teen horror with a refreshingly alert political sensibility" (207). This political sensibility that Craven imbued to the genre is the cornerstone of the most palatable and thought-provoking additions to the genre in the last two decades (205), particularly in films such as *Jennifer's Body* (Kusama, 2009) and *Cabin in the Woods* (Goddard, 2011).

In 2014 writer and director David Robert Mitchel released *It Follows*, a masterclass in indie horror and a fresh new addition to this select cannon. Nonetheless, *It Follows* does not simply adopt the structure and plot elements of the genre, but rather it rewrites them in a refreshing manner. It could be said that *It Follows* reinvents the slasher genre by using its clichés to delve into more contemporary anxieties teens face regarding sex, adulthood and their future in a context of economic crisis. The examination of this generic inflection will be the objective of this dissertation, particularly by looking into and highlighting the most significant generic variations.

*It Follows* (2014), starring Maika Monroe, Keir Gilchrist, Daniel Zovatto, Jake Weary, Olivia Luccardi and Lili Sepe. Premiering at the 2014 Cannes Festival, the success of its debut caused RADiUS-TWC to purchase it for distribution. With a budget of 2 Million dollars, *It Follows* grossed \$23.3 Million worldwide, rendering the film both a financial and critical success, with a Metascore of 83 out of 100. With sites such as *Los Angeles Times*, giving it a score of 90, and high praise in their reviews (Reichtshaffen).

The film narrates how Jay (Maika Monroe), a 19-year-old girl from the suburbs of Detroit, is stalked relentlessly by the inhuman manifestation of a sexually contracted curse after having sexual intercourse with her newly met boyfriend Hugh. This inhuman creature, as Hugh (Jake Weary) explains Jay while he has abducted her, will always follow his prey walking, shapeshifting into different appearances and remaining invisible to those not infected by it. The only option Jay has is to pass it to someone else, praying that said someone is sexually active enough to keep the chain going.

From both this brief synopsis and Mitchel's imitation of the aesthetics of the late 70's one could think that the film is nothing but an attempt to profit from the highly nostalgic horror fans. Yet here lies what makes the film worthy of analysis as Mitchel uses instead this premise, in conjunction to the rest of the finely tuned elements of the film to create a piece of slasher



media that comments on the nature of the genre and deals with issues of mortality, individualism, sexuality and adulthood, without barely showing a drop of blood.

Across the entire film, there is a clear influence of the late 70s slashers, such as *Halloween* (1978) and *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* (1980). The ever-present I-camera focussed on the killer's prey, and oppressive soundtrack in the film evoke its predecessors. The setting itself is crafted in a deliberate attempt to stay chronologically ambiguous, with no clear display of a date in which the events of the film take part. Technology itself seems confined to the early '80s and '90s, portraying old fashion cinemas, dated cars and even cathode-ray tube televisions.

Taking this into consideration, the objective of this dissertation is to analyse how the film recontextualises both the dated elements of slashers such as *Halloween* (1978) and the more modern and gender-critical implications of Teen Horror and Post-slasher films such as *Scream* (1996). In so doing, this dissertation will underline how director David Robert Mitchel creates a collage of horror elements that conveys a new sense of dread appropriate to the current social environment.

## **Discovering sexuality and meeting the monster**

The film begins with a long take of a suburban neighbourhood in Detroit, the long take portrays a girl, Annie (Bailey Spry), fleeing from her home assuring her father everything is alright while wearing her underwear and red high heels. Annie drives towards the beach seeming distressed as if something is following her, but that we never come to see. Yet, once she arrives at the beach, she stays near the sea waiting for the night to pass. The viewer is then introduced to the only instance of gore in the film, as the next shot is a close shot of her dead body, more precisely her upper body and one of the red high heels. Once a next shot expands the view, it can be appreciated how the high heel was able to fit the frame as her leg is completely mangled.

