Bloody Enlightening:

Five Generations of Horror through the Feminist Lens

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Preface

“Why do [men](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Men) [feel](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Feel) threatened by [women](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Women)?" I asked a male friend of mine. . . So this male friend of mine, who does by the way exist, conveniently entered into the following dialogue. "I mean," I said, "men are bigger, most of the time, they can run faster, strangle better, and they have on the average a lot more [money](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Money) and [power](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Power)." "They're afraid women will [laugh](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Laugh) at them," he said. "Undercut their world view." Then I asked some women students in a quickie [poetry](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Poetry) seminar I was giving,

“Why do women feel threatened by men?" "They're [afraid](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Afraid) of being [killed](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Killed)," they said.

—Margaret Atwood, *Second Words: Selected Critical Prose*

The history of the horror genre is extensive. It comes by way of novels, movies, and plays of all sizes and shapes, appealing to all manner of humanity’s worse nightmares. Before these mediums were cautionary tales, superstitions, and folklore spanning a wide variety of decades and cultures.1Stories shared among families not only influenced what we now define as the nuclear family, but generations of clans, tribes, villages, and new settlements. They are important in their telling nature, as scary books and movies—even those on the market today—bear a striking resemblance to real life occurrences. What horror fiction has done is create a place for humans with limited knowledge of the universe to safely explore unexplainable themes like death, fear, prejudice, and survival against all odds. What is perceived as the biggest threat to civilization, however, will depend on the time period in question, making horror throughout written history an interesting and worthwhile field to study people, societal institutions, and expressions of sex and gender.

Even the most fantastical of fiction works can be broken down to reveal everyday struggles. Good versus evil, will against will, the struggle that we see presented to us so creatively is another way of demonstrating a person or entity vying for power in the same way that we all inevitably do. We fight to do the right thing for ourselves and those around us. We struggle to control the urges that we know are inappropriate or detrimental. We try all of these things, but not everyone is successful. As an example of this, we can make a brief study of the infamous novel *Carrie*, by Stephen King. The book is centered on the titular character’s struggle for control over all aspects of her own life. We can find some stark similarities between Carrie’s struggle and the happenings of modern day schools. There is still a tradition that girls, no matter how young, are judged at face value. Carrie White is never befriended by her peers because her mother dresses her in dowdy clothing and keeps her from makeup and similar vanities. She does not fit in with the strict standard established for her gender at the time (1974) and is therefore punished for it, just as many real girls and boys are punished daily.

In a now very popular ending sequence, a smaller group of Carrie’s peers pull a cruel prank on her at the prom. Unfortunately, what the culprits of this practical joke—one that involves pig’s blood being poured all over an unsuspecting Carrie—have no way of knowing is that she harbors some very serious telekinetic powers. In a stunning scene of brutality, Carrie lets loose the force of her mind upon the gymnasium where the event is taking place in. Fires break out. Electrical wires spark, conducted dangerously via the puddles of water that accumulate beneath a vast sprinkler system. Those who flee toward the door find it locked. There is no escape and lives are taken amid the chaos. Undeniably, violence is often the result of the inability to look away from or be kind to those who do not fulfill their society’s current gender schema. What is less certain, however, is who will end up the victim and who will end up the perpetrator of the cruelty once everything comes to a head.

Anyone who watches what is going on across the nation can observe similar patterns of lethal stress, violence, and misunderstanding surrounding gender and sexual expression among other demographics. News stations frequently run stories about mass shootings in public places like movie theaters or college campuses. Statistically speaking, in most cases the perpetrator of the crime is male. On one occasion, before a shooting that took place near the University of California’s Santa Barbara campus on May 23, 2014, the man about to take the lives of innocents explained on a personal video that his actions were because of his poor romantic luck with his female peers, whom he bitterly addressed as, “you girls.”2 In the lengthy video, the future shooter goes on rant about his failures, displaying the belief that he has the right to the sexual encounters with women and every woman who has ever denied him will be punished. This conviction, however unbelievable it may seem, has been reinforced by decades of legal support for patriarchal rule both within the family and in the other prominent institutions.3 When the past has been so full of justified masculine rule over women, it is hardly surprising that these ugly perceptions of entitlement keep turning up in today’s society, turning deadly when they go unfulfilled.

The Santa Barbara shootings were not an isolated incident of male violence against a large number of people. Using information from FBI records, *USA Today* has constructed a report on mass shootings (defined as an event in which more than four people are killed) that reveals that between January and November 1st of 2015, there have been 27 verified shootings across America.4 Of this number, 21 were committed by one or more men and four are still unexplained and currently under investigation.5 That a person would kill those he has never met before in cold blood is chilling, but the reality of the mass murder situation is far more threatening. Despite the fact that public shootings that appear random in terms of victim choice dominate news stations, the majority of all killing sprees are actually family-related killings.6 If the thought of being killed by strangers is blood freezing, the thought that the patriarch of the family could commit egregious crimes against his own flesh and blood is heart stopping. Although we have such strong reactions to these reoccurring tragedies that seem to be colored by sex and gender, putting our thoughts into words can prove very difficult. How do we pin point the root of the problem?

This is where books and movies come in. Within the fictitious confines of paper and film, we can open up a safe sphere in which to talk about the ills that plague our society—sexism, racism, and homophobia included. This methodology is far from unique to our time and place in the world; fiction has been employed as a tool to start dialogues for several centuries, making literature and film excellent fields of study for those interested in looking at the changing influence of gender upon American society. Have attitudes toward violence against women changed since the twentieth century? What about how we prosecute it? Do women now have more control over their bodies? If they do, is this in a legal or social sense? And what about men? How do they suffer along with women under the heavy hand of patriarchy?

There are so many questions to ask, so many links to be found between violence, power, and communication, but still some balk at the thought of looking at such unpleasantness. These are the privileged few whose lives have remained unmarred by the emotional toll of loss, betrayal, and deception. They are the lucky ones, but the statistics are against them. According to recent research done by the CDC, an estimated 22.3% of women come to know extreme violence in their intimate relationships.7 Because this is almost a quarter of the entire female population, one could gather all of their friends in one room and expect that nearly one out of every four would come to know physical and emotional pain at the hands of their loved ones when least expecting it. One in two women and one in five men will be subject to sexual violence other than rape.8In addition, the United States is also home to about 56,000 violent deaths occurring annually.9Crunching the numbers is disheartening to say the least, but awareness is a useful ally to prevention. We must ask ourselves what scares us more: watching a two hour film about a stalker, reading a three hundred page book about a serial killer, or watching the evening news?

Notes

1. Viktória Prohászková, “The Genre of Horror,” American International Journal of Contemporary Research 2, no. 4 (2012),

http://www.aijcrnet.com/journals/Vol\_2\_No\_4\_April\_2012/16.pdf

2. Monica Vendituoli, “Campus **Shootings** Prompt Online Discourse About **Gender**-Based Violence,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 60, is. 38 (2014), A11.

3. Robyn Ryle, *Questioning Gender: A Sociological Exploration*, 2nd ed (Los Angeles: Sage, 2015), 467. See “The Marriage Game” for further information on head and master laws.

4. *USA Today*, “Behind the Bloodshed,” ([Tysons Corner, VA:](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tysons_Corner,_Virginia) Gannett Company, 2015).

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid. 53% of mass murders are domestic.

7. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report/Prevalence and Characteristics of Sexual Violence, Stalking, and Intimate Partner Violence Victimization,” CDC, last modified September 4, 2014, http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss6308a1.htm?s\_cid=ss6308a1\_e.

These numbers are based on widely circulated survey taken during the 2011 calendar year.

8. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) Infographic,” CDC, last modified September 8, 2010. http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/nisvs/infographic.html.

9. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “National Violent Death Reporting System,” CDC, last modified June 18, 2015,

http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/nvdrs/index.html.

A Rather Unexpected Delivery:

An Analysis of Ira Levin’s Rosemary’s Baby Across the Backdrop of the 1960’s

There is a widely circulated image of 1960’s America as a time of cultural upheaval, rife with outbursts of sexual, ethical, scientific, and artistic advancements. This decade is often painted as the precursor to the next, one which would become famous for free love, peace movements, and feminism. What becomes difficult to realize with such prevalent overgeneralizations, however, is that despite the fact that the media held a deep fascination with iconoclastic groups, the majority of the population continued on as traditionally as they had in the two prior decades.1 At this time, women who participated in the second wave of feminism were white, comfortably middle-class, and a clear minority in the whole of their society.2To shed a light on the potential oppression of the traditional marriages that Americans clung so desperately to, writer Ira Levin made his concerns manifest in the 1967 best selling horror novel *Rosemary’s Baby*, which was popular enough to have been translated page-per-page onto the big screen by director Roman Polanski just one year after publication.

*Rosemary’s Baby*,like a lot of the literature of its time, pursues the idea that change can be terrifying to those unwilling or unable to move fluidly along with it. In the same breath, it explores the dangers of tradition for tradition’s sake through young Rosemary and Guy Woodhouse, a couple in their mid-twenties searching for the perfect Manhattan apartment to rent long term. When they receive notice that an elegant old complex they have been looking into for years, the Bramford, has an available flat, the Woodhouses spring into action. At first things run along smoothly and the couple begins to settle into their new home, ignoring the information imparted to them buy a close family friend called Hutch, who warns the couple that the Bramford has seen its share of unsavory characters throughout its history. These include a man who claimed to have successfully summoned the devil, a pair of twisted sisters preoccupied with consuming children, and a record number of unexplained deaths and suicides. This information, trivialized by Guy Woodhouse as the fodder of a bored old man, sets the tone for the ensuing drama, one which features a pregnancy of unusual circumstances and a total loss of bodily autonomy for Rosemary Woodhouse, who is, by many standards, the idea 1960’s housewife.

The sordid tale begins with a chilling case of marital rape.3When Guy and Rosemary agree to have a baby, the furthest thing from her mind is that her own husband might see fit to have sex with her while she is unconscious. Yet this is what the future holds for young Rosemary. While she is fuzzy on what exactly happens to her on the night she conceives her baby, she initially believes that she had too much wine and passed out. In reality she had been drugged by Guy and the neighbors, Minnie and Roman Castavet. The three cook up this plan for purely selfish reasons—Roman and Minnie are Satanists who have been trying to call up the Dark Prince to impregnate a mortal woman with his child. Guy agrees to help them under the condition that they lend him their powers to advance his acting career. In effect, he makes the choice to sell his soul to the devil.

Though joined in the supposedly holy bond of matrimony, Guy swears until the end of the novel that he never meant to hurt Rosemary. He simply did not think that she would mind losing a baby as long as she could have more in the future. In his mind, if he tells his wife that their first child has died, the grief and desperation will drive Rosemary to conceive yet another baby right away, this one actually fathered by Guy. Everyone gets what they want. Rosemary will eventually be a mother to a healthy baby, the firstborn will be forgotten, and Guy’s acting career will rocket into success. He is blinded by the glare of fame and fortune, willing to use his wife’s body as an incubator for evil as long as he benefits directly. After all, is that not what woman’s bodies were created for? To become mothers?

The Castevets, upon succeeding in summoning up the devil and getting Rosemary pregnant, continue to take great interest in “Ro,” as she is affectionately called. With the greatest of subtlety, they convince the expectant mother to switch to a new doctor in her first trimester. She obliges, heeding their promises that Dr. Sapirstein is “one of the finest obstetricians in the country.”4 What they actually mean by this is that the doctor that they have chosen for Ro is a member of their coven, something that becomes apparent to the reader far before the titular character.5 Doctor Sapirstein, after being thrust upon Rosemary, proves to be just as restrictive on her freedoms as the Castavets and Guy. Under the guise of saving her some worry, he orders Rosemary not to read any baby books or consult any girlfriends who have had their own children. He assures her that all births are different, and usually those who are already mothers will hold that if their friends have different experiences during pregnancy, something is wrong with them. She is instructed to come only to him with questions. This elitist sentiment exemplifies the belief that the sphere of professional medicine belongs exclusively to males who are well educated in very specific ways. Laymen and women could never hope to offer Rosemary anything useful, Sapirstein assures her, rendering everyone who truly cares about her voiceless. In this way, he impedes Rosemary’s attempts to become educated about her body and restricts her ability to make smart decisions for herself.

Guy and the other inhabitants of the Bramford not only exert themselves over Rosemary physically, but also mentally. They frequently gaslight her, or lead her to believe that her sensory perceptions and beliefs are incorrect or mistaken.6In the first trimester of her pregnancy, the expectant mother experiences crippling nausea and intense, unrelenting pain that actually cause her to lose massive amounts of weight instead of gaining it. She addresses her doctor with her concerns, to which he replies that the pain should stop soon and she should bear it until it did. Being that Rosemary is so excited for her baby, she accepts this from her doctor, the assurances of the Castevets ringing in her ears. It is impossible for her not to notice, however, how quickly her appearance is declining. Catching her own reflection in a mirror, she is reminded of death warmed over. Certainly she feels just as she looks. Yet when she offhandedly mentions her figure in front of Guy, he boldly lies to her, assuring his wife that she is the picture of glowing health and maternal wellbeing:

Her face grew pinched and wan and shadowed; she looked awful. But Guy

insisted otherwise. “What are you talking about?” he said. “You look great. It’s that haircut that looks awful, if you want the truth, honey...”7

Guy hopes to distract his wife from the truth, that her pregnancy is becoming dangerous to her health. His only hope at keeping her from realizing this is to distract her, to lead Rosemary to blame her weary looks on a poor haircut, something simple and harmless. Minnie and Roman Castavet are quick to share similar opinions, chipping in that “She’s only lost two or three pounds…,” which is “quite normal in the early months of pregnancy…”8 As a result of her husband and neighbors saying contrary things so convincingly, Rosemary begins to internalize their sentiments, instead beginning to feel as though she really were not terribly unhealthy after all. When Guy throws away the scale that sits in the couple’s bathroom because Rosemary keeps weighing herself and noticing her loss, she does not protest or think twice of it.

