

FEMALE AUTHORSHIP IN THE  
*SLUMBER PARTY MASSACRE TRILOGY*

By

LYNDSEY BROYLES

Bachelor of Arts in English

University of New Mexico

Albuquerque, NM

2016

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate College of the  
Oklahoma State University  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for  
the Degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS  
May, 2019

FEMALE AUTHORSHIP IN THE  
*SLUMBER PARTY MASSACRE TRILOGY*

Thesis Approved:

Jeff Menne

---

Thesis Adviser

Graig Uhlin

---

Lynn Lewis

---

Name: LYNDSEY BROYLES

Date of Degree: MAY, 2019

Title of Study: FEMALE AUTHORSHIP IN THE *SLUMBER PARTY MASSACRE*  
*TRILOGY*

Major Field: ENGLISH

Abstract: The *Slumber Party Massacre* series is the only horror franchise exclusively written and directed by women. In a genre so closely associated with gender representation, especially misogynistic sexual violence against women, this franchise serves as a case study in an alternative female gaze applied to a notoriously problematic form of media. The series arose as a satire of the genre from an explicitly feminist lesbian source only to be mediated through the exploitation horror production model, which emphasized female nudity and violence. The resulting films both implicitly and explicitly address feminist themes such as lesbianism, trauma, sexuality, and abuse while adhering to misogynistic genre requirements. Each film offers a unique perspective on horror from a distinctly female viewpoint, alternately upholding and subverting the complex gender politics of women in horror films.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Women in Horror, Pre-Party .....	3
Gender Theory in Horror Cinema.....	8
II. <i>SLUMBER PARTY MASSACRE</i> .....	16
Production.....	16
Analysis.....	20
III. <i>SLUMBER PARTY MASSACRE II</i> .....	29
Production.....	29
Analysis.....	30
IV. <i>SLUMBER PARTY MASSACRE III</i> .....	39
Production.....	39
Analysis.....	40
V. CONCLUSION.....	46
Then and Now: Female-Created Horror Post- <i>SPM</i> .....	46
Conclusion .....	49
REFERENCES .....	51

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Of all the slasher-movie franchises that were spawned in the body-count-happy decade of the 1980s, *The Slumber Party Massacre* is the only one to have been entirely written and directed by women. A strange claim to fame, perhaps, but an interesting one considering how ugly and sexist so many of the films were. Not that you would have ever guessed this fact from looking at the New World poster for 1982's inaugural chapter, where four high school coeds clad in negligees cower from a psycho with a giant phallic power drill hanging between his legs. It's about as subtle as a jackhammer to the skull.

—Chris Nashawaty<sup>1</sup>

Upon first impression, *The Slumber Party Massacre* trilogy seems like an unremarkable entry into the wide and weird canon of 1980s slashers. In an era when T&A-filled gorefests were being produced for cheap to favorable returns, the formula seemed simple--a motley crew of teens or coeds, plus one violent madman, add a novel weapon, and a few shots of bare breasts between eviscerations. Put it all together in 90 minutes or less, sell it to horrorhound teens, and profit. The subgenre was described by feminist horror theorist Carol Clover as “drenched in

---

<sup>1</sup> Nashawaty, Chris, and John Landis. *Crab Monsters, Teenage Cavemen, and Candy Stripe Nurses : Roger Corman: King of the B Movie*. Abrams, 2013.

Taboo and encroaching vigorously on the pornographic.”<sup>2</sup>

The original conceit of *The Slumber Party Massacre* utilizes all of these tropes, as the “Driller Killer”—a male villain brandishing an electric drill, to alternately campy and chilling effect--preys upon high school girls at a sleepover in all three iterations. Although the *Slumber Party Massacre* franchise has faded into this crowded genre field and maintains name recognition only in hardcore horror fan discourse, the films were produced from a unique perspective that sets the series apart. *The Slumber Party Massacre* trilogy remains the only slasher franchise exclusively directed and written by women. In a genre that is notorious for gendered violence and is the site of feminist film theory examination and reclamation, this series should be considered as a notable case study of horror from a feminine perspective. This work will examine *The Slumber Party Massacre* series’ complex co-mingling of explicitly feminist roots (the first film being written as a parody of the slasher genre by a noted feminist writer/activist) and exploitation production perspective (the involvement of Roger Corman). The female perspective (in terms of writing and directing) differentiates this franchise from other series from the era, although feminist messages become complicated or obscured in the finished films. Due to the marginalized and disreputable nature of their genre, the women who created the series are allowed to explore feminine themes with more freedom than mainstream productions, so long as they acknowledge the “requirements” of exploitation (nudity and violence.) This marriage of subversive commentary and misogynistic genre conventions make for a contradictory and fascinating trio of films. Through their unexpected characterization and commentary on gendered tropes, these films exhibit a distinctly female, if at times problematic, gaze. The content of the films comments both implicitly and explicitly on sexuality, queerness, and feminine power reclamation in horror, with the trilogy presenting three varying visions of female-produced horror. The first film explores the

---

<sup>2</sup> Clover, Carol J. *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1992. Print. 21.

fear of penetrative sex from a distinctly lesbian perspective, the second addresses both the anxiety and desire experienced by a traumatized young woman coming into her sexuality, and the third presents male sexual trauma as the trigger for gendered violence--themes rarely addressed in male-helmed horror.

### **Women in Horror, Pre-Party**

Before examining the *Slumber Party Massacre* films, let us explore the historical context surrounding the series, the female pioneers in the horror industry that paved the way for the women behind the franchise. Although the Reagan era was a boomtime for the horror genre, generating iconic slashers with mainstream cultural impact, female authorship within the genre remained rare. Women were almost always protagonists in front of the camera, but behind the scenes women were missing. Of course, this is true for the film industry in general, but particularly notable in a genre that focuses primarily on women as the main characters. Unlike mainstream dramas or comedies, women are the central figures of the horror genre, as well as filling the role of audience surrogate. While it may seem women would be best suited to helm films so concerned about female terror, instead horror directors were almost always men violently objectifying their protagonists.

The cultural context in which the slasher film arose are reflected within the conventions of the genre, particularly when it comes to gender. There was little room for nuance in onscreen representations of the sexes, with characters often occupying the most rudimentary, one-dimensional stereotypes of femininity and masculinity. The cast of slasher films were populated with dumb blondes, promiscuous high school girls, and the shy virgin. The genre essentializes women through the Madonna/Whore complex, with the exception of the scrappy survivalist Final Girl. Theorized by Carol Clover, the Final Girl is often discussed in feminist horror scholarship as

the most significant archetype of women in the modern horror film.<sup>3</sup> The vast majority of horror produced during the slasher era featured heroines who embodied both the damsel in distress and a fierce survivalist ethos.<sup>4</sup> The Final Girl alternately embodied terror and determination, enduring trauma and torment at the hands of a typically male aggressor only to defeat or outlast the killer by the end of the film.<sup>5</sup> This archetype remains a kind of feminist folk hero, a figure who was simultaneously a victim of patriarchal violence and a triumphant hero because of, rather than in spite of, her gender. The Final Girl is also the only female archetype in slasher films which occupies a grey area in terms of gendered behavior—she is more androgynous in appearance and primarily avoids overt femininity, especially in terms of her sexuality.<sup>6</sup> As she is menaced by the male villain, the Final Girl gains more “masculine” characteristics, most notably adopts the specifically phallic method of violence used against her in order to survive. Aside from the Final Girl, who has both the curse and the privilege of bucking gender roles, the women in the films are bound by strict, essentialized feminine identity. Because of this rigidly constructed vision of womanhood, physical and behavioral difference in the women onscreen is worthy of consideration—butch women, gender-nonconforming women, and queer-coded women are exceedingly rare.

These rigid gendered archetypes arose specifically from the slasher film, a particularly brutal and gritty subgenre that first made waves in the early 70s before becoming ubiquitous by the 1980s. Gender politics were significantly impacted by the second-wave women’s movement in the 1970s, which coincided with other leftist efforts to empower marginalized populations. However, the 80s brought Reagan Conservatism, and with it a backlash to women’s liberation. Slashers could be seen as a response to this female empowerment, an effort to put women back in their place through physical and

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.,



sexual violence onscreen.<sup>7</sup> Films like *The Last House on the Left* (Craven, 1972) and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974) introduced an aesthetic of disturbing realism and examined violence against women as random unmotivated terror enacted by male strangers. The subgenre crossed over from grindhouse fare to mainstream success with Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978), which led to franchise-minded, antagonist-centric series like *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Craven 1984) and *Friday the 13th* (Cunningham 1980).<sup>8</sup> Although there were male characters to add to the bodycount, overwhelmingly the victims of this violence and the protagonists of these films were women. The producers, directors, and writers behind the camera, with few exceptions, were men. The male gaze is almost omnipresent in early slashers, with women's naked bodies fetishized even as they are mutilated. The *Slumber Party Massacre* films are contradictory products of both feminine perspectives as well as the misogynistic conservatism of the decade in which they were produced. The films both subvert gendered expectations by giving us androgynous, layered women, as well as uphold them by situating these characters within an exploitative plot structure.

While women were the stars of these films, those behind the camera were men, with few exceptions. However, these exceptions helped shape the genre as we know it today. One of the most influential women in horror during the slasher era was Debra Hill, John Carpenter's frequent collaborator and producing partner. Hill co-wrote and produced Carpenter's *Halloween* in 1978, then reteamed on their follow-up *The Fog* (1980).<sup>9</sup> While Carpenter is lauded as a master of horror, Hill's contribution to horror history often goes unremarked upon.

While Hill was probably the most influential woman in horror production of the era, there were rare instances of women-helmed horror that became more and more common as the decades

---

<sup>7</sup> "Sneak Previews With Siskel & Ebert - 'Women In Danger' Horror Films (1980)." YouTube, YouTube, 1 Dec. 2018, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbtUnOHAX3E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbtUnOHAX3E).

<sup>8</sup> "(RE)SITUATING AND (RE)PLAYING THE GENRE." *Making and Remaking Horror in the 1970s and 2000s: Why Don't They Do It Like They Used To?*, by David Roche, University Press of Mississippi, 2014, pp. 119–153. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vkm5n.9](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vkm5n.9).

<sup>9</sup> "Debra Hill." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, [www.imdb.com/name/nm0384185/](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0384185/).

wore on. Often these female creators came up under Roger Corman, one being Stephanie Rothman. Rothman wrote and directed seven films between 1966 and 1974, including *Blood Bath* (1966), *The Student Nurses* (1970), and *The Velvet Vampire* (1971).<sup>10</sup> Although she never achieved mainstream success, Rothman was a notable presence on the drive-in circuit while creating for Corman's production company. According to a 2007 interview, Rothman was frustrated by the limitations of her early genre work, but attempted to create more meaningful content within the exploitation context:

I was never happy making exploitation films. I did it because it was the only way I could work. While I do not object to violence or nudity in principle, the reason audiences came to see these low-budget films without stars was because they delivered scenes that you could not see in major studio films or more supposedly ambitious independent American films. (Today, of course, you can see these scenes and more, but we are talking about standards operative in the mid-nineteen sixties to seventies when I was working.) Exploitation films required multiple nude scenes and crude, frequent violence. My struggle was to try to dramatically justify such scenes and to make them transgressive, but not repulsive. I tried to control this through the style in which I shot scenes. That was one of my greatest pleasures, determining how my style of shooting could enhance the content of a scene.<sup>11</sup>

Another Corman protege was Barbara Peeters, who collaborated with Rothman on 1978's *Starhops*.<sup>12</sup> Peeters saw the misogyny of the industry when she worked on the sci-fi horror film *Humanoids from the Deep* (1980).<sup>13</sup> Peeters finished the film, but was replaced by Jimmy T. Murakami for additional shooting when she objected to Corman's request of supplementary rape

---

<sup>10</sup> "Stephanie Rothman." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0580571/>

<sup>11</sup> Jenkins, Henry. "Exploiting Feminism: An Interview with Stephanie Rothman (Part One)." *Henry Jenkins*, Henry Jenkins, 16 Oct. 2007, [henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/10/stephanie\\_rothman.html](http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/10/stephanie_rothman.html).

