

Remaking Horror According to the Feminists Or How to Have your Cake and Eat It, Too

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Remakes, as Linda Hutcheon has noted, “are invariably adaptations because of changes in context” (170), and this in spite of the fact that the medium remains the same. What Robert Stam has said of film adaptations is equally true of remakes: “they become a barometer of the ideological trends circulating during the moment of production” because they “engage the discursive energies of their time” (45). Context includes the general historical, cultural, social, national and ideological context, of course, as well as the modes of production and aesthetic trends in the film and television industry. Studying remakes is, then, a productive way to both identify current trends and reconsider those of the past, as well as to assess the significance of a previous work into which the remake offers a new point of entry (Serceau 9), and this regardless of whether or not we deem the remake to be a “successful” film in itself. In this respect, remakes are especially relevant to film and television history and, more generally, to cultural history: they can teach us a lot about the history of production strategies, the evolution of genres, narrative, characterization and style, and of various representations (of an event, a situation, a group or a figure).

In a recent article entitled “Zip, zero, Zeitgeist” [sic] posted on his blog (Aug 24, 2014), David Bordwell warns against the tendency of some journalists to see “mass entertainment” as “somehow reflect[ing] its society”:

In sum, reflectionist criticism throws out loose and intuitive connections between film and society without offering concrete explanations that can be argued explicitly. It relies on spurious and far-fetched correlations between films and social or political events. It neglects damaging counterexamples. It assumes that popular culture is the audience talking to itself, without

interference or distortion from the makers and the social institutions they inhabit. And the causal forces invoked—a spirit of the time, a national mood, collective anxieties—may exist only as abstractions that the commentator, pressed to fill column inches, invokes in the manner of calling spirits from the deep.

I do not think Bordwell is saying that studying social issues in television and film is absolutely pointless, though, granted, that has never been the neo-formalist's primary concern. He is merely reminding us that we must take films and fiction in general for what they are: representations. As such, they are not direct reflections of society, but they may be reflections of their makers' conscious or unconscious view of the state of things, and they may even reflect an industry's view if you consider that industry as a social group. This is why Bordwell concludes that we should see them as "refractions" rather than "reflections." Reflectionist criticism can, indeed, lead to some very dubious statements. One example is Kevin J. Wetmore's *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema*. The author is so bent on circumscribing the post-9/11 status of all American horror movies of the past ten years that he lumps together films like *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, 2008), which deliberately resorts to images similar to footage played on TV, and slasher remakes like *Halloween* (Rob Zombie, 2007), in which, he argues, the killer's random murders make him an incarnation of the terrorist (203)—when, on the contrary, contemporary American horror films are more steeped in causality than those of the 1970s (Roche 118).

As an alternative to the reflectionist approach, Bordwell (2014) proposes to "consider *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (Matt Reeves, 2014) as following the plot pattern of the revisionist Western" in order to identify some of its "political themes." Relating politics to film genre is, indeed, particularly productive because generic conventions are often gendered, racialized, and so on, and they are given to change in time. The figure of the femme fatale, regularly cited as one of the main features of film noir, is a prime example of a gendered generic convention; another would be the Final Girl, the modern avatar of the Gothic heroine. Because these genre conventions have, as Rick Altman (1999) has shown, been constructed by film producers, audiences, critics and scholars, these groups have, in the process, actively participated in the gendering of film genre conventions. Consequently, studying shifts in various forms of representation often comes down to studying the history of a given genre in terms of both its aesthetics and pragmatics. In any case, I see the theme of this issue as an invitation to do so.