Levin shows a sign of the times to be evident in the frequent mentioning of the Catholic Church. Not only is it explained that although Rosemary was raised in a practicing Mid-Western family she does not attend services anymore , but the author subtly adds reality into the work of fiction by mentioning the visit of Pope Paul VI in October of 1965 to Yankee Stadium, where he delivered Mass to a brimming crowd.9 While she does not attend the service, Rosemary watches from the comfort of her Bramford apartment. In this way, Levin establishes The Church as a player in the novel, an entity with a life of its own. When Rosemary is in severe pain, the reader cannot possibly be surprised that she is not willing to even consider that her pregnancy might be fatal and that it might be in her best interest not to carry her baby full term.10 She may not practice Catholicism presently in the novel, but we get a sense of her strong roots, of the values that have been inscribed. Horrifyingly, in her case these values are partially responsible for the birth of the anti-Christ.

In the final chapters the reader bears witness to the birth of the alleged son of Satan, as mothered by Rosemary. When she realizes her son’s dark nature—evidenced by his reptilian yellow eyes, clawed hands, and little tail—the ex-Catholic considers killing him in order to save humanity. This idea is fleeting. As soon as the cult allows Rosemary to step in and hold her baby, she is smitten, unable to even think such thoughts. It is as if she cannot help but be consumed by the act of motherhood.

The issue presented then becomes whether or not women are inexplicably linked with the act or position of “mother.” Every individual should be allowed to answer this question for themselves, but who is to get the final say on the matter? Surely to maintain that everyone be allowed to define their own roles of women or men, a modicum of power has to be with them and not just the people who represent them. In black and white, the story of Rosemary Woodhouse details what happens when others step in to use and abuse a woman’s body rather than let her make her own decisions.

Lending further strength to the idea that Levin writes *Rosemary* as a critique of societal expectations for not only women, but wives especially is the fact that just five years after the success of the aforementioned title and its film adaptation, the author also penned a now famous work called *The Stepford Wives*. In brief, this 1972 novel is about small town in Connecticut which “offers visions of housewifery reminiscent of the critiques offered a decade earlier in bestsellers by Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan, in which housewives are seen as trapped in a nightmarish life of pointless repetition.”11The story follows new-to-town Joanna and her family as they slowly come to realize that the town of Stepford is actually populated by women who have been turned into robots by their scientist husbands in order to curb former feminist/social activist tendencies. The feminine robots now exist as shells of their former selves, created with the intention of caring for all things domestic. When Joanna realizes this truth, she attempts to flee, sensing that her own husband may have been taken in by his nefarious new friends. Unfortunately, Joanna’s flight is made impossible when the men of Stepford track her down and drag her back**.**  She joins the ranks of the other robotic drones, beautiful, utilitarian to her husband’s every need, and empty of personal aspiration.12 Levin leads us to believe that marriage, expanding beyond just the promises and understandings formed between two individuals who are bonded by this holy sanction, is an institution that proves next to impossible to escape. One must recollect the constant string of threats that Rosemary receives when laying eyes on her own baby for the first time; she is told that if she does not behave in a very specific way—with the upmost love and tenderness— in regards to her new child, she will be killed. There is no way out of what society dictates your role to be—short of leaving society completely, something that is obviously not a very plausible option for most.

That the character of Rosemary Woodhouse is a reflection of sometimes problematic conservative motherhood and the backlash against the emergence of the empowered woman boasted by second wave feminism in the 1960s can easily be said. It is thought that we all have choices to make, but sometimes forces beyond our control manipulate the ways in which we move through life. Most individuals possess less power than the collective ideals and efforts of many. One must wonder what might have happened if Rosemary’s girlfriends had been able to step in and assist her in getting away from Guy and the Satanic cult. Alone against the mammoth institution of marriage, she had no chance of winning the fight for her own body.

Notes

1. James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 450.

2. Ibid.

3. Elaine Martin, Casey T. Taft, and Patricia A. Resick, “A review of marital rape,” *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 12, no 3 (2007): 329 – 348, doi: 10.1016/j.avb.2006.10.003. It is worth mentioning that at this point in time, marital rape was mostly unrecognizable in the eyes of the law. It was not until 1993 that all 50 had removed from their legislation exemptions that made it impossible to for one spouse to be brought up on rape charges by the other. This is still an ongoing struggle with many loopholes.

4. Ira Levin, *Rosemary’s Baby*, (New York: New American Library, 2003), 133.

5. While it may be common knowledge today that witchcraft is and was an umbrella term for pagan belief systems across the world, in Rosemary’s Baby, it is used synonymously with Satanism, which has roots strictly in Christianity.

6. Susan Forward and Joan Torres, *Men Who Hate Women and the Women who Love Them* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 48. For those unfamiliar with the term “gaslighting,” it pays homage to a similarly titled 1944 film featuring Ingrid Bergman and Charles Boyer. In *Gaslight*, written by John Van Druten and Walter Reisch, a husband figure is trying to keep information from his wife. In order to do so, he deliberately messes with her belongings, later insisting that she has lost them, or forgotten where she placed them. He plants a seed of doubt within Bergman’s character, making it so that she can no longer trust her perceptions. She is thus blinded from whatever truth Boyer is trying to hide from her, just as Guy attempts to blind Rosemary.

7. Levin, *Rosemary’s Baby*, 146.

8. Ibid, 153.

9. “A Look Back at 50 Years of Pope Visits to the United States,” *Huffington Post*, November 18, 2014.

10. The topic is raised only once within the text, by Rosemary herself. Although none of her friends suggest it, even after realizing how sick she is becoming, it is obviously on Rosemary’s mind. When she protests that she will not consider aborting her child, the reader gets the sense that although abortion is not legal, there are places in NYC in which the operation can be quietly performed.

11. Jane Elliott, “Stepford U.S.A.: Second-Wave Feminism, Domestic Labor, and the Representations of National Time,” *Cultural Critique* no. 70 (2008): 33.

Feminine Frailty in George Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead*

Overwhelmingly in the modern history of the Western world, the professional medical sphere has been dominated by men, usually of a certain class and stature. Once, across many indigenous cultures, women had held very highly regarded positions as healers, midwives, and caretakers, but with the imperialism of patriarchal cultures come punishment and a general outlawing of the use of traditional methodologies.1  Is it any wonder then, that with prestigious men in sole control, there is a fair bit of bias both historically and contemporarily in the treatment and analysis of women’s bodies? While modern scholars and practitioners may look at theories like those proposed by Sigmund Freud and the famous hysteria specialist S. Weir Mitchell and laugh at their outdated ideas concerning the fairer sex, the fact remains that the work of early nineteenth and twentieth century doctors and psychologists serves as a foundation on which all contemporary medicine is based. The waves of misinformation created by questionable early sciences serve to add ammunition to the argument that women—as a sex and as a gender—are inherently weaker than men, a phenomenon screenwriter George Romeo examines and critiques through the character of Barbara in his 1968 independent horror film *Night of the Living Dead*.

It is with a flourish harkening back to Wellsian novels that the *Night of the Living Dead* begins.2 In grainy black and white, the audience witnesses a car ambling slowly through an old cemetery, a brother and sister bantering with each other inside. Behind the sound of their discussion, a radio announcement plays, a cryptic message made unintelligible by static. Unfortunately for the siblings, they never get to hear just what it was that the public broadcasting station was attempting to warn them about. They are too busy arguing over the task they have been sent to do. Johnny is bitter that every year his elderly mother asks him to take his sister Barbara into the rural lands where their father is buried and lay flowers on his grave. The drive, it is said, is long for such a task. Barbara, however, falls well into line with her gender schema. She is the picture of familial reverence; gently, she reminds brother that, after all, it is their father they’ve come to honor. Their mother is much too old to make the trip and they owe it to her. John continues to grouse, talking of useless money spent on flowers and making fun of Barbara for devoutly praying by a gravestone.

Distracted by heckling his sister, neither John nor Barbara notice when a figure starts slowly ambling toward them. It is an undead creature, bent on creating more in its image. When John does see the monster coming his way, he is reluctant to believe the truth. Putting on a show for Barbara, he playfully runs toward the humanoid thing walking disjointedly through the cemetery. Unknowingly, he delivers himself right into the hands of death. He is thrown to the ground by the zombie and although there is no curtain of blood or visible wounds, we are informed by Barbara’s great terror that John is hurt and hurt badly.3 Clueless, Barbara flees, beginning what will be a very short journey avoiding death. Without a male figure in her life—for her brother is now just as dead as her father is—Barbara completely loses her mind, quickly giving in to the shock that the situation she is in has caused.

To watch *Night of the Living Dead* today, people may find themselves frustrated with Barbara’s character. After the death of her brother, Johnny, she falls to pieces, blindly running from the cemetery to a nearby farm house. Though she clearly knows that something terrible is happening—more creatures swarm her as she attempts to flee—the site of a dead body within the house is enough to send her into hysterics. She purposefully flees the unmoving corpse and actually runs *toward* the predators pursuing her. If it were not for the arrival of the movie’s protagonist, Ben, Barbara would have immediately lost her life, maybe even become one of the walking dead. She is incompetent, in need of saving by a man. Indeed, there is a fifteen minute stretch of film in which this particular character cannot say more than the interchangeable phrases, “I don’t know,” and “what’s happening?”**4**She responds to none of Ben’s questions concerning where she came from or what she knows about what is going on. It is as if she has become a mannequin for Ben to shuffle around to safety from scene to scene, a particularly precious ornament.

It is hard to be surprised that Romero paints a picture of the traditional woman too fragile to deal with an outbreak of zombies when centuries of quack science and popular societal ideas have banded together to diagnose females as lesser than their male counterparts—both physically and emotionally. One of such popular diseases is commonly referred to as “hysteria,” which is the Greek word for uterus.5 In the nineteenth century diagnosis with this disease became very common in women of the white middle class. It was thought that this sexed illness emerged when a woman, thought to be fragile and delicate by nature, became too mentally taxed and the symptoms of these stressors became physical—usually in the form of headaches or fatigue.6 While there is, in fact, a medical basis for conversion disorders—or when mental disturbances have physical effects on different parts of the body—the connection between such occurrences and the uterus has since been disproved. Yet, as recently as the late twentieth century the term “hysteria” was still being used to describe certain kinds of diseases—usually those to do with neurological or motor problems—in which no other medical problem could be found**.** In fact, a study conducted in 2005 found that roughly 16.5% of those diagnosed in 1960-1969 were misdiagnosed.7 Although this, in the medical field, is a very high rate of incorrectness, it must be noted that it was a lower rate than in years prior. Similarly, the percentage of misdiagnosis has continued to decline since. Experts explain that “decline from a higher rate [decades before] probably reflects poor methods used in earlier studies, more than the present ability of brain imaging.”8 Without proper knowledge from advanced scientific apparatuses, doctors relied heavily on unproven and unsound assumptions concerning what “healthy” was and who should be the standard of that condition.

While it is a relief for many that the truth concerning the bodies of women is finally becoming an empirical science rather than a philosophically stunted guessing game based on a patriarchal tradition, this does little to change the damage done during the age of rampant hysteria. One famous doctor, who became well known for having treated author and feminist Charlotte Perkins-Gillman in the 1880’s, came up with what is now known as the “rest cure.” Dr. S. Weir Mitchell’s prescription, as detailed in his book *Wear and Tear: Hints for the Overworked,* was that challenging the minds of women was actually hurting them, making them ill. On this, he writes:

Worst of all, however, to my mind-most destructive in every way-is the American view of female education. The time taken for the more serious instruction of girls extends to the age of eighteen, and rarely over this. During these years they are undergoing such organic development as renders them remarkably sensitive. At seventeen I presume that healthy girls are nearly as well able to study, with proper precautions, as men; but before this time over-use, or even a very steady use, of the brain is dangerous to health and to every probability of future womanly usefulness.9

In other words, girls of certain breeding and age are ill-equipped for the same kind of schooling that their male counterparts receive. Dr. Weir Mitchell advocated that to save women that kind of harm and to keep their ability to do the kinds of chores that were fit for them, they must not be physically active and must not try to learn too much. Sometimes, as anyone who has read Charlotte Perkins-Gillman’s short story “The Yellow Wallpaper” will remember, this meant long periods of isolation from others. Other times, naps were considered a healthy necessity after meals and any extension of effort. Both of these suggestions have an effective way of silencing women, of removing them from the bustling of daily life and placing them on the fringes of society. If this belief in stifling women for their own good seems familiar, it is probably because the titular character of *Rosemary’s Baby* was treated in much the same way (in the late 1960’s) when she began to have concerns about her unhealthy pregnancy. She, too, was patronized by a slew of male medical officials, told that she was overreacting and not in her right mind. The conceptualization of hysteria and its prevalence refuse to be diluted completely by time.