This first set of scenes is quite relevant as it plays with the viewer's expectations in this gore scene, who has just been introduced to this gore scene three minutes into the movie. The style of the shots and the shock value of the scenes serve as a bait to catch the viewer's attention. As Sotiris points out, since the 80's the genre formula had become widely known and predictable, even causing the decline of the genre (80). Therefore, the scene serves two purposes as it both delivers the first shock of the film and causes false expectations.

After this, the viewer is introduced to a voyeuristic view of the main character, Jay (Maika Monroe), as she drifts in the safe haven of her pool. Yet the film first portrayal of her is with a set of voyeuristic and furtive shots of her swimming. "I see you," utters Jay to a pair of peeping kids, yet the kids could be understood as an insert of the viewer, as they both share this voyeuristic view of Jay. This is a key moment as it defines Jay's body, as she is, portrayed, perhaps unwillingly, as a sexual object. Then, as if the perception of the boys were a wish come true, the following scene shows Jay getting ready for a date. As Laura Mulvey's writings on the male gaze in cinema observed, "The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly" (715), and this scene clearly references that.

Both lighting and framing are quite important in this scene, as the composition of the shot sets Jay facing her reflection in the mirror while glossing her lips, her reflected body in the mirror is tinted red by the tulip lamps adjacent to it. There is a deeply complex meaning in the scene as the tulips, a clearly vaginal flower is tinted red, a colour both associated with sexuality and violence Jay's look at her reflection in the mirror conveys her awareness of her body's sexual attraction.

From those initial scenes, we can already perceive Jay in complete opposition to the unattractiveness and masculinization of Clover's Final Girl: her blonde hair, coquettishness and sexual availability distance her from that staple character. This paints her as an openly Postfeminist Final Girl. As Martin Fradley suggests in "Hell is a Teenage Girl" (2015), Clover's analysis of the genre became so influential that affected postmodernist films such as the *Scream* series (Craven, 1996-present). Subverting Clover's considerations regarding the Final Girl, the postmodernist Final Girl, is characterised by her postfeminist attitude (hence the term Postfeminist Final Girl). This postfeminism is denoted by the Final Girl's search for personal strength and feminine pleasure. Jay seems to embody a new inflection of the traditional Final Girl that displays both postfeminist and traditional characteristics.

When Jay finally meets Hugh (Jake Weary), her (older) suitor, she decides to teach him how to play "The watching game". A game in which one of the players chooses another person to switch their lives with, while the other must guess who the player did choose and why. This game not only serves as a metatextual play on Mulvey's theory of scopophilia but also is an important moment to define both characters. The scene sets up different layers of perceptions and assumptions and subverts them. With Hugh, both Jay and the audience assume he would like to be the man that dates sexier women. Yet Hugh corrects Jay pointing towards a father and his kid, expressing his desire to be young again as the kid. This desire, as Fradley has noted,

a common theme in Teen Horror, the uncertainty of maturing and the breach of the safety bubble that being a kid represent. (204-219)

But this game of perception ends abruptly. Thinking that Jay had chosen a girl in a yellow dress, Hugh points towards her. Yet it is made clear that Hugh is the only one able to see her, and once he realises, he flees the cinema dragging Jay behind. This truncates the mood of the date, and although Hugh tries to salvage the date in a dinner, they do not have sex, at least for then. It is important to acknowledge that Jay is aware of Hugh's sexual intentions and reciprocates them, as she tells her sister. Those intentions culminate in a second date, this time driving to the beach with the intention to escalate it further in the car as Jay suggests. But before we follow to analyse the sex scene, it is important to consider some things regarding cars in the film and their meaning, serving this occasion as a great catalyser.

As Clover stated on "Her Body, Himself" "the emotional terrain of the slasher film is pretechnological" (198), this still holds true for *It Follows*. As a consequence of this, cars are the direct opposition to the killer, and represent a heaven of safety, from the killer. Cars create a technological privacy bubble and movement that lie in stark opposition to the slow, pretechnological killer, this being even more apparent in the film due to its nature.