Gender and Horror Remakes

The cycle of Hollywood domestic horror remakes of the 2000s and early 2010s is not an isolated phenomenon. As Constantine Verevis (2006) has shown, it is part of Hollywood's strategy of relying on pre-sold material in a period of economic distress. Though David Lynch and Kevin Spacey have recently accused this state of affairs of driving artists away from Hollywood and into the arms of television, resorting to pre-sold titles is by no means exclusive to the film industry, but it involves the television industry just as much, as Lynch and Spacey themselves prove, since one is rumored to be working on a follow-up to *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990-1991) and the other stars in a remake of a 1990 BBC mini-series, *House of Cards* (Netflix, 2013-). This should come as no surprise since video rental companies, streaming providers, TV channels and film distribution companies belong to the same media conglomerates (General Electric, Time Warner, Disney, News Corp, CBS, Viacom).

What makes the cycle of domestic horror remakes of the 2000s particularly interesting is that they are, by and large, remakes of films from the 1970s and early 1980s. Horror scholars have argued that the horror films of the 1970s expressed anxieties concerning, among other things, the women's movement (Waller 12; Worland 231), following the advent of second-wave feminism. In the introduction to *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, Barry Keith Grant notes that gender has always been central to horror—and one could no doubt add to the Gothic and the Fantastic as well. Accordingly, the films of the 1970s have elicited interest from some of the major feminist film critics—particularly Linda Williams, Carol Clover and Barbara Creed—who have written some of the most important books and articles on the genre. The writings of Clover, Creed and Linda Williams, along with those of Robin Wood, have largely contributed to shaping the genre: Clover's Final Girl and Creed's "monstrous-feminine" have become staple horror movie figures, while Wood's thesis that the monster embodies the return of the repressed has been widely accepted as one of the ideological underpinnings of the genre.

This shaping of the genre by feminist film critics has gone far beyond academic circles. In 1992, Clover claimed that some of the filmmakers she had studied were aware of her work and had taken into account her ideas in their later films (232). A quick look at horror blogs like finalgirl.com or imdb message boards proves that fans of horror movies are clearly familiar with the terms "Final Girl" and "monstrous-feminine," though maybe less so with the psychoanalytical framework they rely on. So

it is fairly reasonable to assume that some of the producers, directors, screenwriters, actors and crew who made the remakes of the 2000s, many of whom have gone to film school (Marcus Nispel, Zack Snyder) or studied film in college (Denis Iliadis), have come into contact with the ideas or writings of Clover, Creed, Williams, Wood and Laura Mulvey. Diablo Cody, who wrote the screenplay for *Jennifer's Body* (Karyn Kusama, 2009), the story of a teenager who turns into a walking *vagina dentata*, admitted to having both Clover and Creed in mind.¹ And Quentin Tarantino, who did not go to film school, said that Clover's *Men, Women and Chainsaws* was his favorite piece of film scholarship and that he had the book in mind when making *Death Proof* (2007).

One venue of investigation is, then, the extent to which the treatment of gender in the horror remakes of the 2000s has been affected by feminist film criticism. Two other important factors may also have affected the treatment of gender in the remakes of the 2000s. First, they were made at a time when gender and queer studies had gained ground not only in American academia, but also in American popular culture. Even in France, "la théorie du genre" is becoming so influential, or so the Medieval reactionaries claim, that our children will soon have masturbation lessons in school. It is thus highly likely that the producers, filmmakers and screenwriters were familiar with the thesis common to most gender, queer and race studies that gender, sexuality and other aspects of identity are constructs. The third and last factor is post-feminism. Unlike the first two factors, post-feminism emerged not from the sinful bowels of academia, but from media culture. A fashionable catch-all term that does not refer to a movement with clear figureheads (Gamble 37), post-feminism has been criticized by second-wave feminists for being a "market-led phenomenon." It has "maintained its cultural presence" in the media since the 1980s (Gamble 43), promoting beautiful female success stories which seem to "lead to the conclusion that the time for feminism is past" (Gamble 42, 44).

The following analyses aim, however, at doing more than just checking whether or not the treatment of gender in the remakes of the 2000s refracts the ideas of feminist film critics on horror, the theses of gender studies or post-feminist trends. Rather, I would like to foreground the contradictions that arise from a mixture of political views that converge on some levels and yet diverge on others, making these films what Robin

¹ Orange, Michelle. "Taking Back the Knife: Girls Gone Gory." *The New York Times*. September 3, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/06/movies/06oran.html?_r=0. Accessed on September 1, 2014.