Sixty years after Dr. Weir Mitchell’s heyday, this same concept, that housewives who were struggling with their lives—whether specifically their husbands, children, or wifely-motherly duties—were unhappy because they were being challenged beyond their means, became prevalent yet again. In the 1960’s The Problem that Had No Name became something that everyone wanted to discuss.10 The likes of *Time Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *CBS* broadcasting, *Redbook*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Newsweek* all endeavored to guess what it could be that would cause females who seemed to have everything—money, health, nice possessions, and family—to feel as though their lives were not enriching enough. Yet again, a percentage of people were quick to blame education and overreaching intellect. *Time* reported in June of 1960 that “Many young women—certainly not all—whose education plunged them into a world of ideas feel stifled in their homes. They find their routine lives out of joint with their training.”11  The resolution was simple to some: stop sending women to colleges that would teach them of academics they would never use within the confines of the home. Women, at this time, were again diagnosed to be lacking, to be unable to juggle everything that was put before them. No one stopped to consider that women who had previously worked outside of the home until marriage might be bored and in need of *more* instead of less. Women, again, were just too fragile. They were judged unable to carry the heavy load of a full and varied life. Not only does this response to unhappy women hearken back to previous treatments of hysteria, it is important to note that the gentle and distressed female was very popular in the 50’s and early 60’s movies, a trope Romero pays homage to in his work a half-decade later.

As the first screenplay written and directed by George Romero, the horror film connoisseur now admits that in his youth he sought to place politics into the film by tackling the collapse of “society and societal norms,” as well as the family.12 In a world that craves the decisive nature of empirical science, sifting through the history of life before modern technology proves tricky, fact and fiction blending together based on the authority in charge. What seems clear, however, is that in his admittedly socio-political statement on what the world would transform into under the immense strain of the end of life as we know it, Romero makes it blatantly clear that without family to protect and direct her, woman as traditional society would prefer her will fall to the challenges that face her. Maybe she will try, or maybe she will lay down and die. Perhaps, they will even do as Barbara does at the end of *Living Dead* and willingly run into the arms of their undead loved ones. This is how she meets her untimely end, by blindly seeking out her dead brother, who she witnessed die, because he is familiar and too important to her own identity to go without. Barbara’s character chooses death over existing in an autonomous way in a society that would prefer her dependant on worthier authorities. It is an unfortunate truth that in this world sometimes our choices are not actually choices at all; we are programmed by external factors to operate in a very specific way, to move through the world in ways these outside influences make familiar and justified to us.

Notes

1. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: ZED Books, 1999). When the British Empire colonized New Zealand, for example, the Maori people and their network of aboriginal healers and wise-people were restricted from their traditional practices.

2. Popular Science Fiction novelist H.G. Wells often mentioned the headlines of newspapers and the babbling of radios in many of his early twentieth-century novels in order to convey that an unprecedented change was about to take place. With Wells, this was often massive-scale warfare. In Romero’s film, the news pertains to a widespread disease that is turning human beings into flesh-eating zombies. In both sets of circumstances, the protagonist ignores or brushes off the harsh news, personally unaffected until they directly witness their own way of life crumble.

3. George Romero*, Night of the Living Dead*, perf. [Duane Jones](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0427977/?ref_=tt_ov_st), [Judith O'Dea](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0640621/?ref_=tt_ov_st), and [Karl Hardman](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0362457/?ref_=tt_ov_st) (Continental Distributing, 1968), Film. Interestingly enough, at this time Romero did not call them “zombies” they were simply, the “undead.”

4. George Romero, *Night of the Living Dead*.

5. Robyn Ryle, *Questioning Gender: A Sociological Exploration*, 2nd ed (Los Angeles: Sage, 2015), 264.

6. Ibid, 263.

7. Jon Stone, et. al, “Systematic Review of Misdiagnosis of Conversion Symptoms and ‘Hysteria’,” *British Medical Journal* 331, no. 7523 (2005): 990. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25460967

This number is achieved by averaging together the two categorical time periods of 1960-1964 and 1965-1969.

8. Ibid, 263.

9. . Silas Weir Mitchell, *Wear and Tear; Or Hints for the Overworked* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co. 1871), 33.

10. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1963), 23. This is a term that Betty Friedan uses most frequently to refer to the creeping sense of unexplained dissatisfaction many women felt with their day-to-day lives in the 1950’s and 60’s.

11. Ibid, 22.

12. George Romero, interview by James Blackford, *Sight and Sound* 24, no. 2, February 23, 2014.

Whose Wrath is it, Anyway?

A Critical Look at Religious Gender Roles in William Peter Blatty’s *The Exorcist*

Religion is a powerful force in this world. It has the ability to put people beyond life and death, to make them reconsider what they may know about the physical world they live in and place more importance on the supernatural surround. Countless wars have been waged in the name of holy lands and ways of life. Machiavelli dedicated part of his treatise on authority and leadership to the way that belief systems preserve or destroy power in different situations.1 For centuries, Christian theologies have shaped the lives of men and women down to the most minute of details. Women, especially, have found their lives regulated by holy texts like the Bible. They must act with piety and proper decorum or risk the harsh backlash of not only God and His devout, but the evil that lies hungrily in wait for those who stray. This idea about the dangerous nature of women who deviate from Christian norms continues on from medieval times well into the 1970s, as is exemplified by the struggles of fictional mother Chris MacNeil in the 1971 cult classic novel *The Exorcist*.

It is no secret that the Bible envisions and encourages the idea of the nuclear family. Throughout its contents, there are many passages that examine the role of each member of a family as individuals crucial to the whole. In particular, the holy book has much to say on the role of mothers and their female relatives before them:

Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, andsubmissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.2

This passage from Titus speaks to the ways in which parents, especially mothers, are expected to use their domesticity to reproduce not only in the physical/scientific sense, but also in the spiritual, as well. The family is an institution, and like all institutions must follow specific traditions in order to preserve the existing lifestyle. The most important, arguably, is raising newcomers to the tradition—the very young—to respect and follow Christianity just as their mothers do. This is done in a variety of different ways. Children are verbally commanded to learn the word of God, and then knowing this information, to act in such a way that will honor it. Additionally, children will visually witness this dynamic at work within their households. A young girl who grows up with a mother who takes the maternal role very seriously will likely grow up to follow suit, given that there is no outside interference.

While this seems like a rather arcane idea, just two years before the publication of The Exorcist (the year 1969), intellectual feminists like Margaret Benston were hypothesizing similar ideals about the role of motherhood in everyday life. As Benston writes in her work entitled “The Political Economy of Women’s Liberation,” the family is a “valuable stabilizing force in a capitalist society.”3This author is examining reproduction in a material sense, but the basic rhetoric of Christian Motherhood is the same. Like capitalism, religion is an institution, a well defined system in which people are bound into complex hierarchies. Men produce labor outside of the home for people who are above them in the stratified category of wealth. Women, meanwhile, complete their work—household upkeep, feeding family members, and teaching the children—inside of their homes, compensated by their husbands for their efforts. As far as spirituality goes, males can be said to apply God to the atmosphere outside of the homes that their wives make. Said wives set an example for their daughters, raising them as devoutly as possible.4 Outliers within systems such as these are usually rebuked, whether verbally by others within their society or monetarily by not participating in the established world of capital gain. With this fresh in our minds, we may turn to *The Exorcist*’s Chris MacNeil for validation.

In many regards, the novel supports the idea that those who do not possess faith and teach it to those closest to them are opening themselves up for evil. Unlike in *Rosemary’s Baby*, in which Satan is called into the life of Rosemary Woodhouse by neighbors who worship him, in *The Exorcist*, twelve year old Regan becomes demonic prey by what is seemingly pure happenstance. A closer look, however, reveals that the life lead by the young girl’s mother, Chris, plays an instrumental part in harming Regan. While the single mother would be labeled by few as a “bad” person, the reader is told early on that Chris is an atheist, who “had never taught Regan religion,” as “She thought it dishonest.”5When her daughter begins to ask questions about why God does as He does, she appears to be disturbed, wondering who had been mentioning God. She resolves the situation by confronting the culprit, her secretary, and asking her not to confuse Regan further.

Aside from blatant refusal to provide Regan with a belief system, Chris does not fall into the role of mother as portrayed by the Bible. She is an actress who makes good money outside of the home. In this profession, she spends much of her day getting made to look as appealing as possible, just as many in the entertainment business do.6 In order to compensate for the fact that she is rarely within the home, she has a set of married housekeepers to complete what Christianity often deems womanly duties. This pair falls into line with the roles set out for their genders. The husband, Karl, takes care of landscaping and keeping pests and rodents away while his wife Willie does the cooking and cleaning. The two reside within the house, and as witnesses to the possession of young Regan by the Devil, are quick to believe what has happened to her, even when Chris does not. It is Karl, after all, who places a crucifix beneath one of Regan’s pillows one night, hopeful that it will cut down on the kicking, screaming, ranting and raving that the previously well behaved girl is doing.7 Chris reacts with anger, concerned that adding superstition to the mix will only make the situation more dramatic.

Chris may lead a secular life, but she lives within a country that is more religiously affiliated than most other Western societies. As mentioned in a previous chapter, despite the fascination with rebellion and political upheaval in the 1960’s, the majority of the American population continued to hold on to the same traditions that had been popular in prior decades.8 Unsurprisingly, this applies to religious life particularly. One Oxford historian cites that in the year 1968 around 43% of American citizens “regularly attended services,” framing this statistic with the knowledge that at that same time, only 10-15% of French and English people could say the same.9Despite (or perhaps because of) the social and political atmosphere of the 60’s, this decade saw a resurgence in the running and doctrines of the Catholic Church. Between the years of 1962 and 1965, Pope John XXIII called together several sessions hosted for religious officials to discuss primarily the role of the aged Church in a new and modern world.10  The whole of these meetings were called the Second Vatican Council, or sometimes Vatican II.11 Among the policies considered for updating were how lay people, clergy, and nonreligious persons all interacted with each other.12This issue is addressed within *The Exorcist* with the introduction of Father Damien Karras, a priest who begins to take an interest in Regan and her affliction. Although Karras serves as a member of the Catholic Church, he does not immediately jump to superstition as the root of the problem. He is a melding of advanced science and classical doctrines, trying to navigate healing Regan and keeping Chris, a nonbeliever, up to date and feeling secure that he is doing everything that he can to assist her sick child.

Staying consistent for most of the book, it takes a very long time for Chris to begin to buy into the idea that a demon is possessing her daughter. She spends countless hours conversing with doctors, first taking the physical route and having a physician check Regan’s nervous system. After everything is found to be physically normal, the distraught mother then turns to psychologists, most of whom believe that Regan is spewing obscenities, becoming violent, and voicing horrible, uncharacteristic thoughts because of some deeply buried guilt over the divorce that her mother and father went through.13 Of course none of the medicines that the doctors force on Regan are effective, puzzling everyone and further delaying the help that the young girl actually needs. In a short period of time, she transitions from a cute little girl with freckles and braces into a monster:

…On the creature that was lying on its back in the bed, head propped against a pillow while eyes bulging wide in their hollow sockets shone with mad cunning and burning intelligence…seething in a face shaped into a skeletal, hideous mask…Karras shifted his gaze to the tangled, thickly matted hair; to the wasted arms and legs; the distended stomach jutting up so grotesquely. 14

It is this small but frightening creature that possesses supernatural strength enough to kill a full-grown man, to vomit at will upon those who she wishes to silence, and commits unspeakable sexual acts that defy the definition of all that is holy.

The reader rides the bumpy road with Regan, realizing quickly that the story is not just about her and the struggle to rid herself of evil, but also about those around her—Willie and Karl the housekeepers; Damien Karras, the young priest who is beginning to doubt his faith; and Chris, the mother who is on her own in the world, trying to understand something that she does not even believe in. As outsiders to the situation, we wonder how it was, out of all of the nonbelievers in the world, that the demon Pazuzu chose Regan. This question is only answered once an older priest steps in to assist in the titular act that will hopefully free the innocent from evil. On this topic, the wise elder Merrin says:

Yet I think the demon’s target is not the possessed; it is us…the observers…every person in this house. And I think – I think the point is to make us despair; to reject our own humanity… [and] see ourselves as ultimately vile and putrescent…And there lies the heart of it, perhaps: unworthiness.15

If we are to believe that Pazuzu’s aim was to look for observers who would have the most difficulty, we can reason that Chris’s inability to compel the demon away from her daughter—an inability that arises from not possessing the spirituality to do so for herself or equip Regan with the tool of faith—played a huge part in attracting the hideous entity right to her. In this way, William Peter Blatty lends strength to the idea that women who stray from religiously prescribed norms are inviting misery and strife into their lives. Thus, even though the mother maintains that she is still an atheist toward the end of the book, it is important to recognize that only when she indirectly put her hopes with God—through Damien—is Regan able to be freed from Pazuzu. This emancipation cost the lives of the priests involved, Father Merrin and Father Karras. Father Merrin, who had faced the same demon previously, knew that he was too elderly to live through the rite and willingly went through with it. Father Karras, having learned in his extensive studies that demons who are expelled from a person cannot return, offered his body to the demon, absorbing him and then purposefully jumping out of a bedroom window to ensure his own death. Keeping in faithfully in line with old traditions, it is only a great sacrifice from a male savior that can redeem the afflicted.