<sup>12</sup> "Barbara Peeters." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0676336/>

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*,

scenes.<sup>14</sup> Despite this controversy, Peeters' gender was used to drum up publicity for the film, with press marveling at a woman directing a lowbrow exploitation film.<sup>15</sup> Peeters' womanhood was dismissed when she refused misogynistic content, but used as a gimmick by the very studio that fired her. Although female directors like Amy Holden Jones, Penelope Spheeris, and Rothman have lauded Corman for his mentorship, Peeters experienced the hardships of being a woman in the horror film industry.<sup>16</sup>

Some female filmmakers worked in both horror and adult films, often blurring the line between the two. Roberta Findlay directed 34 adult and exploitation films between 1966 and 1989, many combining the aesthetics and tropes of horror with pornography, often using pseudonyms such as Robert Norman, Robert Williams, and adopting the moniker of Frederick Douglass to serve as cinematographer on the film *Invasion of the Blood Farmers* (1972).<sup>17</sup> Towards the end of her career, she focused more on horror rather than explicit adult content, but failed to cross over into mainstream success. Doris Wishman, called "the most prolific woman director of American film in the sound era" by scholar Moya Lockett, began her career at 48 years old with trendy nudist films in the 1960s.<sup>18</sup> She went on to direct 31 films, up to 3 a year, her last being 2002's *Dildo Heaven*, released the same year as her death at age 90.<sup>19</sup> While Wishman only directed one horror film, *A Night to Dismember* (which has its own storied production history--many original reels were supposedly destroyed in a fire before resurfacing recently as a VHS rip on YouTube,<sup>20</sup>) her films have been analyzed by Lockett as exhibiting a

---

<sup>14</sup> Knipfel, Jim. "Humanoids from the Deep (1980) Review." *Den of Geek*, 12 Jan. 2013, [www.denofgeek.com/us/movies/humanoids-from-the-deep/48374/humanoids-from-the-deep-1980-review](http://www.denofgeek.com/us/movies/humanoids-from-the-deep/48374/humanoids-from-the-deep-1980-review).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>16</sup> Nashawaty, Chris, and John Landis. *Crab Monsters, Teenage Cavemen, and Candy Stripe Nurses : Roger Corman: King of the B Movie*. Abrams, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> "Roberta Findlay." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0011897/>

<sup>18</sup> Lockett, Moya. "Sexploitation as Feminine Territory: the Films of Doris Wishman." *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Tastes*, edited by Mark Jancovich, Manchester University Press, 2003, pp. 142–155.

<sup>19</sup> "Doris Wishman." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0822555/>

<sup>20</sup> Squires, John. "Long Lost Version of 1983's 'A Night to Dismember' Was Just Found and Uploaded to YouTube." *Bloody Disgusting!*, 9 Aug. 2018, [bloody-disgusting.com/movie/3514790/long-lost-version-1983s-night-dismember-just-found-uploaded-youtube/](http://bloody-disgusting.com/movie/3514790/long-lost-version-1983s-night-dismember-just-found-uploaded-youtube/).

unique female gaze.<sup>21</sup> Lockett posits that Wishman's unconventional, almost avant-garde style (including handheld camera and jarring cuts interrupting sex scenes) serves to disrupt the male gaze, denying heterosexual male gratification and focusing instead on the women in her films as individuals.<sup>22</sup> This playful subversion of the woman as object is echoed in the *Slumber Party* films, especially the second movie which utilizes similar editing techniques.

Obscurity is the fate of many female horror filmmakers of the 70s and 80s--directing micro-budget films for the drive in circuit before fading into obscurity, or leaving the genre for work in mainstream fare. Unlike Corman's boys, De Palma, Cameron, Scorsese, etc., their female counterparts did not ascend to popular acclaim.

### **Gender Theory in Horror Cinema**

This is the gender landscape of the industry in which the first *Slumber Party Massacre* film debuted in 1982. Although not unheard of, female horror creators were certainly a rarity, even though under Corman they were afforded more opportunities than the studio system at large. This era of horror has been the focus of extensive feminist film theory and criticism, examining the gender and sexual dynamics of the women on screen. Scholars like Laura Mulvey, Carol Clover, Linda Williams, and Cynthia Freeland created the theoretical framework within which we will explore the implications of the *Slumber Party Massacre* films.

Although not exclusively addressing the horror genre, Laura Mulvey's work with the gendered gaze is an essential concept within horror scholarship. Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema," published in *Screen* in 1975, introduced a feminist perspective on Freudian psychoanalysis<sup>23</sup>. Mulvey examines film through a psychoanalytic framework to reveal "the way

---

<sup>21</sup> Lockett, Moya. "Sexploitation as Feminine Territory: the Films of Doris Wishman." *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Tastes*, edited by Mark Jancovich, Manchester University Press, 2003, pp. 142-155.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>23</sup> Mulvey, Laura, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, *Screen*, Volume 16, Issue 3, Autumn 1975, Pages 6-18, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6>

the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form.”<sup>24</sup> In a genre in which the female body is the site of sexualized violence, Mulvey’s concept of the woman as film pleasure object is painfully relevant. Horror is almost always concerned with the destruction of the feminine form at the hands of a masculine antagonist. Kill scenes often reflect Mulvey’s theory of objectification, with women’s bodies shot with an erotic, sometimes near-pornographic, male gaze.<sup>25</sup> This is particularly common in the “women in terror” films of the mid-1970s into the 1980s. While the slasher is itself a subgenre of horror, “women in terror” films focus exclusively on young women menaced by a male threat. This form of horror is notorious for its depiction of women being tortured both physically and sexually, and has raised moral questions from viewers and critics. In 1980, nationally-syndicated critics Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert aired a special episode of their weekly program focusing on “women in terror” films, arguing that they are a reaction to the second-wave feminist movement and promote misogynistic, sexualized violence towards women as mass entertainment.<sup>26</sup> The woman as symbol of castration threat, an essential concept in psychoanalysis, is subverted and literalized in the *Slumber Party Massacre* films, with women both adopting phallic weapons against their tormentors and destroying the male drill/phallus used against them.<sup>27</sup> Mulvey’s focus on Freudian psychosexuality is reflected in many slasher films from the era, with the explicit voyeurism of women coded as a form of violence.<sup>28</sup> In slashers, looking is a preemptive act of misogynistic dominance that precedes physical and sexual exploitation. Sexual torture of women is a common theme in slashers, from the brutally realistic and disturbing rape scene in *The Last House on the Left* (Craven 1972), to a scene from *Sleepaway Camp* (Hiltzik 1983) where a promiscuous girl is vaginally penetrated by a hot hair curler, which is so over-the-top it is played as comedic. Mulvey asserts that voyeurism is

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>26</sup> “Sneak Previews With Siskel & Ebert - 'Women In Danger' Horror Films (1980).” YouTube, YouTube, 1 Dec. 2018, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbtUnOHAX3E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbtUnOHAX3E).

<sup>27</sup> Mulvey, Laura. Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, *Screen*, Volume 16, Issue 3, Autumn 1975, Pages 6–18, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6>, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.,

intrinsically related to sadism, the desire to punish and control the object of the male gaze.<sup>29</sup>

While context and tone are paramount to meaning, the recurring theme of violent sexuality in slasher films is a genre-specific extension of Mulvey's theory of female objectification in film.

Another film theorist that shapes our perception of the genre is Linda Williams, who focused not exclusively on horror but on such disreputable film cultures as pornography and melodrama as well.<sup>30</sup> Williams' exploration of bad objects of low cultural regard argues for the academic value of such artifacts, not in terms of film quality but ideological messaging and effect on the viewer.<sup>31</sup> The author's 1991 essay "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess" addresses the commonalities of what Williams deems the "body genres": horror, melodrama, and pornography.<sup>32</sup> Williams posits that these three low genres are badly regarded in film culture in part because they both portray and elicit excessive emotion on screen and in the viewer.<sup>33</sup> Pornography is used to evoke sexual arousal in the viewer, and melodrama causes the audience to weep along with the romance or tragedy on screen.<sup>34</sup> Horror is the third of these evocative genres because the terror in the films causes fear in the audience, culminating in the viewer jumping in shock or even screaming in response.<sup>35</sup> These films display actors overcome by emotion, and we as viewers are physically compelled to reflect and reenact those emotions. Williams posits that in these "body genres," women are the receptacles, the bearers of this emotional excess.<sup>36</sup> These emotional reactions are enacted by women who writhe in pleasure, weep with heartache, and scream in pain and terror. In horror, the female characters embody our fear, erupting in panic as spectacle, meant to provoke catharsis from those watching the film. This concept only reinforces the connection between sexuality and violence enacted upon women in horror, and the assumed

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>30</sup> Williams, Linda. "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess." *Film Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4, 1991, pp. 2–13. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/1212758](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1212758).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.,

satisfaction of the audience while witnessing these scenes--the hysteria women perform onscreen in horror is a dark reflection of sexual ecstasy, echoing the movements and exclamations of orgasm. The moment of death is often conflated with sexual climax, both signaling a cathartic release. In horror films, the woman's performances of both pleasure and pain, divorced from narrative context, are similar. A common gag in slashers is the confusion of these two sensations: screams that we assume are the product of fear are revealed as resulting from lovemaking, or vice versa.<sup>37</sup> This is the crux of the slasher genre, the co-mingling of eroticism and brutality, and the confusion between the two, which makes it such a fascinating subject for feminist film scholars. The *Slumber Party Massacre* films are both examples of this exploitative practice and meta-commentary on the construction and execution of these tropes. Although acknowledging male desire to watch women in both pleasure and pain, the women in the films harbor their own fascination with sexual violence, at once repelled by and attracted to the men who torment them.

Feminist film scholarship flourished as a disciplinary focus in the aftermath of Mulvey's seminal article, and feminist horror studies as a field expanded as more academics addressed the specific gender politics of the genre.<sup>38</sup> The seminal work in feminist horror studies was published in 1992, Carol J. Clover's *Men Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*.<sup>39</sup> While previous feminist film scholarship addressed horror tangentially or presented theories that could be applied to horror, Clover's book presented an extended analysis of the genre specifically. Clover examines the gendered archetypes present in horror, and how the genders are characterized as both oppositional and overlapping:

The functions of monster and hero are far more frequently represented by males and the function of victim far more garishly by females. The fact that female monsters and female heroes, when they do appear, are masculine in dress and behavior (and often even in name), and that male

---

<sup>37</sup> This is seen in such films as *Reanimator* and the *Slumber Party* series.

<sup>38</sup> Olson, Scott R. "COLLEGE COURSE FILE: STUDIES IN GENRE—HORROR." *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 48, no. 1/2, 1996, pp. 67–79. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/20688095](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20688095).

<sup>39</sup> Clover, Carol J. *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. B.F.I. Pub., 1992.

victims are shown in feminine postures at the moment of their extremity, would suggest that gender inheres in the function itself--that there is something about the victim function that wants manifestation in a female, and something about the monster and hero functions that wants expression in a male. Sex, in this universe, proceeds from gender, not the other way around. A figure does not cry and cower because she is a woman; she is a woman because she cries and cowers. And a figure is not a psychokiller because he is a man; he is a man because he is a psychokiller. Jurij Lotman<sup>40</sup> has suggested that there are really only two 'characters' (subject positions or functions) in myth: a mobile, heroic being who crosses boundaries and 'penetrates' closed spaces, and an immobile being who personifies that damp, dark space and constitutes that which is to be overcome.<sup>41</sup>

The *Slumber Party Massacre* films traffic in this characterization, with almost elementally evil male characters existing for the express purpose of 'penetration,' invasion, and destruction of the woman's bodily space. However, Clover also posits that the most iconic archetype of horror complicates this gendered divide.<sup>42</sup> The Final Girl is defined by the act of survival, especially in the face of gendered and sexualized violence. In a genre which exploits images of women in terror, the final girl is allowed to fight back and triumph over the trauma she endures. However, the Final Girl phenomenon was problematized by implicit power and value determinations which deemed who was worthy of survival. The Final Girl was white, middle class, and above all, virginal.<sup>43</sup> The sexual politics of the slasher were notoriously Puritanical, emphasizing the purity of our female protagonists while sentencing their more promiscuous friends to violent deaths. Sex (as well as other sinful practices such as drinking or drug use) was enough to send any character to an early grave. This privileging of the virginal woman was additionally complicated by the sexually coded nature of the violence onscreen. Hulking male figures menace often nude teen

---

<sup>40</sup> Lotman, Jurij M., and Julian Graffy. "The Origin of Plot in the Light of Typology." *Poetics Today*, vol. 1, no. 1/2, 1979, pp. 161–184. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/1772046](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1772046).

<sup>41</sup> Clover, Carol J. Men, *Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. B.F.I. Pub., 1992. 13.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*,



girls with phallic weaponry (chainsaws, knives, machetes,) repeatedly hacking and stabbing them to death, sometimes post- or even mid-coitus. The Final Girl is untouchable by the villain because she has not condemned herself by engaging in sex, preventing the killer from replicating this eroticism via violence. The Final Girl is often divorced from her womanhood, presenting as more androgynous and asexual. Clover argues that this allows for a male audience to empathize with the Final Girl, a kind of cross-gender identification rare at the movies.<sup>44</sup> Alternately, the killer is “propelled by psychosexual fury,” unable to differentiate sexual arousal from bloodlust.<sup>45</sup> While the *Slumber Party Massacre* films directly engage with these archetypes, we also see purposeful subversion of these tropes, positioning every male character as possible threat while the women adopt aspects of traditional masculinity in order to survive.