Wood called “incoherent texts,” films that are incoherent because they participate in “surplus repression” (41-42), repressing, I would argue, the patriarchal paradigms they claim to debunk. Hence, the subtitle of this article. For I will argue that, in a sense, post-feminist trends are what enable the survival of exploitative gendered genre conventions even as the remakes knowingly take into account the propositions of second- and third-wave feminist film critics. I use the term “exploitative” deliberately, because when it comes to remakes and adaptations, one must always keep in mind that the main asset of the “pre-sold” title is its economic viability. The main thrust behind the movie is to make money, not to hold up a feminist or post-feminist mirror to society. Or rather, if the film attempts to do, it is, above all, in the hope that it will attract women viewers. Indeed, many of the changes we note in contemporary TV shows and films may have more to do with catering to the audience than progressive politics. Ultimately, the analyses of the remakes will lead me to reassess the political potential of some of the original films within their own context. It is not my aim to wax nostalgic, but rather to suggest that we should always remain wary of any discourse or practice that takes on the guise of progress, especially when they would have us believe that all our problems are a thing of the past.

Remaking Horror According to the Feminists

Like most feminist film critics of the 1980s, Clover, Creed and Williams were above all concerned with questions of representation and spectatorship. Creed (1993) argued that many of the monsters in horror movies are gendered “female” and evoke castration anxiety not so much because they are castrated (as in the Freudian paradigm), but because of their ability as female bodies to castrate. Williams (1984) showed that the relationship between monster and female victim is not so much dichotomous as dialogical, as they reflect each other’s otherness. Clover (1992) pursued this line of inquiry by arguing that the average male spectator identifies not with the male killer, as many reviewers who attacked horror movies posited, but with the Final Girl who functions as “a male surrogate in things oedipal, a homoerotic stand-in” (53) enabling “cross-gender identification” (43). All three critics were heavily indebted to Mulvey’s thesis (1975) according to which mainstream narrative cinema tends to take on a masculine perspective and view women as objects of spectacle that must either be punished or fetishized in order to alleviate castration anxiety. Like Mulvey in her later work, they attempted to find ways out of the male camera gaze

impasse—this is what the concept of “cross-gender identification” seeks to do—but like Mulvey and Christian Metz (1977), they tended to limit spectatorship to the camera gaze and the primal scene model. The following analyses of the treatment of gender in the remakes of the 2000s will, thus focus on the three main aspects on which these critics based their arguments: narrative, characterization and camerawork.

Narrative

Major modifications of the main narrative that affect the treatment of gender are rare in the Hollywood domestic remakes of the 2000s. Few films, for one, change the gender of a main character. *The Thing* (Matthijs van Heijningen Jr., 2011), a prequel to Carpenter’s 1984 remake, which can nonetheless be considered as a remake of the 1984 in terms of narrative structure and imagery, replaces the male helicopter pilot (R.J. MacReady) with a woman scientist (Kate Lloyd). This change is one of the many examples of the slasherization of contemporary American horror cinema since the 1980s (Roche 270), the Final Girl having become a main staple in other horror subgenres. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Marcus Nispel, 2003) and *Black Christmas* (Glen Morgan, 2006) follow an even more contemporary trend, that of depicting sadistic women—examples can be found in *American Psycho II: All American Girl* (Morgan J. Freeman, 2002), *Saw III* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2006), *All the Boys Love Mandy Lane* (Jonathan Levine, 2006) and *Hostel II: Part II* (Eli Roth, 2007), most of which are, significantly, sequels. In *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003), the all-male family of the 1974 film is replaced by a family headed by a mother and comprising two other women, Henrietta and the Tea Lady, while *Black Christmas* (2006) adds a female killer (Agnes) to the 1974 film’s unseen male killer (Billy), though she appears to be subordinate to her incestuous brother. Note that if current trends make room for female villains, thereby acknowledging the possibility of female sadism, they usually remain secondary to the male villain.