Notes

1. Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (New York: Penguin Books, 1952), 69.

Of Ecclesiastical Principalities, Machiavelli states, “They are acquired either by ability or by fortune; but are maintained without either, for they are sustained by ancient religious customs, which are so powerful and of such quality, that they keep their princes in power in whatever manner they proceed and live.”0

2. Tit 2:4-5 English Standard Version (ESV)

3. Margaret Benston, “The Political Economy of Women’s Liberation (1969),” in *Material Feminism: A Reader in Class, Difference, and Women’s Lives*, ed. Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham (New York: Routledge, 1997), 21.

4. The bible makes no mention of classes in which stay at home moms are impossible.

5. William Peter Blatty, *The Exorcist* (London: Transworld Publishers, 1973), 50.

6. Prov. 31:30 (ESV) “Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.” Charm and vanity are requirements of Chris’s job, and she, as stated, does not believe in God.

7. William Peter Blatty, *The Exorcist*, 161-162.

8. James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 450.

9. Ibid, 456.

10. Jason Zuidema, “The Laity, the World and the Legacy of Vatican II on the Consecrated Life,” *Cithara* 53, no. 1 (2015) 55 – 70. *America: History & Life*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 28, 2015).

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Matt. 19:4-6 (New King James Version). “**‘**So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate’.” This quote is spoken by Jesus Christ when asked about the separation of man and wife. The concept of divorce, from a biblical standpoint, is unforgivable to the Christian faith. While practiced now by both churches and government, it is still heavily frowned upon.

14. William Peter Blatty, *The Exorcist*, 194.

15. *The Exorcist*, 293.

The Respectable Girl Becomes the Final Girl in *Halloween*

If there were ever a film to justify research on the role of gender and sexuality within popular horror films and novels, *Halloween* (1978) would be that starting point. The movie fits neatly into the heyday of slasher films that began with Hitchcock’s lucrative *Psycho* (1960) and was one of the first of many to explore the trope of babysitters as targets of malice. The late twentieth century John Carpenter movie establishes the now very popular scenario in which an evil antagonist is trying to maim or kill multiple unsuspecting female characters and only one will survive—contemporarily referred to as the Final Girl. That Carpenter unconsciously chooses his sole survivor based on her perceived “goodness” rather than because she possesses the tools and strength to compete against the danger she is in serves as a testament to which virtues were most valued in women at the close of the 1970s.

Although Carpenter was not the one to come up with the term “final girl” himself, it has been used since it was coined in 1992 and is popular even when looking retroactively at horror films. In order to fully understand the implications of who is selected to serve as the last “girl” left alive throughout various films, we must first come to understand the term as it was originally developed by film theorist Carol J. Clover:

The image of the distressed female most likely to linger in memory is the image of the one who did not die: the survivor, or Final Girl. She is the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and of her own peril; who is chased, cornered, wounded; whom we see scream, stagger, fall, rise, and scream again…1

In many ways, it can be said that this dynamic is in line with social Darwinism, its own brand of bloody survival of the fittest. What does not seem to add up with equating the Final Girl as the most fit to flourish within her film, however, is the fact that the traits given to her seldom add up to create a character strong enough to take on the evil surrounding her. Given that she is not characterized based on her cunning or physical abilities, it seems more in line to say that Finals Girls are not the type of people who are best suited for life, but instead that they are the kind of girls too valuable to society to die. They are good and pure and overwhelmingly fate steps in to save them where their own inherent abilities cannot. That she is even called “girl” instead of “woman” speaks to her virgin spotlessness and the tendency of scary films to infantilize teen girls who are closer to being adults than children.

The first character the audience meets in *Halloween* is none other than the Final Girl herself, Laurie Strode. She is dressed nearly all in pastel colors with the exception of a dark turtleneck sweater reaching chastely up to her chin. Beneath her knee length skirt she wears opaque white tights. Laurie shows no inappropriate skin and even her hair is long and respectably pinned back by a barrette. While walking to school Laurie is confronted by young Tommy and it is quickly established that the teen earns her money by babysitting. She pats her charge on the head and makes promises concerning all of the Halloween-themed fun that they will have later on, once his parents go out. Laurie is kindly, motherly even— a trait often encouraged or sought out in females. Indeed, in an interview nearly four decades after the release of *Halloween*, Carpenter says that Laurie is a babysitter because, "The idea was that every American girl can relate to that."2 With a comment as seeming innocuous as that, the stakes are instantly raised. Not only does the film deal with one friend group in an isolated incident in small town Illinois, we now realize that Carpenter meant the whole scenario to be representative in a lot of ways to the cultural practices of young girls all over America in the 70’s.

Everything about the start of Halloween hints that Laurie’s neighborhood is bright, sunny, and quiet—an ideal image of Smalltown, USA. When masked killer Michael Myers escapes from a 15 year stint in a prison for the mentally ill (for killing his much old sister as a child), however, he returns to this small idyllic town that he grew up in and ensures that nothing will ever be the same.3 What results in Haddonfield turns out to be more of a tournament than a one-on-one battle. Myers seems to gravitate toward Laurie, the first face he sees while hiding out in an abandoned property her father is trying to sell. Because of his obsession, he is also faced with her immediate friends, Lynda and Annie.

These two teens are in sharp contrast to their much quieter friend. Both smoke and in one sequence, Annie pressures Laurie into taking a hit from her marijuana joint while they are driving around in her car. This vehicle, it must be noted, is bright red, from the exterior paint to the upholstery to the trim. This color suits Annie, as she is passionate and outspoken, yelling at passing cars for speeding and going behind Laurie’s back to talk to boys for her. Unfortunately for Annie, she meets an untimely end after abandoning the child she’s supposed to be babysitting with Laurie. This is something that we know Laurie would never do, but Annie is far less maternal and nurturing. At one point, she makes an idle remark about letting the little girl she sits for watch scary movies she should not see just so that she can laugh at her fear. In electing to ditch her charge, Annie effectively places herself in solitude and becomes an easy target. She dies with keys in hand to go pick up her boyfriend when she *should* have been babysitting. Annie’s bright flame is extinguished.

Yet another example of the punishment for loose behavior is seen in third girlfriend Lynda. Unlike Annie and Laurie, Lynda is the only one of the gang that did not have prior responsibilities on Halloween night. What she does plan in cahoots with Annie, however, is to sneak into the irresponsible babysitter’s house with her love interest after the child is asleep and occupy one of the free bedrooms. The only hitch in this plan is that Annie is dead, unbeknownst to Lynda. With no one home, Lynda and her boyfriend go right into the house, have sex in an empty bedroom, and then pilfer cigarettes and beer**.** Their goodtime is cut short by Michael, who murders the happy couple in cold blood.4 Everyone who has had sex or mentioned having done it in the past has been killed.

Although cultural preferences obviously change fleetingly as time passes, it has traditionally been the case that men, as is their born right within patriarchal societies, have defined what is attractive in women. While it seems like an impossible task to average together the opinions of so many males in Western cultures, there is a very common divisional set of traits that has lingered for centuries. It is as Mina Loy poetically declares to an invisible audience of women in her formerly unpublished manifesto on achieving equality between the sexes, “The first illusion it is to your interest to demolish is the division of women into two classes: the mistress and the mother. Every well-balanced and developed woman knows that is not true, Nature has endowed the complete woman with a faculty of expressing herself through all her functions.”5 In this way, misogynistic institutions force women into being either virginal or seductive, at times paradoxically both. The price girls pay for deviating from the path of purity has always been a harsh one, as classic novels like *The Scarlet Letter* show us. Carpenter, though, takes the cake with the fatal punishments he selects for the young women who indulge shamelessly in their own sexuality.

The only explanation we receive as to why Michael reacts so violently to women comes from a scene in the movie in which Dr. Loomis, the man who has been studying Michael for the last decade and a half expresses the depth of his analysis to the local Sheriff of Haddonfield, Illinois. Of his disturbed patient, he says:

I met this six-year-old child, with this blank, pale, emotionless face, and the blackest eyes... the devil's eyes. I spent eight years trying to reach him, and then another seven trying to keep him locked up because I realized that what was living behind that boy's eyes was purely and simply... evil.6

Although this sentiment is not outwardly meant to summon up the traditional image of the Christian Devil, the enemy of God, we are meant to understand that Michael Myers is the embodiment of darkness, of pure “evil.” Playing by the rules of most literature, it is commonly thought that only someone with the purest of hearts and intentions can truly hope to combat such wickedness.

Clueless to the fact that both of her best friends and their boyfriends have died, virginal Laurie is stuck babysitting not one, but two children. She handles this well, as she is very maternal. She goes ahead carving pumpkins and knitting, continuing her night as planned. While the teen does nothing to put herself in immediate danger, like a magnet, Myers is drawn to her. He shows up to the house and might have been successful in hurting Laurie if not for Tommy’s vigilance—it is Halloween, after all, and some older boys have told him that the boogey man is out to get him. He warns Laurie about Michael’s approaching, alarmed by his expressionless mask and menacing stance. Terrified and helpless, Laurie is unable to prevent Michael from getting inside. She staves him off, using, of all the things possible, a knitting needle. Going into mother bear mode, she points the children to safety and tries to call for help. Like many women who came before her, Laurie is willing to sacrifice herself when the going gets tough. None of us are able to say how we would react in the event that someone who means us harm is after us, but it can be said that not everyone would instinctively do as Laurie did and think of the children first before their own bodily safety. In fact, if it were not for Dr. Loomis’s timely arrival hot on Michael’s trail, Laurie’s decision might have cost her her life. Loomis shoots the villain several times, the force of which causes Michael to fall out of a second story window and onto the lawn below. When Laurie and Loomis go to look down on the wounded bad-guy, however, he is nowhere to be found. If Michael Myers cannot be killed by bullets, Laurie’s chances of making it without anything short of a team of exorcists, several machine guns, and a flame thrower seem less than high. Yet somehow, she is whole and in once piece.

Truly the Final Girl in horror films, as demonstrated by *Halloween*, is an unconscious thesis on what the writers and directors perceive to be the most accepted and desired traits in women. It is certainly hard to imagine any rational person sitting down and spinning a tale in which the main character, a sole survivor out of all of her late friends, triumphs over an evil that seemingly cannot be killed by alternatively fending it off with a clothes hanger and a knitting needle. These are not subtle items. They, like many concepts, adjectives, and things, have a gender just as surely as all humans are forced to have one. These items, touched daily by women, are the tools of domestic bliss… not weapons.

Notes

1. Carol J. Clover, Men, Women, and Chainsaws, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 35.

2. Kev Geoghegan, “John Carpenter reflects on Halloween 35 years on,” *BBC News*, October 24, 2013, http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-24296254.

3. John Carpenter and Debra Hill, *Halloween*, perf. Jamie Lee Curtis, Donald Pleasence, and Tony Moran (Compass International Pictures, 1978) film.

It is notable to mention that Michael, at the time six years old, killed his sister a little after she canoodled with her boyfriend. Unlike in the case of Lynda and Annie later on, however, the boyfriend is allowed to live. He exits the house and shortly after their romantic interlude, clueless about the danger the oldest Myers girl is in. Although there are no concrete answers as to why a much older Michael graduates to taking on boyfriends as well, it can be theorized that the answer’s roots in masculinity are to blame. Perhaps, in growing up and becoming a man, albeit a faceless and emotionless one, Michael grows to feel it is his responsibility to take on other males before claiming their girlfriends as prey. He must first possess them before he can take their lives as he wishes.

4. Carpenter and Hill, *Halloween*. Again we note that Lynda’s boyfriend was killed as well. If not a way of asserting his superior manliness, maybe Myers evolves to killing male offenders as a way of ensuring that no white knight will be around to interrupt him once he turns to muting his selected damsels in distress.

5. Mina Loy, “The Feminist Manifesto,” in *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 257.

6. Carpenter and Hill, *Halloween*.

Making Monsters: A Look at Toxic Masculinity in Thomas Harris’ *Red Dragon*

There is a prevalent misconception that feminists only study the damaging effects of patriarchy as they relate to women. This is simply not the case. The strident principals and societal roles enforced by institutional patriarchy, or male-centered hierarchies, hold everyone, regardless of biological sex and gender identity, to very specific standards. Many of these are double standards asserting that men are the sex more inherently blessed with both mental intelligence and physical strength. In the same way that some insist that woman is womb, man is synonymous with bodily strength, sheer prowess. No weakness is allowed to be shown, an impossible expectation, but one encouraged in boys from their youth nonetheless. This meant that they would grow up to provide a wider pool of human capital to be used as the upper echelon saw fit, in other words, a wider selection of useful tools to be employed in foreign lands and pasted across magazine covers and books to exemplify a fit and steely nation. The destructive nature of masculinity, as encouraged by patriarchy, can be closely studied in antagonist Francis Dollarhyde, a character featured in the 1981 Thomas Harris novel *Red Dragon*.

