# FROM BATES TO BUSH

# THE NEW SLASHER FILM

By

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Bachelor of Arts in Film Studies

University of Oklahoma

Norman, Oklahoma

2007

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTER OFARTS
July, 2011

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I am forever in the debt of Drs. Stacy Takacs, John Kinder, and Jeffrey Walker for their willingness to read through multiple drafts of a project on murder and mayhem. I owe a special "Thank You" to Dr. Takacs for being such a helpful guide in what seemed the darkest of hours; her advice, understanding, and counsel proved much too invaluable when the burdens of coursework, teaching, research, and writing weighed on me the most and anxiety loomed the largest. This essay owes much to her stewardship and to our conversations on film and culture.

Moreover, I'd like to sincerely thank the following people for their varying influence on this project: Dr. Brian Price, for introducing me to Richard Rorty, for being such a thoughtful and patient man, and for convincing me to study at OSU; Dr. Carol Mason, for guiding me through the wonderful world of Michel Foucault and for making me feel like I had the whole world ahead of me; Dr. Ron Brooks, for teaching me how to teach and for his passion for students; Dr. Carol Moder, for her understanding and for her friendship; Dr. William Decker, for every kind word of wisdom and encouragement that he has uttered to me in the hallways of Morrill Hall (though I've never been his student); Dr. Merrall Price, for her helpful hand in ensuring that I became a Master of Arts; Dr. Meghan Sutherland, for strengthening my work at the sentence level and for reintroducing me to *Hostel*; Dr. Hugh Manon, for his temperament, his insight and his laughter; *O'Collegian* advisor Barbara Allen, for her friendship and for helping me try my hand at opinion writing and political journalism; director Fritz Kiersch, for teaching me how to make a movie (and how not to); to my unsung editors, Hal Moncrief, Liz Drew, and Megan Rossman.

I'd like to especially thank Dr. Betty Robbins, for being a mentor, for her love of film theory and history, for her intellectual fervor, for being a dear friend, for being one of the loveliest human beings I've ever met, and for teaching me to never settle for less than my dreams. I love you muchly, friend, and this project *simply* wouldn't exist without your encouragement.

Most importantly, however, I'd like to thank my mother, Cloise Cooper, for every bit of love, for every kind word, for every smile, for every vote of confidence, for every helpful anecdote, for always believing in me (even when I told her I was going to film school). No words could possibly describe the impact my mother has had on me and on seeing this project through to its completion. You're an inspiration, you're the heart of the house, and you're the best mother a son could ever want. God speed you in whatever you do, you lovely woman.

I dedicate this essay to my mother, to the students I've taught here at OSU, to my very best friends Charity Rolirad-Caldwell and Austin Tackett, and to my little sister Susan Cooper. Thanks for being the best movie companions a fella could ask for.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

# CHAPTER I

## FROM BATES TO BUSH

A country without memory is a country of madmen. —George Santayana

### The Final Boy

Opening on Christmas Day in 2005 was the horror film *Wolf Creek* (Greg McLean, 2005), one of the financial success stories in a decade dominated by horror both real and imagined. The film's plot is fairly straightforward. Three young people travel across Western Australia in a small car on their way to Wolf Creek Crater, the site of a meteorite crash many years earlier. Here, they encounter the psychotic Mick (John Jarratt) and, for the remainder of the tale, the three friends endure all manner of sadism and torture. Late in the film, *Wolf Creek*'s central protagonist, Liz (Cassandra Magrath), makes a desperate attempt to commandeer one of Mick's cars to escape her sadistic captor. Liz breathes a sigh of relief as she finally manages to start one of the cars. As she leans back in the seat and closes her eyes for a brief second, Mick appears suddenly in the backseat of the car, laughs, and plunges his knife through the front seat—and through Liz. Liz falls from the car and finds Mick standing over her holding a large knife.

Then, describing a little trick used in the Vietnam War to take prisoners and "still get the same information out of 'em," Mick plunges the knife into her back, effectively severing her spine and making what he calls "a head on a stick." And just like that, *Wolf Creek* dispatches Liz, the character the film's director, Greg McLean, describes in an interview on the film's DVD as "like the main character."[1]

This moment in *Wolf Creek*, the death of the film's central female protagonist, represents something serious and provocative for the contemporary horror film, particularly regarding the evolution of the genre and the representation of women in film. With its psychotic madman, women shrieking in terror, and prolonged scenes of graphic and brutal violence, *Wolf Creek* looks like nothing so much as a 1980s slasher film—the cinematic tale of a psychotic killer who stalks and murders a seemingly endless series of mostly female victims. In an interview with *Movies Online*, the film's director acknowledges the similarity, noting the particular spiritual debt *Wolf Creek* owes to Tobe Hooper's 1974 film *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and its slasher killer, Leatherface.[2]

To understand the significance of Liz's brutal and violent demise in *Wolf Creek*, it is useful to return briefly to Hooper's film, particularly its final moments. In *Chainsaw*, a group of five young people traveling in a van across Texas have the misfortune to encounter a family of slaughterhouse workers mechanized out of work. After the chainsaw-wielding Leatherface and his cannibalistic family brutally murder her friends and brother, Sally (Marilyn Burns) endures a night of torture as the family's reluctant dinner guest. Dawn breaks and Sally escapes to a nearby highway where she climbs into the back of a pickup truck, barely avoiding the swing of Leatherface's chainsaw as she rides away to safety. From the back of the truck, Sally watches in hysterics at the receding horror, the image of Leatherface frantically swinging his chainsaw in the middle of a Texas highway until the film's end credits finally roll. Thus, Sally emerges as

*Chainsaw*'s lone survivor, what film theorist Carol Clover has dubbed the "Final Girl"—the lone survivor who "encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and of her own peril; who is chased, cornered, wounded; whom we see scream, stagger, fall, rise, and scream again."[3] Following *Chainsaw*'s Final Girl in 1974, subsequent slasher films such as 1978's *Halloween* and 1980's *Friday the 13th* began featuring a more active female protagonist, leaving each successive Final Girl alone to stare death in the face, defeat the monster and save herself, a development that scholar Andrew Tudor notes as "all but unheard of prior to the seventies."[4]

Liz's death in *Wolf Creek* represents more than the simple killing of the film's central protagonist. In the film's final moments—following the death of would-be Final Girl Liz—the narrative reveals the fate of Liz's fellow travel companion, Ben (Nathan Philips), who awakens to find himself *Wolf Creek*'s lone survivor. Here, Ben discovers himself nailed to a wall in a mock crucifixion. In several dramatic close-ups, Ben struggles to free himself, the camera focusing on his forearms as he endures the pain of prying himself free by forcing each nail through his flesh. His efforts prove successful, and he eventually escapes to freedom. Thus, *Wolf Creek* concludes with the emergence of a Final Boy, its male hero free from further torture and its male monster free to roam the Australian Outback.