Jay and Hugh proceed to have sex in the car in an intimate scene where the camera creeps in a predatorial manner towards the car. Playing with the conventions of the genre yet again, the scene fools the audience into expecting the attack of an unseen threat. "In the slasher film, sexual transgressors of both sexes are scheduled for early destruction. The genre is studded with couples trying to find a place beyond purview of parents and employers where they can have sex, and immediately afterwards (or during) being killed" (Clover, 199). The couple re-enacts step by step what Clover describes in her theory, but instead of their destruction what follows is a heart-to-heart of the couple. At least that is what it seems, what really happens fits Clover's description to a tee, by having sex Jay has scheduled herself for early destruction as

Hugh explains after drugging her. Mirroring other prominent slashers as *Halloween*, Jay's sexual awakening marks her for damnation. Her first sexual experience and her first encounter with It are simultaneous and deeply linked

Many critics and academics draw parallels between Jay being drugged and tied to a date-rape, but as Leslie A. Hahner and Scott J. Varda point out in their work "It Follows and Rape Culture: Critical Response as Disavowal", they fail to understand that a rape already has taken place (253). Hahner and J. Varda define it as a "rape by deception" (253) as Jay's consent is based on the deceptive façade Hugh (Jeff) has elaborated in order to pass It. From here on it must be considered if Jay's following sexual relationships are consensual by nature or Jay's precarious situation.

After explaining the nature of It by tying her to a wheelchair and letting It approach her, Hugh simply dumps her in her lawn, disoriented and traumatised. After this event, Jay begins her journey towards maturity or, as David Greven puts it, her "sped-up, phallically fuelled female *bildungsromans* in which women rapidly develop into their adult versions, coming of age through frantic stress" (146)

## **Towards Sexual Maturity: Understanding the Monster**

Jay is dumped in her porch by Hugh, who flees from the scene right before Jay's friends Yara (Olivia Luccardi), Paul (Keir Gilchrist) and her sister Kelly (Lili Sepe) call for an ambulance. Once she is nursed back to normality, the police appear, eliciting the neighbours judging gazes. The mother of Jay's schoolmate Greg (Daniel Zovatto) even exclaims "Those people are such a mess" as if the assault was the fault of either Jay or her parents. Hahner and Varda remark how Mrs Hanningan (Leisa Pulido), Greg's mother, represents the "victim blaming that permeates public dialogue about sexual violence" (255).

The debate regarding consent is reopened when the police officers explain Jay that there is little they can do regarding her case as it was consensual, and the only criminal charge they can pursue is for her brief abduction. This scene, coupled with the events during Jay's second date, is a clear statement on the views that society holds towards consent and sexual violence, blaming the victim and narrowing consent to a simple "only no means no". Both the policemen and Mrs Hanningan serve to illustrate how prejudices towards sexually active women serve to excuse sexual misbehaviours from their male partners.

For the elaboration of this dissertation *It, the slasher*, has been and will be considered a demon. As David Robert Mitchel explained in a press conference at the 40ème Festival du Cinéma Américain de Deauville, each viewer might come with a different explanation for *It* "depending on who watches it" (Chargé, 00:25-00:47). Therefore, *It* will be considered a demon as it follows (no pun intended) the pop culture considerations regarding demons in horror media. That is: an evil creature that must be invited into our reality, that follows a set of rules, whose touch burns and is somehow weakened by water.

There is no time for Jay to recover from the traumatic experience, as she is back to school almost immediately. The viewer joins one of Jay's academic classes where the teacher is imparting a lecture on "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", a famous poem by T.S. Eliot.

In the poem, Eliot reflects on the loneliness of individualism and the feelings of “helplessness and abandonment” suffered by the individuals (Gates-White, 3). The specific segment being read focuses on the fear towards ageing and the aforementioned feelings of helplessness. Ideas that It embodies as it appears onscreen, taking form as an old woman while “I am Lazarus, come from the dead” is uttered by the teacher.