*Red Dragon* is, at its core, a crime, psychological thriller, *and* horror novel. Many are familiar with Harris’s later works, *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Hannibal*, both of which feature the now infamous Doctor Hannibal Lecter, a brilliant psychiatrist gone murderous. *Red Dragon* is the first novel of Harris’s to introduce Dr. Lecter (at this time already imprisoned) and begin to characterize him. We follow former FBI agent Will Graham as his former boss lures him back into the bureau to help catch a prolific serial killer. On Will’s journey, he must consult the very man who assaulted him and landed him in the hospital for months: Dr. Lecter. This incident eventually led Will to resign from his post, only brought back by a sense of duty to stop yet another murderer. Now behind bars for his grisly actions, the cannibalistic Lecter is a perfect source to assist Will in finding the man that is known only as the “Tooth Fairy.”1

Francis Dollarhyde, known to the public as the Tooth Fairy because he bites his victims with a set of sharpened dentures, is a killer of men and women alike. His preferred targets in the prime of his murder sprees are whole families whom he selects based on the personal home videos he develops working for a photography and film company. In order to understand how prevalent ideals like the nuclear family as normative and the male as the center of that unit figure into the sickness that takes over Dollarhyde, we must first do as Will Graham does and analyze the psychology of his violence in light of the background information imparted to us by Lecter.

A stirring picture develops.

The man who was destined to become a destroyer of all things good was born into the world to a single mother ashamed to be having a baby.2 On top of the tricky situation of unwanted pregnancy, Francis is born with a severely cleft palate. An “obstetrician remark[s] that he look[s] ‘more like a leaf-nosed bat than a baby’,” something we are told is an accurate, although cruel description.3His mother, Marian, is a beautiful but vain woman who was raised in the bourgeois comfort of her parents fortune. Because she has run away from them with a man they do not consider suitable, and that man has deserted her, she is alone—solitary. Yet it appears that she would rather continue on in this way than accept a deformed son. Her only response to her baby is disgust and instant contempt. When she leaves the hospital, she does not take him with her. He is sent immediately to an orphanage and is thus denied what the proverbial American Dream defines as a normal childhood—one with a mother, father, and possibly siblings and pets.

While the concept of the nuclear family is, in many circles, thought to secretly be an impossible standard for everyone to live by, developmental sociologists hold strongly to the fact that children learn all of their immediate gender roles from their parents or guardians. From the very moment a couple learns the sex of their baby, they will begin shaping that baby into a respectable version of already established norms. This is formally known as the process of socialization.4 For example, they might paint the nursery pink or purple for a girl or blue or red for a male, assigning even colors a gender. In the same way, they will pick out matching clothing suitable for tiny boys and girls and begin to select the appropriate toys that encourage the child to fall in line with gender schemas.5

Although it is not a perfect science, sociologists also note that it is very common for children—one they reach the age of at least two—to begin to take in everything that the parent of the same sex does and begin to copy or “identify” with these actions.6 For example, most people can probably recall the idealistic picture or happenstance of a little boy of about three or four trying out his father’s razor on his face, despite the fact that puberty will not occur for about a decade. This is a very common process through which patriarchal society is reinforced. Boys will take on the role of their fathers, and girls will pay close attention to their mothers and begin to copy their moves—traditionally to complete domestic chores and give primary care to any other children within the home.7

When we take these developmental theories and apply them to the life of Francis Dollarhyde, however, we notice that none of these occurred in his life. Instead of having a father to model, Francis spent his crucial years in an orphanage, surrounded by other children who mocked his facial deformity and confronted him with violence because he was different. Where these other boys learned their physical violence, we are unable to say. What we do know, though, is that this was far from the only time that Dollarhyde was faced with fists because he was different. After harrowing years in state housing, during which time he was faced with such contempt that until he left he actually thought his name was something to do with the labia (much more vulgar than the scientific name), Francis is pulled back into the hands of his blood relatives.8 A maternal Grandmother has taken an interest in him, soon dragging her daughter Marian back into the picture too. Marian has since been remarried to a politician and now has stepchildren, one of which blames Francis for his father’s defeat in the polls. This child of only twelve, Ned, hurts Francis, throwing him into a mirror and telling him just how worthless and ugly he is.9 The imagery of a young boy with a harelip looking into a broken and bloody mirror is heartbreaking. In this way, it is literally pounded into Francis that to be a male means punishing the weak simply for being that way and mercy is not a word in masculine vocabularies.

He soon begins to deviate sexually, unable to separate the spheres of violence and passion/pleasure and when he is caught peeping into the windows of an unsuspecting girl at the age of seventeen, he is given the choice between going to jail and enlisting in the army. Because Harris does such a thorough job of establishing a time line of events, it figures to be 1955 when Dollarhyde chooses the army over jail time. Offering criminal offenders a choice between prison and the military is an occurrence more common than many realize, but it is a controversial happening all the same. A 2012 study on alternative sanctions against would-be inmates finds that, “a great amount of anecdotal evidence exists that suggests a number of people have performed military service instead of doing time in prison, but from a legal perspective, this is prohibited.”10 Still, many states all over the U.S. have historically had some kind of alternative sanctions—whether they be half-way houses, electronic monitoring anklets, or house arrest—being employed regularly.

Being that it is 1955 when Dollarhyde “willingly” enlists, it is no surprise that alternative sanctions would be placed on the table. The Korean war had begun only five years prior and the United States, then under the Truman Administration, took aggressive measures to establish its unwillingness to accept the trail of communism that appeared to be spreading from the Soviet Union to other countries in the far east.11 Although America pulled out of Korea after three years had passed, the war in Vietnam, this time headed by President Eisenhower, loomed large on the horizon. Conflict broke out in 1954, when the VietCong army captured a French military base.12 Eleven years later, the United States would offer up its troops. This time period, riddled with conflict and aggression between the United States and the Soviet Union (and all of its satellite countries), saw a resurgence in traditional American values, especially in femininity and masculinity, as the country struggled to define itself amidst political, social, and cultural chaos.13

The military has always been a force to reckon with in terms of the values boot camps and training sessions instill within soldiers. On this topic, poet and feminist Adrienne Rich hold that combat is all about, “the valorization of manliness and masculinity. The armed forces as the extreme embodiment of the patriarchal family.”14 What Dollarhyde’s six years in the army provide him is extraordinary. Affiliated doctors take him on as a sort of science project. They take interest in his cleft palate and begin a series of operations that correct his physical appearance.15  While this is a great improvement to Dollarhyde’s life, he has already lived an extended period of time with his condition. The damage has already been done. Otherwise, the man enjoys his time thoroughly. He works nonstop on perfecting his body, doing enough work that when he sees his mother at Grandmother Dollarhyde’s funeral in 1970, she is shocked by his appearance, which is “deep-chested and sleek, with her fine coloring and a neat moustache.”16 She briefly considers trying to establish an actual relationship with her son once he proves to be refined and powerful thanks to the army.

It is this manipulated version of Francis that later comes across the famous William Blake painting *The Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed in Sun* and it forever changes his life.17

Once seeing the image of the Red Dragon, it haunts him obsessively. He carries it around with him, fantasizing about what it would be like to hold all of the power and violence of the dragon figure. Before too long, Francis begins to believe that he is “Becoming,” that a transition is taking place in which he is actually the Red Dragon brought to earth to do as he wishes. As a result of this belief, Dollarhyde travels many miles to Hong Kong and gets the Red Dragon tattooed onto his back**.** After this point he continues his rigorous physical pursuits, but adds to them the hunting of humans, usually many at one time which corresponds to the phase of the moon.

It is as if, in killing entire families, the monster that was Dollarhyde is recognizing that his society is built around the idea that men are entitled to grow up and form family units. Without having ever experienced one, he is bitter, jealous, and deeply wounded. He does not have women fall over him, despite the fact that he has remained in good shape and had surgery on his facial deformities. He has no biological family left in his life. So he takes the urges to destroy, unconsciously associating them with masculinity, and applies them to innocent and unsuspecting families. He kills them and then arranges them all together, placing fragments of mirror into their orifices so that they can “*see*” him how he wishes to be seen—as a transitioning monster, an otherworldly force.18 Dollarhyde brutally forces himself into families, cleaning up his mess and then returning to his solitude after no witnesses are left alive.

It is only when the team of agents trying to capture Dollarhyde falsely publish a story about men being his sexual preference that Francis begins to slip and become hasty. He has already been enraged by the fact that the news publications refer to him as the Tooth Fairy, something very feminine and partially linked to homosexuality. Calling his sexuality into question is, in many ways, the last straw. The violent reaction can best be explained by a phenomenon frequently called the Lavender Scare, an anti-gay movement that shared the 1950’s with the infamous anti-communist Red Scare and eventually came to a head with the Stonewall Riots in New York City in 1969. In this time period, homosexual acts of any nature were “illegal in every state.”19 To protect themselves the gay community kept itself behind closed doors, within trusted company or none at all. There was a lot at stake if ones sexuality were questioned. Despite the best efforts of counterculture and social advocacy groups, anyone proven to be gay could be “dishonorably discharged from the military and usually fired from the federal government,” among other horrific punishments.20 With a national identity that defined masculine strength as powerful, there was no room for homosexuals in authoritative positions. A purge of all things effeminate was carried out. Learning a large part of his gender identity directly from military service, Dollarhyde feels the uncontrollable urge to lash out, to prove himself as a man. Blinded by rage and pride, however, he gets sloppy and the public justice officials are able to identify him. They begin searching for him, a task that proves very difficult.

Although Dollarhyde has above average intelligence, the need to exist as a manly entity and hold violent power over so many people eventually lead to his downfall. In light of the fact that this antagonist is a manifestation of all things solely masculine and male, it is perfectly symbolic that at a very personal *mano y mano* fight at Will Graham’s personal residence, it is Will’s wife Molly, who gets her hands on a gun and – protecting her son — shoots Dollarhyde five times: once in the leg and four times in the face.21Although Francis Dollarhyde, the Red Dragon, is extinguished, one must wonder whether much was actually accomplished at all. As long as there are harsh gender roles forcing toxic masculinity upon boys, those boys will grow up into strong bodies free of empathy and prone to destruction.

Notes

1. Thomas Harris, *Red Dragon* (New York: Dell Publishers, 2000), 35.

2. Ibid, 250.

3. Ibid.

4. Robyn Ryle, *Questioning Gender: A Sociological Exploration*, 2nd ed (Los Angeles: Sage, 2015), 109.

5. Ibid, 122.

6. Ibid, 120.

7. Contemporarily, not everyone can afford to live this life, staying in the home, but studies have shown that even in the workplace, women tend to most commonly occupy spheres that coincide with their genders.

8. Harris, *Red Dragon*, 256.

9. Ibid, 278.

10. Travis Wade Milburn, “Exploring Military Service as an Alternative Sanction: Evidence from Inmates’ Perspectives” (MS diss., Eastern Kentucky University (Encompass), 2012),http://encompass.eku.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1081&context=etd.

11. Geoffrey Warner, “[The Korean War](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2615722),” [*International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs1944-)*](http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublication?journalCode=inteaffaroyainst)56, no. 1 (1980): 98, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2615722

12. Robert K. Brigham and E. Kenneth Hoffman, “Battlefield: Vietnam,” *PBS*, http://www.pbs.org/battlefieldvietnam/timeline/index4.html

13. James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 450.

14. Adrienne Rich, “Notes Toward a Politics of Location,” in *The Essential Feminist Reader*, ed. Estelle B. Freedman (New York: The Modern Library, 2007), 379.

15. Harris, *Red Dragon*, 284.

16. Ibid, 285.

17. William Blake, *The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed with the Sun*. Black ink and watercolor over traces of graphite and incised lines, ca. 1803, Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY.



18. Harris, *Red Dragon*, 28.

19. Terry H. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 317.

20. Ibid, 318.

21. *Red Dragon*, 443.

The Marriage Game: The Representation of Marital Politics in *Gerald’s Game*

Love him or hate him, Stephen King is a literary giant. According to his personal webpage, he has written over fifty novels, many of which have also been turned into movies.1 With so many published works, it is no surprise that King sometimes falls into the trap of having similar characters between books, pigeonholing himself into popular tropes so to please the masses and continue his lucrative career. One of such stereotypes King was willing to own up to in a 1983 interview with *Playboy*—his difficulty writing complex women characters.2 What must come as a relief to King’s female fan base, however, is that nearly a decade later the well-to-do writer turned out two books that did just that, proving to the world that not only could King delve into the lives of women, but also that he could empathize with the fears of womankind. These two novels, both published in 1992, are *Dolores Claiborne* and *Gerald’s Game*, both of which tackle the themes of abuse between men and women—both physical and mental/emotional—and childhood traumas inflicted on young girls. King uses *Gerald’s Game* specifically as a tool to examine martial politics, especially as they relate to the recognition—or lack thereof—of rape and criminal abuse within family units.