Where precisely is the horror here? Specifically, is torture the fear and Mick its representative monster? What, then, of the victim who endures the torture? In Ben's survival, is he, like the Final Girl, simultaneously victim and hero? What collective fears, cultural anxieties, and nightmares might these new slasher films reflect for contemporary audiences? It would seem the answers are more complicated than a first glance would suggest. That current scholarship on the contemporary horror film,

academic and mainstream alike, neglects the historical and theoretical connection between horror films such as *Wolf Creek* and earlier slasher films like *Chainsaw* only further complicates such questions. If, for instance, the death of Marion Crane in *Psycho*'s infamous shower scene in 1960 provides the earlier slasher film with one of its most enduring generic imperatives—the female victim—what are we to make of recent semantic shifts in the contemporary horror film where the victim function wants manifestation through its male characters, specifically male characters such as *Wolf Creek*'s Ben who we see endure prolonged sequences of sadism and torture? Most notably, if, according to Clover, the 1970s and 1980s slasher film empowered women with the Final Girl, then what does her frequent absence and even death in these new films signal?

I would argue that this critical shift in gender dynamics, as characterized in recent films such as *Wolf Creek*, generates textual and cultural meaning for the contemporary horror film. Thusly, this essay will resituate contemporary horror films such as *Wolf Creek*, Eli Roth's *Hostel*, Marcus Nipsel's *Friday the 13th* remake, and Rob Zombie's *Halloween* remakes in their larger historical and cultural context, focusing not only on the evolution of the slasher monster but, consequently, on the evolution of the earlier slasher protagonist—the Final Girl—to the slasher film's 21st century hero—the Final Boy. To understand what makes McLean's *Wolf Creek*, Roth's *Hostel*, Zombie's *Halloween II* or any of these films part of a genre, it would seem useful to ask what makes each specific film "horrifying."

**On the Significance of Genre**

Writing in the early days of 2006, film critic David Edelstein describes in a brief essay for New York Magazine the recent trends in the American horror genre. Here, he mentions the popular *Saw* franchise—which recently released entry number seven in 3D—Rob

Zombie's *The Devil's Rejects* (2005), Eli Roth's *Hostel* (2006), and McLean's film, *Wolf Creek*.[5] As Edelstein points out, each respective horror film features prolonged scenes of graphic torture, scenes where the camera lingers on bloodied bodies becoming bloodier. Edelstein christens these films "Torture Porn" and declares it a new wave in horror films. And currently, even the academic scholarship surrounding these films has adopted his provocative term. Like Edelstein, horror scholars tend to contextualize the films within America's recent national debate surrounding torture and morality, emphasizing their connection to the disturbing images of torture present in the infamous Abu Ghraib photographs, CIA reports on enhanced interrogation techniques, and the whispers of torture in places such as Guantanamo Bay or Bagram, Afghanistan.[6] In other words, these essays and articles read the contemporary horror film as political allegory, or commentary, that deals implicitly with the various misdeeds and excesses of the unpopular Bush Administration. To argue that these films reflect the cultural anxieties of a nation debating the morality of torture and the politics of 9/11 is not necessarily a misreading. Certainly, the work of theorists such as Giorgio Agamben and Elaine Scarry deserves the attention that current scholarship on these films devotes to them. Yet, this scholarship, and the emphasis it puts on issues of sovereignty and the body, nevertheless overlooks something important: the dramatic shifts in the representation of gender that define these films, and how these shifts at once complement and complicate current discussions on the contemporary horror film. After all, just whose tortured bodies are we talking about here?

The current study of horror films like *Wolf Creek* suggests there exists no precedent for the graphic and gory excesses present in the extended torture scenes of the contemporary horror film. As Edelstein argues, "Torture movies cut deeper than mere gory spectacle. Unlike the old seventies and eighties hack-'em-ups (or their jokey remakes, like *Scream*), in which masked maniacs punish nubile teens for promiscuity

(the spurt of blood was the equivalent to the money shot in porn), the victims here are neither interchangeable nor expendable."[7] Edelstein misses the obvious connection between his own earlier terminology—"Torture Porn"—and his use of the word "porn" in his brief description of the slasher film. For Edelstein, only the presence of torture connects films such as *Saw, Hostel*, and *Wolf Creek*. Yet, no less than seven *Saw* films and two *Hostel* entries suggests that the victims do, in fact, become interchangeable and expendable. Edelstein's observations aside, I would suggest that torture and the interchangeable and expendable victims who endure it emerge as the connective threads between these individual films.

So, when is a slasher film not a slasher film? When it has torture in it? To better understand the confusion that terminology like "Torture Porn" raises, we should consider the specifics of Rick Altman's seminal 1984 essay, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre." Early in his essay, Altman asks, "What is a genre? Which films are genre films? How do we know to which genre they belong?"[8] To answer his questions, Altman turns to the semantic and syntactic approaches to genre studies, two competing tendencies in genre scholarship that his essay seeks to reconcile into a dual approach. In each of these approaches to genre studies, critics and genre theorists assume that film genres develop in a vacuum wherein the semantic elements present in a particular set of films—i.e. specific shots, editing techniques, characters, and settings—owes nothing to the historical context in which they exist. Rather than setting aside either the syntactic approach—i.e. scholarship that focuses on the arrangement of those specific elements in relation to each other—and the semantic approach to genre studies, however, Altman argues that the two approaches are not wholly irreconcilable. Specifically, Altman suggests that only a dual approach that accounts for both the semantics and the syntax of film genre answers the questions that genre studies raise. As Altman argues, "As long as Hollywood genres are conceived as Platonic categories,

existing outside the flow of time, it will be impossible to reconcile *genre theory*, which has always accepted as given the timelessness of a characteristic structure, and *genre history*, which has concentrated on chronicling the development, deployment, and disappearance of this same structure" (632).[9] Specific historical analysis, then, complements this dual approach to genre studies, suggesting that the semantic elements emerge at particular moments in time. Consequently, then, we find the problem with Edelstein's "Torture Porn" terminology: in his creation of an altogether new generic category, we find ourselves limited in the discussion of the contemporary horror film, with current scholarship focusing only on what appears to be a recent development in the genre—i.e. scenes of brutal and graphic torture—rather than examining how torture has long existed in the horror film and interrogating instead how individual films use such depictions of violence to generate textual and cultural meaning for the genre.

Thus, Altman's attempt to reconcile genre history with the existing semantic and syntactic approaches is the task here in our own consideration of the recent generic shifts in the contemporary horror genre. In the title of his essay, Edelstein questions the popularity of these new horror films, asking why American audiences have turned to this new genre with its bloody depictions of graphic and prolonged torture. His question reflects a similar question in Altman's discussion on spectatorship and audience response to genre films. In fact, Altman concludes his essay with a brief commentary on the subject, leaving film genre scholars to work through the relationship between audience and genre films. Here, Altman notes:

> Spectator response, I believe, is heavily conditioned by choice of semantic elements and atmosphere, because a given semantics used in a specific cultural situation will recall to an actual interpretative community the particular syntax with which that semantics has traditionally been

> associated in other texts… Suffice it to say for the present that linguistic meanings (and thus the import of semantic elements) are in large part derived from the textual meanings of previous texts (640).