More common are modifications of famous scenes and especially endings. Again, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003) is interesting in this respect because the notorious meat hook scene features a male (Andy) instead of a female victim (Pam), while a second male character (Morgan) is later hung from a chandelier. As we shall see, this is all part of the film’s program to render unto men the violence the slasher traditionally inflicts on women. The 2003 remake also replays the end of the 1974 film, where a male trucker stops to help the heroine, Sally, who ends up escaping in the

back of a pickup, only to invert it, since the 2003 trucker leads Erin right back to the cannibals' gas station. Similarly, *Halloween* (2007) revisits the end of the 1978 film, with Dr. Loomis shooting Michael Myers to save Laurie, but the 2007 Michael Myers rises again, gouging out Loomis's eyes and forcing Laurie to kill him herself. No doubt these modifications were largely intended to thwart the expectations of fans of the original films, but because the genre conventions (the murder or rescue scenes that are such an important part of horror narratives) are gendered, they necessarily affect the treatment of gender in the films.

Characterization

In any case, these new endings are by no means tacked on: they are instrumental in the characterization of the Final Girl. They show that the Final Girls of the 2000s do not rely as much on male characters to save them because they are stronger, both physically and mentally, than their predecessors. This is clearly the case in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003): Erin, who not only defeats Leatherface, saves herself and even tries to save her friend Morgan, has very little in common with the 1974 Sally Hardesty who merely endures, flees and, fortunately for her, runs into some help (Roche 114). Jill Johnson in *When a Stranger Calls* (Simon West, 2006) also proves better equipped to defend herself than her predecessor in the first act of Fred Walton's 1979 film. And Jennifer Hills in *I Spit on Your Grave* (Steven R. Monroe, 2010), as Laura Mee has noted, already evinces her capacity to fight back during the rape scene (82).

The Final Girls of the 2000s are also less virginal than Clover's model. They have boyfriends—Erin in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003)—husbands—Neil in *The Toolbox Murders* (Tobe Hooper, 2004)—or at least express their sexual desires—Laurie in *Halloween* (2007). However, the remakes maintain the Final Girl's difference from the other female characters along sexual lines. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003) introduces a clear-cut distinction between the two girls that was almost absent from the 1974 film, where the only feature that distinguishes Sally and Pam, who both have boyfriends and don't wear bras, is Pam's bare back; in the 2003 remake, Pepper, a hitchhiker the teenagers met only yesterday, is first introduced necking passionately with Andy in the back of the van (Roche 110). In *Texas Chainsaw 3D* (John Luessenhop, 2013), the Final Girl's (Heather) best friend (Nikki) repeatedly tries to seduce her boyfriend (Ryan). In *Dawn of the Dead* (Zack Snyder, 2004), the main

female protagonist (Ana) is a nurse who spends her time helping people, while a secondary character (Monica), blond of course, spends her time trying on clothes, having sex or getting scalp massages. In sum, the Final Girl of the 2000s is by no means virginal, but her libido is safely contained within a potentially productive heterosexual relationship, unless betrayal returns her to the ideal state of abstinence, as in *Texas Chainsaw 3D* (2013). Regrettably, we have yet to see a slasher where the girl in a long-term relationship gets the axe and the promiscuous woman saves the day—though I would like to believe there is one somewhere out there.

