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Dual Portrayal of Femininity in American Horror Movies

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Zásady pro vypracování

Závěrečná diplomová práce se bude věnovat dvojímu způsobu zobrazení ženskosti v americkém hororovém filmu.

V úvodu práce diplomantka nastíní teorii a historii studia hororových filmů a uvede zvolený teoretický přístup feminismu, kde se zaměří především na to, jak feministická kritika začala tento žánr analyzovat z hlediska genderu a pohledů na ženskost a vysvětlí mj. koncepty *gynaehorror*, monstrózní-ženskost (monstrous femininity), žena jako oběť, posílení ženské moci (female empowerment). Dále charakterizuje subžánr *slasher* a jeho dobové proměny. Jádrem práce bude analýza vybraných filmových hororů, konkrétně *Carrie* (1976), *Midsommar* (2019), *Halloween* (1978) a *It Follows* (2014), v níž se diplomantka zaměří na zobrazení ženskosti, posuny od tradičního pojetí, kontrast se zobrazováním mužskosti a maskulinity. V analýzách se bude opírat o výše uvedené teoretické koncepty a metodiku. Závěrem diplomantka díla porovná, své analýzy přehledně shrne a vysloví obecnější závěry o zobrazení ženskosti v americkém hororovém filmu.

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TITLE

Dual Portrayal of Femininity in American Horror Movies

ANNOTATION

The thesis is focused on the analysis of the representation of the dual image of femininity in selected American horror movies. The methodology rests on examining each film individually, aiming to bring a detailed study and classification of female characters in selected movies as well as a comparative analysis of the distinct representation of females according to the individual subgenre. It takes into account the shift from traditional and 'normal' femininity to a 'monstrous' or 'empowered' one and contrasts it to the representation of male characters and their masculinity.

KEYWORDS

feminism, femininity, gender, feminist movie theory, contemporary horror genre, gynaeohorror, monstrous-feminine, the Final Girl, female empowerment, Freudian theories

NÁZEV PRÁCE

Dvojí zobrazení ženství v americkém hororovém filmu

ANOTACE

Práce se zaměřuje na analýzu reprezentace duálního obrazu ženství ve vybraných amerických hororových filmech. Metodika spočívá v samostatném zkoumání jednotlivých filmů s cílem přinést podrobnou studii a klasifikaci ženských postav ve vybraných filmech a také komparativní analýzu odlišného zastoupení žen podle jednotlivých subžánrů. Bere v úvahu posun od tradiční a „normální“ ženskosti k „monstrózní“ nebo „posílené“ a staví je do kontrastu k reprezentaci mužských postav a jejich maskulinitě.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

feminismus, ženství, gender, feministická filmová teorie, moderní hororový žánr, gynehorror, monstrózní ženství, poslední přeživší dívka, ženská moc, Freudovské teorie

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INTRODUCTION

“Sex is deep at the heart of our troubles, and unless we eliminate the most pernicious of our systems of oppression, unless we go to the very centre of the sexual politic and its sick delirium of power and violence, all our efforts at liberation will only land us again in the same primordial stews.”¹

— Kate Millett

Radical feminist Kate Millett highlighted the topic in which she explored how women are forcibly pushed into socializing in a patriarchally programmed society, challenging the idea that female submissiveness is natural to them. With second-wave feminism and radical feminism, the slogan “the personal is political” became the slogan on banners as women took to the streets for a fairer position in society and demanded to break the ‘glass ceiling’. Although those days are almost gone, the issue persists in some ways. Women are still not given certain privileges, are treated through the lens of a patriarchal world, and in the cultural sphere, female characters are still boxed up according to outdated concepts.

Cinematography frequently deals with a reflection of society, however, one would argue that the horror genre has barely any competence for it. On the contrary, the horror genre is the most dazzling mirror of society, analyzing our environment through the lens of firmly defined cultural beliefs and therefore transforming, developing, and improving its symbolic translations over time. Not only may it examine social and cultural subjects, but it frequently emphasizes gender concerns more than other genres. This is why horror tends to aspire to be the most suitable canvas for exploring gender inequalities or social taboos. In this genre, there is the greatest opportunity to express a radical mindset since “anything goes” in horror.

The major purpose of this thesis is to locate and examine the topic emerging in the horror genre which may seem unknown or insignificant. This topic concerns the representation of women, or more specifically the type of woman’s femininity and how she presents it or uses it in horror movie fiction. The aim is to bring near the matter of how it contributes to the relation to perceiving women in film in the socio-cultural context.

The first theoretical chapter deals with the horror genre in general, its merits for an ordinary consumer, and several ideas about why it is good or bad to watch horror films. It also briefly points out the horror genre’s beginnings in literature. Next, it looks into the journey of female characters in the cinematography, and their stereotypical depiction in connection with the term “woman’s film” in contrast to other genres, where the males are the central figures of

¹ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 22.

the story. The chapter takes into account the work of Alfred Hitchcock and his contribution to reimagining the female figures in horror films. Moreover, it explains postmodern horror's tendencies, and at the end, it explores the division of a cult subgenre, where the gender roles are examined predominantly — the slasher film. The related treatment of women in the horror genre is discussed here.

The second theoretical chapter goes much deeper into the theory of gender issues, starting with gender stereotypes. Further, it deals with several terms, such as essentialism, social constructivism, bioculturalism, and evofeminism. This chapter examines the avant-garde cinematographic term *gynaehorror* focusing on depicting aspects of female physiology, physicality, and female monstrosity in the form of sociocultural taboos together with a psychoanalytic perspective. Three views according to Erin Harrington on the features of the gynaehorrific subgenre are brought to a wider context. Next, there is an examination of the historical and mythological background connected to monstrous femininity, male castration anxiety, and other ideas about psychosexuality highlighted by Freudian theories. Eventually, the two notions of femininity in horror films - the phallic and the castrating - are explained in comparison to the features of the slasher film.

The analytical chapter focuses on the concept of representation of femininity in selected American horror movies. The methodology rests on examining each film individually, aiming to bring a detailed study and classification of female characters in selected movies as well as a comparative analysis of the distinct representation of females according to the individual subgenre. Moreover, this part takes into account the shift from traditional and 'normal' femininity to a 'monstrous' or 'empowered' one, and so it contrasts the dual image of it. To make it more interesting, two movies from each subgenre are compared, one from the 20th century and the other from the 21st century. The evolution of the genre is taken into consideration.

The first two movies comprise women presenting images of feminine monstrosity related to the notion of their bodies and psyche. The movies *Carrie* (1976) and *Midsommar* (2019) are examined based on the attributes of the female characters and the source of their monstrous femininity. This part is supported by the theoretical statements in Barbara Creed's research in *The Monstrous-Feminine*.

The second group of subgenres includes women presenting images of feminine power. The movies are categorized according to female protagonists' characteristics and the source of their power, as well as the shift from innocent victim to rule-maker. These women are studied in accordance with their skills as final girls in *Halloween* (1978) and *It Follows* (2014). The

subject of examination focuses on feminist aspects of women's empowerment and their ability to compete with men and the connection with feminist theory by Carol J. Clover. In these two movies, however, the themes of monstrous femininity can be also spotted, therefore the aspects of it are clarified.

1. THEORETICAL PART

1.1 Women's Journey in Horror Film

Art usually provokes emotions. Sometimes these are fear, anger, disgust, or contempt. The horror genre intentionally aims to provoke these negative emotions in order to evoke a kind of psychological response in a reader or viewer. According to Philip J. Nickel, “those who enjoy horror might seek no justification or defense for it. But because of the strong feelings elicited by horror and the outrageous acts that are depicted in it, to those sensitive to the offense, it is hard not to feel that some justification or defense is needed².”

Now and then, the horror genre is compared to pornography, even though it does not focus on the graphic representation of sex, but on the graphic representation of violence, which can be for some people similarly scandalous. Heavy doses of sex, violence, and emotion, alone or in combination, are denounced as having no logic or justification for being other than to excite. There are countless opinions as to why watching horror movies is bad or what effect it has on a person's psyche and morals. For example, Gianluca Di Muzio states that watching a horror can only harm one's moral character since it entails “silencing one's compassionate attitudes”³ when facing meaningless violence. One might even argue that these types of movies can ignite aggression and the desire to harm others.

However, horror offers a rather satisfying catharsis, which is “the opportunity for the audience to purge itself of negative emotions in a safe environment”⁴, a method already used by Aristotle in his ancient dramas. Catharsis is related to the pleasure of watching a horror movie. Imagine it as a ride on a roller coaster or the bungee jump. Once it ends, all negative feelings we had before and during the action – fear, threat, and nausea – are gone and we are pleased by vanquishing it. Watching horror can simply serve as an instant simulation of danger when we do not want to experience it firsthand and when we are eager for excitement. Rikke Schubart additionally states that the horror genre is far from being only about negative emotions, but being “about learning skills and acquiring abilities, among them emotional robustness, coping, social skills, flexibility, and creativity.”⁵

Additionally, horror has other benefits and merits and it should not be confused with the pleasurable side of watching it. When speaking about realistic horror, it has the power, in a

² Philip J. Nickel, “Horror and the Idea of Everyday Life: On Skeptical Threats in *Psycho* and *The Birds*,” in *The Philosophy of Horror*, ed. Thomas Fahy (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 14.

³ Gianluca Di Muzio, “The Immorality of Horror Films,” *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* 20 (Fall 2006): 287.

⁴ Marc Blake & Sara Baley, *Writing A Horror Movie* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2013), 7.

⁵ Rikke Schubart, *Mastering Fear: Women, Emotions and Contemporary Horror* (Bloomsbury Publishing Inc: New York, 2018), 35.

sense, to break our illusion of the everyday world. It shows the world with all its perils, where murderers, who can be seen only in the crime series on TV, are running around and killing people with snipers or hatchets. At times people can be too afraid of facing reality and tend to replace it with pseudo-reality in the form of a horror movie when avoiding the news of the war so that they can pretend real violence and death do not exist. It helps to realize the transience of life and owing to special effects, how the human body can be damaged. It enables people to witness what they do not want to see in real life.

Frequently, horror movies tend to be underrated and considered dull entertainment. However, unlike other genres, horror movies often try to express a broader social and cultural context hidden behind the story, which contributes to a wide range of strengths of this genre. It serves as a canvas for depicting any burning topic that a whole society can have in mind. This is why the horror genre is a good material for analyzing gender questions. Horror directors concentrating their work on female matters occupy an interesting and simultaneously controversial position in filmmaking because they attempt to portray themes that are often taboo in society. The horrors are an ideal medium for expressing the unspoken as this genre has barely any limits.

From a historical point of view, it is more than convenient for this work that one of the pioneers of the emerging and gradually shaping horror genre along with Horace Walpole, was a woman. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, published in 1818, is a Gothic romance, where she presents the idea that not God but man can create a human. At a time when most Christians believed that man was God's divine creation, the idea of a mortal attempting to create life was both shocking and horrifying.⁶ Shelley even emphasized this theory with the subtitle of her novel *The Modern Prometheus*, alluding to the god who enraged Zeus by causing mankind to burn. Frankenstein was a creature made up of parts of other bodies, so it can be already seen at that time that the horror was full of various religious and social taboos. Moreover, there is strong evidence that this novel focuses on the theme of reproduction and it emphasizes the dangers of reproduction through its confusing depiction of the creator and the monster. There is a tendency to compare this story with autobiographical elements because Mary Shelley had difficulty conceiving and carrying her children to term, and she lost a number of them before or shortly after delivery. Ann C. Hall comments that "to carry the reproductive metaphor regarding the critical reception of the novel further, *Frankenstein* has helped to spawn the feminist literary

⁶ Blake & Bailey, *Writing A Horror Movie*, 11.

criticism movement, as some critics have used the novel to demonstrate the power of female writers and female interpretation.”⁷

In the Victorian era, as literary characters, women have very commonly represented passive roles whose troubles were mostly related to their class or getting into a better society. In most cases, it was about a woman's representative appearance and manner, maintaining the good name of the family, and being overshadowed by her husband. Even female writers had no chance to free their female characters from established conventions and expectations, and when they sought a kind of revolution, they preferred to give themselves a male pseudonym in order to be at least partially taken seriously. This serves as evidence that women's needs were considered frivolous.

As well as in literary fiction, women were forced to undergo a thorny path to representation in the movie industry that would resemble emancipation in its message at least in some way. Molly Haskell, in her examination of the treatment of women in movies, asks: “What more damning comment on the relations between men and women in America than the very notion of something called the “woman’s film?””⁸ The term *woman's film* implies that women's emotional problems and thus women themselves are of less importance. A film about male relationships is referred to as a “psychological drama” rather than a “man's film.” In the 1930s and 1940s, the “woman's film” was as common in studio production as the crime melodrama or the Western. Like any other genre, they fluctuated in quality and followed the formula of escapist stories, with few instances that contained subliminal subversive messages and only a minimal number of instances that sought to undermine them. Basically, “woman’s film” satisfies masturbatory needs and serves as soft emotional porn for desperate housewives; it has the same function as soap operas.⁹ In “man's films”, on the other hand, men experienced countless adventures, which often included fighting enemies, enjoying the hustle and bustle of the city, or performing heroic deeds. In such movies, a woman usually held a position of certain boundaries or limitations, either as a moralist who tried to direct the man's actions so that they were safe, or simply as a wife who prevented the man from experiencing these adventures and forced him to stay at home, which was, of course, a killjoy not only for the husband’s other lives but also for viewers.¹⁰ This reality about “man’s” movies shows that all exciting things

⁷ Ann C. Hall, “Making Monsters: The Philosophy of Reproduction in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and the Universal Films *Frankenstein* and *The Bride of Frankenstein*,” in *The Philosophy of Horror*, ed. Thomas Fahy (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 213.

⁸ Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*, 2nd ed. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 165.

⁹ Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, 166.

¹⁰ Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, 167.

happen outside of marriage and that a woman in them is frequently destined to just wait at home for her husband and wallow in her thoughts and emotions while the husband has a colorful life outside the home. The woman here has no attention, let alone excitement. She is connected only with emotions and is subtly perceived as a pendant. Moreover, every time a woman plays a supporting role in a film, it almost always involves sex acts and a seductive presence which they provide to the male characters. Women are depicted in a range of settings less frequently than men, as Sharon Smith illustrates:

[...] a man is not shown purely in relation to the female characters, but in a wide variety of roles struggling against nature (*The Old Man and the Sea*; *Moby Dick*; *2001: A Space Odyssey*), or against militarism (*Dr. Strangelove*; *Catch 22*), or proving his manhood on the range (any John Wayne Western). Women provide trouble or sexual interludes for the male characters, or are not present at all. Even when a woman is the central character she is generally shown as confused, or helpless and in danger, or passive, or as a purely sexual being.¹¹

Molly Haskell, however, adds other categorizations of the perception of women in the cinema. Aside from this generic plight, there are as many types of women's films as there are types of women. The divide between women's roles as models or victims and between the class elite and the rest of the women causes the most conflict within genre conventions. She calls extraordinary actresses, namely, Katherine Hepburn, Marlene Dietrich, or Bette Davis, "the aristocrats of their sex."^{12 13} Their perspective is unique, and by taking the lead, they go beyond the boundaries of their sexual identities. Instead, because their emancipation as women is predicated on their exceptionality, it diminishes their political impact as victims of choice and renders them unpopular with both men and women in general due to their independence.¹⁴ The term *femme fatale* might come to mind, even though, according to Mary Ann Doane, "the *femme fatale* is the figure of a certain discursive unease."¹⁵ She poses a hazard that is not fully recognizable, foreseen, or controllable. The figure is completely consistent with the epistemic drive of storytelling and the interpretative structuring of the classical text by turning a threat of a woman into a secret that must be forcibly uncovered and brought to light. The *femme fatale* is a glaring example of the depth of the anxieties and fears brought on by changes in the late nineteenth-century understanding of sexual difference.¹⁶ Virginia M. Allen describes her as a

¹¹ Sharon Smith, *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sue Thornham (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 14.

¹² Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, 170.

¹³ Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, 170.

¹⁴ Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, 170.

¹⁵ Mary Ann Doane, *Femme Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 10.

¹⁶ Doane, *Femme Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis*, 11.

sterile and infertile contradiction to the motherly figure yielding nothing in a culture that fetishizes creation.¹⁷ Doane clarifies the difficulties of inscribing the femme fatale figure as a feminist achievement:

Because the femme fatale's representation is so dependent upon perceptual ambiguity and ideas about the limits of vision in relation to knowledge, her incarnation in the cinema is a particularly telling one. Because she seems to confound power, subjectivity, and agency with the very lack of these attributes, her relevance to feminist discourses is critical. Since feminisms are forced to search out symbols from a lexicon that does not yet exist, their acceptance of the femme fatale as a sign of strength in an unwritten history must also and simultaneously involve an understanding and assessment of all the epistemological baggage she carries along with her.¹⁸

However, another type of woman's film - to which only the finest films aspire - is the fiction of an ordinary woman transforming into a special one, or the woman whose starting position is that of a victim of unjust conditions who improves her position through misery and difficulties to become the mistress of her own destiny. The idea of the vital significance of female emotions portrayed through the director's sensitivity and style lends the character grandeur and conviction rather than a subliminal contempt for the female sense. Yet, the woman's starting point in her journey to recognition lies in her position as an object.

Correspondingly, in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey focuses on Hitchcock's movies to demonstrate how women are ultimately transformed into helpless objects of voyeuristic and nasty male impulses in classic Hollywood films, existing only to fulfill their cravings and represent the anxieties of the male audience; and how, implicitly, female moviegoers can only have a masochistic experience.¹⁹ She exemplifies:

His heroes are exemplary of the symbolic order and the law - a policeman (*Vertigo*), a dominant male possessing money and power (*Marnie*) - but their erotic drives lead them into compromised situations. [...] Power is backed by a certainty of legal right and the established guilt of the woman. [...] Hitchcock's skillful use of identification processes and liberal use of subjective camera from the point of view of the male protagonist draw the spectators deeply into his position, making them share his uneasy gaze. The spectator is absorbed into a voyeuristic situation within the screen scene and diegesis, which parodies his own in the cinema.²⁰

Controversially, his films have been interpreted as either flagrantly misogynistic or sensitive to the condition of women. It would be a comprehensive topic for another thesis, whether or not he was a misogynist, however, it was Hitchcock who gave a great deal of space

¹⁷ Virginia M. Allen, *The Femme Fatale: Erotic Icon* (New York: Whitston, 1983), 4.

¹⁸ Doane, *Femme Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis*, 12.

¹⁹ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6-18.