Considering that most recent film criticism, academic and mainstream alike, neglects the historical and theoretical connection between so-called "Torture Porn" and the slasher film, it is useful to borrow Altman's dual approach to genre criticism to understand the evolution of the genre and how contemporary horror films such as McLean's *Wolf Creek* or Zombie's *Halloween II* remake use the conventions of the 1980s slasher film to rearticulate horror in the 21st century. More specifically, we should briefly review the key semantic elements from that earlier (sub) genre, the arrangement of those specific elements in relation to each other, and the cultural significance of this particular formulation for the seventies and eighties horror film.

**The Slasher Film: A Historical Precedent**

Describing the horror genre, Altman suggests, "Horror films borrow from a nineteenth century tradition their dependence on the presence of a monster. In doing so, they clearly perpetuate the linguistic meaning of the monster as 'threatening inhuman being,' but at the same time, by developing new syntactic ties, they generate an important set of textual meanings" (639). As Altman notes, however, the textual meaning of the monster in those earlier literary texts differs considerably from their twentieth century cinematic iterations. Citing nineteenth century literary texts such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and Balzac's *La Recherche de l'absolu* as precedent for the twentieth-century horror film, Altman writes:

> For the nineteenth century, the appearance of the monster is invariably tied to a romantic overreaching, the attempt of some human scientist to

> tamper with the divine order…[and] a studied syntax equates man and monster, attributing to both the monstrosity of being outside nature as defined by established religion and science. With the horror film, a different syntax rapidly equates monstrosity not with the overactive nineteenth century mind, but with an equally overactive twentieth-century body (640).

More importantly, Altman suggests that the horror film would seem to insist upon the presence of the monster as "monstrous double" to its human counterpart's unfulfilled sexual desires, with film after film using the earlier nineteenth century linguistic meaning of monster as 'threatening inhuman being' within new syntactic relations to generate new textual meanings. It is within this context that we must consider the semantic elements that define the slasher film.

Writing in her highly influential 1987 essay, "Her Body, Himself," Carol Clover describes trends in horror films of the 1970s and 1980s, noting, "At the bottom of the horror heap lies the slasher (or splatter or shocker or stalker) film: the immensely generative story of a psychokiller who slashes to death a string of mostly female victims, one by one, until he is subdued or killed, usually by the one girl who has survived."[10] Noting *Psycho* as the ancestor of the slasher film, Clover writes of Hitchcock's 1960 film:

> Its elements are familiar: the killer is the psychotic product of a sick family, but still recognizably human; the victim is a beautiful, sexually active woman; the location is not-home, at a Terrible Place; the weapon is something other than a gun; the attack is registered from the victim's point of view and comes with shocking suddenness (24).

In *Psycho,* these elements structure a film wherein a young woman named Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) steals $40,000 from her bank employer, packs her bags, and flees Phoenix, Arizona to rendezvous with her lover in Fairvale, California. En route, a thunderstorm prevents Marion from reaching her final destination, leading her to pull off the highway and to the Bates Motel. Here, she meets Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) and, a few scenes later, a grisly end while nude in the film's infamous shower scene. Stabbed to death by an unknown assailant, the death of Marion in *Psycho* provides the slasher film with one of its most enduring generic imperatives—the victim. Still, as Clover notes, "None of these features is original, but the unprecedented success of Hitchcock's particular formulation, above all, the sexualization of both motive and action, prompted a flood of imitations and variations" (24). To understand the textual meaning that *Psycho*'s particular formulation generates for the subsequent slasher film in the 1970s and 1980s, let us first consider briefly the key semantic elements present in the genre.

Firstly, we find in the slasher film its monster—the psychokiller. In *Psycho*'s final moments, we learn Norman Bates' ghastly secret: that he, disguised as his long dead mother, killed Marion Crane. Describing the specifics of the slasher monster, then, Clover writes, "The notion of a killer propelled by psychosexual fury, more particularly a male in gender distress, has proved a durable one, and the progeny of Norman Bates stalk the genre up to the present day" (27). As we hear the psychiatrist explain at the end of *Psycho*, Norman killed his mother and her new lover in a jealous rage ten years earlier. Guilt ridden, he steals his mother's corpse, preserves it in the fruit cellar, and then begins to adopt her personality, speaking for her and even carrying on conversations with her before eventually dressing in her clothes. Accordingly, when Norman Bates meets Marion Crane, he finds her sexually arousing and their encounter triggers in Norman his jealousy of his mother's relationship, leading the "mother half" of Norman's mind to brutally murder Marion. Thus, in *Psycho*'s final moments, we see

Norman sitting in a jail cell wrapped in a blanket, alone with his thoughts. Though his lips never move, we hear him speak in Mrs. Bates' voice one final time and, in a close up, we see the image of her mummified skull superimposed over Norman's face, providing the slasher film with its generic imperative—the psychokiller.

Moreover, then, we find in the slasher film its victims. As Clover observes, "Where once there was one victim, Marion Crane, there are now many: five in *Texas Chainsaw Massacre I*, four in *Halloween*, fourteen in *Friday the 13th III*, and so on" (32). And, as Marion's murder in *Psycho* illustrates—and subsequent slasher films exacerbate—the slasher genre seems less interested in the bodies of its male characters than with the bodies of its female victims. Moreover, these victims tend to die at a moment of sexual transgression. We see, for instance, the young counselors of Camp Crystal Lake in 1980's *Friday the 13th* venture off into the wilderness looking for the perfect spot to engage in some form of sexual interplay. In fact, in the original *Friday the 13th*, Jason drowns as the result of two counselors paying more attention to each other's bodies instead of young Jason as he swims in the nearby lake. Yet, as Clover notes, in the moments where killers such as Jason punish these sexually active young couples, the camera remains fixated on the female body in various states of duress and pain. As Clover notes:

> But even in films in which males and females are killed in roughly even numbers, the lingering images are of the latter. The death of a male is nearly always swift, even if the victim grasps what is happening to him, he has no time to react or register terror. He is dispatched and the camera moves on. The death of a male is moreover more likely than the death of a female to be viewed from a distance, or viewed only dimly…or indeed to happen offscreen and not be viewed at all. The murders of women, on the

> other hand, are filmed at closer range, in more graphic details, and at greater length (35).

Here, the visual aesthetics of the slasher film are particularly revealing, a stylistic development at the core of most work on the genre. The slasher film's use of the subjective point-of-view shot aligns the viewer with the killer for the bulk of the murders. As the camera adopts the killer's POV, we watch the killer penetrate the bodies of these female characters with a wide assortment of phallic weapons (chainsaws, machetes, power drills, scalpels, etc.).

Thirdly, horror scholars devote considerable attention to the setting of the horror film, particularly what Clover describes in the slasher film as the Terrible Place. Here, unsuspecting young people stumble upon the killer's veritable abode of horrors. In her description of the Terrible Place, Clover writes:

> The Bates mansion is just one in a long list of such venues—a list that continues, in the modern slasher, with the decaying mansion of *Texas Chainsaw I*, the abandoned and haunted mansion of *Hell Night*, the house for sale but unsellable in *Halloween*…and so on. What makes these houses terrible is not just their Victorian decrepitude, but the terrible families—murderous, incestuous, cannibalistic—that occupy them (30).