This is because the Final Girl remains the moral core of the film. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003) director Marcus Nispel describes Erin as the “moral pillar” of her group of friends and points out that she keeps reminding them of what is right and wrong (Roche 113). Even Heather’s siding with Leatherface and acting as an accessory to murder in *Texas Chainsaw 3D* (2013) is brought on by her sense of ethics, when she finds out that Leatherface is her brother and that the locals massacred their family. At rock bottom, then, the Final Girl remains very close to Clover’s model: she is both attentive and alert because she is not a self-centered juvenile bursting with sexual energy, but an adult aware of the dangers of the world with a highly developed sense of responsibility. In her comparative study of *Halloween* (1978) and *Halloween H20* (1998), Jennifer Connelly argues that the older, stronger, sexually-active Laurie Strode has become a Final Woman (104), a transformation that has also been noted of Ellen Ripley and Sarah Connor in the *Alien* and *Terminator* franchises. Yet it seems to me that the characteristics that make up Connelly’s Final Woman are the same that characterize the heroines of contemporary horror movies, regardless of their age. Because the point is that the Final Girl is already an adult.

All in all, this would seem to make for a more positive representation of the heroine in the horror film—and on many levels, it does. However, as I have already suggested, underneath the post-feminist veneer lurks the dark specter of patriarchy. Indeed, the core quality featured by most contemporary Final Girls is often related to their motherly nature. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003) makes an explicit case that Erin’s moral and physical fortitude are rooted in her maternal instinct (Craig and Fradley 82): the last image we have of Erin, the girl who wanted to get married at the beginning of the film, is of her driving away with the baby she has just saved from the deranged family at her side—and this even though she sits the kid in the front seat (Roche 108-9). Even the more deranged Heather ends up, in *Texas Chainsaw 3D* (2013), looking after her

brother Leatherface like her mother did before her. In *When a Stranger Calls* (2006), Jill Johnson saves the children she's babysitting, unlike her 1979 predecessor. In the end, the postfeminist Final Woman's strength has been redirected at child-rearing—a quality the 1978 Laurie Strode equally shared. With the post-feminist shift, the classic Gothic figure of the virgin has merely made way for that of the mother. And from a Foucauldian perspective, capitalist patriarchy has, once again, been consolidated by channeling energy towards the safeguarding and reproduction of the social order. This is enhanced by the fact that the Final Girl remains, in many horror films, the only truly "positive" female character. Indeed, the secondary female characters more or less share the same unsavory characteristics as their predecessors. *Halloween* (2007) is fairly exceptional in this respect, because not only does it make Laurie Strode less heroic than her 1978 counterpart—in fact, she is very much like Sally from *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) who endures rather than survives—but the 2007 friend Annie Brackett turns out to be a more convincing Final Girl than Laurie, kicking out at Michael Myers before grabbing a butcher knife and attempting to fight him on equal terms (Roche 112). Tough chicks are, Rob Zombie's film suggests, not exceptional. But more importantly, perhaps, in failing to be a Final Girl, Rob Zombie's Laurie, as *Halloween II* (2009) will confirm, also fails to preserve the social order of which her brother and herself have both been victims.

Of course, the treatment of gender in fiction is by no means limited to the representation of women and men, or male and female. In fact, most of the gender trouble in horror, fantasy and Sci-Fi is provoked by the "monstrous" figures of otherness, of which the various avatars of the "monstrous-feminine" are one example. Elizabeth Young (1991) demonstrated that the Frankenstein monster in *Bride of Frankenstein* (Universal, James Whale, 1935) is the site of racial and sexual tensions. A famous contemporary monster that is a prime example of gender (but also racial and ethnic) instability is the Predator, a hypermasculine double of Arnold Schwarzenegger and his team in John McTiernan's 1987 film, endowed with jaws that evoke the *vagina dentata* and a hairstyle that recalls the Rastafarians. This can also be the case when the "monstrous" character is human. Indeed, the subversion of gender (but also of race, class and even humanity) in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) largely emanates from the cannibal family. To start, the all-male family is composed of a mummy-like grandfather and three brothers. The absence of a father and mother leads the brothers to play various roles: the Cook initially acts like a father figure, beating first