²⁰ Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", 23.

to female characters in his thrillers and horror films. For Hitchcock, women were frequently the focal point of the problem in his films, as opposed to the peripheral in many other famous movies. Like in *Marnie* (1964), *Blackmail* (1929), *Vertigo* (1958), *Rear Window* (1954), and *Rebecca* (1940), a woman's identity issue is a driving force behind the plot. Women appear to have a mysterious force that Hitchcock has not been able to comprehend or master.²¹

Mulvey could be right that sometimes the male gaze in his films is too obvious, considering that he even directly uses the subjective point of view of a man staring at a woman or leaving the viewer to find the female character in the crowd. He often only balances with the viewer's imagination and often mixes sexuality with beauty and imaginary desire. Nevertheless, among other things, Hitchcock provides a new notion for women in his films. He gives them cunning, intelligence, and mystery, and "equally" enhances female characters' qualities with those which are attributed more to men, such as selfishness, manipulativeness, and arrogance. While other directors portray women as the embodiment of men's dreams, e.g. those who cast the aptly named sex icon Marilyn Monroe in their films, Hitchcock apart of that often depicts them as sly individuals, who are strong, capable characters taking on central roles in the narrative and occasionally even taking the lead. The female characters in *The Lady Vanishes* (1938), *Rear Window*, and *Vertigo* represent both the victims and the antagonists. They are not viewed as victims because they frequently possess power comparable to or greater than that of the male characters, and they are the center of the audience's attention. These female characters are not just physically attractive; they also advance the plot and have influence over their male counterparts.²² The flaw in Hitchcock's futuristic image of women and the promise of feminism's advancement is, however, his frequent "just" punishment or killing the villainous heroines, the sexually mature women because they pose a threat to the patriarchal family.²³ Although Hitchcock's view of women is very complicated and reflects his powerlessness and inability to control them, he made the women on the screen great unknowns who deserve attention for their actions.

David Greven in his *Representation of Femininity in American Genre Cinema* speaks about the reimagining the woman figures across genres and emphasizes a positive stand on the

²¹ Sharon Jeanette Chapman, "Classical Hollywood film directors' female-as-object obsession and female directors' cinematic response: A deconstructionist and female directors' cinematic response: A deconstructionist study of six films" (San Bernardino: California State University, 1996), 81-82.

²² "Hitchcock's Women: Independent and Strong," Student Film Reviews, published July 28, 2015 <https://studentfilmreviews.org/?p=34049>

²³ Chapman, "Classical Hollywood film directors' female-as-object obsession and female directors' cinematic response," 81-82.

fact “that the seemingly defunct genre of the woman’s film takes a significant new form in the modern horror film, which repurposes female melodrama as it expands upon the precedent of Hitchcock’s 1960 *Psycho*.”²⁴ Greven reflects on this then-new notion of a woman figure in a horror film and explains so-called *persephonal horror*:

Three major trends in the woman's film recur and are reimagined in persephonal horror: mother-daughter relationships; transformation; and the phallic, avenging, retributive woman, the Fury who vanquishes male deviance, a figure released in fusions of the woman's film with other genres, most often film noir but sometimes the western. The persephonal horror film foregrounds relationships between mother and daughter, takes the theme of transformation to dizzying heights, and spectacularly showcases the phallic woman.²⁵

Older genre films like *Gone With the Wind* (1939), *Now, Voyager* (1942), or *Marnie* by above mentioned Alfred Hitchcock put women’s longings at the heart of their stories and ideas. Considering the redefining of the woman’s film, Greven speaks about it as taking on a new but concealed life in contemporary horror movies that concentrate on feminine desires and focus on gender, sexuality, and family. He believes that a large number of important modern horror films—a new era in the genre that began with Hitchcock's *Psycho* and approximately ended with Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991)—should be interpreted as “concealed women's films.”²⁶

In gender studies in horror films, the issue of female representation in horror movies, in particular, has generated discussion among critics. In Carol J. Clover’s and Burry Sapolsky’s opinion more often than male characters, female characters are hurt or killed in horror films. These films also frequently depict graphic violence and erotically or sexually charged situations that border on pornography.^{27 28} Therefore, women are generally influenced by how they are portrayed in these films.

“Science fiction film as a genre—along with its evil twin, the horror film—is now more hyperbolically concerned than ever with the question of difference,”²⁹ wrote Constance Penley in 1986. Barry Keith Grant in his *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film* points

²⁴ David Greven, *Representations of Femininity in American Genre Cinema: The Woman's Film, Film Noir, and Modern Horror* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 83.

²⁵ Greven, *Representations of Femininity in American Genre Cinema*, 84.

²⁶ Greven, *Representations of Femininity in American Genre Cinema*, 36.

²⁷ Burry S. Sapolsky, Fred Molitors, Sarah Luque, “Sex and Violence in Slasher Films: Re-examining the Assumptions” in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 80, vol. 1 (2003): 28–38

²⁸ Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 44.

²⁹ Constance Penley, introduction to *Close Encounters: Film, Feminism, and Science Fiction*, ed. Constance Penley, Elizabeth Lyon, Lynn Spiegel, and Janet Bergstrom (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. vii.

out that her usage of the time qualifier “now” may be a little misleading because the genre has historically tended to be treated in this way and adds:

Most obvious are the horror movies made in the postwar 1950s, a period when popular culture was emphatically repositioning women within domestic space. The threat to masculinity in movies like *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957) and *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (1958) is graphically clear.³⁰

The most prevalent and thus far most successful critical stance taken toward horror films has been psychoanalysis. The genre is most frequently viewed, in Andrew Tudor's words, “as a kind of collective dreamworld requiring analysis by methods derived from one or another tradition of psychoanalysis.”³¹ The horror genre's actual theme, according to Robin Wood, who has had a significant impact on the terminology used to describe horror films, is the struggle for acknowledgment of everything that our society suppresses or oppresses.³² Despite numerous studies looking at universal concerns or historically based cultural anxieties in horror films, gender problems continue to be a major part of the genre. It is because gender is universal and historical, natural and cultural, just like terror itself, according to contemporary thinking.³³

Nonetheless, before examining the notions and elements of contemporary horror films, it is necessary to understand the realities of the postmodern world. For Isabel Cristina Pinedo, “the postmodern world is an unstable one in which traditional (dichotomous) categories break down, boundaries, blur, institutions fall into question, Enlightenment, narratives collapse, the inevitability of progress crumbles, and the master status of the universal (*read* male, white, monied, heterosexual) subject deteriorates.”³⁴ The evolution of the Anglo-American horror genre is mapped out by Andrew Tudor in his work *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie*. Pinedo refers to him, because he primarily distinguishes between the pre-sixties (1931–1960) and post-sixties (1960–1984) genres, “which essentially corresponds to [...] use of “classical” and “postmodern,” respectively”³⁵. Tudor theorizes that the post-1960s genre is connected to postmodernism and the “legitimation problem” of postindustrial society, which refers to the collapse of established authorial frameworks.³⁶

³⁰ Barry Keith Grant, *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 3.

³¹ Andrew Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 2.

³² Robin Wood, “An Introduction to the American Horror Film,” in *American Nightmare: Essays on the Horror Film*, ed. Robin Wood and Richard Lippe (Toronto: Festival of Festivals, 1979), 10.

³³ Grant, *The Dread of Difference*, 7.

³⁴ Isabel Cristina Pinedo, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 11.

³⁵ Pinedo, *Recreational Terror*, 10.

³⁶ Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists*, 222.

Modernists have occasionally condemned the contemporary horror genre for being associated with the debased type of pleasurable mass culture. The contemporary genre is categorized by critics as belonging to “the ideologically conservative culture”³⁷ and is either harshly criticized or praised for maintaining the status quo by reinforcing traditional binary oppositions like normal/abnormal sexuality.³⁸

Pinedo discusses the postmodern elements of contemporary horror and contrasts it with classical horror movies:

The classical genres are defined as bounded by preestablished rules. Genre theory seeks to elucidate these rules and thus provide unity and coherence to a group of films. In contrast, a postmodern work breaks down boundaries, transgresses genres, and is characterized by incoherence.³⁹

The postmodern horror film violates the rules of the traditionally oriented horror genre but does so while preserving some aspects of it, making it feasible to recognize and enjoy the transgression.⁴⁰ In order to develop hybrids like suspense thrillers or science-fiction horror, of which *Alien* (1979) is a noteworthy example, postmodern horror films also appropriate other genre’s general structures and frameworks.

For Kim Newman, the postmodern horror film, for example, refers to the camp horror movies from the 1980s.⁴¹ This prompts the theory to investigate the slasher subgenre. Barbara Creed in her feminist work *The Monstrous-Feminine* characterizes slasher films as :

[...] those films in which a psychotic killer murders a large number of people, usually with a knife or other instrument of mutilation. In the contemporary slasher film the life-and-death struggle is usually between an unknown killer and a group of young people who seem to spend most of their time looking for a place to have sex away from the searching eyes of adults. The killer, who is usually – but not necessarily – male, stalks and kills relentlessly; his powers seem almost superhuman. His weapons are sharp instruments such as knives, pokers, axes, needles, razors. His bloodbath is finally brought to an end by one of the group – usually a woman. Intelligent, resourceful and usually not sexually active, she tends to stand apart from the others.⁴²

From a modern point of view, Sotiris Petridis divides the slasher subgenre, in contrast to the generically known division into the Golden Age (1978-1984) – sometimes mentioned

³⁷ Pinedo, *Recreational Terror*, 12.

³⁸ Pinedo, *Recreational Terror*, 12.

³⁹ Pinedo, *Recreational Terror*, 13-14.

⁴⁰ Pinedo, *Recreational Terror*, 14.

⁴¹ Kim Newman, *Nightmare Movies: A Critical Guide to Contemporary Horror Films* (New York: Harmony Books, 1988), 211.

⁴² Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 15.

already from 1974 – and the Silver Age (1985-1995), into three categories: the classical (1974-1993), the self-referential (1994–2000) and the neo-slasher cycle (2001–2013). In his theoretical study *Anatomy of the Slasher Film*, he considers the subgenre an organism that undergoes changes and evolution based on influences, both those caused by the interplay of the narrative parts themselves and those caused by aspects of the evolution of society that can have an impact on the narratives.⁴³ His research has shown that in terms of the classical cycle, the subgenre centered its narrative structure on stereotyped and traditional depictions. It was discovered through cinema analysis that the syntax was built on conservative values, with a focus on the stereotypical representation of gender and sexuality. The classical cycle prioritized its stereotypical framework over reinforcing the connections between its narratives. A number of movies attempted to move away from the punishment for sexual acts as the cycle came to an end but the number of slashers significantly fell from earlier years. The self-referential cycle highlighted intertextuality and self-referentiality under the guise of satire and/or parody. Self-referential stories naturally preserved some of the core components of the classical cycle while criticizing them. Moreover, the new syntax gave rise to whodunit stories, retaining the focus of the entire film's plot on the identity of the actual murderer, despite the fact that in classical film texts, the identity is usually given in the opening moments. While having the shortest duration, the second cycle represented a revolutionary shift in the subgenre by paving the way for the third cycle's total rejection of traditional conventions. As a result, the second cycle is thought of as a stage between classic movies and neo-slashers. The self-referential cycle continued up until 2000, which was also a turning point for the third cycle because it saw the debut of the first neo-slasher, *Final Destination* (2000). The self-referential cycle's whodunit structure was entirely eliminated by the new neo-slasher syntax, which also highlighted the Other's⁴⁴ true identity and past. Through the case studies, the notion that the neoslashers' syntax is constructed with strong narrative ties between the victims' backstories and the Other's was strengthened, and the Other became more prominent and caused the narration to go on a quest to discover the origins of evil. In this narrative context, gender representations are absent from the subgenre and are replaced by depictions of socioeconomic classes and the conflicts that exist within them. In the years 2014, 2015, and 2016, no film text was able to join the top 100 of the American box office, indicating that the subgenre has once again reached a drop at the end of the third cycle.⁴⁵

⁴³ Sotiris Petridis, *Anatomy of the Slasher Film: A Theoretical Analysis* (North Carolina: McFarland, 2019), 205.

⁴⁴ Petridis uses the term *Other* to refer to a universal source of evil in the stories since it is not usually human

⁴⁵ Petridis, *Anatomy of the Slasher Film*, 207.

Returning to Barbara Creed's explanation of the term slasher film, what might interest the reader is the characteristic role of women there. This topic deserves attention as this work focuses on gender roles in the horror genre. The woman plays an extremely important role in the horror genre because her very presence invites analysis and exploration of subliminal meanings in a patriarchal world. In horror, women play a variety of roles, with the female victim being one of the more common ones. Nevertheless, in horror films, even a woman can effectively frighten viewers.

The postmodern horror genre offers many unconventional themes that have not typically been explored from a feminist perspective before and it sets a new mirror of uncertainty for the whole society. "The boundary between living and dead, normal and abnormal, human and alien, good and evil, is blurred, sometimes indistinguishable."⁴⁶ Tudor describes that in contrast to the traditional horror film, the postmodern horror film inserts the horror in the current day and replaces the competent male specialist with the ordinary victim who experiences a lot of graphic, sexualized maltreatment, especially when they are female.⁴⁷ Thus, there is a need for a feminist interpretation given how frequently the harmed body, especially the female body, is displayed in postmodern horror movies.

The treatment of women in horror films is often linked to the fear of the *abject*. Julia Kristeva, psychoanalyst and feminist, interprets the abject as "something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, [which] beckons to us and ends up engulfing us."⁴⁸ Many people are appalled by the abject, according to Kristeva, because it is something that repulses us but originates from us or from where we came from.⁴⁹ The horror film seems to serve as an example of abjection's work in at least three different ways. The horror movie is first and foremost filled with horrific imagery, starting with the complete, mutilated corpse and continuing with a variety of physiological wastes like blood, vomit, pus, spit, perspiration, tears, and rotting flesh. According to Kristeva and Creed, women are uniquely associated with two types of contaminating substances: menstrual and excremental. Thus, women have a unique bond with the abject as a result.⁵⁰ Second, the concept of a boundary plays a key role in the horror film's production of the monstrous; anything that crosses or poses a threat to cross the "border" or

⁴⁶ Pinedo, *Recreational Terror*, 16.

⁴⁷ Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists*, 81-105.

⁴⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: The Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

⁴⁹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 6.

⁵⁰ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 27.

threaten order and stability is abject. The horror movie's portrayal of the maternal figure as degraded and the child's attempts to sever his or her bond with the mother serve as the third technique to demonstrate the act of abjection.⁵¹

1.2 Gender in Horror and Vice Versa

From various previous feminist studies and theories, it is known that sex is biologically given and innate, whereas gender is a social construct driven by society's gender stereotypes, such as that girls wear pink and apply makeup while boys wear blue and play football. In prehistory, men were associated with hunting and killing while women were with gathering and nurturing, and constructs of this nature lasted for a long time on. Nonetheless, now, in our modern world, it is debatable if men are stronger than women and if women are more emphatic than men, even though it is assumed, the same as that men have a stronger sex drive.

However, these presumptions have no firm base that could construct only one true dogma since many variables can form gender stereotypes, such as the interaction between the mind, the body, and the environment. Well-known gender stereotypes and expressions, often targeted at less dexterous boys when playing on the field like: "you're throwing like a girl" is rooted in the most basic gender stereotype that girls are clumsy when throwing a ball or playing sports. While Straus, in 1962, claims that a girl does not do any needed preparation for a successful throw, such as twisting her trunk or stretching her arm properly,⁵² in 1980, Iris Young opposes that the girl picks up diverse body positioning techniques from boys. Women are taught an ambiguous transcendence in which they see their bodies as both a subject and an object (something to be gazed at).⁵³ According to her, females approach "physical engagement with things with timidity, uncertainty, and hesitancy."⁵⁴ It is usually installed in the female mind that a girl or a woman should be self-aware and behave herself. It is subconsciously natural for women to make a good visual impression on those around them.

Gender stereotypes are, of course, considered negative ones. Stereotypes and scripts, which are stories that instruct us on how to act, are additional extensions of the gender binary. Our self-stories adhere to predetermined patterns and they can influence or even suppress our performance. When a woman is reminded of her sex, she is threatened by her social identity, and therefore she might perform worse. Even though it does not have to be obvious in her

⁵¹ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 28.

⁵² Erwin W. Straus, "The Upright Posture," *Phenomenological Psychology* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 157.

⁵³ Iris M. Young, *Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 44.

⁵⁴ Young, *Throwing Like a Girl*, 34.

manners, a reminder of her gender can have an impact on her mindset and self-esteem. Rikke Schubart claims that negative stereotypes can be fought against “by telling ourselves the incremental story that we can learn new skills and expand our knowledge and abilities.”⁵⁵ The fixed story holds that the person cannot change, whereas the incremental story holds that the person can improve and expand their abilities.

Schubart outlines her idea of the female werewolf and her rarity in literary and cinematic culture.⁵⁶ This kind of notion of the werewolf busts all the myths about the female gender and breaks the old stereotypes since the main destiny of this figure is to hunt cattle or even people and cause fright, which is not so common for a female. On this note, there starts a discussion on how gender can balance on the spectrum of the expected stereotypes and break them despite experienced rules. When applied to the theory of gender in the literary and cinematic culture, society needs to transform the stereotyped stories and play with the overturns in order to retell them in a metanarrative way and think outside the box.

Schubart explains that *essentialism* is the belief that distinctions between men and women are inherent and found in the flesh (or in the brain) and *social constructivism* is the idea that gender can be learned.⁵⁷ She agrees with Young that “the body learns to sense and feel”⁵⁸ and emphasizes the related idea of the body, mind, and emotions being strongly affected by the environment.

The revolutionary term, which was actually coined by Schubart and helped to look at the woman in horror in a new way is *evofeminism*. The aim of evofeminism is to combine feminism and *bioculturalism* in order to discuss gender equality within a scientific and ethical framework, and it is rooted in humanism and ecosophy (ecological philosophy).⁵⁹ The Aarhus University website characterizes biocultural theory as follows:

Human behavior is not just the product of culture and it is not just the product of biology either. Human behavior and human culture emerge from a complex interaction between genetic dispositions and environmental circumstances. Those environmental circumstances range from physical aspects of the biosphere to imaginary cultural constructs.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Schubart, *Mastering Fear*, 69.

⁵⁶ Schubart, *Mastering Fear*, 59.

⁵⁷ Schubart, *Mastering Fear*, 63.

⁵⁸ Schubart, *Mastering Fear*, 63.

⁵⁹ Schubart, *Mastering Fear*, 33.

⁶⁰ Aarhus University, “Biocultural Theory,” last modified October 5, 2021. <https://bioculture.au.dk/research/biocultural-theory/>

The idea that we adjust as we evolve, and that flexibility is adaptive, is central to bioculturalism. The species with the most alternatives survive best when the world changes. This point of view is known as Darwinian (“survival of the fittest”). A literary scholar, Brian Boyd describes fiction as a “Darwinian machine” because thanks to one’s capability of thinking beyond the present time by reducing its restrictions and allowing us to deal with it more freely and somewhat on our own terms, the narrative encourages us to accept the given rather than trying to change it.⁶¹

Evo feminism challenges the idea that women are not drawn to horror by nature. Moreover, Schubart asserts that women can utilize horror in a similar way to how men can, especially as a form of play.⁶² The prefix *evo* can also stand for evolution and it indicates that it strives for fresh new ways, how to gain more freedom, agency, and choices and how to rewrite the meta-narrative, overcome the negative gender stereotype, and confront the entire horror ground. It includes a wide range of feminist theories such as first, second, third, and fourth-wave feminism, postfeminism, neofeminism, and ecofeminism. With evofeminism, Schubart seeks to analyze the present world and identify methods for adaptive behavior and evolution rather than to create an ideal future, and she stresses that dreams of profound change must be abandoned. To use vocabulary by Wendy Brown “gender [...] can be bent [...] but not emancipated... [it is] beyond the reach of revolution.”⁶³

Correspondingly, the impossibility of eradicating gender stereotypes in movies was related to the tabooing of women's topics in American society during the second wave of feminism in the 1970s. At that time, the fear of general femininity, female sexuality, strength, and intellect was omnipresent, and the feminist movements aimed to remove this barricade and give free rein to issues “that are not talked about.”