For Clover, the Terrible Place emerges as a critical semantic element present in the slasher film, an element that suggests the gender anxieties deeply embedded in the genre. The Terrible Place becomes the site where the Final Girl battles the killer. It is also in this setting, this Terrible Place, where the camera permits the audience to shift its perspective from the killer to the Final Girl, allowing her to return the gaze of the monster as she defeats him and restores order to the community.

Lastly, then, we find that the slasher story is not the killer's alone but also that of the one girl who has survived—the Final Girl. In *Psycho*'s final moments, we watch Marion's sister, Lila Crane (Vera Miles), snoop through the Bates mansion while Marion's boyfriend, Sam Loomis (John Gavin), distracts Norman at the hotel. Here, Lila discovers Mrs. Bates' petrified corpse hidden in the fruit cellar and she screams. The sound draws Norman down into the cellar and we see him run into the room disguised as his mother and wielding a large knife. Before he attacks Lila, however, Sam bursts in and wrestles Norman to the floor as Lila looks on in horror. Thus, Lila emerges as *Psycho*'s Final Girl, not necessarily the film's lone survivor, but the generic ancestor of Final Girls in subsequent slasher tales. In *Psycho*, we watch Lila explore the Terrible Place, perceive the full extent of the preceding horror, stare death in the face, and survive Norman Bates' final attack. Though Lila does not save herself, her presence in *Psycho* paves the way for subsequent slasher films to rework her character in such a way that by 1978's *Halloween*, the film's Final Girl, Laurie Strode (Jamie Lee Curtis), not only survives but, indeed, fights off the killer long enough for Dr. Sam Loomis, her assailant's psychiatrist, to save her. In 1980's *Friday the 13th*, no male rescuer exists and the film's Final Girl, Alice (Adrienne King), saves herself after beheading the killer with a machete. By Wes Craven's 1984 film, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, we find the film's Final Girl, Nancy (Heather Langenkamp), setting an elaborate trap in preparation for the film's slasher killer, Freddy Krueger. As Krueger trips trap after trap, Nancy mounts her defense, attacking the killer with no less than a sledgehammer and a fire before eventually defeating the monster, saving herself, and emerging as the film's lone survivor—the Final Girl.

From victim to hero, the presence of the Final Girl represents a noticeable shift in the semantic shape of the protagonist in the horror films of the 1970s and 1980s. As Clover notes:

> With the introduction of the Final Girl, then, the *Psycho* formula is radically altered. It is not merely a question of enlarging the figure of Lila but of absorbing into her role, in varying degrees, the functions of Arbogast (investigator) and Sam (rescuer) and restructuring the narrative action from beginning to end around her progress in relation to the killer (41).

With the presence of the Final Girl, then, the slasher film affords us an active female protagonist, specifically a lone female protagonist who stares death in the face and lives to tell the tale. More importantly, the slasher film's visual aesthetics positions us with the Final Girl in the film's concluding moments. Here, the slasher film's use of the subjective point-of-view shot aligns us with Final Girl and offers her a vantage point not afforded to earlier female characters. This camerawork stands in stark contrast to the earlier moments in a slasher film when we're aligned with the killer's POV for the bulk of the murders.[11]

Consequently, then, the slasher film's final moments illustrates Altman's assertion that the horror film presents the monster as "monstrous double" to its human counterpart's unfulfilled sexual desires. In *Psycho*, then, we find a mentally scarred and sexually repressed Norman Bates propelled to serial murder as a result of his father's death and his mother's unforgiving attitude towards her son's growing sexual maturity. Accordingly, we find in *Psycho*'s Norman Bates the film's victim, protagonist, and monster, his murder of Marion Crane the tragic result of psychological repression—i.e. "the mother half of his mind." With subsequent slasher tales reconfiguring *Psycho*'s Lila as a more active female protagonist—presenting her from the onset as intelligent, resourceful, and generally more sexually reluctant than her female counterparts— we find in the Final Girl the killer's congenial double. Describing the relationship between

the Final Girl and the killer, Clover explains, "The tale would indeed seem to be one of sex and parents…The Final Girl enacts in the present, and successfully, the parenticidal struggle that the killer himself enacted unsuccessfully in his own past—a past which constitutes the film's backstory. She is what the killer once was; he is what she could become should she fail in her battle for sexual selfhood" (49). Thus, by 1980's *Friday the 13th* and 1984's *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, the cinematic tale of the psychokiller who stalks and kills a seemingly endless series of mostly female victims becomes equally the tale of the one girl who stares death in the face long enough to survive, defeat the monster, and triumph over evil.

As Clover notes, "the spiritual debt of all the post-1974 slasher films to *Psycho* is clear, and it is the rare example that does not pay visual tribute, however brief, to the ancestor—if not in a shower stabbing, then in a purling drain or the shadow of a knife-wielding hand" (26). Visual tribute, as it turns out, might not be a useful phrase in describing what each subsequent slasher film aims for in its aesthetics. Instead, as we turn to our analysis of the new slasher film and our discussion on the evolution of the horror film, it helps to borrow from philosopher Richard Rorty his notion of redescription. Early in his chapter, "The Contingency of Language," Rorty writes, "The method is to redescribe lots and lots of things in new ways, until you have created a pattern of linguistic behavior, which will tempt the rising generation to adopt it, thereby causing them to look for appropriate new forms of nonlinguistic behavior for example, the adoption of new scientific equipment or new social institutions."[12] Seen in this context, the horror films of the 1970s and 1980s—particularly Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Carpenter's *Halloween*, Cunningham's *Friday the 13th* and Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street*— become more interesting. Specifically, it helps to think of the directors associated with the earlier slasher film as part of a rising generation of filmmakers, as a community coming of age in the fifties and sixties and

retooling the language of Hitchcock's *Psycho* for the seventies against the real-life backdrop of Watergate, the Women's Movement, and the horrors of the Vietnam War rather than as an organized cinema movement with rigid rules regarding form, casting, and aesthetics.

In her own discussion of the popular '70s and '80s slasher film, Clover notes their multiple references to *Psycho*, suggesting that the slasher film simply restages the aesthetics of Hitchcock's earlier text and reconfigures the Final Girl against the backdrop of the Women's Movement. Rather than calling such references a "restaging," we should consider the "references" to *Psycho* as moments of redescription, moments where directors like Hooper, Carpenter, and Craven redescribe the earlier language of the slasher film in a new way that is not just a variation on that earlier work. Instead, as Rorty would suggest, Hooper (and the individual filmmakers of the earlier slasher films) gets at something that no one else has and "expresses something which had long been yearning for expression" (19). In this moment, these filmmakers become poets, redescribing and rearticulating the victimization and objectification of women in the 1970s and 1980s, giving visual representation to their experience just as the language of feminism had done in the sixties. In the pages that follow, we'll consider how *Hostel*, the *Friday the 13th* remake, and the *Halloween* remakes redescribe the slasher monster for contemporary audiences.