Hitchhiker then Leatherface, before Hitchhiker calls his authority into question at the dinner table, feminizing him by calling him a Cook; Leatherface, the massive butcher, wears a dress and makeup before changing into a three-piece suit. I am by no means suggesting that monsters propose viable models for alternative sexualities. However, the disorder caused by monsters is a threat to the stability of the symbolic order, and it is in this sense that the monster is productive from a feminist and marxist perspective—hence Wood’s thesis of the monster as return of the repressed. It is, more precisely, the dialogical relationship between female heroine and monster, as Linda Williams has suggested, that destabilizes the patriarchal law. For instance, in *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), the subtext on race analyzed by Young gains substance when the Frankenstein monster and the Bride all dressed in white finally meet. In the mad dinner scene at the end of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), the series of shot/reverse shots invite a similar reading, with Sally, the victim, sitting across the table from the mummified head of the family who hardly looks like a threat [72:00-77:15]. In so doing, the constructiveness of the various roles is foregrounded because they are disconnected from the biological bodies involved: the members of the all-male family are all playing parts and, what’s more, not always the same one; and they force Sally to play the part of the guest of honor, after feeding her blood to the grandfather and before attempting to murder her.

Most of the time, the role of the “monstrous” character in destabilizing gender, class or race norms is downplayed in the remakes of the 2000s. This is mainly due to the belief that “bettering” the original films means creating more powerful monsters. In the case of the slasher, remakes like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003), *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006), *Halloween* (2007) and *Friday the 13th* (2009) follow the evolution of the *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* franchises of the 1980s and 1990s by making the killers hypermasculine behemoths (Roche 186-87)—Jason Voorhees is, after all, a giant hockey player. Others like *When a Stranger Calls* (2006), *Prom Night* (2008) and *Silent Night* (2012) include just enough back story so as to leave no room to doubt that the killer is a male psychopath and not a ghost like the Shape in *Halloween* (1978). The 2003 *Leatherface* is described by his mother as a boy who was victimized by girls, thereby clearly circumscribing his gender. This is not the case in *Halloween* (2007) where sexual ambivalence is shown to be central to Michael Myers’s pathology. The opening scenes of *Halloween* (2007) suggest that Michael has a very binary view of women: in his eyes, they are either pure like his mother and baby sister or abject like

his older sister [0:50-5:05] (Roche 97-98). The bullies who taunt him at school make him angry because they not only insult his mother, but in so doing, suggest that she is also a sexual being. The subsequent “Love Hurts” scene initially seems to crosscut between two narrative events, yet the images of Deborah Myers may actually be her son’s own fantasies, thereby suggesting that “love hurts” because Michael has a hard time dealing with his incestuous desires [12:45-13:45].

Films in other subgenres like the zombie movie or the rape-revenge film propose similar treatments of the monster because of the generalized slasherization of the American horror movie. Hence, by making the living dead cunning and agile predators, *Dawn of the Dead* (2004) makes it impossible to establish the political associations George Romero’s 1978 film did largely through the editing (Roche 185). Even *I Spit on Your Grave* (Steven R. Monroe, 2010) abandons the female rape victim’s perspective to follow the rapists as they are stalked by a *femme castratrice* who has now become a stalker endowed with ubiquity. This makes the return to Jennifer’s point of view after each murder a bit problematic and was clearly devised in order to insure the obligatory startle effect. The slasherization of the American horror movie is another way of having your cake and eating it, too, and it leads the filmmakers to further normalize the genre and unwittingly contradict the terms of the material they are working with. In any case, it is largely responsible for some of the films’ failure to tap into the radical potential of the figure of the monster, notably in terms of identity politics.

Fetishization and punishment

In the wake of Mulvey’s seminal essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” critics were quick to confirm that horror films were particularly guilty of both fetishizing and punishing the female body. Indeed, in your typical 1980s horror movie, you know that the girl who is just dying to go skinny-dipping is going to get the axe. Most of the remakes attempt to distance themselves from these conventions. Special attention will be paid to two films that do so in almost opposite ways: *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003) and *Halloween* (2007).