Cynthia A. Freeland addresses these feminist readings of horror in her piece “Feminist Frameworks for Horror Films.”<sup>46</sup> The author critiques psychoanalytical framework, which is used by Mulvey, Williams, and Clover to different degrees, as well as fellow feminist horror theorists like Julia Kristeva<sup>47</sup> and Barbara Creed.<sup>48</sup> Freeland questions the school of thought as problematic and uninterrogated by feminist horror scholars.<sup>49</sup> She also argues that psychoanalysis is restrictive and reductive when discussing film, resulting in scholars “neglect[ing] many other important features of the film.”<sup>50</sup> Freeland also mentions the obsolescence of Lacanian psychoanalytics in the modern era, with developments in queer theory and conceptions of gender malleability.<sup>51</sup> Notably, the image of woman as castrated man seems phallogentric and patriarchal, defining the woman in negation, as incomplete man. Freeland offers an alternative strategy: “we should focus

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>46</sup> Freeland, Cynthia A. (1996). Feminist frameworks for horror films. In David Bordwell Noel Carroll (ed.), *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*. University of Wisconsin Press. pp. 195--218.

<sup>47</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection*. Columbia University Press, 1982.

<sup>48</sup> Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. Psychology Press, 1993.

<sup>49</sup> Freeland, Cynthia A. (1996). Feminist frameworks for horror films. In David Bordwell Noel Carroll (ed.), *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*. University of Wisconsin Press. pp. 195--218.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 201.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.,

on their [horror films] representational citents and on the nature of their representational practices, so as to scrutinize how the films represent gender, sexuality, and power relations between the sexes.”<sup>52</sup> Although her work engages with psychoanalysis less than Mulvey, Clover’s theories do operate under Laquer’s one sex model<sup>53</sup>, which positions masculinity as the norm and femininity as “a defective version.”<sup>54</sup> Again, Freeland argues this limits the perceptions of women in horror by precluding other interpretations of gender. Freeland’s critiques of these models of sexual difference are valid, and asks us to focus more on textual, representational analysis rather than relying on concepts she believes outdated and essentialist. For this analysis of the *Slumber Party Massacre* series, utilizing both of these strategies to different degrees will give us a well-rounded reading of the films. Psychoanalytical interpretations are integral to our readings of these films, due to the heavy-handed symbolism of penetration/castration, but let us also consider textual content including gendered characterization and representations of sexuality.

In terms of lesbian representation, horror has traditionally only used female same-sex desire as an indicator of evil, depravity, and perversion.<sup>55</sup> This is particularly notable in the lesbian vampire subgenre, which emerged in Euro horror during the 1970s. Outside the vampire genre, a character’s lesbianism is often a symptom of murderous psychosis, as explored in Chris Holmlund’s piece “Cruisin’ for a Bruisin’: Hollywood’s Deadly (Lesbian) Dolls.”<sup>56</sup> Any form of queerness is usually attributed to the killer, just another manifestation of their inability to conform to social norms. This speaks to the essentializing of gendered appearance and behavior in horror films, which either vilify gender-nonconforming characters or condemn them to death. Often, this transgressive queer figure is destroyed, restoring normative values. The lesbian-coded characters

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 205.

<sup>53</sup> Laqueur, Thomas. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Harvard University Press, 1992.

<sup>54</sup> Freeland, Cynthia A. (1996). Feminist frameworks for horror films. In David Bordwell Noel Carroll (ed.), *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*. University of Wisconsin Press. pp. 195--218. 203.

<sup>55</sup> As seen in such films as *Dracula’s Daughter*, *Vampyros Lesbos*, and *The Hunger*.

<sup>56</sup> Holmlund, Chris. “Cruisin’ for a Bruisin’: Hollywood’s Deadly (Lesbian) Dolls.” *Cinema Journal*, vol. 34, no. 1, 1994, pp. 31–51. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/1225654](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1225654).

in in the first *Slumber Party Massacre* film are an exception, as their queerness serves as a strength against the patriarchal male killer figure.

While not directly addressing horror films, during the 1980s feminist scholars heatedly debated pornography, with critics like Andrea Dworkin positing that porn is rooted in the exploitation and degradation of women for the sexual pleasure of men.<sup>57</sup> Dworkin is often credited with characterizing all heterosexual sex as rape, an understandably controversial stance.<sup>58</sup> Despite the extremity of this claim, the *Slumber Party Massacre* films implicitly dramatize this anxiety around engaging in heterosexual, penetrative sex, characterizing the act as traumatic and inherently violent for women regardless of their sexuality.

---

<sup>57</sup> Dworkin, Andrea (1987). *Intercourse*. Basic Books.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*,

## CHAPTER II

### *SLUMBER PARTY MASSACRE*

The first of the *Slumber Party Massacre* films may appear as an unremarkable attempt to capitalize on the slasher boom, and in many ways it is a typical cheap production made with the express purpose of quick and easy profit. However, aside from the generic marketing and tawdry title, the film surreptitiously presents a radical subtext courtesy of Rita Mae Brown's story and Amy Holden Jones' direction. This film began a franchise with distinct, unique feminine authorship in a genre field where such a perspective was almost unheard of.

#### **Production**

The first *Slumber Party Massacre* film is the creative brainchild of three seemingly disparate artistic perspectives, which explains its muddled tone. Screenwriter Rita Mae Brown, producer Roger Corman, and director Amy Holden Jones each brought their own perspectives to the project, resulting in a film with multiple motivations and purposes. Unlike its higher profile slasher contemporaries like the *Friday the 13th* series or the *Nightmare on Elm Street* franchise, the *SPM* films originated from an explicitly political, feminist, and lesbian source. In the 1970s and 80s, Rita Mae Brown was a vocal lesbian feminist activist, heavily involved with the

second wave women's movement.<sup>59</sup> She specifically criticized the exclusion of lesbian and bisexual women by the leaders of the mainstream women's movement, resigning from the National Organization for Women over Betty Friedan's lesbophobic remarks.<sup>60</sup> She went on to help found a lesbian separatist collective called The Furies, which advocated an exclusively lesbian community.<sup>61</sup> Brown contributed a landmark work of lesbian literature with her 1973 novel *Rubyfruit Jungle*, and later in life, Brown became a successful mystery novel author.<sup>62</sup> Brown's screenwriting credits are relatively few, but include dramatic TV movies and adaptations of her own novels.<sup>63</sup> *The Slumber Party Massacre* is an unexpected project for such a radical activist and author, especially considering the content of the final film. Rita Mae Brown's script, although rewritten by director Amy Holden Jones, is the crucial detail in a feminist analysis of the films; especially during the early 80s, Brown's lesbian identity was integral to her work, which warrants an analysis of her *Slumber Party Massacre* script through a lesbian lens. Brown has not written about her involvement in the film at length, only mentioning the project in passing in her autobiography *Rita Will: Memoir of a Literary Rabble-Rouser*, although she did confirm that the script was written as a satire of the slasher genre.<sup>64</sup> While the lesbian text of the film may have been obscured during rewrites and the production process, Brown's radical lesbian feminism did survive in the form of subtext and characterization that may not be recognizable to heterosexual viewers.

Exploitation producer Roger Corman was decidedly not interested in feminism when making his films. Corman was known for his micro-budget productions which proved popular on the drive-in circuit, and he catered to a teen audience hungry for subject matter that would make

---

<sup>59</sup> Brown, Rita Mae. *Rita Will: Memoirs of a Literary Rabble-Rouser*. Bantam Books, 1997.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>63</sup> "Rita Mae Brown." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0114522/>

<sup>64</sup> Brown, Rita Mae. *Rita Will: Memoirs of a Literary Rabble-Rouser*. Bantam Books, 1997.

their parents blush.<sup>65</sup> Although he dabbled in many genres, Corman's work usually bore the trademarks of monsters or killers, violence, and female nudity. Known for prioritizing profit over quality, Corman's output has always been seen as decidedly disreputable by Hollywood, critics, and film connoisseurs. However, he is also responsible for discovering many of our great modern filmmakers, particularly those who rose to prominence in the 70s and 80s. Francis Ford Coppola, Jonathan Demme, James Cameron, and Martin Scorsese all helmed low-budget, Corman-produced exploitation films the 1960s and 70s, affording them the opportunity to produce now-classic films.<sup>66</sup> His funding of the original *Slumber Party Massacre* film was certainly profit motivated, in a film landscape where slashers were exploding in popularity and the genre was notoriously cheap to produce. Corman is a complicated figure when it comes to women, both on screen and behind the scenes. Although the content of his films, including the notorious female nudity requirement, is rightly criticized for being exploitative and misogynistic, Corman did give opportunities to young women filmmakers to bring their visions to the projects. "[...] Corman continued throughout the eighties to be a maverick when it came to hiring women. At a time when positions of power in Hollywood were virtually nonexistent for women, Corman employed them at every level."<sup>67</sup> Another Corman protege, Penelope Spheeris (*Suburbia*, *Wayne's World*) is quoted as saying, "The film industry is like a fort with all of these guys--and they *are* guys--holding guns saying 'You can't come in!' But Roger opened the door to that fort for us. It was self-serving to a degree, because he didn't really pay us, but he always instinctively knew the right people to open the door to."<sup>68</sup> John Sayles describes Corman's generosity to women through a more cynical lens: "Roger hired more female directors than anyone else. It wasn't because he was a dyed-in-the-wool feminist. It was just if they had talent and they were cheap, let's try

---

<sup>65</sup> Nashawaty, Chris, and John Landis. *Crab Monsters, Teenage Cavemen, and Candy Stripe Nurses : Roger Corman: King of the B Movie*. Abrams, 2013.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

‘em!’<sup>69</sup> Regardless of his motivation and complicated legacy, Corman afforded significant opportunities for female-authored horror in an exclusionary industry.

The final major player in the production was Amy Holden Jones, an aspiring director without the name recognition of Corman or Brown. Jones excelled in film school, then served as an assistant to the director on *Taxi Driver*, which fostered a relationship with Scorsese, who suggested her to Corman as an editor.<sup>70</sup> Jones went on to edit a string of films, including Corman’s 1976 production *Hollywood Boulevard*.<sup>71</sup> The film was co-directed by another Corman protege, Joe Dante, and was ambitiously billed as “The ‘Ben-Hur’ of Exploitation Movies!”<sup>72</sup> Corman often promoted promising post-production crew to positions behind the camera, and in 1982 Jones got her chance to direct. Corman’s production company had shelved Brown’s script, which at that time was titled *Don’t Open the Door*.<sup>73</sup> In the documentary *Sleepless Nights: Revisiting the Slumber Party Massacre*, Jones explains that the script “needed work,” and that she did a rewrite before filming.<sup>74</sup> In an interesting instance of what could have been, Jones chose to direct her first movie, a low-budget slasher B picture, over editing *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*. Jones defends her choice to helm a film in such a derided genre: “Some people think I did something horrible by directing a slasher film, but I guess they didn’t see it because it’s also a comedy.”<sup>75</sup> This speaks to the perception of the series as shallow exploitation, no doubt due to its title, which emphasizes the nubile young women violently killed to titillate an (assumedly) undiscerning audience. However, unlike the film’s contemporaries which served up empty kills with little subtext, 1982’s *The Slumber Party Massacre* maintains Brown’s ideology, and benefits

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 191.

<sup>70</sup> Collum, Jason Paul, director. *Sleepless Nights: Revisiting the Slumber Party Massacres*. Shout! Factory, 2010.

<sup>71</sup> “Amy Holden Jones.” IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0427468/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0427468/?ref_=nv_sr_1)

<sup>72</sup> “Hollywood Boulevard.” IMDb, IMDb.com, 25 Apr. 1976, [www.imdb.com/title/tt0074633/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0074633/?ref_=nv_sr_1).

<sup>73</sup> Nashawaty, Chris, and John Landis. *Crab Monsters, Teenage Cavemen, and Candy Stripe Nurses: Roger Corman: King of the B Movie*. Abrams, 2013, 182.

<sup>74</sup> Collum, Jason Paul, director. *Sleepless Nights: Revisiting the Slumber Party Massacres*. Shout! Factory, 2010.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.,

from Jones' female perspective, resulting in a film with more to say about gender and sexuality than expected from its title and marketing.