**The New Slasher Film (Or, the Night *He* Came Home)**

Rather than lumping individual films together and creating wholly new categories divorced from historical context—à la Edelstein—let us consider how individual new slasher films redescribe the themes and formal mechanics of the earlier films. Where *Psycho* presents the monster as decidedly human, I would suggest that so-called "Torture Porn" films trouble and rearticulate the themes and formal mechanics of the

earlier slasher film, redescribing the slasher monster as "monstrous other," as a fantastic element beyond our understanding of the world and the way we understand the natural world to function. Christopher Sharrett's discussion on the trends in American horror films of the 1980s and 1990s helps illustrate this assertion more clearly. Drawing on Robin Wood's assertions that the horror film— perhaps more than any other film genre— makes problematic the construction of Self/Other, particularly the construction of what is "evil" in Western society, Sharrett notes:

> From its inception in the German expressionist cinema and the Universal horror films of the 1930s, the genre seemed to understand the Other as a scapegoat and to refuse to see the monster as aberration to be put down to secure bourgeois normality. The horror films of the 1960s and 1970s became steadily more progressive, constantly challenging the legitimacy of capitalist, patriarchal rule, with the monster no longer metaphysical or the product of a lab experiment gone awry, but instead an emblem of the upheaval in bourgeois civilization itself, a perfectly ordinary bourgeoise, thus dissolving further the Self/Other dichotomy.[13]

Rarely is this assessment truer than in low budget slasher films such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Halloween*, seventies horror films where, like *Psycho* and Norman Bates in the sixties, the monster is decidedly human—the byproduct of cultural, political, and sociological factors rather than as a "monstrous other," an external evil beyond our human understanding of the natural world. For Wood (and by extension Sharrett), the horror film suggests a radicalism inherent within the genre in its critique of the social constructions of normality/abnormality, a refusal of the monster as Other, a trend that Sharrett suggests subsequent horror films of the 1980s and 1990s reverse in disturbing ways. Specifically, Sharrett suggests that films such as *Near Dark* (Kathryn

Bigelow, 1987), *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991) and *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1992) co-opt the genre's radicalism and restore the Other as such. Discussing *The Silence of the Lambs*, Sharrett explains, "The film's attitude towards gay culture and feminism flows axiomatically from its attitude towards *difference*, which must be restored through a sacrificial violence that acknowledges the Other by its obliteration, a strategy that admits both the credulity and skepticism of the spectator; the 'specialness' of the Other and our sympathies with it are acknowledged as its monstrous aspect is confirmed" (257). More importantly, as we now begin our analysis of the films that define the contemporary horror genre, we find that this restoration of the Other, specifically the representation of the monster as "monstrous other" in the horror films of the 1980s and 1990s, has significant consequences in our discussion of the horror films of the 21st century's first decade.

How, then, does the new slasher film redescribe the semantics of the earlier iterations? In what semantic shape do we find the Terrible Place, the victims, the killer, and the protagonist? In the contemporary horror film, we find the Final Girl conspicuously absent from the narrative. If she exists at all, these films generally kill her long before the final credits. In a particularly nasty example, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning* (Jonathan Liebsman, 2006), Chrissie (Jordana Brewster) escapes the clutches of the cannibalistic Hewitt Family, the prequel's Sawyer family equivalent. As Chrissie drives away frantically, Leatherface (Andrew Bryniarski) appears suddenly in the backseat of the car, plunging his chainsaw through the front seat and through Chrissie's body. She dies, Leatherface prevails, the film ends. In *Hostel*, however, the Final Girl does not exist. Instead, the film focuses on the travels of Josh (Derek Richardson) and Paxton (Jay Hernandez), two recent American college graduates backpacking through Western Europe. Early in the film, Josh and Paxton walk the streets of Amsterdam with their newfound Icelandic friend, Oli (Eythor Gudjonsson) and

Josh laments the progress of the European journey, asking if they flew "all the way to Europe just to smoke pot," a vice which they enjoyed frequently within the borders of the United States. The subsequent scene finds them in an Amsterdam bar where they plot the remainder of their time abroad, hoping their overseas journey consists of sex with as many foreign women as possible. Later, on the sidewalks of Amsterdam, Paxton explains to Josh that their journey will provide "some life experience," the type of experience that they will reflect on in their later years.

Sexual 'experience' plays a key role in restoring the "monstrous other" in these films and it is worth considering the role that sexual "experience" plays in bell hooks' provocative essay, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance." Here, hooks recalls overhearing a conversation on the sidewalks of New Haven where a group of white jocks described their intention to have sex with as many girls as they could from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. According to hooks, the sexual encounter with this Other promises ritual transcendence. This moment of sexual transgression, this moment where sexual taboo and boundaries collapse, promises pleasure, sensual knowledge, and transformation. In many respects, the first thirty minutes of *Hostel* play out this very same fantasy. For Josh and Paxton, their journey abroad represents an opportunity to transgress sexual boundaries, to fuck as many foreign girls as possible, to return safely to the United States with 'some life experience' that they will never forget.

In *Hostel*, then, Europe becomes the playground on which Josh and Paxton hope to "get a bit of the Other,"[1] a land where they can transgress sexual boundaries *outside* American borders. *Hostel*, however, inverts this fantasy, an inversion that the opening moments of the film allude to in particularly telling ways. The film begins with grainy

[1] To "get a bit of the Other" is, as hooks notes, "contemporary working-class British slang [that] playfully converges the discourse of desire, sexuality, and the Other…as a way to speak about sexual encounter."

images of a darkened, nondescript room. If this room has a floor, the abundance of mud and filth obscure it. The film cuts to a brief view of what might have once been white tile walls. Bloody, soapy water flows down these walls as we begin to hear someone's cheerful whistle. The camera lingers on grimy, rusty pipes, the whistler now visible in the background of the frame. The camera cuts to a drain in the floor. Here, in this shot, thick blood mixes with water, carrying what appear to be human teeth down the drain. In this moment, the audience catches its first glimpse of the torture room that will reappear later in the film. This is *Hostel*'s representation of Clover's Terrible Place. If, for much of the film the camera captures frequent images of topless women who play out the desires and fantasies of the male characters on screen and the young male viewers paying the price of admission, then the images of the Terrible Place suggest an inversion of this fantasy, the horror of the female genital organs. The European playground "out there" becomes the site of the nightmare and it emerges for viewers as the film's Terrible Place against the backdrop of the 9/11-decade.

Here, then, we find the semantic shape of the Terrible Place in the new slasher film. The significance of this Terrible Place and its relationship to the semantic shape of the new slasher killer, the victims, and the protagonist in their post 9/11 context becomes clearer in John Carpenter's description of the horror film. In the documentary *Nightmares in Red, White, and Blue*, Carpenter suggests that two type of horror films exist, explaining:

> One is all about where evil is, the location of it. So we imagine ourselves around a campfire and the wise man or whoever is talking to us about the location of evil and he says 'the evil is out there in the dark.' It's beyond the woods, it's the other tribe; it's the people who don't look like us, that don't speak like us. And that's the external evil. That's the Other, people

> who aren't like us. But the other location of evil, same setting…and the wise man says 'actually, evil is right in here. It's in our own evil hearts. That particular story is a harder one to tell.[14]

After 9/11—one of the most photographed and filmed events in human history— the story of the Other emerged as the dominant cinematic horror tale, with film after film defining the monster as an external evil "out there" to be destroyed. In *Hostel*, then, we find a film uniquely wrapped up in the cultural anxieties of the decade, a film with a Terrible Place explicitly *outside* American and Western borders and a film with monstrous others—i.e. people "over there"— who are distinctly un-American.