The only difference, solid as a rock, between women and men is that their bodies differ biologically and physiologically. In movies, unlike men’s bodies, those of women are very often sexualized, objectified, and shown in the most flattering way and are usually chosen according to ideal physical parameters and the degree of attractiveness. In addition, sex scenes are presented in the most unrealistic and beautifully aesthetic way. Almost as a rule, a scene with a woman in the shower means that the viewer can nearly be sure to see a woman's bust in the next few seconds. One of the reasons why would a film director show women’s breasts for a

⁶¹ Brian Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), Kindle edition, location 4531.

⁶² Schubart. *Mastering Fear*, 70.

⁶³ Wendy, Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 111.

while or give the audience a neat love-making scene, even though it has nothing to do with the rest of the plot, could be the statement that ‘sex sells.’ A great deal of revolution in the look upon the female body brought a cult horror film called *Carrie* (1976), where a taciturn, bullied, unattractive outsider makes her way from the woes of puberty to womanhood, independence, and even supernatural powers. To specify the groundbreaking subject of the horror classic *Carrie*, it was one of the first films to deviate from the appealing shower scene by directly depicting the protagonist's first period and her shocking reaction. The film's explicit depiction of the taboo of menstruation can serve as an introductory starter to the concept of a new female horror film genre that expressly confronts taboo themes in the areas of female physiology, sexuality, and psychology.

Erin Harrington explains the genre called *gyneahorror* as “horror that deals with all aspects of female reproductive horror, from reproductive and sexual organs, to virginity and first sex, through pregnancy, birth and motherhood, and finally to menopause and post-menopause.”⁶⁴ Through this term, her book *Women, Monstrosity and Horror Film: Gynaehorror* analyzes and comprehends the range of social, cultural, political, and biological facets of this reproductive female horrors as they occur in a heteronormative system.⁶⁵ She describes the concept of the gynaehorrific as what is “less linear, more granular, more discursive, and more specific than pre-existing configurations of female, feminine and reproductive horror.”⁶⁶ Gynaehorror she refers to as “a type of signification and content, as an interpretive lens, and finally as a mode of aesthetic, cinematic expression and conceptual representation.”⁶⁷ Harrington builds on the initial concept highlighted by Barbara Creed in her work *The Monstrous-Feminine*, which is a lasting and significant work of modern feminist cultural critique that turned the focus away from the role of a female victim onto the female monster who then lacked any theorization.

Later, in the analytical part, this work is built on three pillars of the definition of gynaehorror according to Harrington, and thus selected female film characters are examined from the several points of view listed above in the quote.

The first view studies *a combination of representations and a matrix*, which could be explained as a universal or cliched identifier of a sort of female monster. Creed enumerates them as “the amoral primeval mother, vampire, witch, woman as a monstrous womb, woman

⁶⁴ Erin Harrington, *Women, Monstrosity and Horror Film: Gynaehorror* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 3.

⁶⁵ Harrington, *Women, Monstrosity and Horror Film*, 2.

⁶⁶ Harrington, *Women, Monstrosity and Horror Film*, 7.

⁶⁷ Harrington, *Women, Monstrosity and Horror Film*, 7.

as a bleeding wound, woman as possessed body, the castrating mother, woman as a beautiful but deadly killer, aged psychopath, the monstrous girl, woman as a non-human animal, woman as life-in-death, woman as the deadly *femme castratrice*.”⁶⁸ However, the gynae horror aims to depict not only the source of feminine monstrosity in its threatening and horrific light but also to raise awareness and highlight the fact that women are destined and bound to the hardship and perils of womanness and they shall be considered victims or even slaves to their bodily functions.

The second view takes into account the *sociocultural discourse* in the sense of the concept of the female body and subjectivity as something that is always in advance to be in need of intervention, control, and regulation because the reproductive body is naturally made as the ‘monstrous’ one without considering its age, compared to the ‘male neutral’ one. For centuries, woman's subjectivity has typically been relegated to the outside within western philosophy that supports the theory of the masculine body as being ideologically neutral. Illustrated by Nancy Tuana's book with the telling title *The Less Noble Sex*, the author points out that the “conception of the rational person is in complete opposition to all characteristics historically conceived as female and associated with woman – the body, emotion, and passivity.”⁶⁹ In earlier times, women were constantly associated only with concerns about their bodies and the associated reproductive function, i.e. menstruation, pregnancy, lactation, and childbirth. These past attitudes have a profound impact and influence on today's perception of women in the fields of medicine, science, and psychology. Elizabeth Grosz writes in *Volatile Bodies* that in the West, fluidity, fluxes, and secretions are used to describe female physicality. From an ontological perspective, there is a belief that structures and characterizes the female body as an uncontrollable ‘leakage’, which determines them to be both passive and reliant, as well as uncontrollable and subversive, however fundamentally inferior to men, despite the fact that men's bodies are equally prone to the mentioned leakage.⁷⁰ The presumptive idea of female monstrosity is present in psychological and medical discourses. For instance, the idea of woman-as-other is positioned as a standard baseline, and the othering of female bodies and experiences is normalized. However, women's lived experience and their knowledge of their bodies are often forgotten, while there is a constant need to compare them with men's bodies. Since it is premised that the body of a heterosexual male is what is normal, orderly, and ideal,

⁶⁸ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 15.

⁶⁹ Nancy Tuana, *The Less Noble Sex: Scientific, Religious, and Philosophical Conceptions of Woman's Nature* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 63.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 202-3.

anything that deviates from that assumes the role of the other and becomes expressly gendered, not only in contrast to but also because of it. Explicitly identifying this and challenging it is a political act. The sexed, reproductive female body might therefore be questioned or made more dreadful by gynaehorrific myths and narration.

Thirdly, gynaehorror denotes a morally charged form of *artistic expression* and the cinematic depiction that demeans the female body and characterizes it primarily in terms of its reproductive abilities negatively and inconsistently. Nonetheless, judgment on whether the film is rife with particularly misogynistic beliefs depends greatly on the film in question as well as the viewer.⁷¹ According to Harrington's ideas, the ability of forms of expression to combine and connect with each other is what creates a cohesive force in horror:

[...] the productive interrelationship of gynaehorrific content, representation and expression may operate through imagery, framing and movement; through the use of sound, light and colour; through the fragmentation or the dissolution of the representational image of the body; through the audio-visual expression of a sense of reproductive dread and terror; or through the way that the female body is elided or rendered present-through- absence within the moving image.⁷²

To comprehend the features of gynaehorror even more and to visualize it better on the examples, the concept of monstrous-feminine should be explored deeper. The notion of the monstrous-feminine is present in every culture. It means the idea of what is abominable, sickening, uncanny, and abject about a woman. Freud associated the man's dread with his childhood assumption that the mother is castrated. In his paper *Fetishism* he stated that "probably no male human being is spared the fright of castration at the sight of a female genital."⁷³ Joseph Campbell then discusses prior primitive folkloristic ideas and their convincing justifications for considering women castrators and witches. He notices a recurring theme known in legend as 'the toothed vagina' - the vagina that castrates. On the other hand, the so-called 'phallic mother,' (the imagined mother having a penis, or, metaphorically, the sense of a mother having features associated with masculinity) is a theme perfectly portrayed in the witch's long fingers and nose.⁷⁴ The witches are well-known female creatures often portrayed as elderly, ugly crones capable of heinous deeds. They were charged with the most scandalous crimes during the previous European witch trials, including cannibalism, murder, castrating male victims, and bringing on storms, fires, and the plague.

⁷¹ Harrington, *Women, Monstrosity and Horror Film: Gynaehorror*, 9

⁷² Harrington, *Women, Monstrosity and Horror Film: Gynaehorror*, 9.

⁷³ Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1927), vol. 21, 154.

⁷⁴ Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (Penguin Books, 1976), 73.

Gendered monsters were a common feature in classical mythology, with many of them being female. Large birds with female heads were characterized as the Sirens. In order to force the sailors' ships into undiscovered cliffs, they used their enchanted songs to entice seamen near shore and devoured their innocent victims afterward.⁷⁵

A scary sight was also offered by Medusa and her two sisters. They used the golden wings to fly, possessed enormous heads covered with the hair of squirming serpents, and fangs of a boar's tusk length. Men who were unlucky enough to catch the Medusa's venomous gaze were instantly transformed to stone. In ancient times, in order to intimidate the opponent, soldiers painted the female genitalia on their shields while necklaces and other jewelry featuring the terrifying image of the Medusa were commonly worn to fend off evil spirits.⁷⁶ In Freud's brief essay *Medusa's Head*, this issue is raised:

If Medusa's head takes the place of a representation of the female genitals, or rather if it isolates their horrifying effects from their pleasure-giving ones, it may be recalled that displaying the genitals is familiar in other connections as an apotropaic act. What arouses horror in oneself will produce the same effect upon the enemy against whom one is seeking to defend oneself.⁷⁷

With this illustrative theory which explains that the castrated female genitalia is represented by the head with its snake-like hair, he also supports his theory of the boy's castration anxiety. The fear of female genitals raises a complex issue rooted in ancient times in diverse religious beliefs and cultures. This myth - often referred to as *vagina dentata* - considering the female genitalia as something evoking fright seems to be quite widespread throughout various past mythological stories. Despite regional variations, the myth frequently states that women are frightening and must be tamed because of the teeth they have in their vaginas. Typically, by a male hero, teeth should be removed or softened before intercourse can be carried out safely.⁷⁸ The woman is looked upon there as a castrator. Edward Gifford describes the claim that according to Muslim belief, if a man stared into a vagina, it would bite his eyes out and render him with blindness.⁷⁹ Barbara Walker states that according to Yanomamo tales, one of the first females to walk the planet was equipped with a vagina that could transform into a mouth with teeth that consumed her lover's penis.⁸⁰ In mythology, the toothed vagina is occasionally displayed as an animal or

⁷⁵ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 16.

⁷⁶ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 16.

⁷⁷ Sigmund Freud, "Medusa's Head" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1922), vol. 21, 274.

⁷⁸ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 16.

⁷⁹ Edward S. Gifford, Jr., *The Evil Eye* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1974), 143.

⁸⁰ Barbara G. Walker, *The Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 1034.

as the animal associate of a goddess, according to Neumann.⁸¹ Therefore, it is obvious that the vagina in these stories symbolizes the trap that engulfs men and will not let go; a black hole where the severed pieces are lost. The threat of being swallowed up or dismembered is opposed to the feeling that the vagina also offers to its suitor, such as joy, pleasure, and excitement. This lure is usually irresistible to men, which is why the vagina dentata is particularly effective at devouring its victims and is the epitome of a dangerous castrator.

In modern times, we do not encounter this term much, but the concept of it is reflected in many kinds of popular culture, although more often we hear names like ‘man-eater’ or ‘castrating bitch’. The concept of castration and the fear of it prevails in horror films. Creed introduces two different notions of castration:

Castration can refer to symbolic castration (loss of the mother’s body, breast, loss of identity) which is experienced by both female and male, or it can refer to genital castration. The horror film offers many images of a general nature that suggest dismemberment.⁸²

Victims rarely die immediately or painlessly in horror films. Instead, they die in agonizingly disgusting ways, their bodies being mistreated, and their limbs amputated. In films like *Jaws* (1975), *Tremors* (1990), and *Alien* (1979), victims are ripped apart and devoured alive by the monster, which is a kind of devouring creature. When a psychopath plays the role of the killing villain, the victims are slashed to pieces and/or severed from their heads. The most common instruments of death are knives and other pointed objects. Therefore, the shared image the female horror film posters very often have is sharp women’s teeth and/or covered with blood trickling over the lips. Metaphorically, her toothed mouth indicates perils resulting from the castrating instrument that she could be hiding in the lower part of her body. This image is very common for horror films with vampires, specifically those that feature lesbian vampires, such as *The Vampire Lovers* (1970) and *The Hunger* (1983). The barred and dangerous entrance is another representation that is related to the vagina dentata. Creed reminds us of the fairytale ‘The Sleeping Beauty’ and the need for the suitor to penetrate the thorny bushes to reach the princess. Only deep love will enable the person to go through it.⁸³ The same applies to tunnels, caves, and other passageways or doorways where the killer can be waiting to attack his victims with the weapon.

⁸¹ Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 168.

⁸² Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 149.

⁸³ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 150.

In agreement with Neumann, Creed points out that “in classical art, the figure of a beautiful woman was often accompanied by an animal companion with open jaws and snapping teeth; the creature represented her deadly genital trap and evil intent.”⁸⁴ The animals were usually portrayed next to the woman’s crotch. This sprouted from male fear of what might be hidden under the woman’s gown. An undersea image of a woman swimming with a large shark lurking below her, its open jaws and teeth shining in the darkened sea, employs this convention in a poster for the movie *Jaws*, which deals obviously with castration anxiety. Stephen Heath’s examination of *Jaws* through the lens of male castration anxieties has highlighted that following the first female victim, all subsequent victims are men, with the emphasis placed solely on removing legs.⁸⁵

According to Creed, the incorporating rather than the castrating aspect of the vagina dentata is highlighted in both two interpretations of this symbol. The first presents the vagina dentata as a metaphor for an orally abusive mother. Male and female babies both fear this mother because they believe that, just as they like to nurse from the breast, the mother would also enjoy feeding on them.⁸⁶ This tendency can be seen in the narrative of 'Hansel and Gretel,' where children are terrified of a cannibalistic witch from whose hut they stole some gingerbread. The other interpretation reads the vagina dentata as a representation of the pre-oedipal dyadic mother, “the mother of infancy, weaning and toilet training who is responsible for the early socialization of the child.”⁸⁷ This is the all-encompassing maternal figure who symbolizes the threat of psychic obliteration by threatening to absorb the infant. Creed simplifies that “the vagina dentata is a mouth; the cannibalistic mother eats her young; the dyadic mother symbolically incorporates the infant.”⁸⁸ This vagina dentata symbolizes a completely other threat, that of the lethal genitalia of a woman.

On the other hand, David Greven challenges Creed with the claim that although there is a tangible dread about powerful maternal figures in modern horror, the genre's need to return to the mother is as strong. This urge may even exceed the dread of reabsorption. The horror film carries over the woman film's concerns and conflicting yearning for a return to the mother, which is intimately tied to patriarchal regimes of defense against such a return to roots.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 151.

⁸⁵ Stephen Heath, “Jaws, ideology and film theory,” *Framework*, no. 4 (Fall, 1976): 27.

⁸⁶ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 152.

⁸⁷ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 43.

⁸⁸ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 152.

⁸⁹ Greven, *Representations of Femininity in American Genre Cinema*, 13.

Going back to Freudian psychosexual studies; his perception of female genitalia, and the emasculation crisis, in his philosophical theories, he comes up with the term *Oedipus complex*. This term refers to a specific phase in the theory of psychosexual development. The healthline.com website defines the term as “the concept [that] refers to a male child’s attraction to their parent of the opposite sex (mother) and jealousy of their parent of the same sex (father). [...] According to the controversial concept, children view the same-sex parent as a rival.”⁹⁰ The same applies to the girl’s complex, but the term *Electra complex* is sometimes used despite being rejected by Freud himself. The myth of Oedipus, who killed his father to marry his mother, is familiar to almost everyone today. Greven highlights that “though the Oedipus complex is firmly rooted in male subjectivity, and most relevant in these terms, Freud insisted on theorizing female psychosexual development through the Oedipus complex.”⁹¹ Freud states “whereas in boys the Oedipus complex is destroyed by the castration complex, in girls it is made possible and led up to by the castration complex.”⁹² Greven subsequently explains the following:

It is the boy’s narcissistic assessment of his own genitals that leads to the destruction of his Oedipus complex: his hate-fueled rage against his father transforms into a belief that his father, who obviously has cut off the mother’s penis, can do the same thing to him. If the father can cut off the penis of a being infinitely larger and more powerful than the boy himself, the once phallic mother now revealed as the castrated woman, imagine what the father can do to the boy.⁹³

Freud uses his theory to explain the boy's desire to be like his father in adulthood, to follow his attitude and one day to have a wife of his own and thus avoid having his own penis cut off by his father. By doing so, the young boy faces his anxiety and gains knowledge from it, particularly about how to be a man like his father and share in his authority by demeaning women and castrating his own wife — how to become heterosexual. According to him, both boys’ and girls’ pre-oedipal fundamental object of desire is their mother. But, while boys undergo the Oedipus complex and continue to view their mothers as objects, girls do not. Now the mother is replaced by their father.⁹⁴ This mystery raised doubts in Freud's beliefs and the need for a deeper explanation from a perspective he had not discovered entirely.

⁹⁰ “What is the Oedipus Complex?,” Healthline, last modified on January 23, 2019, <https://www.healthline.com/health/oedipus-complex>.

⁹¹ Greven, *Representations of Femininity in American Genre Cinema*, 15.

⁹² Sigmund Freud, “Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes,” *Standard Edition*, vol. XIX (1961): 256.

⁹³ Greven, *Representations of Femininity in American Genre Cinema*, 15.

⁹⁴ Greven, *Representations of Femininity in American Genre Cinema*, 16.

He partly attributes this behavior to *penis envy*, which can be likened in modern times to a desire for power. He blames penis envy for “woman’s hostile bitterness against the man, which never completely disappears in relations between the sexes, and which is clearly indicated in the strivings and in the literary productions of ‘emancipated’ women.”⁹⁵ The roots of the ‘envy’ are in the finding of a young girl’s childhood when she notices that she lacks something the little boy was born with between his legs. That means that she believes that she has been castrated. From Freud’s point of view, the destiny of a woman’s identity and psychology lies only in her desire to be masculine, and that the penis of a woman is replaced in later years by the desire to become a mother. This statement is strongly *phallogentric*, which means that it emphasizes only the masculine point of view; with phallus meaning the representation of a penis.

That is where Greven criticizes Freud and offers a gender shift in the mythological narrative concerning the origins of female sexual development since the Oedipus complex is deeply focused only on masculinity. Greven raises the *Persephone complex*, which undermines the Oedipus complex, in terms of understanding female sexual identity and its construction and emotional reaction within patriarchally programmed society. Arbitrary segregation between daughters and mothers must be addressed with the relevance to femininity aspects and emphasis on female figures. The myth is about the “ineluctably tragic dissolution of the daughter-mother bond necessitated by the daughter’s journey away from the mother into the social order, which the Greek myth of Persephone’s abduction hauntingly symbolizes.”⁹⁶

Freud’s theories on differences between sexes are of an extremely patriarchal nature since they refer to the phallus as the decisive signifier and the father as the creator of the human order. By opposing that she cannot be identified with regard to the phallic symbol that restricts women, the second sex, with its feminist ideology that sees women as inferior to men, Creed undermines Freud’s pre-oedipal phallic mother. Since the *archaic mother* – “the original parent, the godhead of all fertility and the origin of procreation”⁹⁷ - is not bound by patriarchal symbols that misogynistically confine and restrict the power of femininity, it might have a positive meaning.⁹⁸

The Freudian thesis of the phallic woman is further challenged by the appearance of the female castrator in the horror movie. The idea of the phallic woman and the castrating woman

⁹⁵ Sigmund Freud, “The Taboo of Virginity,” *Standard Edition*, vol. 11 (1918): 205.