### **Analysis**

The plot of the film is straightforward and sometimes downright uninspired, although we see glimpses of the radical subtext of Rita Mae Brown's original script amid the typical terror. The film centers on Trish and her friends on the basketball team gathering for the titular Slumber Party while her parents are out of town. As it often does in these kinds of films, this Friday night bash coincides with the escape of mass murderer Russ Thorn, as we are warned by radio announcements and prominent newspaper headlines. Although clocking in at a lean 77 minutes, the majority of the film consists of teen girls wandering in and around Trish's home, with jumpscare both at the hands of their obnoxious friends and eventually the Driller Killer himself. Very little happens in terms of story, but the details in characterization, dialogue, and subtext make for a rich viewing experience nonetheless. Although now a typical slasher on paper, the radical lesbian feminist perspective survives in the form of subtext, despite our inability to ever know Brown's original vision.

The first scene of the film evokes a major theme throughout the movie, the loss of innocence. Protagonist Trish awakens and begins getting dressed, her nudity contrasting with her child-like bedroom. In fact, Trish begins gathering her dolls, toys, and trinkets from girlhood, pausing at a beloved stuffed animal before deciding to hold on to that particular keepsake. She is then shown placing these belongings in the garbage. We see a hand remove a Barbie doll from atop the pile as Trish reassures her parents that she is indeed old enough to stay by herself for the weekend. Later in the film, Thorn affixes the now-bloody Barbie to the window frame with a butcher knife, providing a not-so-subtle image of destroyed innocence. This introduces the struggle the women in the film are experiencing, caught between the safety of girlhood and the dangers of their newfound sexuality. The characters oscillate between these two desires, in turn



embracing their erotic interests while harboring suspicions towards the men they are presumed to engage with sexually. This is especially apparent in the characters of Valerie and Courtney, two sisters who live next door to Trish. The sisters speak frankly about their own sexual pleasure in a way that feels natural and realistic, rather than performative for male viewers. At one point, Courtney makes sure Valerie is busy outside then runs upstairs to Valerie's room searching for something in her drawers and under her mattress. Courtney eventually finds what she is seeking-- a *Playgirl* magazine with Sylvester Stallone on the cover. When Valerie returns and asks Courtney what she's doing, Courtney answers, "homework." Valerie responds with "Ok, but do me a favor and don't tear out the centerfold this time." While male-catered pornography and masturbation are mentioned in many teen films, slasher or not, the implication of female masturbation is almost unheard of. The inclusion of shots featuring nude male pinups from the magazine emphasize an explicit and unabashed acknowledgement of teen girl sexuality, framing it with a casual normality. The sisters, Courtney at 12 and Valerie at 17, speak about masturbation and sex with a familiar ease while also mentioning their anxieties and misgivings on the subject. Courtney is both fascinated by men and afraid of them; at one point she mentions an interaction with a boy her age: "He started kissing me and he stuck his tongue in my mouth. I thought I was gonna throw up!" The juxtaposition of virginal innocence and sexual desire is only emphasized in a scene between the sisters. Valerie teases Courtney about "beating off boys since the 5th grade," while Courtney licks a comically large lollipop and denies her accusations. The vagueness of "beating off" gives this exchange two possible meanings--Courtney has been receiving male attention since 5th grade, or she was engaging in non-penetrative sex acts. The vehement denial on Courtney's part implies the latter, while the huge lollipop characterizes her as childlike. The women in the film are negotiating two warring desires, maintaining their innocence and venturing into the fraught sexual arena. Although it is difficult to claim definitively, this discussion between sisters about pleasure, desire, and experience is not likely to be found in a typical slasher catered to the male gaze. The female authorship of the film is apparent in the nuance and deftness of

these usually exploitative discussions. As Jones mentions in the *Sleepless Nights* documentary, “Credit to Rita Mae Brown, because the film is really about a virgin’s fear of sex.”<sup>76</sup>

Above all else, the film is about female sexuality—the omnipresence of lesbian subtext, the robust curiosity and repulsion towards sex felt by teen girls, the constant threat of male violence through penetration, and the fear of losing innocence by engaging sexually for the first time. To be clear, the characters on screen are not explicitly lesbian—however, the female characters are heavily queer-coded, even when gossiping about boys and heterosexual sex. This may seem contradictory, but the film can be interpreted as working on two levels, the surface reading of familiar story beats as well as the underlying subversion of the very tropes being showcased. It is important to remember that the film was originally written as a satire of the genre before being rewritten as more mainstream with the comedic aspect muted.

(For the purposes of this piece, I will be using the term lesbian in referring to the characterization of the characters rather than queer. While the word “queer” has been used widely in academia to refer to non-normative behavior as well as homosexual activity/identity, lesbian encompasses a specific cultural context, including gendered notions of appearance, social practices, and relationships between female characters.)

The most notable instances of lesbian-coding are seen in supporting characters who appear early in the film. The first victim of the Driller Killer is an unnamed woman employed as a telephone technician. She is wearing denim, a tool belt, her hair held back by a bandana. When she appears atop a ladder, the two main male characters, Neil and Jeff, immediately ogle her behind and begin flirting with her. “Have you considered dating younger men?” Jeff asks. “I haven’t really thought about it,” she responds. The line scans as a tongue-in-cheek joke for audience members who read the woman as gay. Immediately after this encounter, the woman is pulled into the telephone company van by the Driller Killer, pleading for help to the boys who cannot hear her screams. One shot frames her between Thorn’s legs, with his drill hanging

---

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.,

pendulously from his groin, in front of her terrified face. This mimics the poster, which puts the girls in a similar position of subordination. The woman is drilled through the forehead, the first death of the film. She refuses male attention and is subsequently killed by a phallic instrument through the forehead, a gruesome form of penetration shot with the framing of a sexual assault. This interaction introduces a major conceit in the film—the “more masculine,” lesbian-coded characters are constantly preyed upon by male sexuality, in the form of everything along the spectrum from seemingly harmless flirting to explicit sexualized violence.

As aforementioned, the girls are characterized first and foremost as athletes, playing basketball under the direction of their female coach. A plot point in the film revolves around the girls calling their coach to settle an argument over baseball runs from a recent major league game. This emphasis on athleticism and women’s sports adds another layer of queerness. The girls are explicitly physical, strong, and empowered by a traditionally masculine sport. This leads to a scene which encapsulates the cognitive dissonance of Corman-mandated sexploitation with this homosexual undercurrent. After practice, the girls shower together in the locker room, in a scene reminiscent of countless trashy teen sex films of the era. Lingering shots of soapy breasts and bare butts are clearly inserted to fill some sort of quota, as the scene serves no purpose other than to titillate. In the documentary *Sleepless Nights*, which examines the legacy of the series, actress Debra De Liso who played Kim addresses the nudity, saying that directing nude scenes was “hard on [Jones.]”<sup>77</sup> Jones herself describes the scenes as a sort of necessary compromise to create the film she wanted: “When you did a film for Roger there were certain expectations,” she explains.<sup>78</sup> However, there is a curious aside when we hear one girl say, “You know, I think your tits are getting bigger!” Two girls respond with “who, me?” Amid this content for heterosexual men in the audience, we get a hint of homosexual interest, perhaps reminding us that the film is surreptitiously complicating these “expectations.”

---

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.,

The most obvious instance of lesbian subtext is when Coach Jana arrives at her front door after school. As she unlocks the door, a power drill bursts through the wood near her face. Instead of the Driller Killer, the door opens to reveal yet another handywoman, whom Jana greets as Pam. Pam, who has very short hair and presents as butch, explains that she was “putting in [the] peephole,” before reassuring that the shelves she’s working on should be ready soon. Coach Jana’s butch “friend” is shown wielding her own version of the same weapon the killer uses as an extension of his penis, implying the possibility of women to perform and embody an alternative penetrative sex.

In terms of traditionally gendered behavior, the film presents a curious reversal of tropes. The two boys in the film are characterized as more feminine, in that they are physically weaker with less agency in the story. Jones acknowledges this in *Sleepless Nights*, stating that the boys have roles usually reserved for girls.<sup>79</sup> Conversely, the women are confirmed as stronger physically as well as better equipped to survive. In one of the more humorous scenes in the film, Neil and Jeff discuss whether or not they should prank the girls.

Jeff: “Let's go by and scare the girls tonight. [...] You know how girls love to scream.”

Neil: “I don’t know.”

Jeff: “What's the worst that could happen? I mean, so they get mad at us.”

Neil: “They can beat the shit out of us.”

Jeff: “That's right, we did flunk gym.”

While the young men in the film seem aware of their subordinate position, it is reinforced through repeated instances of the girls overpowering them physically. At one point, when the boys scare the girls in the garage by tampering with the fuse box, Kim gives Jeff a black eye by hitting him with the flashlight. Men in the film are complex amalgamations of either feminized, lovesick weakness, or a sexualized threat to the women around them--sometimes, the same character embodies both roles concurrently. Earlier in the film, we follow Diane on her walk home, as seen

---

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.,

through the eyes of her stalker, whom we assume to be the Driller Killer. The camera follows Diane, getting closer and closer, until we see a hand reach out to grab her shoulder. With comical, immediate assuredness, Diane grabs the hand and reflexively flips her follower head over heels. The stalker is revealed to be her boyfriend John, not the Driller Killer, who groans, “Holy shit, I think you broke my back.” Although he is physically emasculated by his girlfriend in an unexpected subversion of gender tropes, John is explicitly compared to the Driller Killer in his desire to follow, touch, and frighten women. Later in the film, he pressures Diane for sex, and she eventually relents after he coerces her. The men in the film are both pathetic and misogynistic, subordinate to the very women they objectify. The final major male presence in the film is also presented as a possible danger to women--Trish’s suspiciously helpful neighbor, Mr. Contant. He is shown as all too eager to look out for his teenage neighbor while her parents are out of town, with hinted lascivious motivations. When Trish is home alone after school, she realizes someone is upstairs and attempts to flee, only to be caught by an apologetic Mr. Contant, who offers a weak explanation for entering. Later, when he catches her and her friends with marijuana, he conspiratorially assures Trish, “I won’t tell if you won’t let your parents know I scared you to death.” In an inexplicable detail, Contant later frightens Diane outside in the dark while he hunts snails with a ridiculously large butcher knife, only to be killed immediately after by Russ Thorn. Often, when we are made to believe the killer is near, it is revealed to be one of the “normal” male characters, which functions both to create suspense and to conflate them with the killer; we are meant to believe that any of these men are capable of hurting these women, with their constant voyeurism, intrusion, and stalking. Visually and thematically, they are presented as almost interchangeable with Thorn. This echoes the latent fear of men and masculinity throughout the film.

Voyeurism is a recurring theme--male characters watch female characters without their knowledge. While the men in the film are implied to be capable of misogynistic violence, they all engage in this more passive form of sexual exploitation. Russ Thorn watches women from the

bushes for the first half of the film, terrorizing them from a distance. The boys Jeff and Neil are also voyeurs, watching in awe as the girls strip and dance nude in an all-female space that they believe to be free from the male gaze. This is textbook gaze theory, engaging with Mulvey's theories on the pleasure in looking at women who do not know they are being looked at. The sexual thrill comes from the ignorance of the women who are being looked at, who are on display for male pleasure always, even in the privacy of their home. While only Thorn is willing to enact violence upon the women, the boys in the film also participate in this visual intrusion, its own form of violation.

Let us now consider Thorn himself, the first of three Driller Killers throughout the series. His drill is the most apparent visual metaphor of the film--he holds the long, twirling drill low near his genitals, clearly a deadly substitute for the penis. The character is middle-aged, not a young attractive teen like his victims, implying the threat of adult male sexuality. Actor Michael Vilella explains his conscious engagement with this aspect of his character in the *Sleepless Nights* documentary.<sup>80</sup> He describes going method on set and stalking the young actresses, as well as claiming his main motivation for Thorn was "love."<sup>81</sup> The drill-as-penis metaphor is mentioned, with Vilella describing applying Vaseline to his drill bit as a simulation of masturbation.<sup>82</sup> Thorn is a silent entity throughout the film, only speaking at the climax when he has cornered Trish, who is pleading for her life. His only lines in the film are as follows: "You're pretty. All of you are very pretty. I love you. Takes a lotta love for a person to do this. You know you want it. You love it. Yes." If the phallic symbolism of his killing method were not enough, Thorn confirms in-text that he is doing this out of a psychotic sexual attraction to the girls, a twisted version of "love" that reenacts penetrative sex as extreme violence. Thorn is the embodiment of rape, the unwanted physical invasion of the female body to satisfy male desire in order to manipulate the

---

<sup>80</sup> Collum, Jason Paul, director. *Sleepless Nights: Revisiting the Slumber Party Massacres*. Shout! Factory, 2010.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*,

woman's form for pleasure. The inclusion of the line "you know you want it" firmly grounds the moment in the context of sexual assault, with the added layer of Thorn preying on women who are coded as lesbian, implying forced "corrective" male sexuality upon women who exist outside the heterosexual framework. The film ends with an unexpectedly powerful visual that only reinforces this reading of female power over a threatening masculine entity. At the film's climax, Thorn struggles with Valerie, her sister Courtney, and Trish, only to realize Valerie has found a weapon of her own in the garage, a machete. In a series of slow-motion closeups, we see Valerie seize her only opportunity to best the killer--castration. She cuts the drillbit in half with her blade, symbolically destroying the sex organ. Villela even comments on the scene: "When that drillbit was cut it was as if my penis was cut."<sup>83</sup> Additionally, Valerie hacks off Thorn's hand, which has been identified in texts on psychosexuality as a sex organ as well. However, this does not signal the end of the struggle. After a moment of relief, Thorn throws himself at the women, screaming and flailing. The final death blow comes only when Valerie runs him through with the machete, recreating the act of penetration and using it against the masculine entity who used it to terrorize. The implications of this scene are many--women are shown as capable of penetrative action as both sex act and form of self-defense, echoing the use of tools by the lesbian-coded handywomen earlier in the film. This also signals a reversal of brutality often seen in slashers focusing on final girls, with peace only achieved through female characters replicating masculinized violence, by redirecting this sexualized violence towards their oppressor. Female survival in this context requires the adoption of male brutality. It is hard to say if this is a problematic means of triumph--questions arise of whether it is possible to survive as a woman without lowering oneself to the same violence of their oppressor. Even in this film, where the defeat of Thorn is shown as unequivocally justified, the film ends on a haunting note not of relief but rather trauma. The final images of the film show Valerie, Courtney, and Trish weeping hysterically, looking at Thorn's

---

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.,

body in horror while sirens approach. It is clear this is not a victory without cost, with an implied emotional aftermath that is expanded upon in the second film.