The treatment of violence in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003) deliberately goes against this genre convention, as the replacement of a female by a male character in the meat hook scene suggests. The 1974 film does, in effect, fetishize its main female victim, Pam: the slow low-angle tracking shot which follows her to the house is centered on her bare back, announcing the meat hook that will pierce her but

that the viewer will never see [36:15]; the subsequent frontal close-ups of her face allow the viewer to look at her while she screams in pain [39:45]. In the mad supper scene, parts of Sally's body, her wide-open mouth and eyes, are equally fetishized through the use of extreme close-ups [74:50-75:27]. The male characters, by comparison, are killed off quickly or in the dark. In the 2003 remake, Pam's new avatar Pepper is also murdered onscreen, but her body is entirely concealed by Leatherface and the darkness [57:45]. Of course, this is not to say that no violence is inflicted on the female characters. Erin and Pepper are made to lie face down in the dirt by a perverted Sheriff, the close-ups showing them gagging [49:20], and a subsequent scene opens with a close-up of Erin waking up as some yellow liquid spills onto her face [64:30]. Yet in both cases, the pornographic imagery serves as a red herring, since, in the first scene, the male character (Morgan) is the one the Sheriff will ultimately choose to throat rape, and in the second, a reverse shot reveals that, although the Sheriff does have his pants down, he is actually pouring beer onto Erin's face. Overall, both Leatherface and especially Sheriff Hoyt seem keener on torturing the male characters in scenes that abound in gory close-ups (Roche 93). Like the films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder analyzed by Kaja Silverman, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (2003) returns "to the male body all of the violence which it has historically directed elsewhere" (9), in this case at female bodies.

The remake fails, however, to be the feminist critique of the slasher it apparently aspires to be. For one, it shamelessly fetishizes its lead actress, Jessica Biel—and not, paradoxically, the libidinous Pepper. Indeed, as Erich Kuersten (2005) has noted, Jessica Biel conforms to the norms of beauty promoted by contemporary magazines, which celebrate muscular female bodies. Costume, lighting and camera angle regularly highlight her body in scenes where she is practically posing. The Making Of even shows cast and crew tastefully describing one of the chase scenes as a "boom boom boom shot."² Clearly, everybody was fully aware that the star's body was being exploited. Thus, the filmmakers of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003) practically call on post-feminism as an alibi to fetishize their lead actress, but their cynical and essentialist perspective transpires when director Marcus Nispel compliments Biel on being very "fit" and says that he believes that female viewers will appreciate a character who taps into "her feminine energy."³

² In the DVD extra "Chainsaw Redux: Making a Massacre" [59:30].

³ In "Chainsaw Redux: Making a Massacre" [16:25].

The film even adopts a self-reflexive perspective of Biel's fetishization in a scene where Old Monty gropes her buttocks while gazing out of the shot, presumably in the killer's direction [29:50] (Roche 110). This early scene reflects, then, the (male) pleasures of fetishizing and punishing the female body. Like the previously discussed pornographic shots of Erin and Pepper drooling, the scene teases the (male) spectator's expectations about what lies in store—her boyfriend Kemper's going to get it. Yet considering the number of shots that highlight Biel's body, self-reflexivity is a mere alibi: the perfect "how to have your cake and eat it, too" strategy, it allows the film to cleverly say "this is wrong"—and get away with it. It is fairly common in contemporary horror films and can be executed far more intelligently. *I Spit on Your Grave* (2010), for instance, resorts to *mise en abyme* when one of the male rapists is shown filming the scene, thereby portraying onscreen the collusion between sadistic male gaze and camera gaze Mulvey had theorized [20:27-24:57]. The male assailant is literally fetishizing Jennifer's teeth with his cameraman's assistance, but his own presence ultimately disrupts the fetishization when he makes his presence as fetishizer visible. The difference with the scene from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003) is that, like Meir Zarchi's 1978 film, *I Spit on Your Grave* (2010) refuses to fetishize Jennifer's body through *mise en scène* and the usage of close-ups, and insists, instead, on the rapists' grotesque features, thereby distancing the viewer from the rapists (Clover 139-40). The *mise en abyme* thus comments reflexively not so much on the spectatorial terms of the horror film—as is the case in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003)—as on the distancing strategy adopted in both versions of *I Spit on Your Grave*.