⁹⁶ Greven, *Representations of Femininity in American Genre Cinema*, 97.

⁹⁷ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 46.

⁹⁸ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 223.

have occasionally been mixed. Laplanche and Pontalis in *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* claim that there are two ways a woman can be phallic: either she possesses phallic characteristics, or she has the male phallus kept inside of her.⁹⁹ They note that even when it is unknown what the rooted image is, the term *phallic woman* is widely used vaguely as a descriptor of a woman with apparently masculine character qualities, such as authoritarianism. The misunderstanding is most obvious with respect to the so-called phallic woman and castrating woman. The phallic woman is represented by the lethal femme fatale of film noir, the woman who carries a gun in her handbag. She, like the previously mentioned castrated woman, is another embodiment of female sexuality as it relates to the phallus. Creed importantly distinguishes:

The archetypes of the phallic and castrating woman are quite different and should not be confused; the former ultimately represents a comforting phantasy of sexual sameness, and the latter a terrifying phantasy of sexual difference.¹⁰⁰

Since woman's horror is closely linked to the concept of the female body and often depicts peripeteia that corresponds only to female physiology, there is the possibility of addressing a myriad of related themes. These topics may, for example, touch on issues related to virginity, menstruation, pregnancy, miscarriages or abortion, uncanny births, menopause, and a barren body. They can either be the main theme on which the plot of the film is based, exploiting their potential to cause terror in the viewer due to their relentless, complex reality and authenticity, and building the entire story around it, or they can be used only as a source of terror, primarily supporting the indirectly related plot. The most interesting horror films, however, are those that use these motifs as symbols of social, cultural, or feminist critique, or ones that mix these earlier applications. In this regard, nowadays, the term gynaehorror comes to mind. While the horror genre continues to be considered a misogynistic genre, gynaehorror seeks to challenge heteronormative notions and redefine the genre as potentially inclusive and advantageous, supporting women rather than discriminating against them. And horror itself can be radical. The genre deliberately concentrates on non-normative bodies, identities, expressions, and affects while recycling and rearticulating specific images as well as destabilizing and then generating new meanings. Harrington reflects on gynaehorror and the concept of the 'monstrous' as follows:

In unpicking the gynaehorrific underpinnings of the representation of women, sex, reproduction and monstrosity in horror – that is, the social, cultural and discursive means by which female gendered monstrosity operates – and in exposing the

⁹⁹ J. Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Hogarth, 1985), 311.

¹⁰⁰ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 221.

mechanisms through which horror functions as art, as industrial product, as affect engine and as cultural artefact, we can also untangle molar issues of female monstrosity. After all, we must accept that the nature of the ‘monstrous’ isn’t itself, inherently negative. The monstrous is disobedient, unruly and disrespectful of borders – although this begs the question, ‘who is being disobeyed and whose borders disrespected?’¹⁰¹

Gyneahorrific themes and films expose misogyny and dread through their narratives, interests, and the way they model and frame the female body using the temporality and spatiality of film. They moreover provide a space for aesthetics and embodiment where women's bodies and bodily existence demand being seen and stress being significant for the celebration of otherness.¹⁰²

If we want to get a better insight into attributes of phallic and castrating women by advice from Creed, one more term broadly used in the cinematic horror sphere should be outlined. *The Final Girl*, who appears in the horror subgenre of a slasher film is “the one character of stature who does live to tell the tale.”¹⁰³ Carol J. Clover, in her pioneer work on gender in slasher films, summarizes that the prototype final girl is significant since she stands out from the other female characters in the movies. In this subgenre, the virgin hero is a common motif. It is demonstrated that sexual abstinence is thought of as some sort of protective spell by making the virgin-hero the center of the story and clearly framing the murderer's actions as a means of punishment for his teenage promiscuous victims. However, in modern horror, even the trope of the Final Girl is quite often correlated with sex, at least with her boyfriend, so sexual abstinence is no longer rule number one in order not to be murdered. Harrington additionally states on this issue:

Even as female characters have developed and become more sexually active in horror films, and as the trope is subverted, recycled or parodied in postmodern and millennial horrors, the Final Girls are still presented as different from – both less than and more than – the other female characters. Very often, the Final Girl relinquishes her femininity or avoids the trappings of overt feminine sexuality, either through ‘actual’ virginity – that is, a lack of sexual, carnal experience, even if she still desires or is desired – or through some other engagement with the implications of cinematic presentations of normative femininity.¹⁰⁴

The Final Girl displays sexual hesitation or indifference; is given interests that are labeled as masculine (or at least unfeminine); and is designated as somehow different from her female

¹⁰¹ Harrington, *Women, Monstrosity and Horror Film*, 28.

¹⁰² Harrington, *Women, Monstrosity and Horror Film*, 28.

¹⁰³ Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saws*: 44.

¹⁰⁴ Harrington, *Women, Monstrosity and Horror Film*, 28.

peers. This is frequently indicated by having a masculine name, like Joey, Stevie, or Max. Compared to her peers, she is more psychologically developed, vigilant, inventive, responsible, and intelligent. She seeks the murderer, and instead of attempting to escape, she eventually comes face to face with him.¹⁰⁵ In her paper on visual pleasure, Laura Mulvey called women “the bearer of the bleeding wound,”¹⁰⁶ highlighting the terrifying traits of the castrated female body, which is a crucial representation of the female victim in a slasher film.

According to Clover, women are more commonly chosen as victims because they are given more latitude in expressing their emotions. “Angry displays of force may belong to the male, but crying, cowering, screaming, fainting, trembling, begging for mercy belong to the female. Abject terror, in short, is gendered feminine.”¹⁰⁷

It is evident, that the slasher film seems to focus more on the victimization of women, and in Creed’s view, the slasher film’s female castrator has received very little critical attention. Women are portrayed as castrators in two different settings: as killers and as heroines. Several movies, including *Play Misty for Me* (1971), *Hands of the Ripper* (1971), *Friday the 13th* (1980), *Don’t Look Now* (1973), and *Sisters* (1972), feature a female killer. The female killer is always portrayed in these movies as unhinged usually because she has unfairly been deprived of something (e.g. when she is deprived sexually or emotionally), which sets her apart from the rape-revenge genre,¹⁰⁸ where the protagonist is referred to as *femme castratrice*. Therefore, psychotic women who are considered female castrators/slashers/killers usually go on the rampage because they have lost something, they lack something – they are castrated. According to Creed, “the slasher film deals specifically with castration anxieties, particularly with the male fear of castration [...], symbolic castration appears to be part of the ideological project of the slasher film.”¹⁰⁹

A further significant factor that is frequently overlooked in analytical studies of the genre is the fact that the slasher film’s heroine is also portrayed as a castrating character. Creed criticizes Clover for refusing to let the title character, to whom she coined the term “Final Girl” be characterized as castrating and rather suggesting that the protagonist is phallicized by the slasher film, demonstrating it with the above example with boyish names, which are supposed to imply that the protagonist is not a traditionally feminine character.¹¹⁰ Clover states her belief:

¹⁰⁵ Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saws*, 40-44.

¹⁰⁶ Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” 7.

¹⁰⁷ Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saws*, 51.

¹⁰⁸ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 167-172.

¹⁰⁹ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 171.

¹¹⁰ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 172.

Figuratively seen, the Final Girl is a male surrogate in things oedipal, a homoerotic stand-in, the audience incorporate; to the extent that she ‘means’ girl at all, it is only for the purposes of signifying phallic lack. The discourse is wholly masculine, and females figure in it only insofar as they ‘read’ some aspect of male experience. To applaud the Final Girl as a feminist development . . . is, in the light of her figurative meaning, a particularly grotesque expression of wishful thinking.¹¹¹

Creed importantly opposes:

The avenging heroine of the slasher film is not the Freudian phallic woman whose image is designed to allay castration anxiety (we encounter her mainly in pornography and film noir) but the deadly femme castratrice, a female figure who exists in the discourses of myth, legend, religion and art but whose image has been repressed in Freudian psychoanalytic theory largely because it challenges Freud’s view that man fears woman because she is castrated.¹¹²

By eradicating women (previous victims) or rewriting the heroine as a masculine character, argues Clover, slasher films help mitigate men's castration anxiety. Therefore the heroine is phallicized in order to overcome the monster.¹¹³ However, Creed makes a rather complex examination of this claim and proves the opposite. Usually, the number of female victims in one film is large - there is not only one female character - and the victims are constantly replacing each other. Moreover, the act of torturing a woman is presented in greater detail, and sometimes female victims are replaced by male victims even, thus it contributes to the continued existence of this anxiety. The slasher movie purposefully tries to evoke castration phobia. This is primarily accomplished by depicting women in the dual roles of castrated and castrator; in almost every case, the latter representation dominates the resolution.¹¹⁴ Correspondingly, Harrington describes that “this tension is resolved when the Final Girl ‘un-mans’ the killer by asserting herself in a manner coded as active and masculine, often through the acquisition and use of phallic weaponry, and then through the disruption or penetration of the killer’s body.”¹¹⁵

Notably, a different point of view is offered by Roger Ebert in his essay ‘Why movie audiences aren’t safe anymore’, where he criticizes a modern slasher film and deplors the victimization of women, however, presents a completely different conclusion:

These movies may still be exorcizing demons, but the identity of the demons has changed. Now the “victim” is the poor, put-upon, traumatized male in the audience. And the demons are the women on the screen.¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saws*, 53.

¹¹² Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 173.

¹¹³ Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saw*, 50.

¹¹⁴ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 173-174.

¹¹⁵ Harrington, *Women, Monstrosity and Horror Film*, 52.

¹¹⁶ Roger Ebert, “Why movie audiences aren’t safe anymore,” *American Film* 5 (1981): 56.

According to Ebert, female castrators in horror movies either propagate the myth that women are perilous and destructive or profit from the audience's interest in the association between sex and death, especially for men. That the heroine's victim-experience of deepest terror, which is considered a passive and feminine emotional state, enables the viewer to partake in such an experience in a way that is approved by culture, is one of the most significant Clover's assertions. As a result, the (typically male) horror audience has room to transgress or queer their gendered identification. This, according to Clover's interpretation, allows the audience to alternate between identifying with an engaged antagonist whose overtly macho viewpoint dominates the early scenes of the movie but whose masculinity is subsequently undermined, and sharing the heroine's harrowing, feminized terror.¹¹⁷ Whereas Barbara Creed's belief about female monstrosity is that the depiction of the monstrous-feminine in horror films relates to men's dread of women, Carol Clover promotes the concept of the predominant thrill for male viewers of the genre being a masochistic rather than a sadistic one.

2. Gender and femininity in selected American horror movies

The analytical chapter introduces two ways of representation of femininity and explores the notion of gender in selected American horror movies according to the theories mentioned in the theoretical part. The division of subgenres is based on the source of the protagonist's femininity. The first two movies are categorized as those consisting of the concept of monstrous-feminine and the last two are categorized as those consisting of the concept of the Final Girl. Nevertheless, those concepts are intertwined and may occur in all selected movies in some form, therefore they are taken into consideration in the conclusion.

2.1 *Carrie* (1976)

As already indicated in the theoretical part, the film *Carrie* by director Brian De Palma became somewhat of a cinematic milestone and a controversial film that has opened up unaddressed topics and has offered several sources of abject that gynae horror now explicitly explores in its studies from the perspective of female monstrosity.

In the first scene, where the girls' gym class is taking place, it is immediately clear that Carrie is disliked, is being tormented, and is the target of ridicule from her peers. Her response, however, does not imply any bitterness or desire for vengeance; rather, it simply reflects her quiet, awkward personality. The following scene is a pillar of the entire film, however, it starts rather ambiguously and in the favor of the male audience, as it superficially objectifies several

¹¹⁷ Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saws*, 47.

women's bodies at once, showing them completely naked as they shower, dry, and dress in a changing room filled with thick hot steam from the showers. The next image is a close-up of Carrie in the shower thoroughly washing her body with soap (the usual symbol of cleanliness) and the camera pans over her wet skin, her hands almost auto-erotically touching her breasts, stomach, and then between her thighs. Carrie serves as a voyeuristic object here. This whole scene is underlined by clichéd melodramatic music, which seems to be a deliberate mystification of the viewer, given the further direction of the plot. De Palma intentionally sets an erotic tone to this scene and explores the eroticism of the female body. The turning point comes when Carrie is washing between her thighs and suddenly notices blood (the usual symbol of “impurity”) running down her hand. She brings her bloody hand to her face, whose expression now indicates incipient hysteria. What comes next is the genuine horror in her eyes, the panic, and chaos she causes as she starts screaming desperately, running towards other girls and shaking them with her bloody hands, naked and cringed, looking like a skeleton crying for help. This is the moment the director immediately sweeps away all the viewer's expectations and presents several sorts of bodily monstrosity, from the horrible hysterical burst through to the display of Carrie's naked wet gaunt body, to the blood pouring out of her. What Carrie gets is ridicule and assault from peers throwing pads and tampons at her while she cowers in a corner with her eyes wide open in abject panic. What the representation of female monstrosity now does is repel and disgust the male gaze (see Appendix 1).

Due to having a religiously orthodox and bigoted mother with Puritan beliefs, Carrie is completely unfamiliar with the trappings of womanhood such as menstruation and perceives it as a violation of her body's order and an unknown phenomenon. She believes she is dying. She is unaware of how her female body is conditioned and has not received the knowledge that is typically passed down from mother to daughter. Another violation of order could be the moment when her teacher tries to help to calm her down from her psychotic state. As the teacher shakes Carrie's head and she exclaims, the light bulb goes off and given the plot of the rest of the film, the viewer can assess that this starts the symbolic turning point for Carrie's coming-of-age and the beginning of her supernatural abilities. From now on, it can be seen that whenever Carrie gets angry or is confronted by someone, she can move and throw things with her mind. For example, when the principal repeatedly misspells her name after an incident in the showers, Carrie forcefully corrects him, and an ashtray suddenly flies off his desk and breaks. Or when a boy rides on a bike, passes her, and yells: “Creepy Carrie, creepy Carrie”¹¹⁸ at her, she knocks

¹¹⁸ *Carrie*, directed by Brian de Palma (United Artists, 1976), 0:09:38.

him off the bike effortlessly with her mind. This is clear evidence that her first period empowered her, gave her courage, and started a new era of wanting to become independent, break away from her mentally unstable, patriarchally programmed mother, and experience things like any other normal high school girl.

The father in the story is absent, while Carrie's relationship with her mother invites diverse analyses. Her mother is a tyrant who is deeply religious and who thinks that women's sexuality is fundamentally wicked and the cause of man's "fall from grace". Moreover, she gradually in the story regards her daughter as a witch. She avoids discussing sexuality and reproduction with Carrie out of concern that she would get corrupted and will not let her make friends or start a relationship with a boy. The image of her motherhood matches the phallic mother that Carrie sees in her. Ann Kaplan describes the paradigm of "the evil, possessive, and destructive all-devouring"¹¹⁹ mother, who dominates much of the iconography in Hollywood, as follows:

The phallic mother satisfies needs for power that her ideal function prohibits. She may also project on to the child her resentments, disappointments and failures for which the child is also to suffer.¹²⁰

The mother is perceived here as an abject. Far from being motherly, her relationship with her daughter seems rather religious. From the way the mother treats Carrie, it is obvious that she keeps her daughter under control and "protects" her from the vices of womankind. When the mother learns from a phone call from school that Carrie has got her first period, hell ensues in the form of a religious sermon, where the mother forces a kneeling Carrie to repeat phrases from the Bible while physically assaulting her, convinced that her daughter must have sinned:

Mrs. White: And God made Eve from the rib of Adam. And Eve was weak and loosed the raven on the world. And the raven was called sin. The raven was called sin.
Carrie: Why didn't you tell me, Mama?
Mrs. White: Say it. [...]
Carrie: No. [...]
Mrs. White: And first sin was intercourse. First sin was intercourse. [...]
Carrie: I didn't sin, Mama. [...]
Mrs. White: And the Lord visited Eve with a curse. And the curse was the curse of blood. [...] Lord, help this sinning woman see the sin of her days and ways. Show her that if she had remained sinless the curse of blood would never have come on her. [...]
Carrie: No, Mama! No!

¹¹⁹ Ann E. Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 48.

¹²⁰ Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation*, 47.

Mrs. White: Don't lie, Carrietta. Don't you know by now, I can see inside you?
I can see the sin as surely as God can.¹²¹

Margaret White, the mother eventually throws her daughter into a cramped, dark cupboard and instructs her to pray to God for forgiveness. There is a small statue of Jesus on the cross looking up. Speaking about sexist theological doctrines, Mrs. White attributes all human evil to women, saying: "And he visited Eve with a second curse. And this was the curse of childbearing."¹²² She believes the human race is cursed and that curse is carried from mother to daughter through the blood of a woman. The victim sacrificed on behalf of society is always a woman. Mrs. White embraces patriarchal sexism but Carrie starts to be determined to escape her mother's ingrained misogyny, although she had obeyed her until just now. She was submissive and allowed her freedom to be taken away. Carrie's decision to go to prom with a boy who, to her surprise, has invited her despite her mother's prohibition shows her now rebellious nature. Kaplan comments on this situation:

The phallogocentric logic of the classical Freudian scheme brilliantly occludes any possibility for a pre-Oedipal feminine identification with the mother; the mother is always viewed by the child as having the phallus, until the disillusionment that instigates the Oedipal crisis and ushers in the castrated, powerless mother of the Symbolic order.¹²³

Carrie's mother is a phallic as well as a castrating mother because she deprives her daughter of her natural needs, learning about sexuality, and profiting from social connections at an adolescent age, resulting in a lack of knowledge of her body and loss of life experiences. Her mother castrates her as she constantly takes from her and gives nothing in return. She is so manipulative she even hurts herself by tearing her hair to prevent Carrie from going to prom. She considers Carrie's dress indecent. Carrie's cleavage is now being captured on camera:

Mrs. White: I can see your dirty pillows. Everyone will.
Carrie: Breasts, Mama. They're called breasts. And every woman has them.
Mrs. White: Take off that dress.
Carrie: No.
Mrs. White: We'll burn it together and pray for forgiveness.¹²⁴

This is another illustration of Carrie's desire to take womanhood into her own hands and her willingness to explore new territory of her body and go through the experiences that are a normal part of female youth. She is now prepared to physically separate from her mother's grip

¹²¹ *Carrie*, 0:14:26 to 0:15:47.

¹²² *Carrie*, 0:15:59 to 0:16:04.

¹²³ Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation*, 48.

¹²⁴ *Carrie*, 0:53:33 to 0:53:55.

and symbolically castrate her power of control. Now, her mother knows that the recently gained womanhood will take Carrie away from her.