During his interview for *Sleepless Nights*, Villela states he never thought of the film as abusive towards women, due to the fact it was directed and written by women.<sup>84</sup> This poses a fundamental question about the film--is it feminist only by the virtue of being female-authored? That assertion seems too simplistic and positions every female filmmaker as defined by a specific political movement with which they may not identify. A film created by women is not immune to misogynistic tropes found in male-helmed movies, and the inclusion of such exploitative details do not necessarily serve as commentary on these tropes. However, female-authored films show an inherently alternative perspective, allowing us to study the differences in the gendered gaze on film. The *Slumber Party Massacre* certainly engages with gendered tropes of horror in a way that both subverts and upholds problematic representations of women. The film may not be explicitly feminist, but being written by a self-identified feminist activist lends to a deeper reading, which finds that *The Slumber Party Massacre* is a complex comingling of feminist and lesbian subtexts with the dubious representation of women typical of the genre.

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.,



## CHAPTER III

### *SLUMBER PARTY MASSACRE II*

#### **Production**

After the success of the original film in the home video market, Corman went ahead with a sequel in 1987, yet again choosing a female writer/director, *Rock n' Roll High School II* director Deborah Brock.<sup>85</sup> In *Sleepless Nights*, Brock explains that Corman had already sold the international distribution rights to the film on title alone, allowing Brock to have almost total freedom helming the production.<sup>86</sup> She also penned the script, which expands on the plot of the first film while taking on a campier tone, inspired by her love of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, and in turn produced a horror-musical-comedy that includes full dance numbers, gruesome amateurish practical effects, and a narrative focusing on a girl's fear of her own sexuality after the traumatic events of the first film.<sup>87</sup> Brock addressed the feminist implications of the series' female authorship, by explaining that although she did not set out to make a feminist film per se, she wanted to emphasize the film's feminine voice, pointing to the sisterhood of the girls in the film and their capability as a band, claiming they have more agency and personality than the usual

---

<sup>85</sup> "Deborah Brock." IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0110564/?ref\\_=tt\\_ov\\_dr](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0110564/?ref_=tt_ov_dr)

<sup>86</sup> Collum, Jason Paul, director. *Sleepless Nights: Revisiting the Slumber Party Massacres*. Shout! Factory, 2010.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*,

crop of coeds in these types of films.<sup>88</sup> Like Jones and Brown, Brock also intended to satirize the genre, although in a different manner than the previous film--while the original entry into the series played the satire as a subtle wink, the sequel takes horror tropes as mere suggestions while it constructs its own bizarre vision of horror both silly and earnest.

Production followed the typical conditions of a Corman film, with budget being the biggest priority. Although he was generous with opportunities for women, Corman was also something of a terror on set, on the rare occasions he visited--he was by all accounts domineering and intimidating to both the cast and crew.<sup>89</sup> “We lived in fear of Roger coming to the set. He would not come very often but he would come once or twice during shooting,” Brock remembers.<sup>90</sup> In regards to content, especially the mandated female nudity, Brock explains that “Roger was gonna do whatever he thought was gonna sell the movie best,” which included catering to young male viewers hungry for on-screen nudity.<sup>91</sup> This film is an example of the Corman production method--hands off, little money, lots of freedom--resulting in an oddball film completely unlike any other horror title of the time, or since.

### **Analysis**

While the first entry into the *Slumber Party Massacre* trilogy was a nightmarish invasion of violent male sexuality into a lesbian-coded space, its sequel has decidedly more complicated feelings about sex. *SPM II* chronicles a teen girl confronting her sexual fantasies in the aftermath of trauma, with full musical numbers and a surreal sense of humor. Even within the notoriously weird genre of 80s slasher sequels, the film is an oddity in every way--from its almost experimental editing, its dream logic, and notably its gonzo new take on the Driller Killer. The film is more fever dream than functional narrative, but it presents a darkly funny take on female

---

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.,

fantasies, the complexities of sexual desire in the aftermath of gendered trauma, and the shame women are meant to feel in regards to their sexuality.

Like the first film, *Slumber Party Massacre II* follows a group of girls having a sleepover, although this time the fun lasts a whole weekend at an empty vacation house. The protagonist, Courtney, is the only connection to the first film--she was the spunky, *Playgirl*-reading younger sister who helped kill the original Driller Killer, Russ Thorn. The sequel picks up five years later with Courtney now 17 and trying to live like a normal teen girl, despite her traumatic past. Her older sister Valerie survived the massacre as well but has been committed to a mental institution, driven mad by the horrors witnessed in the first film. This threat of falling into madness haunts the film, as Courtney's grip on reality begins to slip. The trigger for Courtney's hallucinations is her burgeoning sexuality, and her fear of those impulses. Rather than lesbian fears of male sexual penetration, here we see a girl's fear of her own desires.

While the first film operated with a tongue-in-cheek humor that undercut the seemingly serious tone, the sequel is an explicitly satirical horror-comedy, taking advantage of the creative freedoms afforded by Corman for director Debra Brock. The result is high camp, with such overwrought lines as "Sunday's my birthday and I don't want to spend it at a mental hospital!" However, amidst such ridiculous gags as an exploding killer pimple and a possessed raw chicken, the film presents a surprisingly complex take on the typical virgin-in-peril narrative.

Russ Thorn, the original Driller Killer, was a middle aged madman, who forced his violent sexual desires on unwilling young women. However, *SPM II* introduces a radically different antagonist, their own nameless version of the Driller Killer who takes more inspiration from Freddy Krueger than Michael Myers. This Driller Killer is a swaggering rockabilly guitarist, with a tall pompadour, all-leather outfit, and a filligried red guitar that doubles as a giant drill bit. He speaks almost exclusively in 1950s song lyrics, and looks more like a lost member of the Stray Cats than a horror movie villain. Unlike Russ Thorn, this character is not necessarily meant to be frightening. Rather, he's more of a Dr. Frank-N-Furter figure, the enigmatic, violent, yet

undeniably charming character from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (which Deborah Brock used for inspiration.)<sup>92</sup> And like his *Rocky* predecessor, this Driller Killer functions more as a symbol than character, for the dangers of sexual pleasure. He is coded as masculine, certainly, with his phallic drill and overt sexuality, but he is given more feminine attributes, like eye makeup, campy musical interludes, and glimpses of emotional sensitivity. This killer is handsome, mysterious, and blatantly presented as an object of sexual desire. He is less a typical disfigured slasher villain, and more a fantasy object for the female gaze. Furthering the fantasy narrative, he seems to only exist in Courtney's head (until he eventually manifests physically), a creation of her subconscious. This characterization is one instance in which Brock's feminine perspective comes to the forefront--with a kind of reverse femme fatale fetish object catered to women's desires, whose dark sexuality is dangerously attractive.

The Driller Killer haunts Courtney's dreams, and eventually her waking hours as well, but his appearances are usually triggered by her lustful thoughts. The film begins with Courtney's sexual dream about Matt, her all-American, football-playing crush. Matt is a figure of ideal masculinity, nonthreatening, handsome, athletic, popular. And yet Courtney's dream is interrupted by the cackling, shadowy presence of the Driller Killer. This is a recurring pattern--every time Courtney slips into sensual daydreams, the Killer emerges to torment her. In one of these hallucinations, Valerie, trapped in the asylum, urges Courtney: "Don't go all the way!" It is implied that the Killer drove Valerie insane, and now he's coming for Courtney; the Driller Killer, to put it simply, is Courtney's "dream" man, a manifestation of her sexuality she finds both attractive and terrifying.

One aspect of the film indicative of its disorienting, dream-like structure is the non-chronological editing and unconventional framing. This could be attributed to amateur production, but the choices are made repeatedly and with seeming intention by the filmmakers. The stylistic flourishes reflect the hallucinogenic nature of the plot, which leaves the viewer

---

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.,

unsure as to whether we are seeing reality or fantasy. Editor William Flicker would go on to edit multiple episodes of *Pee Wee's Playhouse*, another example of his cutting imbuing a surreal playfulness to a genre considered unsophisticated (in this case, children's television.)<sup>93</sup> The editing is particularly notable, with frenetic nightmare imagery flashing over scenes of suburban normality. Some shots during these hallucinatory sequences take on an air of the subliminal, with evocative imagery such as bloodied sheets, a dead dove, close-up kissing, and a severed arm thrown atop a birthday cake. Even in these images on screen less than a second, we understand that this film is primarily concerned with loss of innocence, in multiple ways--Courtney preparing to lose her virginity, and being corrupted by this latent violence.

It is this confrontational, aggressive yet whimsical style that distinguishes the film from less inventive slashers of the era, and reflects the themes of the film visually. Often, actors are made to look straight into the camera, usually during musical interludes or hallucinatory sequences, to jarring effect. This is particularly notable in the framing of Matt, the idealized love interest. He is repeatedly shown staring into the camera, the audience inhabiting Courtney's perspective as he stares at her longingly. Director Debra Brock addressed these unusual shots in her commentary on the film: "We shot [Matt] intentionally in these strange close ups because the idea is to give you this feeling that maybe he's not the nice guy he seems to be at the beginning. [...] At one point we thought about having the same actor play Matt and play the Driller Killer and this would be, you know, this psychological thing that they're two sides of the same guy."<sup>94</sup> This intentionality supports a reading of the film as more than paint-by-numbers slasher fare, but rather a more complex (if technically poorly executed) feminine commentary on genre tropes.

The presence of a feminine gendered gaze in the film is evidenced by these unconventional decisions. Rather than only presenting women as titillating objects of pleasure, both Matt and the Driller Killer are shown in what are essentially pinup poses, tossing a football

---

<sup>93</sup> "William Flicker." IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0282284/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_nm\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0282284/?ref_=fn_al_nm_1)

<sup>94</sup> Brock, Deborah, director. *Slumber Party Massacre II*. Concorde, 1987.

shirtless and peacocking in leather, respectively. We the audience are made to identify with Courtney in these moments, rather than the typical male camera gaze. Matt and the Driller Killer are specific female fantasy objects, exaggerated in their embodiment of “good” and “bad” sexuality, a male equivalent of the virgin/whore dichotomy. The original intention to have Matt and the Driller Killer portrayed by the same actor only underlines the psychosexual aspect of the film, and the characterization of male individuals is fraught with both erotic curiosity and fear.