The novel’s setting is a beautiful patch of shore along a small lake in Maine, but *Gerald’s Game* is anything but a warm vacation story. If someone were to pick up the book having little idea what would confront them between its pages, they would be in for a surprise. Despite opening upon a scene in which a middle-aged couple are enjoying an early autumn day by taking off their clothes for a romp between the sheets, the atmosphere clouds up quickly. We are introduced to Jessie Burlingame, wife of the titular Gerald, who just so happens to be handcuffed naked to the posts of her solid wood bed.3  Gerald, it seems, has become bored with their sex life after twenty years of marriage and has recently requested a foray into bondage. Jessie, with his best interest in mind, has complied a few times in the past. What is different about this occasion, however, is that the two are in an isolated location—for most people abandon their vacation houses once the shorter, colder days roll around—and instead of tying her up with a silk scarf or harmless fuzzy handcuffs, Jessie is cuffed with police-grade restraints. Understandably, she begins to feel uncomfortable with this arrangement and requests that Gerald unlock her so that they can have unfettered sex.

Jessie’s request has an unsatisfactory result and we begin to see why the book’s title was chosen. Remarkably, Gerald, believing that his wife’s protests are all a part of the game, continues to advance on her. She reiterates that she would like to be freed, verbalizing that this is not part of their normal bondage fantasy, but a sincere wish. This time Gerald recoils, hoisting himself off of her so that he can look at her fully and judge her expression. Then the game begins to turn extraordinarily sour. She asks him to get the key, to which he chillingly responds, “What if I won’t?”4  Jessie, sensing that Gerald is enjoying his power over her immensely, recognizes the danger of her situation, all alone in a heavily wooded area with a man who refuses to check his sexual arousal. Gerald is not going to stop. Instincts kicking in, Jessie delivers a swift kick below the belt when he comes within reach, effectively incapacitating him. She has narrowly avoided marital rape.

Justifiably, most consider crimes committed against loved ones or family to be the most heinous of all. We have a perception today that spouses are synonymous with most beloved teammates; you would not disadvantage your own teammates, as you have the same goals and objectives and you form such a tight kinship as to help each other to make it safely over hurdles. While many couples now function this way, the concept that marriages should be formed primarily out of love is relatively new to Western Cultures, dating back only about 200 years.5  Before that point in time, holy matrimony was a necessity for individuals to better survive and gain any kind of recognition as beings with power. It was not about finding the love of your life, but rather, finding a match that would best provide for what you lacked. Women, especially in time periods which they were expressly forbidden by law to own property, often tried to “marry up,” selecting suitors who were not only older, but more established financially and socially.6  This is largely referred to as the “marriage gradient” pattern and is highly visible in the marriage of Jessie and Gerald Burlingame.7 The converse side of this pattern has shown men to select mates who might be a little below them, the idea being that their position in society is stable enough to withstand a partner of lesser wealth or recognition. While many of these pairings functioned satisfactorily—outwardly, anyway—it is important to note that an uneven balance of power was created in which one partner, the one with less fortune, had a lot more at stake than the other. For an example of this, we can look at the status of Gerald, a lawyer in a successful firm, and Jessie, a sometimes substitute teacher. Gerald’s money is her money and if a split were to come, Jessie would be far worse off than Gerald financially, even if alimony was awarded. In fact, Mr. Burlingame even goes as far as to subtly remind his wife of this every now and then. Before Jessie married him, she was a fulltime teacher, making it completely on his own.8 After the union, she quits the profession, but this does not last long. After a while, she goes back to being an educator—this time as a part time substitute. Gerald outright tells her that he does not understand her excitement over this, despite the fact that Jessie considers teaching to be something that makes her feel whole and well-rounded.9 As someone who makes big bucks at a swanky attorney’s office, Gerald is unable to see the worth—literally—in the career that earns Jessie only “chump change.”10

Is it any real surprise, given the patterns sociologists have noticed in mate selection, that such an inequality of power spawned an increased likelihood of marital rape? Indeed, until as recently as the 1960’s—when the second wave of feminism occurred—there existed in the United States a set of protective legislation called “head and master laws.” These laws provided husbands and other male familial heads the freedom to make and enforce all decisions within his family unit.11 Among these perks included sex at any time, verbal freedom, and the ability to lay forceful hands on his wife whenever the situation seemed necessary.12This is not to say that all men before the middle of the twentieth century hit their wives, but rather that the legal system around them took no precautions to prevent it within the domestic sphere. In this way, the American government provided its people with the express knowledge that it considered all households to be inherently and rightly patriarchal.

It may appear that something is off in the equation of affection and abuse between married couples. While it is recognized that about two centuries ago couples began to widely consider love to be the most important factor in selecting a spouse, how can it be that only fifty years ago abusing said spouse was still legal and accepted behind closed doors? It seems as though a person who loved their partner would easily be able to refrain from hurting them, right? But adoration and admiration are complex emotions. Perhaps some of Jessie’s sentiments while tied to the bed of her lake house can shed some light on what enables men (and women, of course, as they too can be abusers, but usually less frequently) to hurt the ones they should love and value above all. As Gerald looms over her and ignores her protests, she has an epiphany that:

…he didn’t know she was serious because for him, Jessie Mahout Burlingame, wife of Gerald, sister of Maddy and Will, daughter of Tom and Sally, mother of no one, was really not here at all. She had ceased to be here when the keys made their small, steely clicks in the locks of the handcuffs. The men’s adventure magazines of Gerald’s teenage years had been replaced by a pile of skin magazines in the bottom drawer of his desk, magazines in which women wearing pearls and nothing else knelt on bearskin rugs…In the back of these magazines…were ads for inflatable women which were supposed to be anatomically correct…She thought of those air-filled dollies now, their pink skins, lineless cartoon bodies, and featureless faces, with a kind of revelatory amazement.13

This is to say that Gerald is so caught up in his own fantasy that his wife ceases to even exist as a human being and is instead just an elaborate blow-up doll laying around to meet his current needs. The proof of his privilege is plainly obvious in that, as a male, he is expected to define—remember that the law was on his side for the majority of American history—the boundaries of his sexual encounters with his wife. As feminists, if we believe that patriarchy is an institutional system of inequality, then we must also come to realize that this construct that allows men the final say in matters concerning women filters down into all areas of the human experience, sharply influencing expressions of intimacy and eroticism.14

It is hard to imagine that all of these things happen to Jessie within the first dozen pages of the novel. The game does not end with her kicking Gerald in the testicles, him uncuffing her, and a particularly nasty divorce. No, the picture of bad health, Gerald actually has a heart attack and dies right there on the floor of the lake house. Jessie is still cuffed to the bed, alone with her late husband’s body and her own menacing thoughts. The rest of the novel is about her desperate attempt to free herself before she dies of starvation or dehydration. In the time that it takes to do so, she must confront her own demons—both literally and figuratively. . She must acknowledge both the fact that her father molested her when she was a child—something that she has repressed for long years, and that there is a mysterious presence that keeps showing up in the cabin. Page by page, we follow Jessie as she painstakingly liberates herself from the marital handcuffs, unpacking years of emotional baggage that she has been shouldering.

We learn about the difficult relationship Jessie has with her mother, who was often jealous of her husband’s favoritism of the young girl. In fact, Jessie neglects to tell her mother about her father’s inappropriate behavior partially because she believes her mother would blame her for it, the topic of victim blaming not being highly visible at the time—1963. All of the flashbacks King gives us of young Jessie and her family prove that, to most, the father that molested her was a standup kind of man, well liked and a hard worker. It is almost as if these traits would absolve him of the crime he has committed against his own flesh and blood. Suddenly, all of the thoughts Jessie has about men being helpless to their sexuality make complete, stunning sense. An unknown and unrecognized victim, she has rationalized what has happened to her, accepted it as an unfortunate accident in an unfortunate world. Only in realizing the full extent of her father’s guiltiness does Jessie regain an inner control that powers her toward survival.

Her freedom does not come cheaply. To earn it, she struggles and bleeds, cleverly smashing a drinking glass from the shelf above her and collecting the sharp shards the best that she can.She then must cut one of her wrists, shedding pint after pint of blood, and peel her own skin back in such a way that will enable her to free herself from one set of cuffs.15  Then, she must pull the heavy weight of the solid wood bed across the room via her other attached arm. She frees herself, but the price she pays is a hefty one. All throughout her walk through the fire, voices in her head talk to Jessie, each representing a facet of what society has taught her about herself. Even after her physical freedom is won, one particular voice that Jessie refers to as “Goody” because of her piousness and conservatism, keeps belaboring the point that if Jessie would have just let Gerald have sex with her, he would still be alive and everything would be dandy**.** This particular voice speaks to the nature of the lessons women are taught about their husbands—namely that they are creatures of immense appetite and as long as women submit to their husbands, everything will be fine, healthy, even. When we leave Jessie at the end of the novel, we get a sense that this traumatic incident will haunt her for the rest of her life, living on in dreams and sudden recollections that she would rather disappear.

Although the days of the marital exception in rape laws are over and recognition and criminalization of domestic violence are widespread, Jessie and Gerald Burlingame embody that the gendered nuances of power inequality in marriages remain. Maybe the only way to truly extinguish them is to reexamine both the ability to compromise and the stubborn tendencies that we all possess, thinking carefully before we marry people who we believe we will naturally get along well with and considering which sacrifices we are or are not willing to make. Marriage itself is hard work, that much is certain, but changing the long established institution is a labor even more strenuous. Perhaps time and awareness are our only hope.

Notes

1. Tabatha King, “The Author,” Stephen King.com, last modified October 7, 2015, http://stephenking.com/the\_author.html.

2. Johnathan Davis, “Caught in the Machine of American Capitalism,” in *Stephen King’s America* (Popular Press: 1994), 84.

3. Stephen King, *Gerald’s Game* (New York: Viking, 1992), 3.

4. Ibid, 12.

5. Robyn Ryle, *Questioning Gender: A Sociological Exploration*, 2nd ed (Los Angeles: Sage, 2015), 310.

6. Ibid, 313.

7. Ibid.

8. King, *Gerald’s Game*, 120.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ryle, *Questioning Gender*, 467.

12. Ibid.

13. King, *Gerald’s Game*, 4-5.

14. Susan Gubar, “Representing Pornography: Feminism, Criticism, and depictions of Female Violation,” *Critical Inquiry* 13, no. 4 (1987): 712-741, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343526.

15. King, *Gerald’s Game*, 239.

The Final Girl Finally Makes Sense: *You’re Next,* The Game Changer

It is widely considered by scholars and historians that the beginning of the 1990’s ushered in a new wave of feminism, the third wave. This new brand of feminism, expanding on the earlier work of its suffragette and advocate sisters, took strides to be more inclusive, more encompassing to the many diverse lifestyles men and women led. The new goal was not only to look at the role of gender and sex in society, but also to take a long, hard look at the role that intersectional demographics like race, class, sexual orientation, and body condition have on everyday life and the bigger picture of our culture. With this shift in study, voices that had long been ignored became audible. In light of this third wave, it is no surprise that narratives, both fictional and otherwise, began to become more diverse, more representative of those who struggled to be heard and seen. This proves especially true for the horror film genre. Brave writers and directors have begun to venture away from stale sex-based power struggles and slowly gravitate toward richer characters fully colored by traits other than gender expression. This phenomenon has led to the creation of a number of films that examine the role of class when intersected with sex and gender, a study carefully cultivated in the 2014 film *You’re Next* (dir. Adam Wingard).

Wedding anniversaries are supposed to be happy occasions, instances in which even the largest and busiest of families drop what they are doing and return to each other to celebrate and to honor the bonds they share. Unfortunately, in the case of Paul and Aubrey Davison, their 35th year as husband and wife will be their last. The good-intentioned couple is excited to get away to their remote vacation house with their four adult children and each of their significant others, but little do they know that a nefarious plan has been put into place by two of their sons, Crispian and Felix. Unbeknownst to everyone in the house except for the two perpetrators and Felix’s girlfriend, Zee, three men have been hired to kill the majority of the family. The audience, who are not privy to this information either, watches in suspense as the protagonist, Crispian’s innocent girlfriend Erin, struggles to survive and make sense of her environment as men in animal masks begin to attack the family get-together.

To better understand the role of class and private ownership in motivating Felix and Crispian in *You’re Next*, the origin of the nuclear family must first be explained. In his essay entitled *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State,* Friedrich Engels, fueled by the studies of anthropologist Johann Bachofen, presents the argument that the human race’s technological advancement, though beneficial, inspired the need for personal ownership. Innocently enough, primal man began with the domestication of various animals to fit his needs. To better ensure that the children he cared and created inherence for were actually his biological match instead of another man’s, monogamous relationships were established.1 This is simply Darwinian biological instinct, the insurance that a person’s genes will live on through their offspring. The problem with this, however, comes with the transformation of human flesh and blood into commodity. As time moved forward, it became the work of the woman to produce children for her husband, a task that meant she was powerless without either.2 While she was at home with the children and the household chores, her husband was out in the industrial world slaving so that he might have the chance for betterment, for maximum capital gain.