The character of the gym teacher Ms. Collins, who has been trying to keep a protective hand over Carrie since the incident in the showers and even constantly maliciously and aggressively intending to harm and punish all the girls who bully Carrie, also deserves a short but worthwhile note in a similar sense. She, too, in a sense can be viewed as a castrating woman/bitch towards girls. She tries to rob them of their free time in the form of detention on the athletics field, on the condition that if they do not show up, they are banned from their dream prom night. When she discovers that Carrie was invited to the prom by Tommy Ross, the boyfriend of one of the girls, she immediately sees this as another potential act of bullying and tries to prevent it. But Tommy Ross' girlfriend swears she just wants to do something nice for Carrie. Despite making an effort to be fair and bring justice to Carrie, she is really intense in her actions when she is trying to physically destroy girls on the athletics field.

As illustrated before, blood plays an important role in the movie. A woman's blood is shown as an abject fluid that contributes to Carrie's monstrous image. It connects the three most important scenes of the film. The first is the opening scene in the shower, where Carrie starts to appear as a menstrual witch who got her telekinetic powers through her period. The second scene is crucial and takes place at the prom when she is set up — not by Tommy Ross, but by the most ruthless bully Chris, who has been prohibited from the event—and her boyfriend Billy Nolan. The night before the prom, Billy has made arrangements to have a bucket of pig's blood fastened above the stage where the prom king and queen will be announced. Carrie is the one who gets to the stage as the winner since Chris and her accomplices falsified the polls. In the moments before Carrie and Tommy are chosen, certain cinematic imagery can be noticed. The room changes colors alternately, and at the moment the camera focuses on Carrie during their conversation, the lighting turns bloody red. Prior to Carrie's coronation, a long crane shot that distorts space, time, and perspective creates a dream-like atmosphere. Carrie (now overwhelmed, sobbing, recognized, lovely, and attractive) is positioned at the center of the social and sexual hierarchy (see Appendix 2). De Palma also manipulates the use of music, alternating dreamy romantic music focusing on a shot of Carrie with unpleasant, ominous music while shooting the hidden bullies and the bucket of blood from above. At the exact moment of Carrie's utter euphoria, Chris, who is hiding under the stairs, pulls the rope and drops a bucket of pig's blood on Carrie. She is sacrificed and bathed in blood on behalf of a malicious school crowd. Her eyes now display even bigger shock than in the shower scene as she is covered with

blood and the cinematic carnage begins. The cinematic devices that De Palma uses to multiply the effect of the horror moment, Harrington expertly comments:

Beyond the unsettling, almost grotesque manipulation of cinematic space caused by the prom's lurid coloured lights and the juxtaposition of wide shots with extreme close ups of faces and hands, the scene is marked by temporal shifts (between slow motion, real-time footage and jagged jump cuts), aural manipulation (the suppression of environmental diegetic sound, the emphasis upon the sound of the dribbling, shower-like blood), and the use of mobile split screens that express an immense violence and centralise Carrie's abject, unsettling subjective position.¹²⁵

The heinous, embarrassing prank unleashes Carrie's telekinetic rage in a massive, deadly wave of wrath that kills dozens and completely destroys the school gym with fire. As the film inescapably thematizes the issue of the split in a great deal; such as the split of the daughter and mother, the split between oneself and society, and the internal split between a shy girl and the powerful witch, the screen is split into two parts here, so that the shot of Carrie's subjective perspective killing out of revenge all who mocked her is as intense as possible (see Appendix 3). Her killing spree also splits Ms. Collins in half with a piece of iron. The pig's blood, which has now soaked into her hair and clothes and transformed her into a murderous bloody monster causes an abject horror, and attempts once more, as in the opening scene, to deflect the male gaze and voyeurism from the lovely, the princess-like, and now feminine little girl who won the crown (see Appendix 4). And yet, there is a twisted power in this refusal to consider this symbolic blood as a wound or even as proof of the toothed vagina of what Creed refers to as the feminine castratrice. Harrington argues that:

By re-centring power within the body of the woman, and centralising the abject subject position of Carrie within cinematic time and space, this refusal counters modes of objectification that try to constrain and control her, especially as blood's (monthly menstrual) return refuses to be suppressed.¹²⁶

The comparison made between women and pigs is pivotal in the movie's discussion of the abject. In the very first gym scene, after the team loses because of Carrie, Chris tells her: "You eat shit",¹²⁷ and at the prom, she gets soaked by pig's blood, which Billy Nolan and his friend procured directly from the killing of an animal. Creed clarifies:

Pigs are stigmatized as 'dirty' creatures because of their habit of wallowing in their own excrement (if there is no mud available) to protect their extremely sensitive skins from sunburn. Women and pigs are also linked in myth and language. In Greek and Latin the female genitals are referred to as 'pig', and the cowrie shell

¹²⁵ Harrington, *Women, Monstrosity and Horror Film*, 231.

¹²⁶ Harrington, *Women, Monstrosity and Horror Film*, 232.

¹²⁷ *Carrie*, 0:01:09.

which clearly represents the female genitals was called 'pig'. Even today, 'sowishness' is used in German as a slang term for menstruation.¹²⁸

This analogy could also mean in some sense Carrie's position in society, as pigs are considered "low" in most cultures.

The movie builds on the superstitious notion that menstruation blood has dreadful powers by connecting Carrie's supernatural abilities with blood. *The Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* points out that according to sayings in earlier times "a menstruous woman's touch could blast the fruits of the field, sour wine, cloud mirrors, rust iron, and blunt the edges of knives,"¹²⁹ which means she could be easily called a witch. Even Carrie's mother experienced her daughter's supernatural powers, therefore she is certain she is a witch. She expresses this feeling when she refuses to let her go to prom with Tommy due to which Carrie pins her to the bed with her telekinetic ability — she goes by saying a quote from the Bible: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."¹³⁰

After a series of brutal supernatural murders, Carrie returns home to a house full of lit candles, although her mother is nowhere to be found. As she enters the house the music sounds seriously religious even ritualistic. She removes her bloodied garments and enters the bathtub, where a close-up shows her getting soap and scrubbing the blood off her face while sitting in the fetal position. Creed states that "the bloody water suggests a rebirth and a desire to return to the comforting dyadic relationship."¹³¹ According to Greven's theory, the fetal position could mean a desired return to the mother. The fact that there is an emphasized shot of Carrie taking the soap and washing her face off makeup could mean that she wants to get rid of her acquired womanhood transformation and return to the period before her first menstruation — to the pre-Oedipal phase. After the bath, she pulls her chaste nightgown back on, which covers all her curves, and fastens up to the last button up to her neck. Proof that she is not ready to accept her femininity and takes its manifestations as a curse, just like her mother told her. The mother has now emerged from behind the door and kneeled before Carrie having an insane look. Carrie briefly outlines her traumatic incident and begs her: "Hold me, Mama. Please, hold me."¹³² After the mother tells the story of how she sinned with a man and should have killed herself when she found out she was pregnant with her, she stabs Carrie in the back and causes her to fall down the stairs. The mother now takes on the role of a slasher psychotic woman who is

¹²⁸ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 109.

¹²⁹ Walker, *The Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, 643.

¹³⁰ *Carrie*, 0:55:30 to 0:55:33.

¹³¹ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 111.

¹³² *Carrie*, 01:26:38 to 01:26:40.

obsessed with her faith and moves around the house like a psychopath with her arms outstretched, crossing herself with a knife in her hand. Her conviction she must kill her daughter flows from the belief she is possessed by the devil. This scene echoes the previous scene of the confrontation, where Carrie, out of anger, slams all the windows in the house with her mind and the mother reacts to it: "Witch. You've got Satan's power."¹³³ Carrie tries to crawl away from her, and when the mother raises her hand to ultimately kill her daughter, Carrie uses her power to send multiple knives into her mother's body, pinning her to the wooden beams with some aimed at her hands. This position alludes to Christ's crucifixion, during which the mother lets out long, loud, nearly orgasmic sighs, symbolizing her religious and sexual fulfillment, as she was unconsciously sexually deprived for a long time. Carrie provides her mother relief in the form of symbolic knife penetration, again in the connection with blood. This scene hints at the repressed sexual longing that characterizes the fatal mother-child relationship. She now takes the fetal position again like she has done many times before. As the house begins to burn, she takes the mother and drags her into a womb-like closet, where she used to perform her prayers of punishment but also comfort. As they lie together in the burning house the conclusion indicates an ultimate statement of total submission to the maternal entity's authority and a return to the dyadic all-encompassing mother. The castrating mother re-absorbs the life she once procreated.

The male gender plays only a small role in the film since De Palma primarily focuses on femininity. There are only two of them. They represent good (Tommy Ross) and evil (Billy Nolan). The male characters are relatively flat and one could only analyze the performance of Tommy Ross, who is genuinely nice to Carrie as she kind of symbolizes his feminine side, however, this line is not developed further.

To sum up, women are significant to De Palma because, according to an essentialist perspective, they are the more affectionately motivated of the sexes and the most vivid representation of issues involving interpersonal ties. De Palma's general interest in themes surrounding intimacy led to his interest in femininity. Women are critical to his cinema because they help viewers understand the nature of depictions of mental and emotional experiences and processes, as well as issues with misogyny and related violence.¹³⁴

In conclusion, in *Carrie*, there is strong evidence linking menarche and puberty to female monstrosity. Moreover, woman's blood also refers to maternal blood, which highlights the procreative role of women in feeding the developing fetus. Menstrual blood is portrayed in

¹³³ *Carrie*, 0:47:30 to 0:47:34.

¹³⁴ Greven, *Representations of Femininity in American Genre Cinema*, 115.

the horror genre as a source of abjection since it has such strong supernatural powers that it may turn a woman into a terrifying creature such as a murderous witch. However, the movie conveys a dual message. Although it resurrects outdated taboos of blood and misogynistic beliefs, it also adds the factor of encouraging compassion for Carrie since she is a victim of these biases.

2.2 *Midsommar* (2019)

Given that *Midsommar* is a recent folk horror movie by filmmaker Ari Aster and may not be well-known to everyone, a brief synopsis of its plot is required.

Dani, a soon-to-be American college graduate, is dependent on Christian, her self-centered and distant boyfriend, while traumatized and still working through a tragedy when she lost her whole family due to her bipolar sister's murder-suicide. Despite their impending breakup and in an effort to save their failing relationship, Dani joins Christian, two of his friends, and their mysterious friend Pelle to attend a once-every-ninety-year summer solstice festival in a secluded pagan community hidden in the heart of the Hälsingland region of Sweden. After a long time, Dani feels happy again. However, with the help of a pagan cult, what starts as a peaceful retreat gradually turns into a weird competition that gets more and more violent. The movie is crammed full of investigations into internal fear and rooted realism combined with bizarreness and gore. Empathy, family, and a curious reflection on toxic as well as symbiotic codependency are among the elements that immediately become apparent after watching the movie. However, a key, although not an immediately recognizable element is the exploration, emphasis, and celebration of primitive and essential notions of womanhood power, and femininity.

To introduce the genre, folk horror is a subgenre of horror fiction that employs aspects of folklore to arouse dread and suspense. The highlighted side of nature, isolated rural settings, superstition, folk religion, paganism, and sacrifice are all recurrent themes. Folk horror is often focused on human attitudes and behaviors rather than the supernatural, despite its association with supernatural horror films. It commonly incorporates naïve outsiders coming up against these.¹³⁵ It typically displays new religious, spiritual, or philosophical shared beliefs by a specific community — something that corresponds to the premises of the cult.

The community that the group of friends joins is called Hårga, and its belief is based on the fact that the fundamental role of a woman, which she has been deprived of due to the

¹³⁵ Bernice M. Murphy, "Beyond Midsommar: 'folk horror' in popular fiction," *The Irish Times*, published July 23, 2019, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/beyond-midsommar-folk-horror-in-popular-fiction-1.3963971>

patriarchal programming of the world, should be spiritual leadership, healing, blessing the harvest, nurturing and procreation, i.e. keeping the cult alive. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English address the historical role of women as healers and the authority of the people in their booklet *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses* and talk about female healers contra the patriarchy:

For centuries women were doctors without degrees, barred from books and lectures, learning from each other, and passing on experience from neighbor to neighbor and mother to daughter. They were called “wise women” by the people, witches or charlatans by the authorities. Medicine is part of our heritage as women, our history, our birthright. Today, however, health care is the property of male professionals.¹³⁶

They are discussing this because the new age has suppressed female dominance in medicine, replacing it with the male science-based contemporary medical profession and defaming the female nature-based one.

The Hårga women reclaim the position of power in *Midsommar*. It comes as no surprise that the leader of the community is a woman who leads the group spiritually (probably as well as politically). From the integration of visitors to the religious and cultural rites to the choice of mating pairs, a real “wise woman” directs everything. In the Hårga, women hold a position of authority and even holiness. These women are leaders in the community, choose their mates, utilize old magic to influence events, and, perhaps most visibly, engage in a sexual rite that honors pleasure and is charged with feminine power. Women have the last say in how their sexuality is used within the Hårga. This demonstrates Aster's desire to stress matriarchy, women as figures deserving of respect, and the celebration of the female body's inherent reproductive functions.

Isolation and solitude, which is natural for the pagan spiritual Swedish cult, is also the pivotal premise and theme of this film, focusing primarily on the main female character, Dani. At the beginning of the film, when Dani suspects something awful has happened to her family, her cell phone is directly visible in the shot, and in the history of the called contacts it can be seen that eight different calls “didn't connect.”¹³⁷ This means Dani is extremely lonely, she is ignored, and also her boyfriend Christian provides no support since he is on the list. The framing, which places Dani's size as noticeably shorter than the rest of the group and regularly places her in the corners of the frame, graphically conveys her isolation from her male companions and her emotions of helplessness and invisibility (see Appendix 5). Whereas she tearfully tries to come to terms with her fear alone, Christian is being boosted by his friends to

¹³⁶ Barbara Ehrenreich, Deidre English, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1973), 1.

¹³⁷ *Midsommar*, directed by Ari Aster (A24, 2019), 0:03:18.

break up with Dani whom they refer to as a burden, and one can tell that Christian feels the same way. When Dani's fears about family are confirmed, the boys fake-willingly allow her to join the originally intended men's party only and Christian only stays with her due to her emotional state. With a sort of PTSD making the word "family" traumatize her, despite Dani's desire to unwind her mind after a horrific tragedy, her male pals are of no use and just serve to worsen her misery. That Dani is constantly under pressure from men who have no empathy for her is illustrated by the scene before entering the Hårga community, when the men want to take psychedelic mushrooms:

Pelle: Do you guys wanna take it now or should we settle in first?
Mark: Fuck it, let's just take it now, right?
Boys: Yeah. Yeah.
Dani: You know what, I might have to find my footing first if that's okay.
Christian: Uh, yeah, of course. [...] And listen, if you're feeling uneasy, you don't have to take them at all.
Dani: No, no, no, I just... I wanna feel settled first.
Christian: I'll wait.
Dani: No, no, you go ahead. [...]
Christian: I want us to come up together.
Mark: Ready?
Christian: I'm gonna wait for Dani, so you just go ahead.
Mark: Dude, we can't take them at different times, they'll be totally separate trips.
Christian: You wanna wait for us then?
Dani: You know what, it's fine, it's fine.
Christian: Babe, no.
Dani: I'm ready. No, it's okay.
Christian: Don't feel rushed.
Dani: I don't, I don't. It's fine, I'm ready.
Mark: Are you sure?
Dani: Yes, Mark, thank you. [...]
Christian: Don't let Mark be the one to pressure you of all people.
Dani: He's not, he's not. It will... It will get complicated otherwise, it's fine.¹³⁸

She gives in to their requests and ignores her emotions because she is aware that Christian wants to take the drugs right away despite his claims to the contrary. However, Dani experiences a bad trip as she is triggered by Pelle's speech about family. Related to the theme of isolation and loneliness, every time Dani has a PTSD tantrum, she runs away to somewhere alone with her hand over her mouth to hide her emotions. Dani always tries not to express her emotions in front of others. Her nightmares represent her feelings of fear and loneliness when she has a

¹³⁸ *Midsommar*, 0:27:14 to 0:28:31.

dream about boys abandoning her in the community and leaving by car, while she tries to scream “Wait!” but no sound goes off her mouth, just a black fog.

Immediately upon entering the community, whose inhabitants are white, many of them blonde, dressed in white, floating clothing, and living in harmony with nature, the group witnesses several strange rituals. At the very first dance - a game of “Skin the Fool”, Christian, sitting in the grass, is subtly kicked by one of the local girls Maja to get his attention. Through her deeds and motivations, Maja serves as a focal point for the movie's depiction of the menstrual and reproductive abject. A young woman is expected to select a mate to conduct the mating ritual with once she reaches maturity per Hårga's criteria. This is against the expectations of a patriarchal society where it is mostly the man who chooses his worthy female partner. Evidence of this action is provided by a tapestry that hangs loosely around the dwelling, on which a bizarre love spell is depicted (see Appendix 6). With the help of various ingredients, her pubic hair, and menstrual blood, the girl mixes a potion, which she then gives to her chosen one and he falls in love with her. This shot instantly causes disgust and cringing from a wide audience given Maja's goals and the cult's ritualistic sex acts. Christian's drink stands out as vivid orange in the line of light-yellow ones made for both inhabitants and guests. Apparently, Christian has been given Maja's menstrual blood. The subsequent scene in which he removes a crimson pubic hair from his mouthful of beef pie and then exchanges a confused look with Maja is evidence of it. Like many directors before him, Aster has exploited menstrual blood which is socially considered taboo, to both offend and excite the audience. Male viewers' desire is naturally sparked by the monstrous-feminine despite their contempt for it. Similar to *Carrie*, menstruation has the mystical power to enrich women while robbing others of something — castrating others.

Men's helplessness in the face of women's use of sexuality as a tool of mind control is evident in *Midsommar*. For this matriarchally programmed community, the males are only of phallic function, i.e. to provide the seed for women. In this movie, the male gaze is reversed. Here, the males are the victims of female desires and are chosen for the fulfillment of their needs. The Hårga women castrate males metaphorically from their position of power in a patriarchal society by using them only for the purpose of reproduction. A Western audience may interpret this loss of social and sexual authority as a feature of horror. Mark also experiences constant stalking from one of the local women who chose him and now follows him with her gaze at every step, which makes Mark very nervous. This line is closed when the girl invites Mark to come with her in the middle of dinner and Mark, with a vision of easy sex,

goes with her. However, his fate is a mysterious disfigurement of his face and later death, which is needed as a sacrifice for the final Hårga ritual.

The theme of empathy is pivotal for this movie. Dani gradually realizes how ignorant, unempathetic, and uncaring her boyfriend Christian is. It starts with the scene where Pelle gives Dani a birthday present and she says that Christian forgot her birthday, but at that moment she blames herself for that: “I forgot to remind him, it’s not his fault.”¹³⁹ Then there's an awkward scene where Christian has been obviously made aware by Pelle that it is Dani's birthday and brings her a piece of pie with a candle that he fails to light while singing *Happy Birthday*. After a disturbing ritual where the community watches as members who have completed their Hårga life cycle jump off of a cliff to give their lives as a gesture, Dani is once again overcome with trauma and seeks empathy from her boyfriend:

Dani: Are you not disturbed by what we just saw?