The juxtaposition of sexuality and violence in the film support a post-trauma reading of the narrative. This interpretation serves as an interesting continuation and departure from the sexual politics of the first film, which leaned on lesbian subtext and sapphic fear of male penetration. For the majority of the film, her friends believe Courtney is losing her mind, refusing to believe her cries for help. This is particularly potent in the context of abuse and trauma, with the common occurrence of a female victim being disbelieved. Courtney’s past is referred to multiple times by her friends, to alternately comforting and caustic effect. The boorish TJ responds to Courtney’s breakdown by saying, “Courtney should just go see a shrink if she can’t loosen up,” while the kinder Matt reassures Courtney that he does not think she’s crazy: “I think you’re a very sensitive person and something bad happened to you when you were little.” Courtney’s narrative is that of a young woman who survived the first film’s titular massacre, and that unaddressed trauma permeates her life to the point of madness. This psychological break we witness in the film is intrinsically tied to Courtney’s burgeoning sexuality, which triggers her memories of sexualized terror from the first film. This psychological slant is addressed in the audio commentary by Brock: “This is actually a movie about a girl who has delayed stress because she and her sister [...] were involved in the terrible goings-ons in the first film and Courtney is just starting to suffer now. She grows up and has hit puberty here.”<sup>95</sup> In regards to a scene in which Courtney is kept up at night by her friends having sex in the next room, the director adds: “The sexual component is starting to disturb Crystal’s [Bernard, the actress who

---

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.,

plays Courtney] stress about the horrible things that happened at the Craven's house in part one. [...] Basically her sexuality is very repressed and when she gets exposed to sexuality it brings up bad violent things for her. It's kind of a Freudian film."<sup>96</sup> Producer Don Daniels points out that "It's really different from a lot of movies of this genre where you have sex and you die. Here you don't really even have to have sex and you die."<sup>97</sup> In a genre where sexuality is punished, the aftermath of traumatic events in horror are not often explored in the films (with such exceptions as the *Scream* series and the most recent *Halloween* (2018)). However, in *SPM II* the antagonist is that trauma personified, evolving from the inner turmoil of those repressed memories of sexualized violence. This is a rare example of the villain springing from the mind of the protagonist, her psyche turning against her rather than an outside entity. The Driller Killer is the specter of sexual and physical violence from the past, which is inextricably linked to her sexual curiosity.

Dreams are a recurring theme in the film, both in terms of content and structure. This aligns with a post-trauma interpretation, as nightmares are a common symptom of those who survive trauma. Obviously, this allows for the film to indulge in surreal and fantastical moments, but also utilize unexpected symbolism and metaphorical significance. Early in the film, Courtney's mother says, "Dreams are one way our minds deal with frightening experiences [...] your sister has problems because she's never been able to release...." This concept of "release" has multiple meanings--the release of pent-up sexual energy, emotional catharsis, and the constant threat of possible eruptions of violence. This brings to mind Robin Wood's 1975 article "Return of the Repressed," which posits that horror is primarily concerned with ignored, taboo impulses personified., often emerging from nightmares.<sup>98</sup> Courtney's sexuality is repressed as a consequence of her trauma, and it returns in a vengeance in the form of the Driller Killer, first in

---

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>98</sup> "Return of the Repressed." Robin Wood on the Horror Film: Collected Essays and Reviews, by Robin Wood, Wayne State University Press, 2018.

her subconscious and eventually in reality. Dreams are the initial domain of the Driller Killer, and he constantly invades Courtney's pleasant dreams similarly to his spiritual successor, Freddy Krueger. Like the *Nightmare on Elm Street* villain, this mental violation takes on a sexually-coded significance.

The Driller Killer is a figure defined by the act of penetration. As aforementioned when discussing the first film, the drill as chosen weapon is perhaps the most phallic method of murder. The film even underlines this sometimes comical representation of the male member with a winking comment--TJ reads from a pornographic novel: "His burning lips seared her rose of a mouth while his pulsating tool drove deep into the confines of..." before gasping at the paperback romance. When he kills, the Driller Killer wags his tongue, blows kisses, and recites lyrics such as "this is dedicated to the one I love." In a twisted, darkly humorous way, the film is a romance between Courtney and her tormentor. Although he is a threat, the movie presents him as a charming, enigmatic bad boy who shares significant chemistry with Courtney, even as he is swaggering toward his victims brandishing his own pulsating tool. He is undeniably appealing for female viewers, an aspect almost always lacking in slasher films of the era, which provide plenty of nude women as eye candy for a presumed male audience. In the full musical number for "Let's Buzz," the Driller Killer performs an extended dance sequence to the camera--he is alone, performing high-camp choreography presumably to titillate the heterosexual women or gay men in the audience. The character is also afforded odd, unprecedented moments of quiet humanization. Perhaps the most jarring instances in a film that includes an animatronic chicken occurs when the Driller Killer ceases terrorizing and hints at his motivation, offering some telling exposition for a character who is primarily a metaphysical mystery. The most significant moment occurs in the first half of the movie and perhaps is the most cogent distillation of the film's theme. After struggling to sleep with the cacophony of loud lovemaking from the next room, Courtney dreams she's in bed with Matt, on an idyllic morning after. However, Matt becomes the Driller Killer, who coerces her with such explicit sexual threats as "You know you want it." He



then reveals Valerie's dead body near the bed, and says with a disturbing wistfulness "I've had Valerie. I'm tired of Valerie. I just wanna make love to you." The Driller Killer grabs Courtney by the shoulders and looks her in the eyes while explaining "I am you, and you are me, until we go all the way." This is the crux of the film, the confirmation that the Driller Killer exists as a fragmentation of Courtney's psyche which becomes so powerful it alters her perception of reality and crosses over into the physical realm. She cannot be free until she confronts her trauma, "releasing" herself from the erotic and mental tension by giving into her latent desire and fear of this violent sexuality.

It would be remiss to discuss the film without mentioning the sexualization of the young women within the story. While it is true that the film is more equal opportunity in its objectification, ostensibly due to the female gaze of the writer/director, the film is still Corman exploitation, which requires a certain level of visual stimulation for the male audience. The most obvious instance of this is a truly ridiculous strip pillow fight. The character of Sheila is nothing but the most basic stereotype of a high school slut, and she is ogled by the voyeuristic boys while she dances topless with her friends, spraying champagne and grinding against the floor lamp while pouting directly to camera. The sequence would not be out of place in a soft core porn film. We must acknowledge that although the film showcases a female gaze by presenting male pleasure objects, it also conforms to exploitative expectations of female nudity catered toward heterosexual male viewers.

The ending of the film brings the running theme of fantasy vs. reality full circle. After Courtney seemingly defeats the Driller Killer by setting him on fire, we cut to Courtney and Matt asleep in bed, leading us to question whether or not the entire film was a dream. However, when Courtney kisses Matt, he once again transforms into the Killer. Courtney screams hysterically, and it is revealed that she is trapped in a mental institution, the final shot being a drill bursting up through the floorboards. The film does not execute this double fake-out particularly well, in that it leaves the viewer confused as to whether the entire film took place in Courtney's head. However,

one theme is clear: Courtney cannot defeat the Driller Killer, she cannot escape her trauma, and she will forever be trapped by the memories of the first massacre. Courtney's relationship to sex, men, and even reality has been forever altered by the gendered violence she has experienced. For such a lighthearted film, the ending is bleak in its finality. She refuses to acknowledge her desires and traumas, and because of this she cannot find a "release" for her fractured psyche.

In the DVD commentary, the following exchange occurs between Debra Brock and interviewer Jason Paul Collum:

Brock: "These are really breakthrough feminist films in terms of women in jeopardy. The *Slumber Party* series."

Collum: "And they get slammed for being misogynistic."

Brock: "They do?"

Collum: "Which doesn't make a lot of sense."

Brock: "Cause they're not misogynistic actually."<sup>99</sup>

Like any piece of media, meaning is in the eye of the beholder. Especially when it comes to representations of women, the line between reinforcing misogynistic tropes and subverting them is thin. The film, and the series at large, engages with these established images of women in torment, satisfying the expectations of an exploitative production model while offering an alternative vision of feminine power--one that is complicated by trauma, sexual confusion, fear of men, and survival. For a film which Brock describes as "all in good fun, [...] the happy good time horror movie," it presents a feminine, tongue-in-cheek version of a genre so dominated by misogynistic images of women, examining the aftereffects of gendered trauma with a disarming sense of humor and gonzo imagination.<sup>100</sup>

---

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.,

## CHAPTER IV

### *SLUMBER PARTY MASSACRE III*

#### **Production**

With the popularity of the first two films in the rental market, a third and final movie was produced in 1990, three years after the previous sequel. For this installment, Corman associate producer Sally Mattisson was given directing duties, her only directorial credit to date.<sup>101</sup> Before *SPM III*, Mattisson worked primarily in another exploitation genre, ultra-cheap martial arts action movies with titles such as *Bloodfist* and *Last Stand at Lang Mei* (both 1989).<sup>102</sup> Writing duties were assigned to Catherine Cyran, a fellow producer for Corman during the late 80s.<sup>103</sup> Cyran herself would go on to direct, mostly direct-to-video titles, and she produced 10 screenplays for Corman from 1990 to 1995.<sup>104</sup> By all accounts, these female creators were simply cranking out another sequel, with *Slumber Party Massacre III* being one of four projects Mattisson worked on in 1990, and one of three scripts Cyran wrote the same year.<sup>105</sup><sup>106</sup> As evidenced by the uneven and meandering film, it seems that the women behind the scenes for this installment were not intentionally engaging with feminist representations or gendered horror

---

<sup>101</sup> “Sally Mattisson.” IMDb, IMDb.com, [www.imdb.com/name/nm0560370/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0560370/?ref_=nv_sr_1).

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>103</sup> “Catherine Cyran.” IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0194274/?ref\\_=tt\\_ov\\_wr](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0194274/?ref_=tt_ov_wr).

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>106</sup> “Sally Mattisson.” IMDb, IMDb.com, [www.imdb.com/name/nm0560370/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0560370/?ref_=nv_sr_1).

tropes. The result is a film that addresses a new subject, male sexual trauma, albeit only as a tawdry plot point.

### Analysis

The third installment of the franchise marks a significant downturn in both entertainment value and subtext--comparatively, the third film makes the original two entries look like Ibsen. The plot is indecipherable, the killer's motivations never explored in depth, and the latent feminist leanings of the other films is notably missing. While the first two films engaged with teenage female sexuality in a way that felt real and lived in, *Slumber Party Massacre III* plays like a typical direct-to-video slasher, a shallow tale of tortured teens without much underlying commentary on genre conventions and gender relations. However, the film is not totally creatively bankrupt--it addresses, albeit poorly, a new aspect of sexual trauma unique to this entry in the series. Child sexual assault, voyeurism, and familial abuse are all touched upon, however briefly, to explain the actions of the new Driller Killer, Ken Whitehouse. While the previous film focused on the reemergence of traumatic memories from Courtney's past, this version positions the male killer as a survivor, irreparably damaged by the sexual abuse he experienced as a child.

The film's plot yet again revolves around the titular slumber party, this time with a group of California teens interested in little more than beach volleyball and casual sex. After meeting handsome former classmate Ken Whitehouse on the beach, the girls and guys invite him to join them for beer and pizza. After keeping the identity of the killer a mystery throughout the first half of the film, it is abruptly revealed that Ken is the one drilling the teens to death one by one. Although poorly explained, it eventually becomes apparent that Ken has been triggered by the recent suicide of his uncle, a former police officer who sexually abused him throughout his childhood. As in first film, Ken is eventually defeated by protagonist Jackie, who turns his own drill against him.

Compared to the two previous Driller Killers, Ken's character is a stark departure. He is not a middle aged psycho obsessed with young girls like Russ Thorn, or a metaphysical sex demon prone to one-liners and dance moves. Instead, he was first and foremost a victim of his own sexual torment at the hands of his family member. This is an unexpected choice, shifting the trauma from the young women at

the center of the story to the killer himself. While he is not portrayed as sympathetic per se, this humanizing detail is afforded to a male antagonist for the first time in the series. He is clearly at the mercy of his twisted psyche, enacting a kind of revenge by proxy on his abuser. This also marks the first time in the series that the killer was revealed to be an explicit love interest of one of the young women. While the relationship between Courtney and the Driller Killer was undoubtedly sexualized in the second film, we are introduced to Ken as a handsome stud flirting with Juliet, presenting him as a nonthreatening boyfriend rather than secret sadist. The opposite fake out technique has been used multiple times in the series, tricking the audience into believing that the male characters are actually dangerous only to have them killed by the real villain. While this previously functioned as a method of suspense building while making us question the trustworthiness of the men in the film, Ken's characterization reinforces this suspicion of men in an altogether different way. Even seemingly harmless and sweet men are shown as capable of misogynistic depravity. This is the only aspect of the film that succeeds in being truly frightening--that any man could be an abuser, no matter how he appears. In fact it is the abuse enacted upon Ken by another seemingly honorable man, a police officer, that facilitates his breakdown and subsequent murders.