What, then, of *Hostel*'s monster and its protagonist? As previously mentioned, the Terrible Place is the site of gender and sexual anxieties where the Final Girl confronts the killer, the monster of the slasher film and, ultimately emerges victoriously. And, as also previously mentioned, *Hostel* does not contain a Final Girl, focusing its attention squarely on Josh and Paxton. For the first thirty minutes of *Hostel*, as the film plays out its male sexual fantasies, the narrative focuses specifically on Josh, a character secretly struggling with his own sexuality. In fact, the camera remains with Josh as Paxton indulges in his various sexual escapades with Oli and the various girls they meet along the way. The textual and cultural significance of Josh's sexual confusion, however, only comes into focus in the scenes preceding his brutal torture. In a scene early in the film, for instance, Josh, Paxton, and Oli travel by train to a Slovokian town promising further sexual exploits. A middle-aged German man enters their boxcar, sitting beside Josh. The four men exchange small talk before the man compliments Josh ("a handsome American"), briefly touching Josh's thigh. This moment elicits a violent reaction from Josh, who screams at the man for touching him. The man exits the boxcar quickly, leaving Paxton and Oli to mock Josh's "near-homosexual" experience. This man's

reappearance in three subsequent moments in the film is even more revealing, illustrating quite noticeably the semantic shape of the new slasher monster.

In the first moment, the man saves Josh from a gang of local Slovakian children. Thankful, Josh apologizes for the earlier scene on the train and offers to buy the man a drink. Inside the bar, Josh apologizes again for his earlier behavior, briefly touching the man's leg. The camera captures this moment in a close up, focusing on Josh's hand before he quickly removes it. The man pauses, looks at Josh and, in an exceptionally poignant moment, he explains, "I would have done the same thing at your age. Choosing to have a family was the right thing for me. Now, I have my little girl. But, you should do what is right for you." In this moment, *Hostel* explicitly positions Josh as gay. And, at this precise moment, one of the Slovakian women, Svetlana (Jana Kaderabkova) appears at Josh's side and declares, "Excuse me, it's my turn now." In the subsequent scene, Josh has sex with this girl as Paxton has sex with another girl across the room.

These scenes establish the stakes in regards to sexuality in *Hostel* and, arguably, in these new slasher films as a whole. The camera aesthetics of this sex scene are especially suggestive of this tension. Here, as Josh and Svetlana begin kissing, the camera focuses on a shot of Svetlana as she removes her bra, revealing her bare breasts. The camera cuts to the medium shot of Josh as he looks over to Paxton. Yet, the camera refuses to give us Josh's point of view, to give Josh his reverse shot gaze. Tellingly, the camera instead returns to a topless Svetlana, lingering on this image before cutting to a close-up of Josh as it registers the pleasure and confusion on his face. The next shot is of Svetlana, who glances over to the other bed. And, where earlier the camera denied Josh and the audience the shot that would register his recourse to Paxton—the real object of Josh's sexual desire—it grants Svetlana her POV shot, giving the audience the image of the other topless girl. In this way, *Hostel* and its camera aesthetics decide 'what is right'

for Josh, what sexual boundaries he can transgress and which ones he cannot—doing so against the real-life backdrop of anti-gay rhetoric and gay marriage debates in America that, along with discussions on torture and morality, helped define the last two U.S. presidential elections.

It is not necessary to turn to a detailed discussion of the subsequent torture sequences in the film, the moment where Josh becomes victim. Previous scholarship explores these graphic and gory scenes in excruciating detail, emphasizing Elaine Scarry's discussion of the body in pain. Instead, I would point out the crucial and dramatic shift in the way these films present their graphic torture sequence from the way that the earlier slasher film did. If the camera in the earlier slasher film lingers on women in various states of duress and pain, then the camera in the contemporary horror film is distinctly disinterested in images of women in its graphic torture sequences. Specifically, in *Hostel*, the camera focuses on images of the male body in pain. The film devotes considerable screen time to the prolonged torture sequences of both Josh and Paxton. In fact, in his particularly brutal torture scene, Josh sits in only his underwear as the middle-aged man from the train resurfaces a third time, this time to torture his young American friend with a power drill and a scalpel (familiar weapons from the earlier slasher film). Again, earlier essays on these new films devote considerable attention to these torture sequences. Yet, these essays overlook the relationship of the only scene in *Hostel* in which a woman is tortured, in an extended long shot, to the earlier slasher film which featured a subjective camera intent on charting the pain inflicted on its mostly female victims in painstaking close-up. That *Hostel* should shift its attention to the male body and even express outright disinterest in its one female character and her torture sequence suggests that where the earlier slasher film played out the gender anxieties of its male viewers on the body of its mostly female victims, these new films have a keen interest in doing so on the bodies of its mostly male victims.

Thus, we see the semantic shape of the victim, protagonist, and monster in the new slasher film come into place. If the horror film presents the monster as "monstrous double" to its human counterpart's repressed sexual desires, in *Hostel,* then, we find a repressed psychokiller propelled to serial murder as the result of his repressed homosexuality and his desire to conform to the social construction of "what is right." Accordingly, we find in *Hostel*'s Josh, the film's protagonist and victim—his death the tragic result of a killer's psychological repression. Moreover, we cannot ignore that *Hostel* presents Josh as a character struggling with his sexuality, even positioning him as gay. Thus, we find in Josh the killer's congenial double. The camerawork in the scenes where Josh encounters the man who eventually tortures and kills him only further establishes the relationship between Josh and the killer. Here, we see the film's camera aesthetics "decide" what is right for Josh, even deciding what sexual boundaries he can and cannot transgress. More importantly, though we see Josh stare death in the face in his prolonged and brutal torture sequence, the film refuses Josh the moment where he defeats monster and saves himself. Josh dies and the killer prevails.

Consequently, however, we find in *Hostel*'s Paxton the film's lone survivor—the film's Final Boy. In the film's final moments, we see its new male protagonist stare death in the face and defeat the monster. In his survival, however, is he, like the Final Girl, simultaneously victim and hero? If repressed sexual desires are the fear and *Hostel*'s human killer its representative monster, what then of Paxton? The film never presents Paxton as a character struggling with his sexuality and we even see Paxton mock Josh's "near homosexual" experience in the earlier train scene. Nothing, in other words, would seem to suggest in *Hostel* that, in defeating the monster, Paxton confronts his "monstrous double." Yet, in the same train scene, we do see Paxton have a brief conversation with the man who will soon torture and murder his best friend. Here, the two men discuss eating meat as the man picks at the chicken in his small salad bowl, the

man explaining, “I like to have a connection with something that died for me; I appreciate it more.” The film cuts to a close-up of an unconvinced Paxton as he responds, “Well, I’m vegetarian.” The camera returns to a close-up of the man before he replies, “I am a meat eater; it’s human nature.” Laughing, Paxton concludes, “Well, I’m human and it’s not in my nature.” Seconds later, the man turns to Josh, puts his hand on Josh’s thigh and asks, “What’s in your nature?” In the film’s concluding moments, Paxton will kill this man in a train depot toilet stall to avenge Josh’s death. Paxton cuts off two of the man’s fingers before slitting his throat. The man dies, Paxton boards the next train, and the film ends. Thus, we find in *Hostel* a repressed homosexual male victim, a psychokiller propelled to serial murder as a result of his repressed homosexuality, and a masculine, heterosexual male protagonist who eventually kills the killer, leaving us with the most masculine of horror tales where only the “right” man survives and with the evil “out there” beyond American borders defeated.