On its first appearance, the demon manifested as a naked woman, this time the demon appears as an elderly woman wearing only a nightgown. Thus, David Robert Mitchell exchanges the overalls and knife of Mike Myers (*Halloween* 1978) for the nakedness of both hand and body. The demon further avoids the conventions regarding the slasher by the absence of any phallic weapons. Clover understands the weapon as a tool to pierce the veil of flesh, a veil only protected by collective taboo (Clover 198), in Mitchell’s work, the entire body of the demon is a weapon, and its mere existence breaks the taboo.

As Erin Harrington explains, creature designs deliberately sexualised as H.R. Giger’s xenomorph, serve to “evoke abject genital horror and a playful ambivalence about the nature of the unbounded feminine” (61). Creed’s monstrous-feminine skips the intermediary that is the slasher to be present directly in the film. Rather than a Terrible Mother castrating his son and creating a psychosexual killer who seeks revenge through evisceration, the monstrous-feminine is the slasher itself rather than being created by it.

This fear towards the female body as a castrating element links to the *vagina dentata* imagery. Creed establishes in her book *The Monstrous-Feminine* (105–121) how in horror this figure accounts for sexual anxiety as it castrates both literally and figuratively. The demon renews this ambivalence in the slasher in an unprecedented form, the literal castration, as explained previously, in slashers comes by the mangling of the body. Yet it also serves as a metaphorical castrator, gating the virgins from accessing sexual adulthood by its presence, dooming anyone who dares to have sex. The demon represents both a symbolic castration and

a literal castration to those who dare to ignore it. As commented previously it fills both the role of the Terrible Mother and the slasher.

Jay solves this encounter by fleeing to the fast food joint where her friends work. The fact that her friends are working either after or during classes serves to ground the film in a period of economic recession. There she finds the support of her friends who decide to have a sleepover to help her, a constant element along the film. This is especially true for Paul, who is in love with Jay and would do anything to help Jay. Further in the film, we see how he is even willing to put his life at risk, yet his true motives are blurred between selflessness love and his desire to have sex with Jay.

It is during this sleepover when the viewer is able to further understand Paul's feelings towards Jay. After being forced to sleep on the sofa, Paul receives the nightly visit of Jay who chats with him about their teenage years and their shared first kiss. This is one of the many scenes that point towards the attraction Paul feels towards Jay, the lack of reciprocity and how both are aware of it, an important point that will be expanded later.

This candid interaction is interrupted by a window being smashed, marking the arrival of the demon. Paul then rushes to call the police while Jay is left alone as she decides to inspect where the noise came from. Not only does she find the source of the noise but also the demon, who this time takes form as a rape victim (Hahner and Varda 256) wearing ragged clothes, half naked and pissing herself, another incarnation of the monstrous feminine. This form perfectly aligns with our previous consideration regarding it, the raw sexual imagery of a rape victim is displayed in conjunction with the imagery of dirtiness and decay. This appearance greatly strengthens the Monstrous-Feminine aspect of the demon and serves as a diametrical opposition to classical slashers.

Jay, again, flees from the monster and locks herself in the bedroom upstairs until the rest of her friends manage to get in, except Yara. This causes them to open the bedroom's door



yet again, allowing It to enter the room. The demon takes form as an almost disproportionate tall man. With an impressive frame that mirrors the more traditional slashers such as Mike Myers.

This time Jay is forced to flee through the roof, using a bike to arrive at a park with a set of swings where she recovers her breath. This is highly symbolic, as adulthood is the source of her anguish, and her temporal safe place is intended for kids, a place where she no longer belongs to. After some brief moments, the rest of Jay's friends arrive at the swings and hug her, indicating how she is not alone during her maturation. It is then, when a figure approaches, quickly being identified as Greg rather than the demon. After a brief explanation, Greg does not hesitate to aid Jay to search for Hugh's whereabouts and real identity, although his motivations for help are not clear at this time.