As seen in the first two films, the other male characters exhibit varying degrees of lechery at the expense of the female characters, specifically through the recurring theme of voyeurism. Every film in the series has featured the "classic" 80s slasher scene of young men spying on women as they undress. This is shown through multiple point of view shots from the voyeurs' perspective, breathing heavily while watching the girls dance nude or make out with their boyfriends. We are positioned as the voyeur, implicated in our own scopophilic viewing of the sex and violence on screen. Regardless of any violent intention, all men are shown as possible sexual threats in some form or another. When Jackie comes home at the beginning of the film, she finds her creepy neighbor Morgan looking around inside, yet another older man from the neighborhood whose intentions are suspect (like Mr. Contant in the first film.) He claims he is interested in buying the home, but is later shown watching Jackie and her friends across the street from a telescope, reading a book on human anatomy. We can only wonder that if Ken had not

crashed the party whether Morgan would have menaced the girls in a similar fashion, as it is shown he is certainly capable of disturbing behavior. The high school boys in the film show a similar proclivity for voyeurism. The more lascivious ones, Tom and Michael, advocate for them to take advantage of the party to peep on the women. Michael explains that “A stud would never pass up an opportunity like this,” while Tom takes the plan a step further with “I got the perfect solution—we can all get an eyeful and they won’t even know who we are!” He suggests they scare the girls while they’re undressing by wearing Halloween masks; this way they can gain sexual gratification without revealing their identities, leaving the girls unsure of who spied on and terrorized them. Even Frank, the one male character who objects to taking advantage of the women, is pressured into joining them. Yet again, even the most trustworthy men in the film eventually give into their voyeuristic tendencies. Finally we have the most obvious red herring, a character known only as “The Weirdo.” He is first shown watching the girls play volleyball from afar on the beach. One of the boys, Duncan, shouts “You! Buddy keep your eyes to yourself! See, he averted his eyes. That’s a sign of submission. I learned that studying orangutans in biology class.” A throwaway line, perhaps, but it establishes the power relationship in looking and being looked at. Echoing gaze theory, the watcher is in control of the situation, objectifying the women’s bodies for pleasure without their consent or knowledge. Those who look away are submitting, while those who look are exerting dominance. We are meant to believe that The Weirdo is the killer from the beginning--an obvious choice with his antisocial behavior and threatening appearance. The Weirdo continues his peeping tom routine throughout the film, following the girls back to Jackie’s home and lurking outside, until he is dispatched by Ken in ridiculous fashion with the sharpened bill of a taxidermied swordfish. Interestingly, Ken and The Weirdo are both introduced as watching the girls on the beach, the only difference being their appearance. Even the charming Ken has the following loaded exchange with Juliet on the beach--

Juliet: “Sightseeing?”

Ken: “I like what I see.”

Rather than the typical quiet loner, the killer is an athletic golden boy, subverting expectations and presenting even the most ideal vision of masculinity as capable of extreme violence. Fear of men is a

running theme through the series, of course, but this is the most explicit instance of every male character looking to exploit, assault, or kill the women in the film. The message is clear--even if the man outside is not trying to kill you, he is probably watching you undress.

Ken's sexuality is the trigger for his psychotic episodes, and the violence he enacts is clearly linked to his twisted sense of lust. This is evidenced in the kill scenes, which oscillate between over-the-top silliness and truly disturbing sadism. The power drill makes its return, but this time it is used in a somehow even more explicit sexual manner. When the first victim is murdered in her car, we see the drill tear into the back of the driver's seat, impaling her from behind. Rather than the slashing or stabbing motions seen in the previous films, one close-up shot shows the drill being pushed in and out, in and out, mimicking intercourse. Ken is performing a kind of penetrative rape by proxy, pressing into the girl again and again. Although it may seem an arbitrary distinction from the quicker kills of previous films, the extended stabbing scenes emphasize the symbolism of sexual violence to disturbing effect. Ken is shown as being triggered by people touching his genitals, which first occurs in a sex scene with Juliet. When he suddenly recoils at her touch, Juliet reassures "Ken don't worry, there's other ways to make me happy," after which he performs oral sex on her. Interestingly, this is the first instance in the series of a man giving a woman pleasure without penetration, an act which focuses on the gratification of the woman only. Immediately after, Juliet discovers a plug-in vibrator in the bathroom while running a bath. In a moment of cruel irony, Ken electrocutes Juliet by dropping the electric vibrator into the bath, killing her with a symbol of female pleasure that bypasses male participation altogether. She enjoys oral sex from Ken, who then punishes her for experiencing such gratification that deems male penetration unnecessary. Ken's twisted perception of sex focuses only on non-consensual penile stimulation, destroying women who enjoy sex outside of that paradigm. Later in the film, Ken recreates his love scene with Juliet on the terrified Suzy--rather than kissing up and down her chest and stomach, he strokes her body in the same manner with the tip of his drill. This scene with Suzy is a turning point in the film, where the campy fun tone of the series turns extremely dark. We linger on Ken straddling Suzy, slapping and punching her in the face while he screams at her. While the earlier films would have showed this exchange quickly,

perhaps undercut with a one liner, this is graphic, intimate, extended violence enacted upon a woman pinned to a bed by a man. In a series that usually addresses these serious issues with a winking satirical bent, this is the most visceral and shocking moment of gendered violence.

As he torments his victims, Ken's personality fractures into two distinct voices--that of his abusive uncle as well as himself as a child, the period of his life during which he was abused. Shortly after Ken is revealed as the killer, we see a macabre shrine he has created in the back of a van, the walls plastered with pictures of his uncle, surrounded by lit candles and the corpses of his victims. Staring at the newspaper clipping reporting on the cop's suicide, Ken whispers "Uncle this is for you" before resuming his massacre. While terrorizing the girls, Ken adopts the persona of his uncle, shouting such lines as "be nice to uncle, girls," and "Uncle Billy has something for you, come and get it!" However, in his more vulnerable moments, Ken regresses to the voice of a young boy, begging his uncle to stop: "Please Uncle Billy I don't wanna do this!" Even his victims recognize this personality split, with Maria offering understanding in an effort to calm him. "I know somebody did something really awful to you, but it wasn't me Ken!" She then offers him her body in exchange for her life, which only serves to further trigger his psychosis. While the film engages with child sexual abuse as motivation for Ken's actions, it offers a cartoonish and crass representation of Ken's trauma. He reacts to being victimized by not only embodying the his abuser, but reenacting the violence he suffered on others. While the first two films in the series are by no means nuanced examinations of mental illness (Russ Thorn has escaped from a mental institution, and Courtney's psyche disintegrates with laughable results,) the third entry portrays an abuse survivor as a psychotic mass murderer, unable to reconcile identity, delusion, and reality. It is rare that we see a male survivor of sexual abuse perpetrated by another man in a horror film, especially as the crux of the story. Compared to the feminine trauma shown in the second film, Ken's reaction as a male to his sexual exploitation is more violence, rather than the hysterical fear the female characters succumb to. Ken is a male abuse survivor who reacts to his trauma by perpetuating and recreating the violence he experiences, raising questions about gendered reactions to sexual trauma. While obviously a problematic representation of male victims, the film attempts to demarcate the different effects of sexual violence on



men and women. When the women in the series go mad, they are overcome by terror, while the madmen enact that terror on others, particularly women who interest them sexually.

All three installments of the franchise feature a similar ending, the symbolic destruction of the male sexual threat. In the first film, we saw a simulated castration, the second showed Courtney setting the Driller Killer ablaze, and finally here we see the theme of feminine reclamation of the penetrative power object come full circle. Rather than defeating the killer with her own weapon, Jackie wrestles the drill away from Ken and stabs him over and over, even going so far as to cry “Die! Die!” as she plunges the drill in and out. This is the first time that the final girl defeats the Driller Killer with his own phallic implement, reclaiming the masculine instrument used to torment her. This is the most on-the-nose moment in the series of a woman forced to adopt the method of male violence, implying there is no escape without lowering herself to the same brutality. Yet again, the ending is triumphant yet bleak, implying that the female characters are irreparably changed by the events they survived.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

#### **Then and Now: Female-Created Horror Post-SPM**

While the *Slumber Party Massacre* films are not widely regarded as a turning point in women-helmed horror, they do span a period of time, from 1982-1990, in which horror from women became more commonplace and appreciated. The 1980s saw more female-authored horror, although mostly ultra-low budget exploitation fare. The first *Slumber Party Massacre* film not only inspired two sequels, it also led to directorial assistant Carol Frank to write and direct her own Corman slasher, *Sorority House Massacre* in 1986.<sup>107</sup> Interestingly, when women create horror films, they often challenge genre conventions, as seen in Jackie Kong's 1987 *Blood Diner*, a wacky horror comedy with a gonzo tone similar to the second *SPM* film.<sup>108</sup> Katt Shea, another Corman protege, directed three horror films in from 1987-1989: the stripper slasher films *Stripped to Kill* and *Stripped to Kill 2: Live Girls*, as well as the vampire romance *Dance of the Damned*.<sup>109</sup> Female horror in the 80s reached its zenith with the critically-acclaimed and visually arresting *Near Dark*, the second feature film from writer-director Kathryn Bigelow who would go on to be the only woman to win a Best Director Academy Award.<sup>110</sup> A melancholy drama, the film follows a gang of outlaw vampires welcoming an Oklahoma farmboy into

---

<sup>107</sup> "Carol Frank." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0290867/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0290867/?ref_=nv_sr_1).

<sup>108</sup> "Jackie Kong." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0465034/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_nm\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0465034/?ref_=fn_al_nm_1)

<sup>109</sup> "Katt Shea." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0002240/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0002240/?ref_=nv_sr_1).

<sup>110</sup> "Kathryn Bigelow." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000941/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000941/?ref_=nv_sr_1).

their fractured family dynamic. Although certainly a horror film--Bill Paxton's Severin slits a bartender's throat with a boot spur--the movie presents a sophisticated narrative with significant depth and artful direction, a high-water mark of quality 80s horror.

The 1990s saw a boom of women behind the camera in the genre, with women taking over major franchises and high-profile adaptations. Noted music video filmmaker Mary Lambert directed *Pet Sematary* (1989) from a script by Stephen King adapting his own novel, and its sequel *Pet Sematary II* in 1992.<sup>111</sup> Rachel Talalay, who worked as a production manager on the first two *Nightmare on Elm Street* films and producer on the third and fourth installments, graduated to directing 1991's *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare*.<sup>112</sup> This is a recurring theme in the careers of women in horror--again and again we see that female filmmakers work their way up from the bottom on multiple films for the likes of Corman and Craven before making their directorial debut. The aforementioned Katt Shea reached mainstream success with 1992's *Poison Ivy*,<sup>113</sup> and the same year Fran Rubel Kuzui brought the first iteration of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to theaters.<sup>114</sup> In the mid-90s, more serious female auteurs began dabbling in horror, resulting in a spate of films that marry pitch-black comedy with hyper-violence. Acclaimed feminist artist Cindy Sherman wrote and directed the slasher satire *Office Killer* (1997), a film that focuses on the trials of being a woman in an office environment full of back-stabbing and sexual harassment.<sup>115</sup> This is one of the very first horror feature films that explicitly acknowledges its feminist perspective, a predecessor of the robust feminist horror output of the present day.

The turn of the century saw a series of three critically acclaimed art house horror films directed by women, expanding the horror genre to address heady concepts of desperate savagery, yuppie psychopathy, and blood-drenched sexuality. The first of these is the 1999 cannibal film *Ravenous*,

---

<sup>111</sup> "Mary Lambert." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0005116/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0005116/?ref_=nv_sr_1).

<sup>112</sup> "Rachel Talalay." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0003080/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0003080/?ref_=nv_sr_1).

<sup>113</sup> "Katt Shea." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0002240/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0002240/?ref_=nv_sr_1).

<sup>114</sup> "Fran Rubel Kazui." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0476900/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_2](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0476900/?ref_=nv_sr_2).

<sup>115</sup> "Cindy Sherman." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0792398/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_2](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0792398/?ref_=nv_sr_2).

directed by Antonia Bird.<sup>116</sup> The film is a product of a female director taking on a horror film dominated by violent masculinity, focusing on military men on the American frontier in the late 1800s menaced by a cannibalistic pioneer. Another example of a woman helming a story focused on violence in the male psyche came a year later, with Mary Harron's *American Psycho* (2000).<sup>117</sup> The Bret Easton Ellis adaptation (with a screenplay by Harron and Guinevere Turner) is notable in its cold, apathetic tone which mimics the mindset of the titular madman as he massacres women after using them for sexual gratification.<sup>118</sup> One can't help but remember the conversations around Barbra Peeters, the public fascination with a woman directing a film which depicts misogynistic and sexual violence. The film earned Special Recognition from the National Board of Review for Excellence in Filmmaking.<sup>119</sup> Finally, horror reached the heights of the art film when French auteur Claire Denis released *Trouble Every Day* in 2001.<sup>120</sup> The film follows two lovers who descend into vampiric madness as their lust for each other turns violent. Such a highly regarded filmmaker as Denis taking on the genre as a follow up to her internationally acclaimed *Beau Travail* (1999) gives horror, especially female-created horror which addresses themes of sexuality, a new kind of credibility.<sup>121</sup>

Finally, after a lull in both quality and quantity of horror in general, let alone female-authored films, the 2010s brought a renaissance in the genre which echoed the more inventive independent fare of the late 90s and early 2000s. Recent years have brought us such celebrated international horror titles as Jennifer Kent's *The Babadook* (2014)<sup>122</sup>, Ana Lily Amirpour's *A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night* (2014)<sup>123</sup>, and Julia Ducournau's *Raw* (2016)<sup>124</sup>, signaling an explosion of women's horror around the world. Stateside we have seen such remarkably varied achievements in the genre as Karen Kusama's

---

<sup>116</sup> "Antonia Bird." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000944/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000944/?ref_=nv_sr_1).