This arrangement has been replicated with such an alarming frequency throughout the centuries that Crispian and Felix feel that as men born into a wealthy household, they are entitled to all of their parent’s combined wealth. By eliminating their parents and making it look like a terrible tragedy that they both somehow miraculously survived, they shorten the period of time that they must wait for their inheritance to roll in. The other two siblings, Aimee (with boyfriend Tariq) and peevish and disliked antagonist Drake (with wife Kelly) are an impediment because in the twenty-first century women inherit wealth as well. That they are killed is simply a business decision. Both surviving brothers get a higher amount of money if they are the only ones left to probate their parents’ wills.3

The slaughter even begins with heavy handed foreshadowing that class and financial status are important to the Davisons. The house that they use as a second home is gloriously furnished, large and spacious although it is obviously unused most of the time.4 Once all parties arrive, the anniversary dinner put out is gorgeous, every wine and water glass is brimming and an impressive spread of food has been laid out. Before anyone is allowed to eat, the family patriarch insists that they all join hands and pray, expressing in his thankful speech that he and his wife are overjoyed to have the whole family together again. The prayer is hardly over when brother Drake Davison begins to interrogate his sister’s boyfriend, Tariq. Drake pointedly asks Tariq what he does, and when the former replies that he is a documentarian who has had a few of his works screened at underground film festivals, the scrutiny begins. Drake haughtily suggests that perhaps Tariq should look into commercial filming, as “that’s where the money is.”5 Girlfriend Aimee Davison tries not to get offended by her brother’s rant, but when he calls Tariq a starving artist and heavily ridicules him, she snaps. A fight breaks out, everyone in the family joining in to either try to soothe or agitate the conversation. In the meantime, Tariq sees something moving outside of the window and stands to go take a closer look.

The Davisons are still so embroiled in their argument that they hardly notice when an arrow comes shooting through the dining room window, skillfully impaling Tariq between the eyes. The first death in a horror film is often the cheapest, for although it may be the most shocking, the audience has had the least amount of time to get to know and relate to the first character to die. There is also the fact that people sit down to watch scary movies knowing that the experience they are about to have is just that—scary. They expect that the time will come that blood is shed and all of the remaining characters will have to figure out how to deal with the information that one of their own has died and if they are not careful, they will too. Victim Number One, while not meaningless, affects the watcher that much less. So what does it say about the film’s message if the first blood drawn belongs to the person who has literally just been established to be the poorest of all of the members of the anniversary party?

Classist and gender inequalities are coupled often during the movie. In the instance of Tariq’s death, it is helpful to look at the nature of capitalist economies themselves first. It is the very nature of capitalism to exploit. In order for the capitalistic bourgeoisie to make money, they must not only control the production of goods or services that they sell, but also pay the labor force responsible for doing the actual work less than the cost of the final product/service. In this way, human beings are each given an inherent value, as they are a cost to their bosses.6 If the value of the labor force becomes too high and the capitalists find it harder to profit as steeply, the workforce will be terminated in favor of finding a new one that will work for less.7 It is a case of the end justifying the means, with the high class willing to sacrifice the proletariat for the good of the business. With this dynamic in mind, we can look at all of the guests in the Davison house that were not blood relatives of the couple who had been together 35 years and see them much the same way as a capitalist would see workers who were no longer useful. The brothers quickly assign the other guests a value and deign that their value is lesser than that of the fat checks they plan to receive from the Davison estate. Everyone is disposable to Felix and Crispian Davison. Unfortunately for them, however, they drastically underestimate the talents of Erin, who step-by-step evades death at the hands of the three men who have been hired to do the killing.8Her skills are totally outside the realm of her gender schema, something that saves her and her alone

Since *You’re Next*’s protagonist ends up being a final girl, or a sole survivor, and it is only natural that her character arc be compared to the role of the original final girl herself, Laurie Strode of John Carpenter’s classic film, *Halloween* (1978). Although both Laurie and Erin can be titled “final girls,” the term first coined by film theorist Carol Clover for the last female left standing, their mannerisms are completely at odds.9 Laurie, from the time the audience first meets her, is characterized as shy and virginal, kind and motherly.10She is a high school student who is shown to do well in class and docilely respects her responsibilities. Erin, on the other hand is an Australian national who was raised in the Outback, taught by a paranoid father how to survive in almost any perilous scenario.11There are no children around to paint her as maternal.While she is never wildly sexual or projected to be obnoxious in any of the ways that Laurie’s friends are, the whole premise of *You’re Next* is that Erin is going to visit her boyfriend’s family. Crispian and Erin share a bed and are obviously sexually involved. Through various dialogues, we learn that Crispian, a college professor, is actually a good bit older than Erin, who is a graduate student in her final year and was once even a student of his.12 Erin, older than the pure Laurie—who John Carpenter has stated to a be representation of the all-American, relatable and respectable girl—is much more experienced.13 Where Laurie’s legacy (before Michael arrives on scene) is the cushy life she leads in her idyllic, tree-lined small town, Erin’s inheritance is survival, resilience in the face of harsh conditions.

After getting a handle on how Laurie and Erin are different characters, it is also interesting to analyze the differences in their methods of staying alive throughout their violent trials. Laurie barely fends off attacker Michael Myers with clothes hangers and knitting needles and is only saved at the last minute by a male doctor who has been pursuing Michael with a gun. Her only real power over Michael, whose psychopathology seems to revolve around the sexuality of young women, is that she is chaste and pure. Erin, meanwhile, fights tooth, nail, and blender (the Davisons must have invested in a high quality juicer, as the blade of their machine is able to fatally slice through Felix’s flesh…) against the masked men who are trying to kill her, not only relying on instinct, but also on years of training in the Outback. That she successfully survives only makes sense. Erin navigates the dangers around her like a well-seasoned general. We see her stitch, compress, and tourniquet wounds only to put the members of her “infantry” to work helping her secure the house mere minutes later. She is effective, calculating, and athletic. She is conditioned to endure, unlike Laurie.

Erin’s strength, after all of her trials against the masked murderers, is displayed nowhere quite as clearly as in the scene in which she finds out that boyfriend Crispian was responsible for all of the death she has struggled to prevent. After all of the cards are on the table and Erin and Crispian are facing each other, he implores her to understand, saying, “Come on, we’re so broke, babe.”14 The sentiment is disturbing, as it clarifies that the scheming brothers have strategically gone through the family and assigned a relative worth to every individual. In this way, it is established that in his mind, the death of the patriarch and matriarch’s lives are viable sacrifices in return for an easier economic situation for himself and the (now deceased) couple Felix and Zee.He asserts that everything that he has orchestrated has been for their mutual good and that it was always part of the plan that Erin should live to be one of the only surviving witnesses to explain the tragedy that has happened, a neutral party in that she is not a member of the Davison family. One regards this information doubtfully in light of the ferocity of the prior attack scenes, in which the men in animal masks demonstrated little selectivity for victim choice. Erin, if she was a weaker woman, would have been killed for sure, whether it was planned or not. Perhaps realizing this, Erin refuses to buy into the fact that so much blood and death could bring about any positive results. She looks on, horrified, as Crispian makes one last attempt at seducing her into sharing his point of view. Seeing that his girlfriend is so disturbed, he brings up her student loan debt, asking how much easier her life would be if they could pay off that debt before moving on to the next stage in their relationship. She responds by stabbing him to death, shocked and afraid, betrayed and unwilling to blindly love such a horrible person. Erin, who has been commoditized based on her potential to testify in court and throw legal parties off of Crispian’s trail, has just staged a classist revolt that at the same time disrupts the traditional flow of power throughout the gender hierarchy. In this new atmosphere, neither maleness nor riches is an undisputed trump card. This is a drastic change from the precedents established in works like *Rosemary’s Baby* when males steal away Rosemary’s control over her own body, or the *Exorcist*, in which none of the money poor possessed Regan’s mother had could save her from evil only two men of the clergy could properly fight.

One has to consider the difference that thirty-five years must have made in treatment of women on screen. Where once women were rewarded simply for being what society desired them to be—like in *Halloween*—now, they seem to have to earn their lives, fighting in the same primal ways that their male counterparts have been expected to do for decades. While it is a relief that in this regard women are not held to comically impossible standards so much anymore, the ending of the *You’re Next* gives some pause. In the very last scenes, a police officer shows up just in time to see a crazed Erin stab Crispian, having zero insight to the fact that Erin’s move was defensive. The policeman shoots Erin in the shoulder, thinking that she must be the one responsible for the pile of bodies scattered around the house. What happens next seems to occur in slow motion. A trap that Erin has rigged above the front door is set into motion by the police officer who opens the front door, dropping an axe right onto his head. We hear Erin yell out, “NO!” but it is too late. Our last sight of her is in the credits, which take the form of a messy police file. Below the mug shot of a beat up and bruised Erin is written “suspect,” surrounded by a tentative question mark. After pausing briefly on this part of the file, the next pages flash across the screen, pictures of every deceased member of the family and how they died. The question left unanswered is whether or not Erin has survived her ordeal just to be sent to prison for the murders of the Davisons, their guests, and the three unidentified men in animal masks. Will Erin be punished for possessing the skills she does? Maybe she will be considered just too dangerous to be set loose.

Notes

1.Friedrich Engels, “The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State,” in *The Essential Feminist Reader*, ed. Estelle B. Freedman (New York: The Modern Library, 2007), 106.

2. Ibid, 108.

3. *You’re Next*, directed by Adam Wingard (2011; Santa Monica, CA: Lions Gate, 2014), DVD.

4. Ibid.

This can safely be deduced not only because Mr. and Mrs. Davison are shown driving to the house with all of their luggage, but also because once they get into the house, they must uncover all of the protective sheets on the furniture.

5. Ibid.

Drake very obviously is purposefully stirring up trouble. His smug expression and the condescending tone of his voice speak volumes.

6. Barbara Ehrenreich, “What is Socialist Feminism?” in *Materialist Feminism: A Reader in Class, Difference, and Women’s Lives,* ed. Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham (New York & London: Routledge, 1997), 66.

7. Ibid.

8. *You’re Next*, Wingard.

Erin’s skills are that of an army nurse trained to perform on the front lines. She quickly herds everyone to the safest place possible for them and secures traps around unprotected windows and entry points. With a trained eye, she picks up common household items and turns them into objects of protection. She gives orders swiftly and concisely. If everyone in the house had listened to her every instruction, they probably would have made it through the siege on the house. But the Davisons all have their own ideas about how to survive—ideas that get them killed.

9. Carol J. Clover, Men, Women, and Chainsaws, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 35.

10. John Carpenter and Debra Hill, *Halloween*, perf. Jamie Lee Curtis, Donald Pleasence, and Tony Moran (Compass International Pictures, 1978) film.

11. *You’re Next*, Wingard.

It is very interesting that Erin mentions offhandedly that her father was so meticulous with her survival prep because he was freaked out by the fact that he had a daughter. This is either meant to be taken that he was an over protective parent afraid for his young one, or more specifically, that the thought of having a fragile girl out in the world was too much to bear.

12. Ibid.

13. Kev Geoghegan, “John Carpenter reflects on Halloween 35 years on,” *BBC News*, October 24, 2013, http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-24296254.

14. *You’re Next*.

Crispian’s speech patterns are key in this particular scene. His face is alarmed as he takes in the sight of his girlfriend holding a knife, but his voice is perfectly calm. It is almost as if he expects Erin to be as motivated by he is by money. He thinks he has a good chance of winning her over to his side.

No Ruined Woman in *It Follows*

It is very common these days for major movie releases to spend extravagant amounts of money on production. In the heyday of fantastic journeys and comic book-to-big screen adaptations, the flashier the better. Frequently, the best of the best are made for a stunning $100 to $200 million.1 That being said, any smaller movie productions that end up doing well enough to compete with mammoth film companies’ works are an interesting topic of study. Although they lack the luxuries of over the top props, computer generated images, and expensive costuming, something about them resonates with the general public. Although this is different from film to film, it is often a golden combination of fine acting skills by fresh actors and the quality of the story being told that win the audience’s heart. In the case of *It Follows*, a 2015 wide release film from the up and coming David Robert Mitchell, the refusal to cast the female protagonist as a ruined woman after a strange sexual encounter has attracted a lot of attention from a diverse fan base ready for some major changes in horror film characters.

Conceptually, the film takes psychosexuality to previously unexplored territory. We begin with an introduction to Jay Height, a young woman of nineteen who has begun a relationship with Hugh, a new guy in her life. We watch her carefully prepare to go out on a date, surrounded in her home by her younger sister Kelly and neighborhood friends Paul and Yara. We immediately get the sense that all of these characters are close and trust each other deeply as they wish her well on her night out. Jay and Hugh go to a movie and at first, everything seems fine. They banter with each other, playing a people watching game before their show begins. But then Hugh begins to get twitchy. He points out a woman in the crowd that simply is not there, alarming a confused Jay. After it becomes obvious that the woman he sees is only visible to him, he begs his date to go somewhere else instead. They leave, Hugh making weak excuses for his behavior, and go grab something to eat before ultimately driving out to an abandon section of metro-Detroit and parking the car. They begin to have sex, something that is clearly consensual for both parties. Afterward, they lay there, Jay hanging peacefully out of the car and picking at daisies that have begun to grow up through the concrete. While the audience focuses on this, they lose sight of Hugh until he is suddenly climbing over Jay with a white cloth clutched in his hands. The gut-wrenching fear the audience instinctively feels is justified as Hugh chloroforms Jay.