Like *Hostel*’s Paxton, *Wolf Creek*’s Ben endures a night of torture at the hands of a male killer, escapes, and emerges as the film’s lone survivor. Yet, unlike Paxton, *Wolf Creek* never allows Ben to confront its psychotic killer nor does Ben even see the killer again after he escapes captivity. Therefore, in *Wolf Creek*’s Final Boy, we find not only a reconfiguration of the Final Girl as male, but a redescription of the female hero as no more than masculine victim. In *Hostel* and *Wolf Creek*, we find a reversal of the terms set by Hitchcock’s *Psycho* and subsequently redescribed by filmmakers in the 1970s and 1980s slasher films where we see the monster as “monstrous double” to its human counterpart’s unfulfilled sexual desires. Instead, in *Hostel,* the monster becomes no more than an ‘aberration to be put down’ to secure normality and order; similarly the case in *Wolf Creek*, the monster is a psychokiller with no ties to world in which he exists. Thus, though the semantic shape of the killer as human in *Hostel* and *Wolf Creek* seems to recall the semantic shape of *Psycho*’s Norman Bates, these two films reconfigure the

monster as the Other, a semantic shift not without consequence in regards to the representation of sexuality and women in film. Here, women become "other" and mere objects of visual pleasure (nothing more than a "head on a stick"), homosexuality becomes "other," the world outside American borders becomes "other," and it is in these places that we find the location of evil in the 21st century horror film.

**The Boogeyman is Coming: Cinema Now**

Describing the visual style of his *Halloween II* remake, Rob Zombie calls his 2007 remake of Carpenter's *Halloween* a "weird sidestep," explaining:

> I think because it was someone else's material, [the film] kind of messed with me. I made the first half of the movie my thing and the second half, I felt, I should bring in more John Carpenter beats because that's what people are going to be expecting, but, as soon as I started doing that, I don't think I had quite the same enthusiasm for the film that I did when it was new stuff. That's why, with this movie, I tried to flip all of them [them characters] upside down and make them my characters.[15]

What about Rob Zombie's *Halloween* remakes in comparison to films like *Hostel* and *Wolf Creek*? What, then, of films such as Marcus Nipsel's remakes of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Friday the 13t?*? That the first decade of the 21st century offered no less than a dozen big budget remakes of countless other slasher films such as *Black Christmas*, *The Hills Have Eyes*, *The Hills Have Eyes* 2, My *Bloody Valentine 3D*, *Prom Night*, *When a Stranger Calls, Sorority Row*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, and *House of Wax* surely suggests something about the larger cultural meaning of the contemporary horror film. One hesitates to make any universalizing claims regarding the state of an entire genre, however, particularly given the varying semantic shape of the Final Boy in

*Wolf Creek* and *Hostel*. To argue that the films of the 9/11-decade reflect the cultural anxieties of a nation debating the morality of torture and the politics of 9/11 is not necessarily a misreading. To remove these films from their historical, cultural, and generic context, however, divorces them from their original historical meaning and significance. In doing so, we disregard the evolution of the horror film and the particular elements that define the genre as such. Thus, at first glance, with its machete-wielding madman, women shrieking in terror, and prolonged scenes of graphic and brutal violence, Nipsel's *Friday the 13th* remake looks like nothing so much as a *Friday the 13th* film. Yet, where once there was Alice in the original film, we find Clay (Jared Padlecki) as the new film's Final Boy, a male protagonist in the new slasher tradition of male protagonists. Though the film offers Whitney, Clay's sister, as the only other survivor, the remake tricks audiences into thinking that Jason kills Whitney in the film's opening moments. It is only in the film's later moments that we learn Jason has kidnapped and hidden her in what the film's DVD synopsis describes as his "den of torture and fear" because she resembles his dead mother.[16] The film's victims further exacerbate the new slasher film's interest in the male body, with the number of male victims far outnumbering the amount of women killed onscreen (eight male victims, four female victims). In fact, the camera focuses considerable attention on the bodies of these victims, with one particularly gruesome scene in which Jason slowly pushes a screwdriver into a male character's neck. Shot in close-up, this death lasts for over a minute and only highlights the reversal of the earlier slasher film's emphasis on the female body. Moreover, Jason survives at the end of the film, attacking Whitney one final time just before the end credits roll. Thus, the *Friday the 13th* remake ends, offering its protagonists nothing more than promise of more violence to come and viewers the promise that the boogeyman is still "out there."

Is this, then, the shape we leave the horror film, as a film genre once radical in its descriptions of evil as decidedly human—the byproduct of cultural, political, and sociological factors— now less progressive in its representation of the monster as "monstrous other?" If we borrow from Altman his notion that a particular semantics develops in a specific cultural situation, do the contemporary American horror films and their monsters simply reflect the moment in which they exist? If so, then the horrifying attacks of 9/11, the anti-gay marriage ballot initiatives that all but defined the 2004 election, the two wars across the pond, the devastation of an American city and the Gulf Coast by one of the worst storms on record, and the worst economic recession since the Great Depression surely help tell the tale of the contemporary horror film and the evolution of the genre during the Bush era. With the real-life madman responsible for the 9/11 attacks free to roam the world for most of the decade, the notion that evil was still "out there" waiting to strike once more became a horror tale all too easy to sell to American audiences. Upon reflection, the Final Boy is a congenial double for that audience, a symbol of a weakened United States facing down imagined monsters onscreen while the real-life ones roam free. One wonders, then, where the horror film goes in 21st century's second decade now that we've killed Osama bin Laden and defeated "the boogeyman."

On a less pessimistic note, I would suggest, however, that in Rob Zombie's *Halloween* remakes we find the last remnants of *Psycho*'s Norman Bates and Hitchcock's visual description of monstrosity and madness. In his *Halloween* remake, then, the monster is decidedly human and Zombie specifically situates Michael Myers as such. Or, as we hear his psychiatrist, Dr. Sam Loomis, explain, Michael is the result of a "perfect storm" of "internal and external" factors gone violently wrong. As his earlier quote suggests, Zombie's *Halloween* remake spends the first third of the film setting up Michael's troubled childhood, locating the real horror squarely in the family (his

violently abusive stepfather and his verbally abusive older sister) and in the community (the hypermasculine male bullies who ridicule him as a "faggot" and taunt Michael at school because of his mother's job as a local stripper). Thus, in Zombie's *Halloween* remake, we find a mentally scarred Michael Myers propelled to serial murder as a result of his father's death, his community's attitudes towards his mother's work (as sex object), and his stepfather and older sister's attitudes toward the young boy's growing sexual maturity. Accordingly, we find in Zombie's Michael Myers the film's victim, protagonist, and monster, his subsequent Halloween night rampage the tragic result of psychological repression.