## **The Drive Towards Damnation in an Economically Ruined Society**

Once Greg has joined them, Jay and her friends, they drive in search of Hugh's house in order to find some clues regarding his true identity. Greg seems older and more experienced than the rest both sexually and in life. He is described through his car, as a masculine extension of his sense of self, the first time he is introduced he can be seen handwashing his car. As previously discussed, cars are masculine technological spaces that sit in opposition to the slow, pretechnological nature of the slashers. There is powerful symbolism in the way the car is split between the frontal seats and the back seats, which serve as an imaginary frontier delimiting both adulthood and sexuality. Jay and Greg are openly sexual while Paul is relegated to the back seat.

The drive-by shots of Detroit serve to remark the tragic economic misfortune of the city. After the outsourcing of American industry, the once industrious city of Detroit remains a husk of its past self. A city of abandoned buildings and factories and a state of economic crisis only aggravated with the economic recession after the financial crisis of 2008. As Cassey Ryan Kelly illustrates in "It Follows: Precarity, thanatopolitics, and the ambient of horror film" (3-5) in traditional slasher media the suburb represented a safe haven, having said safety compromised by the introduction of the slasher. Here, the economic crisis caused by the deindustrialization caused the impending ruin of all the interconnected circles. Both the suburb and the city are scheduled for this post-industrial ruin that serves as a Terrible Place that permeates each aspect of the individual. Kelly concisely formulates that "*It Follows* maps the vulnerability of individual bodies as a structural byproduct of social and environmental factors" (4). This considerations regarding the city certainly tie back to Hahner and Varda remarks regarding the agency of consent during crisis. Women in situations of precarity become "disposable bodies that can be violated at any moment." (253)

This same state of ruin is shared in Hugh's temporal house, an abandoned structure with all the windows covered that lies ominously in an impoverished neighbourhood in the south. It looks like a quarantined site, the zone zero of a terrible contagion, of course, that contagion is the economic recession that spreads from the city and infects the suburbs. Some of the signs of the contagion can be seen nearing Jay's neighbourhood, clearly manifesting how the economic recession creeps on the middle class too. After searching through the entirety of the house Paul finds a photograph of Hugh and a girl wearing a school jersey, which sends them towards a near school. There Greg and Jay manage to find Hugh's real name, Jeff, and address while leaving the rest waiting at the car.

Once they arrive at Jeff's house, her mother receives them, revealing that the first time Jay encountered the demon it adopted that appearance. There are quite important Oedipal implications to this, yet for the sake of fluidity, it will be elaborated further in this section. Jeff's house is located in the new suburbia, a place yet untouched by the economic ruin. Jeff's house lies in total opposition to the house he inhabited as Hugh, while said house was in the derelict city, his actual home is in the outer suburbia. The source of Jay's dread did not come from the city but rather from the rich suburbs. Kelly signals how Jeff's situation represents how "mortality [is] passed to those less fortunate" (10). Jeff travels from the outer suburbia to the city in order to pass his mortality onto those less economically fortunate. This will be the same decision that Paul takes at the end of the film, clearly indicating a pattern of abuse towards the poor.

Therefore, the fact that Jay does not want to pass it on to another unsuspecting man indicates the divide between Jeff and Jay, and how she does not want to partake in the chain of abuse. Jeff comments on how for a girl it should be easy to pass it to anyone, and Paul seems willing to receive it. Again, there is a strong emphasis on the consent of the sexual relationship, yet what seems sound in a technical way denounce the point previously stated, consent must

be questioned under structures of precarity (Hahner and Varda, 254). In order to gain some extra time, they head out to Greg's lakeside cabin, a cabin where his now absent parent used to take young Greg.