When she comes to, Jay has been brought to an even more secluded section of the city and tied to an antiquated wheelchair. Surprisingly, Hugh does nothing to hurt her. Frantically, he begins to explain that through having sex with her, he has passed on a type of nightmarish entity that will pursue her until she passes it on too someone else—sexually, of course— or it inevitable touches her, in which event, she will die. To illustrate his point to the terrified Jay, Hugh wheels her over to the edge of the old building they are in and points out a dim figure in the distance. Upon a closer look, we see that it is a naked woman walking slowly toward them. Hugh explains that the entity does not run or carry any torturous tools, but instead that it need only touch her to kill her. No one else can see It and if It succeeds in killing off one person, It will immediately return to the person It had hunted previously and follow them until they pass It on again. It can appear in any shape, Hugh cautions, including as people you know and trust. Feeling as though he has made his point, Hugh runs Jay back to his car, drives her home, and unceremoniously dumps her on her front lawn, where she lays crying, alone, and confused about what has just happened to her. Kelly notices her state and quickly runs to call the cops, sending out Paul and Yara, who are still hanging around, to help Jay.

Everything about *It Follows* suggests a shift in societal views on women’s sexuality. Popular fiction has been traditionally dominated by tragic female figures who suffered as a result of indulging in their own sexuality. Often, these old prototypical women found themselves shunned or viciously reprimanded if any details about their affairs became public. Friends and family members ran from the women who left their husbands and children for other sexual encounters. The contemporary case of Jay, however, is polar opposite of the Chris MacNeils and Laurie Strodes of days gone by. After her sexual encounter with Hugh in the first couple of scenes in *It Follows*, one would almost expect that Jay’s family might scold her for being reckless enough to park in the middle of nowhere with a boy that she has only gone on a few dates with. It is, after all, a dangerous world that we live in and in many cases those who witness a tragic accident happen to someone have trouble accepting that the victim was truly powerless in their situation and could not have acted in a different way that would have saved them from whatever it happened to be that they suffered. A group of psychologists from the University of Arkansas have described this social phenomenon as such:

When presented with negative outcomes, people often engage

in counterfactual thinking, imagining various ways that events

might have been different. This appears to be a spontaneous

behavior, with considerable adaptive value. Nevertheless,

counterfactual thinking may also engender systematic biases in

various judgment tasks, such as allocating blame for a mishap,

or deciding on the appropriate compensation to a victim. Thus,

counterfactuals sometimes require thought suppression or

discounting, potentially resource-demanding tasks.2

In other words, it has been observed that under certain circumstances, people have elected to blame victims for the instances that have taken their power away. Perhaps this is an instinctive reaction from those who have been privileged enough to miss being victimized to help them escape from guilt or fear that the similar crimes could happen to them in the right time and place. For example, we could say that it is easier for one individual to blame a woman’s clothing choice or willingness to be out after dark for her rape than to admit that their society has a serious problem that no one is ever truly immune to. What sticks out about *It Follows*, however, is that even though for decades, judges, family members, the public justice sphere have been improperly assigning fault to victims, *no one* in Jay’s life does this to her after her brief yet terrifying abduction.

Everyone in Jay’s life is very understanding of her accident and treats her with respect and kindness. Even the police are very gentle as they ask her questions about Hugh and put together a file to try and find him. Unfortunately, “Hugh” does not actually live in the house that he told Jay he did and it is suspected that he used a fake name. The police have next to no options or leads on their case and begin to shut it, satisfied that Jay is physically unharmed. Mentally, however, Jay begins to suffer from the effects of her ordeal. While she initially refused to believe any of the information that Hugh force fed her, she begins seeing people that no one else can see, walking through both crowded and quiet places. She explains to her sister, Yara, and Paul what is happening to her, but they—for obvious reasons—have a hard time believing her. Yet, unlike in the cases of stories past, the three stick by Jay’s side, vowing to protect her.

Eventually, smooth talking, womanizer Greg joins the neighborhood gang. Unlike everyone else, however, he refuses to believe Jay is in any real danger. To humor her, or perhaps to have an excuse to get between the sheets with her, he offers to sleep with Jay so she can escape It. But afterward, he is careless, refusing to let the rest of the posse stick around and watch over him. Greg goes about his own business, satisfied that he has gotten what he wants and Jay feels better. Unfortunately for him, his apathy does nothing to protect him from It, which is inevitably following. Greg is found dead with no visible marks on his body.3 It as if he has caught a sudden illness, invisible to the naked eye.

The general atmosphere and subject matter of *It Follows* are reminiscent of key events in the history of medicine and the progression of HIV/AIDS in America. One experience that can be compared to Jay’s happened in 1984, when a thirteen-year-old hemophiliac named Ryan White was diagnosed with AIDS, a disease that was then poorly understood at best.4His mother, shocked and confused by the diagnosis, was told that with his immune system compromised, the young boy only had three to six months to live. Proving everyone wrong, however, Ryan would continue on for five more years, fighting not only to live, but to live as normally as possible. Unfortunately, because of the lack of public information concerning AIDS, the community members of Kokomo, Indiana protested Ryan’s return to Western Middle School.5Unlike the fictional character of Jay, Ryan was forced to live in relative isolation. Young and alone, he and his family were forced to try and adapt to Ryan’s diagnosis. Considering that Jay probably would not have lived to the end of *It Follows* without the help and support of her friends and sister, it is terrifying to consider what may have happened to Ryan if his family had not relocated to a more welcoming town. There, he went back to school, his presence prefaced by an informational assembly that helped students understand that their classmate would not easily pass his disease on to any of them.6 He lived his teen years much the same as any other child would before passing away at the age of eighteen in 1990.

Jay, on the other hand, is much luckier to have a support group to help her deal with her new quality of life. Like a serious sexually transmitted disease, It does not cease to exist once passed on. Once infected, you can always see It, even if It is not after you. When It turns back to Jay, Paul offers, out of love instead of the same manipulative disbelief that got Greg killed, to sleep with her. To Paul, Jay’s prior sexual experiences do not constitute her identity. This is a huge change from earlier troupes like those seen in *Halloween* and *The Exorcist*, both of which make it plainly clear that those who indulge in sexual behaviors are wicked and will end up punished for their sins.7 He has loved her for a long time, the boy next door who just never got the chance to sit down and express himself and how he feels about her for who she is. It is understood that instead of going their separate ways after they can both see It, Paul and Jay will remain as a team, working to evade It until they can find a solution

While both Paul and Jay are undeniably going to have to continue to adapt to their new lives, it is important to note that with their posse to protect them, they *can* survive and that no one has been ruined, just changed a bit. Like a chronically sick person, Jay’s life will be made of worry and searching, answers and antidotes. The last shot the audience registers is of Paul and Jay’s hands clasped tightly while they walk through the neighborhood. A figure walks slowly several yards behind them, and we have no idea if this follower is It or just another neighbor. But the pair continue steadily walking away together and one thing is immediately clear—there is hope.

Notes

1. Kirsten Acuna, “The Thirty Most Expensive Movies Ever Made,” *Business Insider*, June 18, 2014, http://www.businessinsider.com/most-expensive-movies-2014-6?op=1 .

In June of 2014, Business Insider catalogued 30 movies that were very expensive to make, and out of that number, 26 of them were made in the 21st century, despite adjusted numbers for inflation.

2. Stephen D. Goldinger, et al, “’Blaming the Victim’ under Memory Load,” *Association Psychological Science* 14, no. 1 (2003): 81.

3. *It Follows*, directed by David Robert Mitchell (2014; Troy, MI: Anchor Bay, 2015), DVD.

4. Health Resources and Services Administration, “Who was Ryan White?” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Publications, 2015).

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. See “Whose Wrath is it Anyway?” and “The Respectable Girl Becomes the Final Girl” for elaboration on this troupe that features pure, virginal women as celebrated survivors and sexually active girls as throwaway, lost characters.

Conclusion

There are many revealing truths concerning who writes what in the cinematic and literary worlds, but as the audience for these mediums, we have grown dulled to the subtleties that are in front of us daily. When I selected the popular films that I wanted to examine, I failed to realize something vital: that *all* of these works were penned or directed by men. For all that the messages and tropes analyzed concern gender identity and the role of societal expectations in the lives of men and women, the lens these issues are scrutinized through is unwaveringly male. Indeed, the New York Film Academy finds that, as of 2013, the ratio of men to women working on films is 5:1.**1** One can only imagine what these numbers must have looked like decades ago, when films like *Rosemary’s Baby* and *The Exorcist* were being filmed. So while there is merit to studying horror fiction, it must also be recognized that for as long as those who write the works are such a specific demographic (male, for example), the themes we analyze do not necessarily represent *all* of the fears and lifestyles of the diverse American population.

One particular subject seems to be very popular in the 1970’s and 80’s: youth. The works selected to represent this time period, *The Exorcist* (1971), *Halloween* (1978), and *Red Dragon* (1981) all place heavy focus on youth and the process of losing innocence in a harsh world. Regan from the *Exorcist* novel, for example, is a mere child when she becomes possessed by the evil Pazuzu. A formerly fun loving daughter, Regan begins to curse, soil herself, and commit unthinkable sexual acts (like masturbating with a crucifix). At the novel’s close, we are left uncertain whether or not the child will be able to fully reclaim her innocence, her purity, or if she will be forever scared by her feverish nightmare. Similarly, in *Halloween*, several prototypes of teenagers are served—the fun loving, promiscuous Lynda and Annie and then the respectable and responsible Laurie. After escaping Michael, even someone as naive as Laurie would have been considerably aged by the sheer stress and violence of her experiences. The trope of lost youth rears its head in *Red Dragon* as well, though more subtly. The killer who is sought for his heinous crimes lived a particularly brutal childhood, mocked and unwanted because of a facial deformity. It can be assumed that Francis Dollarhyde only held the rosiness of childhood for a very brief amount of time before he became old enough to become cognizant of others’ opinions of him.

While it is tempting to call this obsession with youth and innocence a fad, the truth may be a bit more complex. As stated in “An Unexpected Delivery,” in the late 60’s and 70’s the media became obsessed with the role of young people—college age especially—in counterculture and civil advocate movements. A significant amount of people remained just as traditional as they had always been, but the iconoclastic voices of the minority were audible and their actions visible. Unavoidably, it must have seemed to some that American youngsters were losing their minds and their morals. This general theme carried over easily from television programs and newspapers into books and film.

Despite the fact that the civil rights movement was also raging around the country, the works studied in “Bloody Enlightening” seem to completely ignore race as an important part of the American experience. The only highly visible character of color, Ben, is seen in Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead*. Unfortunately, Romero freely admits that when he was creating the script for this film, he did not write his protagonist to be a black man.2 That Duane Jones won the part of Ben appears to be totally by happenstance rather than purpose and in light of this, the film does not contain any link to the experiences of black individuals during the polarized 1960’s. It is difficult to say whether or not this lack of people of color is because the horror film industry is, like all other capitalistic ventures, in search of the highest profit and thus targets the interests of the mainly white majority, but it seems likely.

Another explanation for racial uniformity comes in light of the popular reasoning of those like Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell (see “Feminine Frailty”) over a century ago. In order to justify inequality and trivialize suffering, even men of science and great knowledge postulated that “inferior” peoples—like racial minorities or the working class—were naturally more resilient and better able to navigate adversity. When such a belief circulates, how can you create a character that would fit into a scenario in which he or she has absolutely no control? Perhaps both of these possibilities are incorrect and the truth is much simpler, much more unpleasant. In the same way that women are characterized in such a way that we can look at their traits and assign them a relative value (think of the contrasting roles of Lynda and Laurie in *Halloween* and who got to make it through Michael’s reign of terror) we also assign value to race. Maybe at this point in time, the American people were numb to the well-being of African Americans. After all, even though the days of slavery seem so long ago, the history of Jim Crow, racial segregation, and violence are still visible in the rearview mirror. Can it be that actual occurrences, in this case, are far more terrifying than any horror fiction could hope to muster up?

While many feminists would alternatively shy away from and scorn decades of horror fiction and fake-blood drenched scripts, there are valuable representations concerning real life gender expectations to be translated from within their depths. The people who decided to pick up pen and paper were not raised in total isolation. Their muses, conscious and unconscious, were born from newspapers and folklore, witnessed events and feelings toward them. In many ways, authors of such tales become the gods pulling the strings to worlds that closely mimic our earth. As this plethora of gods and goddesses are products of their environment in the same way that we all are, their insights are worth paying attention to.

Notes

1. Nicholas Zurko, “Gender Inequality in Film,” (New York City: New York Film Academy, 2013).

2. George Romero, interview by James Blackford, *Sight and Sound* 24, no. 2, February 23, 2014.

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