Christian: Yeah, of course, I am. That was really, really shocking. I'm trying to keep an open mind though. That's cultural, you know? We stick our elders in nursing homes. I'm sure they find that disturbing. I think we really need to just at least try to acclimate.¹⁴⁰

This lack of empathy escalates when Dani finds out that one member of the group who came with them allegedly left his girlfriend in the community and went ahead to the station without saying anything. When she goes to tell Christian, he just retorts “What a dick move”¹⁴¹ and “That sucks,”¹⁴² shows no confusion or empathy to Dani’s worry, and continues his conversation on the subject of incest with one of the community members. For the first time, during supper, she expresses her mistrust of Christian out loud when she once more mentions Simon leaving Connie there:

Dani: I could see you possibly doing that.

Christian: What the hell does that mean?

Dani: Never mind.¹⁴³

Dani can see something is up as Christian's gaze is constantly elsewhere than on her. His character offers the viewer nothing to root for the whole time.

While men here represent toxic, flat, and unempathetic characters being passive victims of murderous pagan rituals in the course of the story, women move the story and are considered sacred. The mythology of *Midsommar* is naturally female and is founded on an unrestricted,

¹³⁹ *Midsommar*, 0:43:05 to 0:43:09.

¹⁴⁰ *Midsommar*, 1:13:48 to 1:14:13.

¹⁴¹ *Midsommar*, 1:22:50.

¹⁴² *Midsommar*, 1:23:58.

¹⁴³ *Midsommar*, 1:28:38 to 1:28:53.

primeval idea of what it means to be a woman. Historically and culturally rooted realities contribute to the link between women and nature. The energy of the female vibrates throughout nature. The essential scene where the Maypole dance ritual is performed comes before a crucial section of the movie where Dani is going through the self-actualization phase.

The Maypole represents here the phallus, the thrust into the Earth mother's womb. Before performing the crucial Maypole dance ritual, in which only women participate, they are given a special drink by one of the elders. They are wearing white garments with huge flower wreaths on their heads representing their purity and femininity. After a while, the audience realizes that the drink was hallucinogenic, as Dani appears dizzy and hallucinates that grass is growing through her legs, just as it had happened to her when she ate the mushrooms earlier, signifying the reunification of feminine strength with nature. Nature here could symbolize the archaic mother since everything in the community is subordinate to her. To cite Creed it is “the original parent, the godhead of all fertility and the origin of procreation.”¹⁴⁴ Despite being drugged, Dani finally feels a sense of feminine strength and connection to the other girls. Dani's momentary ability to speak Swedish to them without realizing it is evidence of their newly gained sisterhood bond. Dani is the last to stand in the competition and is crowned May Queen. Now she is surrounded by attention and admiration and is raised on a pedestal and sung by the crowd (see Appendix 7). When she sits on the greenery throne, there is a visible connection and harmony as the green leaves move according to her motions and breathing. Her new role as May Queen is to bless the land and livestock, again in accordance with a certain ritual.

Meanwhile, Christian meets with the wise woman Siv, who informs him that he has been chosen as Maja's mating partner: “You have been approved to mate with her. You're an ideal astrological match. And she has fixed her hopes on you.”¹⁴⁵ After that, Christian again drinks the unknown liquid that is offered to him. At this stage, Christian is almost completely enchanted by the love spell cast by Maja, acts drugged, and finally follows her to the barn. The assisted ritual of mating can begin. In the barn, Maja is lying on the ground on a bed of flowers, surrounded by a semicircle of naked women of various ages. Christian approaches and the mating begins. Aster uses a bird's eye camera from above to emphasize the gruesome symmetry of the ritual (see Appendix 8). During that, women make empathetic sounds of pleasure and sigh at the rhythm of the sexual act, rubbing their breasts. Among other things, this scene highlights the theme and language of empathy that Hårga women speak most loudly. At times, one of the female spectators even pushes Christian against Maja. By changing the typical

¹⁴⁴ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 46.

¹⁴⁵ *Midsommar*, 01:41:13 to 01:41:22.

description of sexual abuse performed on women, this instance serves as a particularly brutal illustration of the monstrous-feminine. Maja then says the eerie words “I can feel it! I feel the baby,”¹⁴⁶ meaning the ritual is completed. Christian, who begins to realize that he has been tricked into the act, runs outside. The viewer now sees him completely naked with his penis on display and perceives him as a victim thrown away after a “violent” female act. Maja can be interpreted here as both the witch and the monstrous womb because her menstrual blood has the power to enchant a man into her favor by impregnating her while he is not sane.

As was already noted, Dani's emotional suffering is the primary focus of the movie. Due to her emotional isolation from others, Dani expresses her grief in secret and alone for most of the first act of the movie. This is consistent with the idea that women are perceived as being more sensitive in patriarchal cultures and that they must control their emotions in order to be appreciated. The only person with whom Dani appears to have any sort of emotional bond is Pelle. Dani receives emotional support from the Hårga members as she integrates, which gives her more freedom to express her emotions. By rejecting women's patriarchal identity as the other and promoting feminine emotion and empathy as common experiences, the concept of Hårga challenges the way that society views women. In the end, the Hårga support enables Dani to accept her loss and get through it together as opposed to just going through it alone. She is protected by other women who give off the impression that they are taking care of and mothering her as they resurrect her from the moment of utter weakness into the position of May Queen. It is the scene during the mating ritual when Dani witnesses her boyfriend cheating on her through the keyhole. She immediately experiences an immense feeling of betrayal and bursts into hysterical crying right in front of the barn. Women take her to the common dwelling and share her suffering through vocalization (see Appendix 9). They cry out loud together in pain holding each other. She discovers a group of females with whom she can share her suffering without fear of being judged. Without the masculine group dynamic in comparison, this scenario may have appeared abject, which is why it is crucial to the story. Dani is able to find peace through this shared experience because of the common feminine empathy. As a result, she acknowledges her role within the Hårga and decides to choose Christian, who is now completely paralyzed in a wheelchair, to participate in the Midsommar ritual's last sacrifice.

In the movie's climax, Dani best represents women. While using her power in the presence of nature, she gazes outward in several images, inviting the audience to experience her emotional awakening with her. Dani's journey serves as a metaphor for every girl's journey

¹⁴⁶ *Midsommar*, 02:06:41 to 02:06:45.

toward womanhood. It ends in the ultimate tragedy as Christian and the other sacrifices are burned alive alongside freed and empowered women. In the words of Creed, “the idea that woman should give physical expression to her anger is represented as an inherently destructive process.”¹⁴⁷ Christian was killed by Dani as a direct result of her rage. This change in power is reflected in a fresh color scheme of vibrant yellow, pink, and white that recalls the powerful feminine energy that is now embodied by Dani. She had finally broken free of her invisibility and reclaimed her feminine power, killing the source of her agony. Therefore, she can be considered a revenging femme castratrice as she took revenge for the traumas caused to her.

To conclude, whether Dani is an innocent victim of the monstrous-feminine of the Hårga or only an extension of their brutality is a subject that has to be asked. Either way, Aster defies and subverts conventional horror assumptions of the monstrous-feminine to develop a fresh narrative climax of feminine strength that is nonetheless explored through gender and reproductive folk horror where he openly examines the themes of matriarchy, sisterhood, female emotions, and empowerment although accompanied by gory violence and grotesque scenes.

2.3 *Halloween* (1978)

As evidenced by the fact that it was the top-earning horror film of its time, the slasher film *Halloween* by director John Carpenter has gone down in history as the American founder of this subgenre.

The movie opens with a scene in which the audience is provided with a POV camera view, a pioneering aesthetic innovation in filmmaking that offers a completely new manner of connecting with the character whose gaze is offered. In order to observe a teenage couple engaging in foreplay, the stalker circles the house and ascends the front stairs. As the pair make their way up the stairs, the stalker penetrates the house through the kitchen’s back entrance. The drawer is opened and a butcher knife is brought out, a blurred arm comes in the frame. The viewpoint belongs to a narrative character, and this is the first concrete proof we have of that. When the teenager walks downstairs and leaves the house, the stalker waits in the shadows and then climbs up the stairs where he takes the clown mask off the ground and puts it on the head. The mask’s silhouette has now encircled the viewer’s field of vision (see Appendix 10). As the half-naked teen girl brushes her hair in front of the mirror, he approaches her. She only has her panties on and her breasts are visible quite well. He starts stabbing her after noticing the untidy linens on the bed. His point of view and subjective perspective offers the viewer to identify

¹⁴⁷ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 69.

with him as his arm is swaying and stabbing her until she is knocked to the floor. He then exits and when takes off his mask, we get our first glimpse of the murderer - a disoriented 6-year-old boy holding a knife covered in blood.

The credit can be already given to Clover in this case for pointing out that the male audience has an easy opportunity to identify with the male perspective that is offered to us early in the film, as it is soon established that the gaze belongs to little Michael Myers. Even though it is not shown explicitly, it is confirmed from the first scene that the murder is preceded by any kind of sex between the characters and that the subsequent killing spree begins with the murder of a female character.

Fifteen years later, Dr. Samuel Loomis, Michael's psychiatrist, arrives at the sanitarium to take Michael to court for a hearing, accompanied by a female assistant. However, things do not seem right after they notice the inmates freely walking in the yard. Whereas an assistant waits in the car, Loomis gets out and goes to investigate the situation. Then Michael jumps on the roof of the car and tries to get in by smashing the window and attacking the woman. While she is cringing in the car seat, he pulls her hair, and the viewer can see the terror and fear in her eyes. She manages to exit the car and Michael gets in and flees Smith's Grove in it. The woman hides in the ditch by the road and Loomis runs to her. He just asks if she is okay but does not even offer a hand to help her out of the ditch. The woman is sitting in the dirt in shock and breathing heavily, while Loomis is raged by Michael's escape.

Despite being a legit victim of the killer, the woman was not injured. Nevertheless, the man from the previous scene, Dr. Loomis was completely absent from the picture and went unnoticed while "taking action" outside. That is another proof that the narrative is presented through a male gaze, looking only at passive women in detail. The assistant may have been the second dead victim, but she escaped and was left in shock and crying, while the male figure received no physical or mental harm.

The next scene follows the female protagonist Laurie as she walks from her house to school. At first glance, it can be said that her appearance exudes a certain amount of unfemininity. Her walk is cumbersome, and her image could be described as that of an "old maid", with her wearing a brown sweater, flowered skirt, white stockings, and unflattering old-fashioned shoes. She has a lot of books in her hands, which suggests that she can already be said to be smart and like school, based on the expected stereotype. Next to her friends who are wearing more sophisticated and sexier clothes, she looks a little uncool. Laurie's main concern is that she left her chemistry book at school, while her two friends Annie and Lynda discuss babysitting people's kids, so they have a place where to have sex with their boyfriends. When

one friend departs, the other laments Laurie's lack of socialization and constant babysitting, to which Laurie herself responds: "Guys think I'm too smart,"¹⁴⁸ which is why *Halloween* follows Clover's formula in great detail. The question is whether it was not *Halloween* that became Clover's template.

Moreover, when comparing the names of all three girls, it is obvious that Laurie's name sounds the most boyish, while her friends have very feminine names. They also openly discuss their sexual activities, and while there is no way to tell if Laurie is a virgin, the fact that she has nothing to add to the conversation indicates she has no experience with boys. Laurie's "uncoolness" can be also seen when she is trying to smoke with her friend Annie in the car and she cannot even hold a cigarette properly, she coughs and her expression shows that she does not like it. Her female friends can be seen trying to draw Laurie more into the social life and even deciding for her in some cases to get more involved with the males. An example of this can be seen in a phone conversation between Annie and Laurie:

- Laurie: So, what is this big, big news?
Annie: What would you say if I told you that you were going to the homecoming dance tomorrow night?
Laurie: I'd probably say you have the wrong number.
Annie: Well, I just talked with Ben Tramer, and he got real excited when I told him how attracted you were to him.
Laurie: Oh, Annie. Oh, you didn't. Please tell me you didn't. How could you do that? I mean how can you just call him.... [...]
I can't tell you anything. Every time I tell you something, everyone else knows about it.
Annie: Look, it's simple. You like him, he likes you. All you need is a little push.¹⁴⁹

The fact that Laurie is considered attractive by men but does not want to admit it indicates either her low self-esteem or that she is not even interested in men, which supports Harrington's virgin-hero theory concerning her further contextualization, rejection of a woman's behavior, appearance, and on the contrary, engagement in activities associated with men. To extend this theory, she quotes radical feminist Andrea Dworkin and her notion of Joan of Arc:

For Joan and the virgin saints who appeared to her in divine visions, virginity was an active element of a self-determined integrity, an existential independence ... not a retreat from life but an active engagement with it; dangerous and confrontational because it repudiated rather than endorsed male power over women.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ *Halloween*, directed by John Carpenter (Compass International Pictures, 1978), 0:24:42.

¹⁴⁹ *Halloween*, 0:41:27 to 0:42:45.

¹⁵⁰ Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 96.

Laurie quickly forgets the discussion about boys and settles down to watch a scary movie with the young boy she is babysitting before fulfilling her previous pledge to accompany him in carving a pumpkin.

The next scene offers another voyeuristic view, of a now grown-up killer who has set out to stalk his hometown after escaping from an asylum. He stares at Annie through the window after she has soiled her clothes, ended her phone call with Laurie, and begins to undress. She is seen from the back, having only knee socks and panties. After some time, Annie and her boyfriend have a seductive phone call in which they decide where and when to have sex. She gets into the car but before she manages to start it, Michael assaults her from behind and begins to strangle her. Her facial expression drowns in agony and she makes squeaking noises while fighting for her life. The steering wheel honks several times but otherwise, the majority of the death act is not accompanied by any music, and only the sighs of the victim and the killer can be heard. Eventually, Annie's suffering is terminated by Michael slitting her throat with a knife.

When comparing the death scene of Annie and the following death scene of Bobby, the boyfriend of other Laurie's friend Lynda, it can be said that the murder of a man is in fact shorter than that of a woman. The act of Annie dying lasts for almost fifty seconds, while Bobby's lasts only thirty seconds straight. Furthermore, even though their deaths are quite similar and include strangling and the use of a knife, Bobby's expression while being killed is not so much disturbing and the shot often cuts to his feet trembling in the air as he is pushed to the wall. He has got more peaceful face when he is stabbed in the stomach and pinned to the wall with a knife. In addition, in this case, the scene is accompanied by music the whole time.

What these scenes have in common, nonetheless, is sex. The murder scene is usually preceded by a sex act. In Bobby's case, the previous scenes show Michael watching Bobby and Lynda cuddle on the sofa and then also in the bedroom while performing sex under the blanket and moaning loudly. After sex, Lynda's breasts are visible for quite a long time. Thus, the majority of the male audience will find it to their liking and the woman is again portrayed as an objectified figure who is supposed to bring excitement.

In most voyeuristic scenes the viewer keeps seeing only Michael's back (see Appendix 11). Pinedo discusses the importance of gender issues in slasher films and points out that the voyeuristic camera used in slasher movies frequently places the audience in the killer's shoes by keeping the killer offscreen throughout the stalking and murdering. This is the misogyny of the genre.¹⁵¹ Mulvey's commentary on the male gaze suggests that it positions the victims in

¹⁵¹ Pinedo, *Recreational Terror*, 74.

slasher movies as the subject of a sexual examination; they are studied and eroticized before being slaughtered. Their sexual behavior is visually documented in order to prove their guilt and justify the severity of the punishment they will get.¹⁵²

When Lynda calls Laurie while waiting for Bobby to bring her a beer after sex, her shirt is still unbuttoned and she is naked underneath. Michael then approaches her from behind and starts strangling her with the phone cord. Her death is the shortest one and lasts for approximately thirty seconds and her facial expression is as affected as Annie's with her mouth wide open, making a grunting noise so that Laurie interprets the squeals she hears on the other end as orgasmic. Clover in her essay "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film" explains:

Killing those who seek or engage in unauthorized sex amounts to a generic imperative of the slasher film. It is an imperative that crosses gender lines, affecting males as well as females. The numbers are not equal, and the scenes not equally charged; but the fact remains that in most slasher films after 1978 (following *Halloween*), men and boys who go after "wrong" sex also die. This is not the only way males die; they also die incidentally, as girls do, when they get in the killer's way or try to stop him, or when they stray into proscribed territory.¹⁵³

Twenty minutes before the end of the film, Laurie is given space and the narrative focuses solely on her. She is *Halloween's* Final Girl. Now the viewer sees her worried expression and reflections about what is going on. She prudently decides to go to the house next door where Lynda is supposed to be. However, her step is very calm and slow and she walks with both hands in her pockets as if she were a man. When she gets inside the house, she still considers her friends' actions a joke. It has to be said that the events of *Halloween* provide only little foreshadowing for the Final girl, and only in the scenes where Laurie notices the masked man, first on the way home from school and then from her bedroom window. A huge shock overwhelms Laurie as she gradually discovers her friends dead all in one room.

When Laurie is cut by Michael's knife and falls down the stairs, she is moving into a phase where she is fighting for her life. Her struggle naturally begins with her trying to escape and screaming desperately for help. She manages to get back to her babysitting house but she discovers that the window was left open. Later, when Laurie and Michael fight and she manages to knock him to the ground with a knitting needle, she reaches for his butcher knife, but she lets go of it after he appears to be dead. The murderer gets to his feet as she makes her way upstairs to the kids, grabs the knife, and follows her. She retreats to a closet where she transforms a hanger into a weapon and, as the killer bursts down the closet door, pierces his eye. We watch

¹⁵² Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 16-26.

¹⁵³ Clover, Carol J., "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Films" *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 83.

this from her inside perspective as Michael attacks the closet door with slashes and stabs. Now, the audience can rather identify with the heroine and share her terror (see Appendix 12). The hanger here represents the phallic weapon, as the knitting needle represents it in the previous scene. Both weapons are pointy and have almost the same shape.

In Clover's words, it can be said that Laurie gets phallicized by both the fact that her name is rather masculine and/or that she managed to wound her attacker twice and survive. Michael drops the knife and falls to the ground. Laurie grabs the phallic knife for the second time. She sends the kids to the police, believing Michael has once more been defeated, before collapsing in agony and exhaustion. The murderer rises once more and starts fighting with Laurie again but as he prepares to stab her, Dr. Loomis, who has been alarmed by the kids, runs in and shoots the murderer several times causing him to fall out of the window. But after a while, looking out, the killer is found to be gone, and the muffled breathing from under the mask is heard again before the closing credits.