In a quick sweep the film returns to characterise Jay as a traditional final girl, she becomes "not sexually active" and "watchful" (Clover 204). This characterisation is culminated by Greg giving her his dad old revolver, a literal tool of male aggression. After practising a bit with the revolver, Jay joins her friends in the lakeside. Jay's transformation has not been completed yet, as the rest of her friends she oscillates between adult decision and adolescent whimsicalness. This lakeside rest is short lived as the demon arrives at the beach taking Yara's appearance. This echoes Jeff's explanation of the rules that the demon follows. The demon can take assume any appearance to reach its target, even friends and family.

Jay runs from the demon towards the barn where the gun is stored, and rather than keep fleeing Jay reenacts the final scenes of traditional slashers and confronts the demon, shooting toward it. This proves to be useless as once Jay lands a shot on the demon, it gets back up and continues its pursue. The values that were implied in the traditional ideas of the Last Girl are no longer valid in a world where the precarity and horror are structural (Hahner and Varda, 254). Once she locks herself in the barn, the demon proves its ambivalence as a slasher as it also does possess unnatural strength, punching a hole in the door. With her process of becoming a Final Girl truncated, Jay flees towards the safety of Gregg's car. But the structural Terrible Place has permeated enough (Kelly, 3) to render even cars unsafe, and Jay has an accident that sends her to the hospital with a broken arm.

Once in the hospital, after the failure of the Final Girl values, Jay abandons her Final Girl behaviour. There she has sex with Gregg in a scene where the values behind it are intentionally muddied. Both characters take advantage of the situation in order to achieve their means. While Greg takes advantage of Jay's vulnerability to have sex with her, Jay plays on

that to get rid of the demon, but in a sense, Greg is in the place of power and Jay yet again in the vulnerable situation. The sudden removal of Greg from the group and his gloating about having sex with Jay are key indicators of this.

The film returns to its slasher roots, and Greg, by having sex, has scheduled his own destruction. Soon after their sexual encounter, the demon manifests to kill Greg, adopting his form it breaks into the house while Jay gazes in horror. Jay's efforts to save Greg are futile, as she arrives just barely before the attack and is unable to stop it. The demon, shaped as Greg's mother pounces on Greg, killing him in an instant. The demon has powerful connotations of both *vagina dentata* and the Terrible Mother, and this scene serves to illustrate it perfectly, as it is the second time that the demon adopts the form of a mother.

Representing, as Erin Harrington puts it, the "pre-Oedipal mother who threatens symbolically to engulf the infant, thus obliterating them" (54). Greg, who already presented the most Oedipal qualities by living alone with her mother and using his father's inheritance (The gun, the house by the sea), completes the cycle by challenging his castration by having sex with Jay and is punished by the Monstrous Feminine as a literal Terrible Mother.

## **The Perpetual State of Victimhood of the Precarious Women**

With the death of Greg, the state of mortality and vulnerability of Jay is once again heightened, once again turning into a woman in a precarious situation. Jay resorts to fleeing with her car towards the beach, and sleeping in the car hood, mirroring Annie's situation at the start of the film. Once she awakes, she hears some men partying in a boat and Jay begins to approach them undressing herself as she enters the waters. The next scene Jay is shown distressed and with wet hair, being inferred that she had sex with the men on the yacht.

As both Kelly (10) and Hahner and Varda (254-256) illustrate, the film creates a powerful statement regarding women and the agency of their bodies. Jay's option to pass it to other men is never optional as she is under a situation of precariousness that threatens her life. In this last sexual encounter, Jay resembles a prostitute as for both the only manner in which they can temporarily escape the systemic violence towards them is by using their bodies. This solution being temporal as due to their systemic precariousness the violence will return towards them, forcing them to sell their bodies again for temporary safety. Unlike traditional slasher movies, here the use of sexuality is a tool to evade the structural violence rather than an indicator for damnation.