<sup>117</sup> "Mary Harron." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0366004/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_nm\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0366004/?ref_=fn_al_nm_1).

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>119</sup> "American Psycho." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, 14 Apr. 2000, [www.imdb.com/title/tt0144084/?ref\\_=nm\\_knf\\_t1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0144084/?ref_=nm_knf_t1).

<sup>120</sup> "Claire Denis." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0219136/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0219136/?ref_=nv_sr_1).

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>122</sup> "Jennifer Kent." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0448768/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0448768/?ref_=nv_sr_1).

<sup>123</sup> "Ana Lily Amirpour." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm3235877/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm3235877/?ref_=nv_sr_1).

<sup>124</sup> "Julia Ducournau." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm4469445/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm4469445/?ref_=nv_sr_1).

emotionally wrenching *The Invitation* (2015)<sup>125</sup>, Anna Biller’s feminist 60s sexploitation throwback *The Love Witch* (2016)<sup>126</sup>, and Leigh Janiak’s harrowing nature horror *Honeymoon* (2014)<sup>127</sup>. While these films are collectively categorized as elevated horror, old-fashioned exploitation films are made by the likes of the Soska Sisters, twins whose credits include *American Mary* (2012) and *Dead Hooker in a Trunk* (2009)<sup>128</sup>.

Since the first *Slumber Party Massacre* in 1982, the genre has expanded into every creative direction, with everything from high art to trash films falling under the horror umbrella. With this development in the genre, we have seen massive leaps in opportunities for women to present their perspective on the genre. Horror specifically by and about women in frightening situations has become a medium for the exploration of feminist issues such as rape and assault, misogyny, revenge, pregnancy, sexual agency, motherhood, and masculine violence. Women’s horror allows female filmmakers as well as audiences of any gender to examine the inherent fears of womanhood on film.

## **Conclusion**

As film scholars, forgotten pieces of paracinema<sup>129</sup> pose a challenge to what is and is not considered worthy of study. Although not every forgotten film is suited to academic reexamination simply by virtue of existing, it is useful to study some of these bad objects as sites of transgressive themes and representation, as the exploitation model of production allowed for more creative freedom than studio films. There is a reason that the series has been lost to time to all those other than the most hardcore horror fans, as the franchise did not have a significant popular impact. However, these films embrace their low status, which affords them more freedom to include such feminist (or simply feminine) subtext such as lesbianism, female sexuality, and gendered trauma. As the 80s ushered in more conservative ideology

---

<sup>125</sup> “Karyn Kusama.” *IMDb*, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0476201/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0476201/?ref_=nv_sr_1).

<sup>126</sup> “Anna Biller.” *IMDb*, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0082366/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_nm\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0082366/?ref_=fn_al_nm_1).

<sup>127</sup> “Leigh Janiak.” *IMDb*, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm4074404/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_2](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm4074404/?ref_=nv_sr_2).

<sup>128</sup> “Jen Soska.” *IMDb*, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm3609341/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm3609341/?ref_=nv_sr_1).

<sup>129</sup> Sconce, Jeffrey, ‘Trashing’ the academy: taste, excess, and an emerging politics of cinematic style, *Screen*, Volume 36, Issue 4, Winter 1995, Pages 371–393, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/36.4.371>

on gender and sexuality, the films adjusted to this new historical context. The male villains in the films represent shifting visions of violent masculinity, transforming from a mindless middle-aged psycho creeping on young lesbian women, to a sexy female fantasy that challenged women's desires and fears of men, to an idealistic Reagan youth harboring secret perversions despite his squeaky-clean appearance. The series is a fascinating case a shifting socio-political landscape being reflected even in lowbrow horror. While bigger budget studio productions are beholden to higher expectations, made to appeal to a general audience, films like the *Slumber Party Massacre* series are inherently niche, targeting an undiscerning viewership looking for cheap cinematic thrills. However, this discounting of the films quality allow them to explore more transgressive ideas about gender and sexuality. The undervaluing of female filmmakers which led them to only gain opportunities for work in the exploitation industry mirrors the undervaluing of the slasher genre, and this lack of investment risk resulted in female-authored films that implicitly addressed transgressive women's issues. While women were (and remain) shut out from reputable Hollywood films, female-authored horror is a doubly marginalized filmic space where women can explore a genre so inherently tied to gender with a creativity rarely afforded by mainstream films. The *Slumber Party Massacre* series may not be considered classics, or even considered at all, but they are a compelling collection of rare films in which women present their own version of horror which uniquely reflects their feminine identity.

## REFERENCES

- “American Psycho.” IMDb, IMDb.com, 14 Apr. 2000, [www.imdb.com/title/tt0144084/?ref=nm\\_knf\\_tl](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0144084/?ref=nm_knf_tl).
- “Amy Holden Jones.” IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0427468/?ref=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0427468/?ref=nv_sr_1)
- “Ana Lily Amirpour.” IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm3235877/?ref=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm3235877/?ref=nv_sr_1).
- “Anna Biller.” IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0082366/?ref=fn\\_al\\_nm\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0082366/?ref=fn_al_nm_1).
- “Antonia Bird.” IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000944/?ref=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000944/?ref=nv_sr_1).
- “Barbara Peeters.” IMDb, IMDb.com, <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0676336/>
- Brock, Deborah, director. *Slumber Party Massacre II*. Concorde, 1987.
- Brown, Rita Mae. *Rita Will: Memoirs of a Literary Rabble-Rouser*. Bantam Books, 1997.
- “Carol Frank.” IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0290867/?ref=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0290867/?ref=nv_sr_1).
- “Catherine Cyran.” IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0194274/?ref=tt\\_ov\\_wr](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0194274/?ref=tt_ov_wr).
- “Cindy Sherman.” IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0792398/?ref=nv\\_sr\\_2](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0792398/?ref=nv_sr_2).
- “Claire Denis.” IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0219136/?ref=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0219136/?ref=nv_sr_1).
- Clover, Carol J. *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. B.F.I. Pub., 1992.
- Collum, Jason Paul, director. *Sleepless Nights: Revisiting the Slumber Party Massacres*. Shout! Factory, 2010.
- Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. Psychology Press, 1993.
- “Deborah Brock.” IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0110564/?ref=tt\\_ov\\_dr](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0110564/?ref=tt_ov_dr)
- “Debra Hill.” IMDb, IMDb.com, [www.imdb.com/name/nm0384185/](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0384185/).
- “Doris Wishman.” IMDb, IMDb.com, <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0822555/>
- Dworkin, Andrea. *Intercourse*. Basic Books, 1987.
- “Fran Rubel Kazui.” IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0476900/?ref=nv\\_sr\\_2](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0476900/?ref=nv_sr_2).
- Freeland, Cynthia A. (1996). Feminist frameworks for horror films. In David Bordwell Noel Carroll (ed.), *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*. University of Wisconsin Press. pp. 195--218.

- Holmlund, Chris. "Cruisin' for a Brusin': Hollywood's Deadly (Lesbian) Dolls." *Cinema Journal*, vol. 34, no. 1, 1994, pp. 31–51. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/1225654](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1225654).
- "Hollywood Boulevard." IMDb, IMDb.com, 25 Apr. 1976, [www.imdb.com/title/tt0074633/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0074633/?ref_=nv_sr_1).
- "Jackie Kong." IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0465034/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_nm\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0465034/?ref_=fn_al_nm_1)
- "Jen Soska." IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm3609341/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm3609341/?ref_=nv_sr_1).
- Jenkins, Henry. "Exploiting Feminism: An Interview with Stephanie Rothman (Part One)." Henry Jenkins, Henry Jenkins, 16 Oct. 2007, [henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/10/stephanie\\_rothman.html](http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/10/stephanie_rothman.html).
- "Jennifer Kent." IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0448768/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0448768/?ref_=nv_sr_1).
- Jones, Amy Holden, director. *Slumber Party Massacre*. 1982.
- "Julia Ducournau." IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm4469445/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm4469445/?ref_=nv_sr_1).
- "Karyn Kusama." IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0476201/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0476201/?ref_=nv_sr_1).
- "Kathryn Bigelow." IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000941/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000941/?ref_=nv_sr_1).
- "Katt Shea." IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0002240/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0002240/?ref_=nv_sr_1).
- Knipfel, Jim. "Humanoids from the Deep (1980) Review." Den of Geek, 12 Jan. 2013, [www.denofgeek.com/us/movies/humanoids-from-the-deep/48374/humanoids-from-the-deep-1980-review](http://www.denofgeek.com/us/movies/humanoids-from-the-deep/48374/humanoids-from-the-deep-1980-review).
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection*. Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Laqueur, Thomas. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Harvard University Press, 1992.
- "Leigh Janiak." IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm4074404/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_2](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm4074404/?ref_=nv_sr_2).
- Lotman, Jurij M., and Julian Graffy. "The Origin of Plot in the Light of Typology." *Poetics Today*, vol. 1, no. 1/2, 1979, pp. 161–184. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/1772046](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1772046).
- Luckett, Moya. "Sexploitation as Feminine Territory: the Films of Doris Wishman." *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Tastes*, edited by Mark Jancovich, Manchester University Press, 2003, pp. 142–155.
- "Mary Harron." IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0366004/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_nm\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0366004/?ref_=fn_al_nm_1)
- "Mary Lambert." IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0005116/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0005116/?ref_=nv_sr_1).
- Mattison, Sally, director. *Slumber Party Massacre III*. 1990
- Mulvey, Laura. Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, *Screen*, Volume 16, Issue 3, Autumn 1975, Pages 6–18, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6>
- Nashawaty, Chris, and John Landis. *Crab Monsters, Teenage Cavemen, and Candy Stripe Nurses : Roger Corman: King of the B Movie*. Abrams, 2013.



- Olson, Scott R. "COLLEGE COURSE FILE: STUDIES IN GENRE—HORROR." *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 48, no. 1/2, 1996, pp. 67–79. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/20688095](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20688095).
- "Rachel Talalay." IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0003080/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0003080/?ref_=nv_sr_1).
- "Return of the Repressed." *Robin Wood on the Horror Film: Collected Essays and Reviews*, by Robin Wood, Wayne State University Press, 2018.
- "(RE)SITUATING AND (RE)PLAYING THE GENRE." *Making and Remaking Horror in the 1970s and 2000s: Why Don't They Do It Like They Used To?*, by David Roche, University Press of Mississippi, 2014, pp. 119–153. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vkm5n.9](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vkm5n.9).
- "Rita Mae Brown." IMDb, IMDb.com, <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0114522/>
- "Roberta Findlay." IMDb, IMDb.com, <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0011897/>
- "Sally Mattison." IMDb, IMDb.com, [www.imdb.com/name/nm0560370/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0560370/?ref_=nv_sr_1).
- Sconce, Jeffrey, 'Trashing' the academy: taste, excess, and an emerging politics of cinematic style, *Screen*, Volume 36, Issue 4, Winter 1995, Pages 371–393, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/36.4.371>
- "Sneak Previews With Siskel & Ebert - 'Women In Danger' Horror Films (1980)." YouTube, YouTube, 1 Dec. 2018, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbtUnOHAX3E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbtUnOHAX3E).
- "Stephanie Rothman." IMDb, IMDb.com, <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0580571/>
- Squires, John. "Long Lost Version of 1983's 'A Night to Dismember' Was Just Found and Uploaded to YouTube." *Bloody Disgusting!*, 9 Aug. 2018, [bloody-disgusting.com/movie/3514790/long-lost-version-1983s-night-dismember-just-found-uploaded-youtube/](http://bloody-disgusting.com/movie/3514790/long-lost-version-1983s-night-dismember-just-found-uploaded-youtube/).
- "William Flicker." IMDb, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0282284/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_nm\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0282284/?ref_=fn_al_nm_1)
- Williams, Linda. "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess." *Film Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4, 1991, pp. 2–13. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/1212758](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1212758).

VITA

Lyndsey Kathryn Broyles

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: FEMALE AUTHORSHIP IN THE *SLUMBER PARTY MASSACRE* TRILOGY

Major Field: English

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in English at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2019.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in English at University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico in 2016.