Halloween (2007) adopts a different tack than *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003), one that is, in a sense, closer to the rape-revenge model than to that of the slasher. As in earlier slashers, more female characters are murdered, and emphasis is put on the violence inflicted on their bodies. However, because the 2007 Michael Myers is a fairly stereotypical psychopath and not the depersonalized killer of the 1978 film, the violence is entirely justified on the narrative level. The close-ups of Michael's female victims are thus systematically accompanied by reverse shots of Michael observing them. The depiction of mutilated bodies is associated with a diegetic gaze that is sadistic and that, unlike the 1978 film, fails to hide behind a mask—Michael's eyes are always visible (Roche 179). The difference between this approach and the self-reflexive gimmick used in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003) is that it is systematic: *Halloween* (2007) never lets the viewer forget the association between

both gazes, while *Halloween* (1978) constantly plays on the dis-association of the killer's gaze and the camera gaze. Furthermore, the camerawork in *Halloween* (2007) tends to thwart the fetishization of female bodies by relying on handheld shots and angles that impede the spectator's view, the darkness further frustrating the line of sight (Roche 110). Thus, not only is the camera gaze aligned with the psychopath's perverse gaze, but by mimicking his pent-up sexual energy the camerawork makes it impossible for the male viewer to enjoy the spectacle of mutilated bodies. *Halloween* (2007) thus suggests that the reactionary treatment of gender in *Halloween* (1978) is not just a matter of how the female characters are represented, but has just as much to do with the treatment of the killer and the unabashed voyeurism the inhuman killer enables.

Conclusion

Ultimately, *Halloween* (2007) sticks to its political agenda and offers a more coherent metafictional critique of the slasher genre than *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003), a clear example of wanting to have your cake and eat it, too. The treatment of gender in many of the remakes of the 2000s is, unfortunately, more in the vein of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003), and often far less compelling: the films depict stronger Final Girls than their predecessors, but continue to unashamedly fetishize them—though they usually get to keep their clothes on—and punish the other female characters for being licentious. Many of the remakes allude to the ideas put forth by feminist film critics, yet do not integrate them throughout the film, as if one or two apologies could excuse the rest. They further contradict their own terms by celebrating the post-feminist babe. Indeed, these examples suggest that post-feminism remains problematic for feminism because it often conceals patriarchal discourses and practices. The equation between female strength and motherhood that some of the films make is particularly alarming insofar as it indicates that the capitalist patriarchal order has already turned post-feminism to its advantage, a situation no doubt encouraged by the fact that, unlike second wave feminism, most forms of post-feminism endorse capitalism.

Many remakers also attempt to have their cake by eating it, too, by tapping into current trends that sometimes end up being antithetical to the film's own terms. In this respect, the slasherization of the horror movie has been detrimental to the treatment of the monster. In some cases, the treatment of identity politics in the remakes ends

up being more essentialist than the films of the 1970s because their monolithic representation of the monster precludes the deconstruction of hegemonic norms made possible by the dialogical relationship between monstrous and female protagonist. In the end, all these inconsistencies are best explained in terms of the competing demands made on films and on remakes in particular: satisfying the fans of the original films and of the genre, and especially satisfying the younger audiences who remain the core audience in movie theaters. Moreover, if producers and filmmakers are nowadays more aware that women do represent a major part of the audience, this does not mean that they do not wish to continue to cater to male (and other) audiences. The fact that both handsome male and female characters are fetishized, no doubt, ensures that each member of the audience, regardless of her or his sexuality, gets a piece of the cake. But the question remains: is it okay to have your cake and eat it, too? Many of these films seem to suggest that it is, so long as you know it isn't. I, for one, would prefer a change in attitudes instead of occasional apologies.

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