Once Jay arrives home, she locks herself in the "safety" of her room, but the industrial ruin is already seeping into the middle-class suburbs as the above ground pool lies dilapidated. Paul seems eager to "help" her to pass it. As Jay refuses, Paul creates a plan to fight and maybe kill it, reminiscent of the last acts in slasher films where the victim decides to strike back. The place Paul decides to use to set up the trap is in an old pool where they used to go, situated at the edge separating their suburbia and the derelict city. Yara then reflects on the line that divided the safety of the suburbs and the dread of the city. As Kelly proposes (3-4), in traditional slashers the racist notion of the city as a criminal place that attempts to breach the safety of the suburbs is commonly used by exchanging the racialised prejudices with a

psychosexual killer. In *It Follows* this clear division is accentuated by the Eight Mile Road, the massive road that severs the city in two distinct halves. Yet the killer does not come from the city, rather is a systemic infection that affected first the city and is slowly seeping into the working-class suburbs. The only boundary that assures safety in a post-industrial crisis is the boundary between the upper class and the rest. As Jeff illustrates, the rich are able to use the poor as proxies against any misfortune while their suburbia remains unscathed.

Therefore, it is no surprise that Paul's trap fails miserably as the demon enters the pool shaped as Jay's absent father. Yet Paul manages to land a shot on its head, but rather than dying, the demon seems to adopt its real form. Metaphorically portrayed as an inky red mass that fills the whole pool, the previous symbol of safety being contaminated. It does also bear a strong menstrual imagery as the following quotation from Erin Harrington illustrates:

It may allow a penis in, but it actively ejects a substance that is a signifier of both fertility and infertility, rendering the penis bloodied; beyond blood's own sense of indeterminacy this fluid may allude to woundedness or the capacity to wound (227).

This serves as an excellent example to conclude and reiterate the qualities that this slasher possesses in relation to the rest in the genre. While traditional slashers are individual, masculine, and phallic (Clover, 194-198), the demon is systemic, feminine, and vaginal.

The failure at destroying the monster states a new cannon in the slasher, a world where the monsters are systemic and unable to be killed by traditional means of masculinity. With the decision of Jay to pass it to Paul and subsequently Paul passing it to a prostitute, the chain of precariousness and lack of sexual agency follows the economic strata, being prostitutes the dead end of such a chain. In the end, nothing has changed, Jay will probably be a victim for life, forced to exchange her sexual agency to evade her ruin. *It Follows* shines a light in relations of economic and gender power, yet the story cannot be solved "creating a sense of horror at the absence of social and political change" (Fradley, 219).

## Conclusion

*It Follows* offers a refreshing view of the slasher genre by heavily imitating the atmosphere of classics such as *Halloween* (1978) and subverting the expectations of the viewer. There is an expertise in the usage of the metatextual, as the film plays between the conventions of the traditional slashers and more modern works from Teen Horror.

The film uses and subverts the elements of the traditional slasher to adapt it towards a modern period where the menace does not lie in the criminal seeping into the suburbia from the city. The dread in this modern slasher lies in the inherent precariousness of the individuals in a period of economic crisis and how their body agency is permanently put at risk, evidencing their mortality. The post-industrial landscape of the movie serves to remark how the individuals have been abandoned during the crisis and their only means of protection are themselves and their friends, as it happens with Jay.

The portrayal of Jay in the film serves to question both the traditional and modern idea of the Final Girl, as they both fail. This remarks the need for a new model of Final Girl in a time period where the violence is systemic rather than individual. With the usage of a slasher that is able to shapeshift, the film steers from the individual killer towards the idea of a killer that could be any of us; as during periods of vulnerability anyone could be an agent of violence against the precarious.

Ultimately, the film cannot offer any closure as the elements that create this status of precarity, in which the slasher thrives, has not been addressed. The underlining problem behind it, how women in situations of precarity are prone to sexual violence, remains unanswered, as the economic structures that favour it remain unquestioned.



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