Unfortunately, *Halloween's* narrative point is a disappointment in many ways, and in this case, one must give Clover the benefit of the doubt that the Final Girl here falls far short of any feminist achievement, and instead highlights her inability to stand up to her enemy alone. In general respects, however, Laurie pretty much meets the criteria for a trope of the Final Girl, when Clover states about that figure:

She is the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and of her own peril; who is chased, cornered, wounded; whom we see scream, stagger, fall, rise, and scream again. She is abject terror personified. If her friends knew they were about to die only seconds before the event, the Final Girl lives with the knowledge for long minutes or hours. She alone looks death in the face; but she alone also finds the strength either to stay the killer long enough to be rescued (ending A) or to kill him herself (ending B).¹⁵⁴

She risks her life looking for the reason why her friends are unreachable and engaging in conduct that is generally designated for men and for which women who adopt it for themselves suffer horrific consequences. This is the time when she becomes "empowered". To the critical opinion that *Halloween* punishes the female protagonist's sexuality and masculine tendencies, director John Carpenter responds:

They [the critics] completely missed the boat there, I think. Because if you turn it around, the one girl who is the most sexually uptight just keeps stabbing this guy with a long knife. She's the most sexually frustrated. She's the one that killed him. Not because she's a virgin, but because all that repressed energy starts coming out.

¹⁵⁴ Clover, "Her Body, Himself," 84.

She uses all those phallic symbols on the guy. . . . She and the killer have a certain link: sexual repression.¹⁵⁵

Clover takes an even deeper look at this gender connection between the killer and the Final Girl aptly arguing:

For all its perversity, Carpenter's remark does not underscore the sense of affinity, even recognition, that attends the final encounter. But the "certain link" that puts killer and Final Girl on terms, at least briefly, is more than "sexual repression." It is also a shared masculinity, materialized in "all those phallic symbols"—and it is also a shared femininity, materialized in what comes next (and what Carpenter, perhaps significantly, fails to mention): the castration, literal or symbolic, of the killer at her hands.¹⁵⁶

Not only does the Final Girl expressly unman an aggressor whose masculinity was doubted but she mans herself in addition. In the same way that the Final Girl employs "all those phallic symbols," the threat represented by the "uterus" is also subdued and removed. Therefore, the Final Girl's masculine traits still predominate over feminine ones here.

Moreover, it must be said that the lay film consumer could say that they barely have any confidence or a sense of empowerment in Laurie at all; instead, they could kind of chastise her for her naivety as she repeatedly turns her back on lying killer, leaving the knife there without making sure he is dead and slowly walking away. Despite the several injuries she inflicted on the killer, she even had to be rescued by a man who was much quicker and more efficient in dispatching him. This undermines any feminist outreach. The claim that the focus of this story is mostly on the heroine's physical and emotional anguish, which has no positive outcome until the male character steps in, is consequently a legitimate one.

In conclusion, it can be said that rather than any feminist development in the case of *Halloween*, one can explore more cross-gender identification and gender ambiguity in the character of both the Final Girl and the killer. *Halloween* does phallicize its main character, either by her name or by the weapons she uses on the killer and injures him with them, but the ending of the film lends a lot to the theories of Clover, who claims that the Final Girl exists only as a source of male identification for a predominantly male adolescent audience, by ultimately having to be rescued by a man like a princess in a fairy tale. So even Creed remains disappointed because Laurie is still a little short of the status of a castrating woman. Although she may have caused damage to Michael's conceptual masculinity, his physical shell remained

¹⁵⁵ John Carpenter, interviewed by Todd McCarthy, "Trick or Treat," *Film Comment* 16, no. 1 (January–February 1980): 23–24.

¹⁵⁶ Clover, "Her Body, Himself," 96.

intact through her attempts to hurt him. However, on the contrary, Laurie gains the status of a surviving victim and the last girl standing.

2.4 *It Follows* (2014)

Directed by David Robert Mitchell, this film serves as a pure representation of the neo-slasher era because, unlike *Halloween*, which serves as a representative of classic horror, it subverts the stereotype of gender in horror on a whole new level and tries to focus its narrative on a refreshing exploration of the possibilities of this subgenre, especially using the supernatural entity for killing the victims. Although *It Follows* is an homage to *Halloween* and borrows its iconic shooting styles, its take on characters and gender relations presents a whole new awareness. Therefore, it is impossible to avoid comparison, at least in some elements.

Jay, the name of the main character, has a manly ring to it, so Clover's theory of a phallicized female protagonist would fit here. However, she was given this name only in honor of Jamie Lee Curtis, who played the character in *Halloween*. Moreover, she is very feminine and delicate, has blonde long hair, and wears girly clothes. The second reason to side with Clover would be that Jay, the inconspicuous victim-hero is considered as "other" among her female peers, as she is the only one being chased by "a shape-shifting, 'it'-monster."¹⁵⁷ From now on, Mitchell offers predominantly new socio-cultural topics which have never been examined in classical slasher films. According to Jessica Balanzategui, the supernatural slasher aims to:

restore the relevance of the slasher not through processes of irony but by reinvigorating the overworn and predictable mechanics of the classic form through a supernaturally charged fluidity which serves to unsettle traditional generic dichotomies—in particular the Manichean binary of the stalker killer and the Final Girl/Boy—in turn probing many of the contradictions and ambiguities that were latent in the classic slasher.¹⁵⁸

To undermine gender stereotypes later, the first dead victim is an unfamiliar woman in the intro of the film. *It Follows* subverts slasher clichés in fresh ways because it assumes its audience is familiar with them. It, for instance, introduces us to a number of 'killers' that sporadically manifest in both male and female forms rather than the sole murderer, who in typical slashers is frequently gendered male. Additionally, in a conventional slasher, teens are punished for having sex; in this movie, having sex is necessary for survival.

¹⁵⁷ Harrington, *Women, Monstrosity and Horror Film*, 43.

¹⁵⁸ Jessica Balanzategui, "Crises of Identification in the Supernatural Slasher: The Resurrection of the Supernatural Slasher Villain" in *Style and Form in the Hollywood Slasher Film*, ed. Wickham Clayton (London: Palgrave, 2015), 163.

Mitchell mainly uses visual language in his film, as there is minimal talking and the camera is his most powerful tool. Although he also uses a voyeuristic point of view at the beginning of the story, it is just to use some traditional slasher elements to set up a paranoid atmosphere and misguide the viewer. The POV camera shot is offered to the viewer through the fence as Jay cleans the pool and is about to get into it (see Appendix 13). In the scene in the pool, the image offers her subjective POV as she examines her hand, which has a bug crawling on it. In the scene after having sex in the car with Hugh, the same view of her hand is offered as she lies on her stomach in the backseat, stroking a flower next to the car with her hand as she melancholically contemplates life (see Appendix 14). This kind of subjective point of view is shown mainly at the beginning of the film as a luxury of perception. Over time, Jay loses moments of this contemplative gaze, most often down at her hands or legs. As soon as she is afflicted with an 'it' monster, she is robbed of this subjective point of view, as she must constantly look around and be careful if the monster is not approaching her. Implying that she is powerless over the haunting curse, Jay no longer controls the gaze. The camera usually moves in a very slow circular motion while searching the surroundings since 'it' is likewise slow, and looks for it in a way that enables the audience to identify the monster alongside with Jay (see Appendix 15). However, identification is difficult because the monster takes on the appearance of familiar and unfamiliar persons, so Jay is constantly paranoid and terrified.

Jay may strive to be the potential Final Girl, but Clover's model for that persona is far from ideal. Most definitely, the movie's main heroine is not a virgin. On the contrary, quite early in the movie, the viewer learns that Jay is sexually active, and due to intercourse with a boy Hugh, she momentarily was in love with, she gained a sexually transmitted 'disease' in the form of a stalking monster which is fluid in its form. Hugh puts Jay under chloroform sedation after their sexual encounter and attaches her to a wheelchair. When Jay wakes up, Hugh says to her: "This thing. It's gonna follow you. Somebody gave it to me, and I passed it to you back in the car."¹⁵⁹ The 'It' monster adopts several human shapes and only follows one person at a time requiring an ongoing transmission line. If Jay dies, it will then start by going after Hugh.

In an effort to break the curse, Jay seeks the aid of her sister Kelly, friends Yara and Paul, and neighbor Greg. Whereas in *Halloween*, the male killer usually killed the girls one by one, and the peripheral male characters served only as individuals seeking sex with those girls, *It Follows* emphasizes gender balance and expands the group of girls to include two male friends who fight alongside Jay against evil. Since the main character does not hide her

¹⁵⁹ *It Follows*, directed by David Robert Mitchell (Northern Lights Films, 2014) 0:19:03 to 0:19:22.

traumatic experience and immediately after being thrown out of the car by Hugh in only her underwear in front of her house, she confides in her friends about everything that happened. Thus it is clear that the narrative functions on the collective work. And although her friends find it hard to imagine Jay's position since they do not see the monster at all, they serve as her support the whole time.

In a smart updating of Clover's model, the film challenges the theories of how gender and sexuality are treated. First off, the movie shows the fragility of the male body rather than the usual slasher's concentration on the feminine body as the object of adulation. As the number of female victims' bodies increases and the Final Girl is phallicized, the slasher in Clover's model evades the victim's dread of castration. Nonetheless, the situation is reversed in *It Follows*. During Greg's death scene, the body is shown in distress for the longest, most graphically.

Greg maintains a resolute façade to hide any sense of dread that may depict him as weak or effeminate after having sex with Jay. Greg seems to be the only one who is more skeptical about Jay's situation and his actions can be justified by wanting to have sex with her. Greg denies seeing any ghosts. Jay keeps watch over Greg's home from her window because she does not believe Greg after her personal experiences with the ghosts. When a person resembling Greg approaches his home, breaks the window, and enters, Jay takes immediate action and pursues. Jay reaches Greg's bedroom and in front of its door, she sees the monster transformed into Greg's mother, as shown in a now-rare POV image taken from Jay's viewpoint. The mother figure bangs on Greg's door wearing only a light white silk robe. When he opens, she knocks him to the ground. Quite a long shot now offers an image of Greg's mother sitting on her son and moving around on his genitalia in a move that satirizes the incest fetish (see Appendix 16). As she twists and squeezes Greg's hands, a liquid looking like urine erupts from between their bodies, and what appears to be semen, a thick light liquid, flows from between their palms.

This demonstrates that the film also contains elements that can be defined as monstrous-feminine or female abject. Kristeva remarks that the unexpected release of physiological fluids such as “urine, blood, sperm, excrement are a true ‘abject’ where man, frightened, crosses over the horrors of maternal bowels and, in an immersion that enables him to avoid coming face to face with an other, spares himself-the risk of castration.”¹⁶⁰ The murder of Greg by his mother involves all three levels of the abject according to Kristeva's theory —crossing a ‘border’, the mother-child relationship, and the abject of the feminine body. The monster being transformed

¹⁶⁰ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 53.

into the form of Greg's mother, crosses the line between the normal mother-son relationship considering the scene has sexual overtones. Moreover, before the act, Greg sees mother's exposed breast under her gown and then is symbolically raped. As already said, the abject is according to Creed and Kristeva gendered female. Stacy Rusnak in her essay *The Slasher Film and the Final Girl Get Makeovers*, clarifies that usually, "the male viewer escapes the horror of confronting his incestuous fears and desires, and the loss of the phallus, by watching the film's violence enacted across the female form."¹⁶¹ By the graphical display of a suffering male body, *It Follows* reverses this deflection. There is a zoom of Greg's face as the scene comes to an end. Now, his eyes are wide open and dead and he personifies the utter abject. Similarly, another instance of monstrous-feminine or a woman causing the abject takes place during the scene when Jay for the first time encounters the 'it' in her house. She sees a woman who looks like she has just been assaulted and/or raped. She is missing her front teeth, wearing only a bra over one breast, and missing a sock. She slowly approaches Jay and urinates through her skirt. Again, the depiction of female bodily fluids is used to evoke terror and contempt in the viewer.

As already outlined above, the director treats men in his movie as women and undermines the slasher's gender stereotype. Starting with the monster alternatively changing into a woman or man, more explicitness in the murder of a man than a woman (the first victim's murder was not shown at all), and most importantly, not phallicizing or empowering the Final Girl. Actually, unlike Clover's Final Girl, Jay never engages in confrontation with any of her ghost stalkers and instead always runs away from them, either on a bike or in a car. Jay's only responsibility is to look out for 'it' and to let her friends know if she sees one. In the ending pool scene when the teens devise a plan to aid to kill the monster, she is just pointing the finger at it. The Final Girl is phallicized in conflicts in the classic slasher, which gives the male audience a lighthearted, unnerving way to attach to her. Here, Jay does not undergo the traditional Final Girl transformation to male traits, which would phallicize her. By avoiding the procedure, the movie challenges the established masculine power hierarchies and questions Clover's earlier admission that in slashers, "the same body does for both."¹⁶² Rusnak comments on the finale of the film:

Finally, the film ends not with a sole surviving Final Girl, but rather with a gesture toward a 'Final Collective.' Jay's friends, all except Greg, survive and continue to help Jay as she learns to live with the constant threat that the ghosts may appear at

¹⁶¹ Stacy Rusnak, "The Slasher Film and the Final Girl Get Makeovers: *It Follows* and the Politics of Fourth Wave Feminism" in *The Final Girls, Feminism and Popular Culture*, ed. Katarzyna Paszkiewicz & Stacy Rusnak (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 125.

¹⁶² Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saws*, 59.

any moment. This ending might be explained by the context in which the film emerges: fourth wave feminism, that has brought a renewed interest to raising awareness about the power of thinking collectively.¹⁶³

By the end of the movie, Jay has Kelly and Yara's persistent support, however, their feminine fellowship overcomes gender distinctions as even Paul joins the girls. The very final scene of the movie shows Jay and Paul strolling together in their suburban streets. In contrast to Clover's assertion that according to classical slasher conventions, "the community returns to its normal order"¹⁶⁴ after the female protagonist has killed the monster, Jay and Paul continue to be affected by the curse, and their "partnership" is reinforced by holding hands, though not in a romantic sense. Paul now carries a curse as a result of asking Jay to sleep with him so that she can pass 'it' on. Like with Greg, Jay initially resists because she believes Paul is too fragile to deal with the consequences, but she finally gives in and the two have sex eventually. Obviously, Paul is distinguished as being less "macho" than Greg. He is quiet and reserved, and his stature is small. Yet Paul ends up being Jay's greatest ally because he deliberately jeopardizes his safety to spare Jay from having to deal with the curse alone. To undermine Clover's template of the Final Girl taking action to defeat the enemy, Jay learns how to live with her ghosts together with Paul and keeps a safe distance from them.

One could argue that much as sex is punished by death in *Halloween*, this sexually transmitted monster is likewise a form of punishment for sexually active or promiscuous teens. The way Hugh throws Jay out of the car may imply that the film's subliminal messages could refer to victims of sexual abuse and the associated trauma or stigma surrounding the subject. Jay is assaulted early in the film, but she confronts it and, after opening up to her friends, is able to overcome the threat, despite the fact that no one is given any details about the entity's past victims. Based on the facts available to the viewer, it is evident that they approached it in the opposite manner from Jay. Hugh moves to a decaying house and transits it without discussion. Jay, on the other hand, freely discusses it, allowing her to tackle the issue without judgment. Skeptical Greg, who gladly takes on Jay's demon, utilizes the opportunity to have sex with Jay in contrast to Paul who genuinely tries to help with her troubles. This results in Greg's death, which could be viewed as a punishment for his hidden intentions and Jay is ultimately left in the same situation she was in before passing it on. Jay has the opportunity to sleep with a bunch of men on the boat at one point in the film, but she understands that it is wrong and returns home. This is the polar opposite of Hugh and, most likely, the ones before him.

¹⁶³ Rusnak, "The Slasher Film and the Final Girl Get Makeovers," 126-127.

¹⁶⁴ Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saws*, 50.

Although rather inconspicuous, the theme of parenting can be found in *It Follows*. For Clover, sexual autonomy stems from a yearning to be free of parents' repressive control, particularly among teenagers. She claims that "it is this disabling cathexis to one's own parents that must be killed and refilled in the service of sexual autonomy." Strangely, *It Follows* frequently portrays the parents as being absent, unconcerned, or simply useless. Given his absence from the home but his appearance in family photos, it is assumed Jay's father is deceased. It is implied several times that her mother is an alcoholic. Although the police quickly come to the house after Hugh drops her off at home tied up and still wearing only her underwear, it is her sister and friends who take care of her rather than her mother. Before or after the teenagers are attacked by the 'it', there do not seem to be any house rules in place in their homes. Ironically, as the group of friends approaches a swimming pool where they intend to finally get rid of the cause of Jay's dread, Yara laments that when she was younger, her parents forbade her from going behind the suburb's border to the dubious city nearby (though the movie was shot in Detroit, the set of the film is unknown), probably because of the perceived risks that cities present. The mother seen so far does not seem like the kind of mother who would ever be strict, but Jay responds: "My mom said the same thing."¹⁶⁵ The perils of the actual world are undoubtedly causing these middle-class parents anxiety. Despite all of their efforts to protect their children, the horrors nevertheless materialize in the shape of the entity. Unsettlingly, the entity frequently assumes the role of a parent, as seen in Greg's case or when Jay's father is standing naked on her house's roof or later at the swimming pool trying to electrocute her. The director of the film never explains this fact, although Hugh does foretell that occasionally the entity may appear as "people you love, just to hurt you."¹⁶⁶ Of course, there is a possibility that teenagers genuinely view their parents as monsters from whom they can never run. Alternatively, it is also possible that they are merely desiring more love and, perhaps, guidance from the ones who are meant to be guarding them. In one of the movie's final moments, we witness Jay's mother giving her daughter attention for the first time while tenderly rubbing her back. A glass of red wine can be seen in the background, and the camera pans in on a snapshot of Jay's family when times were simpler and more innocent: the nuclear family image. This single shot can symbolize a simple transition from the carefree age of adolescence to adulthood.

In light of the fact that the majority of the peripheral characters, including Greg and Hugh as well as Jay's mother, are dishonest or have hidden agendas, Jay is the only true choice for a meaningful identification, whether the audience is male or female. The audience sees the

¹⁶⁵ *It Follows*, 1:21:29

¹⁶⁶ *It Follows*, 0:19:53 to :19:57.

world from our protagonist's point of view in the numerous instances in which we can see the entity following Jay. When Hugh points out an invisible girl in the cinema that Jay cannot see, it allows the viewer to empathize and connect with her. When it comes to finding and killing her stalker, Jay shows the most creativity, cunning, and intuition; but, in the end, it is Paul who rescues Jay by shooting the 'it' in the head when they fight underwater. By being rescued by her childhood best friend who has been in love with her for a long time, Jay partially subverts the cliché of the Final Girl. The final shot shows how they are strolling the suburb street together and behind there is a man in the distance who wears the same clothes as Paul. Although the audience does not know if it is 'it', it most probably implies no happy ending for Jay and Paul and only shows their collective determination to learn how to live with this curse.