By the time we meet *Halloween*'s Laurie Strode again in Zombie's *Halloween II* remake, we see the physical scars left behind by her brother's brutal Halloween rampage a year earlier. Having stared death in the face in the final moments of 2007's *Halloween*, Laurie Strode becomes the rare example of a contemporary Final Girl. Early in *Halloween II*, Laurie attempts to describe life to her therapist a year after Michael Myers' attack left her parents and many of her friends dead, saying "I don't know, without them, I feel like I don't even know who I am anymore." Here, a mentally and physically scarred Laurie struggles to find the language to describe her intensifying nightmares and her growing sense of dread that the worst is still to come. Scrawled across the wall over the bed in her bedroom is "In Charlie We Trust," a clear reference to serial killer Charles Manson. Thus, in Zombie's *Halloween II* remake, we find in Laurie Strode the killer's congenial double. Laurie is what Michael once was and, in borrowing from Clover, "he is what she would become should she fail in her battle for sexual selfhood." By the film's end, Laurie defeats the monster but, in the film's final moments, we see Laurie sitting in a mental hospital, alone with her thoughts. Like Norman Bates, though her lips never move, we watch as she disappears into madness. Finally, however, Rob Zombie saves his most brutal onscreen violence for his "visual tribute" to *Psycho*'s

infamous shower scene. Here, we find the death of Annie (played by same actress who played a young Final Girl in *Halloween 4* and *Halloween 5*). When Laurie discovers Annie barely alive, her nude, bloodied body sprawled across the floor in the upstairs bathroom, it is a moment Zombie prolongs. And, in an exceptionally poignant moment, the film allows Laurie to register her friend's death as she cradles a dying Annie in her arms before the terror resumes. In the subsequent scene, Zombie's camera lingers on the image of Annie's father discovering the body and the film allows him to register the horrific death of his daughter.

Lastly, then, we find in Zombie's *Halloween II* remake rare moments of the horror film's humanity, a new slasher film that describes the victimization and objectification of women in the 21st century. As Zombie explains, "I was never a fan of '80s slasher movies. I think they are cartoony and silly. I was more into the violence in movies like *Taxi Driver*, *The Wild Bunch*, and *Bonnie and Clyde*. The violence in those films makes a statement in some way…it's saying something. And it's either brutal, or depressing, or it's real. But it's never fun."[17] Thusly, in a scene late in *Halloween II* when we see Dr. Loomis signing autographs for his new book *The Devil Walks Among Us,* we find our once reliable hero (Sam Loomis in *Psycho* and Dr. Loomis in the original *Halloween*) here redescribed as a greedy sell-out, a man more interested in selling the story of his former patient as evil, as literally "the devil," than with the consequences of publishing his book. When the father of one of Michael's victims confronts Dr. Loomis with a photo of his dead daughter, we see a poster plastered on the wall in the background that reads "Cinema Now." This moment is perhaps a critique of the contemporary horror film, a bloody horror show much more interested in graphic onscreen violence than the meaning behind it all. I hesitate to make any progressive claims regarding a film genre with a nasty history of reserving its most brutal onscreen violence for female characters. Yet, it is clear that within the history, we have something else, something much more

complex than simply a new genre, something in the culture that these films seem to reflect and surely something we ignore at our own peril.

NOTES

1. "The Making of Wolf Creek," *Wolf Creek*, directed by Greg McLean (2005; Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc., 2006), DVD.

2. "Wolf Creek: Greg McLean Interview," *Movies Online*, http://www.moviesonline.ca/movienews_6498.html. Describing his film, McLean explains point blank, "I think *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* was a fairly large influence. *Massacre* is just the most remarkable, brutal comment—it's actually an anti-comment because it's saying nothing about what happened."

3. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 35.

4. Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists*, 127.

5. Edelstein, "Now Playing at Your Local Multiplex: Torture Porn."

6. For further examples of academic scholarship on "Torture Porn," see also Gabrielle Murray, "*Hostel II*: A Representation of the Body in Pain and the Cinema Experience in Torture," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 50 (Spring 2008), http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc50.2008/TortureHostel12/text.html; Dead Lockwood, "All Stripped Down: The Spectacle of Torture Porn," *Popular Communication* 7 (Jan. 2009): 40-48; and Jason Middleton, "The Subject of Torture: Regarding the Pain of Americans in *Hostel*," *Cinema Journal* 49 (Summer 2010): 1-24.

7. Edelstein, "Now Playing at Your Local Multiplex: Torture Porn."

8. Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre," 639. Subsequent paginal references are to this text.

9. For another example, Altman turns briefly to the musical, noting its own generic transformations in the late 1920s and the early 1930s. As Altman points out, the semantic elements of the musical shift in the 1930s with a new emphasis on the community and on the relationship between the individual man and woman who form a dancing couple, a major shift from the conventions present in the earlier Busby Berkeley musicals.

10. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 22. Subsequent paginal references are to this text.

11. For more on the representation of gender and sexuality in cinema, see Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, " in *Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2001), 342; Gaylyn Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Joan Copjec, *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004); and Robert Lang, *Masculine Interests: Homoerotics in Hollywood Film* (New York: Columbia Press University, 2002).

12. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 9. Subsequent paginal references are to this text.

13. Sharrett, "The Horror Film in Neoconservative Culture," 253.

14. *Nightmares in Red, White, and Blue*, directed by Andrew Monument (2009; Lux Digital Pictures, 2009), DVD.

15. "Interview with Rob Zombie, Director of *Halloween II*," Collider, http://collider.com/interview-with-rob-zombie-director-of-halloween-2/6396/.

16. *Friday the 13th*, directed by Marcus Nipsel (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2009), DVD.

17. "Interview with Rob Zombie, Director of *Halloween II*."

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Master of Arts

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Scope and Method of Study:
This essay focuses specifically on American horror films released in the 21st century's first decade— i.e. films released between 2000 and 2010— in comparison to earlier slasher films and the relationship between them. Thusly, my study consisted largely of intensive film viewings, as well as rigorous research on existing film theory, film criticism and genre scholarship (specifically on the horror genre but not limited to).

Findings and Conclusions:
This essay suggests that recent film criticism and genre scholarship neglects the historical and theoretical connection between so-called "Torture Porn" and the 1980s slasher film. The creation of this altogether new generic category limits the discussion of the contemporary horror film and encourages current scholarship to ignore the generic persistence of scenes of brutal and graphic torture within the genre. As a result, scholars fail to ask how individual films use such depictions of violence to generate new textual meanings within a new context. Most problematically, such scholarship ignores the shift in gender dynamics present in recent American horror film as compared to earlier iterations. This study suggests that it is precisely the shift in gender dynamics that generates textual, linguistic, and cultural meaning for the contemporary horror film. Thus, the essay resituates contemporary horror films such as *Wolf Creek*, Eli Roth's *Hostel*, Marcus Nipsel's *Friday the 13th* remake, and Rob Zombie's *Halloween* remakes in their larger historical and cultural context, focusing not only on the evolution of the slasher monster, but also on the evolution of the earlier slasher protagonist—the Final Girl—into a Final Boy. By attending more closely to generic and cultural contexts, we can see that this shift registers specifically post-9/11 anxieties about the status of the hero and the inviolability of the masculine/national body.

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