To conclude, this neo-slasher film is an excellent example of how to subvert and redefine the idea of the Final Girl while still making references to some of the more known elements of the trope. Here, the Final Girl never undergoes any sexualization, fetishization, or undermining. Mitchell's film symbolizes a new wave of inventive horror that reimagines the traditional tropes of the genre that is so well known and allows identification with the Final Girl on a completely new level and from the beginning of the timeline. It is done by using negative space to tempt the audience into looking for objects in the corner and using a subjective point of view. Although Jay has no claim to the title of phallic woman, castrating bitch, or femme castratrice, Mitchell uses elements associated with the monstrous-feminine to evoke the abject and challenges Clover's theory that a man escapes his castration anxiety by watching violence against women. Instead, he depicts it on a man.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there are many reasons and justifications for watching the horror genre as it helps us cope, armor ourselves, and gain emotional flexibility in the real world. In addition, it serves as a release of accumulated negative feelings, catharsis, escapism, and a substitute for the pitfalls of the real world. Any form of the horror genre is ideal for outlining today's hot world socio-cultural topics, and taboos, but only the film genre has the power to confront the viewer with a visual image and thus enhance their experience when perceiving a subliminal message.

It was Mary Shelley who began to present religious taboos in literature with themes seemingly connected to women's problems, thus fueling feminist literary criticism followed by the difficult path of female writers in finding their own voice. In the film industry, female characters were initially found mainly as supporting, secondary characters, where they were mainly useful to men or, conversely, as killjoys. On the other hand, as “compensation”, the genre “woman's film” appeared, which served as emotional soft porn for women associated only with home and emotions. Although Mary Anne Doane and Molly Haskell talk about other female representations in the film, namely “the aristocrats of their sex” (Hepburn, Dietrich, Davis) or femmes fatale, none of these concepts brought any revolution in the fight against gender stereotypes in genre cinematography. It was not until Alfred Hitchcock brought a certain innovation to the film in the direction of redefining female characters. Although the starting point of the characters in his films is always object-like, Hitchcock's stories are guided by the focus on the woman and her acquisition of a masculine nature that is more equal to men and deserves more attention from the viewer. Despite the fact that the “woman's film” has been redefined and expanded into horror and other genres, gender issues remain an immense topic across the whole cinematography.

Only symbolic revolution is brought about by postmodern horror, which breaks all boundaries and conventions of classical horror works, creates hybrids of old genres, and is characterized by incoherence and violating the rules. The most successful subgenre in this respect is the slasher film which is undergoing changes depending on the influences in society, specifically the one falling into the self-referential second cycle, which satirizes the traditional concept of gender in classic slashers and provides a bridge to the third phase of neo-slashers, where gender is absent and the focus lies mainly on socio-economic and cultural topics. In order to further undermine gender stereotypes, the importance of female characters associated with the three techniques of the abject is increasingly shown in horror to emphasize that this genre

can be built on purely female themes and thus shock a patriarchally programmed society since the abject is generally gendered feminine.

Schubart has drawn attention to the work being done by evofeminism, which unifies all eras of feminist movements, in breaking down gender stereotypes in the horror genre and challenging fixed tales with incremental ones. An illustration of this attempt is the cult horror film *Carrie*, which introduced a new innovative idea for the female horror genre by showing the female body as something that inspires terror rather than objectifying it. Although women are frequently connected with their bodies and regarded as the less noble sex, gynaehorror addresses all aspects of female reproductive horror and seeks to oppose this stereotype, attempting to make the female body more terrifying through gynaehorror myths and narratives. As a result, it returns to classical mythology and traditional myths about witches, Medusas, and Sirens, and reintroduces elements of the monstrous-feminine (what is abominable about woman) that frighten the male audience.

In the past, due to the association between the female genitalia and castration anxiety, warriors utilized the female genitalia as a shield symbol for repelling the enemy. *The vagina dentata* frequently appeared as an animal that was displayed near the crotch of a woman. Creed states that the myth of the vagina dentata captures more than castrating the incorporating aspect of the metaphor of a mouth as a maternal figure and describes two variations of the vagina dentata: the pre-oedipal dyadic mother who incorporates her children and the orally abusive mother who symbolically devours them. Greven, on the other hand, emphasizes the necessity to return to the mother's womb. These theories contradict the phallogocentric principles of Sigmund Freud's theories, which explored the castration complex in relation to the Oedipus complex and penis envy. According to his psychosexual analysis, penis envy results from a woman's desire for power, which over time transforms into a desire to become a mother in order to feel validated.

Since gynaehorror strives to redefine the horror genre as potentially inclusive and supporting women with a celebration of otherness and linking horror to the female body, it rearticulates specific images and generates new meanings. Therefore, it introduces new portrayals of phallic/castrating women and tropes such as the Final Girl, femme castratrice, castrated female killers, etc.

Although there is a disagreement between Clover and Creed regarding whether the slasher genre tries to suppress or evoke castration phobia and whether the Final Girl is a feminist accomplishment, it generated a lot of discussion in the horror genre, highlighted the part played by women in creating fear, and established a new pillar for feminist debate.

The first two analytical subchapters examining the sources of monstrous femininity in the movies *Carrie* and *Midsommar* show that these sources can lie in completely diverse environments. While *Carrie* battles with the perils of her first menstruation, which she was unaware of due to her patriarchal mother's puritanical attitudes, Dani struggles with trauma and feeling alone in a male-dominated environment that makes her feel inferior. Whereas De Palma emphasizes the mother-daughter relationship, themes of “detachment from the mother's breast,” fighting for personal freedom, and discovering one's own sexuality, Aster focuses on the matriarchal atmosphere of the Pagan community in which men are solely seen as semen providers and females as figures of holiness and authority.

However, both movies share several similar components. Women are a source of fear because of the menstrual blood's magical power and the ability to achieve authority through a particular transformation. In *Carrie*, the menarche gives the female protagonist supernatural powers, allowing her to carry out bloody revenge when the conflict between her bullies escalates and she transforms into a murderous monster. The movie shows the menstrual blood as an abject fluid which empowers her subjectiveness and through the visual split images thematizes the internal dilemmas of Carrie's coming of age.

In *Midsommar*, the menstrual blood utilized by the character of Maja for her profit of insemination is strong evidence of monstrous-feminine in the form of a castrating womb that robs men of their supremacy. In addition, the connection between women and nature plays a significant role since it celebrates a primeval mythological idea that these two are strongly intertwined as nature presents the archaic mother who rules the world order. The concept of Aster's female-led community challenges the view on women and offers empowerment through empathy, sexual freedom, and the sharing of emotions within the sisterhood.

Although De Palma presents a character the audience is rooting for, in the end, *Carrie* suffers a sad fate due to her desire to return to her mother's womb and dies together with her phallic mother, which means monstrous femininity is punishable by death in this instance.

Similarly, Aster creates a character who suffers through the story and is pitiful in the eyes of the audience. Nonetheless, due to postmodern updates, he purifies her of the trauma by self-actualization and validation through monstrous feminine transformation and gaining her revenge and thus empowerment. Both movies show that in the patriarchal society the abject lies in the reproductive horror of the female body and insisting on the “delicacy of the symbolic order,” the monstrous-feminine calls attention to it. Both directors operate based on the “Good for her” trope which brings the emotional catharsis to the audience and enables them to identify with the characters and support their revenge against unjust circumstances.

In *Halloween*, Carpenter introduced a new way to identify with the character whose gaze is offered and set the stage for the new and later heavily explored Final Girl trope. In this movie, the objectification of women is omnipresent since they are studied and eroticized before being punished for their open sexuality. Moreover, the audience is put in the killer's shoes where lies the misogyny of the genre since genders do not get equal attention and usually women are the victims and suffer the most as opposed to male characters. The identification with the characters shifts across the timeline, and while in the beginning there is a clear connection with the male killer, in the end, the audience is given a phallicized virgin woman's point of view. Whereas Carpenter claims that the killer and the Final Girl share sexual repression, Clover states they rather share masculinity symbolized by phallic symbols as the threat of the 'uterus' is completely suppressed. As a result, although Laurie presents a prototypical Final Girl, rather than a feminist film development or creation of a castrating woman, Carpenter provoked a debate about the fact that the slasher film is mainly focused on satisfying the needs of a male audience.

On the contrary, in *It Follows* Mitchell completely subverts all gender stereotypes and slasher clichés since he puts the killing monster in both alternating gender forms and enhances the main female protagonist with strong feminine traits and sexual activity. This film offers only Jay's point of view and thus provides only her subjectiveness and not the killer's. The audience is capable of identifying with her and seeking the monsters in her surroundings. Mitchell uses almost all traditional aspects of slasher and abject reversely. To provoke fear in the male audience he uses monstrous-feminine to mutilate the male body most graphically and treats males as victims. As opposed to *Halloween*, the Final Girl Jay is empowered neither by phallic symbols nor self-transformation. *It Follows* works predominantly not with the Final Girl alone but with a group of her friends and highlights the importance of collective work according to 4th-wave feminist premises. It examines many sociocultural topics and provides space for deeper analysis of various hidden issues.

These two completely diverse slashers share a similarly desperate ending. In Laurie's case, it means being saved by a random man despite the killer being on the loose again. In Jay's case, it means being saved by her childhood male friend who sticks with her no matter what while they are being aware that the monster is still out there and they have to learn how to live with it. It is obvious that in the second case, the gender balance is not an issue and therefore, it can be argued that the entire Final Girl trope lacks meaning and is swept away with the fresh unconventional rules.

RESUMÉ

Hlavním cílem této diplomové práce je najít a analyzovat témata v americkém hororovém filmovém žánru z oblasti feministické kritiky a vyzdvihnout tak problematiku, která se může zdát nejasná nebo nepodstatná. Předmětem této práce je zjistit, jakým způsobem jsou ve vybrané hororové fikci vyobrazovány ženské postavy, konkrétněji pak, jak se projevuje jejich ženskost a dále diskutovat o vlivech vnímání těchto filmových postav v sociokulturním rámci. Pro tuto analýzu jsou vybrány čtyři hororové filmy, rozdělené do dvou pomyslných kategorií či subžánrů podle hlavních “zdrojů” ženskosti zdejších hlavních postav. První kategorie se soustředí na filmy obsahující koncept *the monstrous-feminine*, tj. monstrózně-ženský, druhá na koncept *the Final Girl*, tj. poslední přeživší dívka. Dále je také zvážena genderová vyváženost v těchto snímcích a proměna žánrů napříč staletími, jelikož je v každé kategorii zkoumán jeden film z 20. a jeden film z 21. století.

První teoretická kapitola se nejprve zabývá obecnějšími a historickými přehledy spojenými s hororovým žánrem a hovoří o konkrétních přínosech jeho sledování i jeho počátcích v literatuře, kdy jako mezi prvními autory Mary Shelley do svého díla zakomponovala protináboženské myšlenky týkající se tabu ohledně reprodukčních praktik a prosazování ženské interpretace v tehdejší mužsky psané kanonické fikci. Dále kapitola nastiňuje konkrétní žánr z let minulých, který přímo nesl název “ženský film” a zobrazoval hlavně podřadné role ženských postav, které byly mnohdy spojovány pouze s domovem, manželstvím a emocemi a sloužily ženám jako emocionální soft-pornové mýdlové opery. Na druhou stranu se zde kapitola zmiňuje o jistém přetvoření této submisivní reprezentace ženy ze strany režiséra Alfreda Hitchcocka, který ve svých dílech propůjčil protagonistkám charakter mnohdy srovnatelný s mužským zastoupením, což bylo v té době poměrně revoluční rozhodnutí a nabídl tak ženám jistou, ale komplikovanou míru emancipace, jelikož své ženské postavy rád za jejich nezávislost následně trestal. V této souvislosti je zde nabídnut pohled na moderní období hororu, ve kterém byly ženské postavy často viktimizovány a zobrazovalo se na nich intenzivnější násilí než na mužích. Postupem let, David Greven po vlivu Hitchcocka konstatuje žánrovou proměnu, která pomalu začíná přetvářet vnímání žen a jejich problémů ve filmografii a jejich prosazování do hlavních rolí především v postmoderním hororu, který se naopak snaží nabourávat tradiční genderové konvence tohoto žánru, narušovat jeho koherenci, přeformulovávat známý *narrativ* ve svěží formě a používat k jeho zkoumání obor psychoanalýzy. V tomto ohledu je nejúspěšnější subžánr *slasher* filmu, který se historicky

neustále mění v závislosti na trendech ve společnosti, a tudíž se dělí do tří různých období dle kterých lze tyto genderové trendy zkoumat.

Druhá kapitola představuje termín evofeminismu, který v sobě kombinuje všechna období feministických hnutí a o kterém se mluví v souvislosti s vytvářením inkriminujících narativů na úkor těch zažitých v oblasti genderových stereotypů a spojování žen pouze s jejich fyzickým tělem. Proto je tu uveden ne příliš známý termín *gynaehorror*, tj. “ženský horor”, jenž se zabývá právě zobrazováním tabuizovaných témat spojených s ženským tělem, explicitním zkoumáním reprodukčního ženského utrpení, ale zároveň se opírá o klasickou mytologii a tradiční mýty o “zubaté vagíně” a nově představuje prvky monstrózní-ženskosti ve snaze prezentovat ženské tělo jako něco přirozeně děsivého a konfrontovat tak patriarchálně nastavenou společnost. Pohnutky k těmto feministickým avantgardním interpretacím iniciovaly falocentrické až misogynní psychosexuální teorie Sigmunda Freuda, které jsou zde stručně naznačeny pro představu o tom, proč je důležité začít redefinovat roli ženy jak ve společnosti, tak v hororovém žánru, vymanit ji z role podřadné mužům, z role oběti, oslavovat její jinakost a představit horor jako potencionálně inkluzivní žánr podporující ženy na úplně novém spektru. Pro tyto účely se v hororu začínají objevovat tropy jako “poslední přeživší dívka” a “kastrující žena”. Zároveň je tu také nastíněn koncept “falické ženy”, jež představuje symbolickou sexuální totožnost s mužským pohlavím a v kinematografii mu tak umožňuje kulturně schvalovanou identifikaci napříč genderem, která nicméně nepřináší feministické kritice příliš pozitivní obraz. Tyto reprezentace ženských postav v hororu jsou podrobně vysvětleny a odlišeny podle jejich přínosu hororové kritice.

V analytické kapitole operují dva vybrané filmy s konceptem monstrózní ženskosti a uplatňují myšlenku o ženské postavě, která se díky své symbolické, ať už tělesné či duševní proměně vymaní z postu oběti a zaujme místo na piedestalu v nespravedlivé společnosti. Ženy v těchto filmech působí strach hlavně díky své reprodukční schopnosti, tělesnou rozdílností od mužů a mnohem pestřejším emocionálním rozpětím. Nachází se zde několik aspektů monstrózní ženskosti, a to především v zobrazování síly menstruační krve jako něčeho, co ženu posiluje a dává jí až nadpřirozenou moc. Zatímco v *Carrie* je první menstruace zobrazena jako zdroj strachu i v hrdince samotné, v *Midsommaru* je síla této krve využívána vědomě a s posláním. Jako další zdroj divákovy děsu tu lze vyčíst i emoce hlavních hrdinek, které se projevují opravdově a velmi intenzivně, tak aby byl zážitek co nejnepříjemnější. Režisér snímku *Carrie*, Brian De Palma adresuje jak témata ženské reprodukce a tělesných proměn, tak vztah matky s dcerou v náboženském prostředí. Ženy jsou pro De Palmu významné, protože jsou naproti mužům více láskyplně motivované a nejživěji zastupují otázky týkající se mezilidských

vazeb, protože pomáhají divákům pochopit povahu zobrazení mentálních a emocionálních zážitků a procesů. Dyadický vztah mezi matkou a dcerou zobrazuje jako něco z čeho se nelze vymanit a předkládá monstrózní ženskost ve formě touhy návratu do matčina lůna, které jak život dává, tak si ho bere i zpět. Na rozdíl od Carrie, jejíž monstrózní ženskost je nakonec trestuhodná, režisér Ari Aster obdařuje hlavní hrdinku Dani katarzí na nejvyšší možné úrovni. Pomocí emocionálního očištění díky splynutí s přírodou a empatii v matriarchálně nastavené společnosti sundává hlavní hrdince okovy, kterými byla doteď v patriarchální společnosti sužována a umlčována a posiluje ji osvobozujícím monstrózním ženstvím s účelem vyvolat v divákovi strach, odpor, ale i soucit.

Zbylá část analytické kapitoly zkoumá dva slasherové filmy obsahující tropu “poslední přeživší dívky” a analyzuje její feministické dosahy. V tomto případě je žánrová proměna napříč staletími citelně znatelná, jelikož 21. století přináší četné sociokulturní proměny a nechává genderové stereotypy minulého století daleko za sebou. Zatímco režisér John Carpenter se svým *Halloweenem* vytváří ve své době zcela novou šablonu poslední přeživší dívky, která statečně svádí boj se sériovými vrahy, feministická kritika zjišťuje, že její poslání je pouze sloužit mužskému publiku jako falická identifikace, jelikož nese mnoho mužských rysů. Celý koncept je založen na prohlubování misogynních myšlenek a stavění ženského pohlaví pouze do pozice oběti, která si zaslouží trest smrti za svou otevřenou sexualitu. Na druhé straně *It Follows* režiséra Davida Roberta Mitchella otevírá zcela nový pohled na gender a boří stereotypní představy o vrahovi a oběti rafinovaným podkopáváním tím způsobem, že zde zabijácké monstrum mění pohlaví dle příležitosti. Mitchell je revoluční v mnoha dalších aspektech tohoto subžánru. Nejen že hlavní hrdinku obdarovává čistě femininními rysy, ale oslavuje její sexualitu, dává na odiv její nedostatky a strach a nepropaguje pouze její individualitu, ale snaží se protlačovat soudržnost její genderově vyvážené skupiny přátel. Boří tak zažité mýty o klasickém vzoru poslední přeživší dívky. Tento snímek také obsahuje prvky monstrózní ženskosti jejíž pomocí vymazává standartní představu o tom, že ženy jako časté oběti vrahů v hororech mívají explicitnější smrt, protože do této role staví mužskou postavu a vyobrazuje její umírání v rukou ženy graficky a na odpor stereotypním představám. Mitchell vymazává nejen genderové rozdíly, ale také mu přidává mnoho materiálu pro analýzu různých metaforických témat spojených se sociekonomickou nebo psychologickou situací postav a dodává tak tomuto subžánru hluboký vhled do dnešní společnosti.

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APPENDIX



Appendix 1



Appendix 2



Appendix 3



Appendix 4



Appendix 5



Appendix 6



Appendix 7



Appendix 8



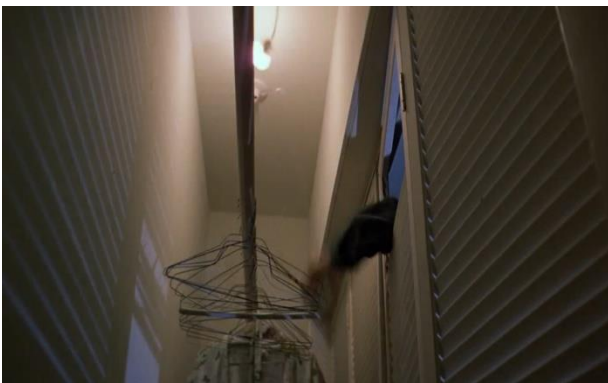
Appendix 9



Appendix 10



Appendix 11



Appendix 12



Appendix 13



Appendix 14



Appendix 15



Appendix 16