

A Historical Approach to the Slasher Film

Horror films are one of the most popular genres in Hollywood and constitute an integral part of pop culture. The horror genre made its appearance almost at the same time cinema was born and numerous subgenres were created after that time. Some examples are the demonic movies, the vampire films and the splatter films. One of the most well-known and important subgenres of horror is the slasher film. In this article I will argue that there are three basic periods in the lifetime of slasher films: the classical period; the postmodern period; and the neoslashers. The classical period starts in 1974 and lasts until the end of the 1980s; the postmodern period takes place in the 1990s; and neoslashers started to evolve in the beginning of the new millennium.

If we deconstruct the narratives of slasher films in a simple way, we can say that these movies are about a serial killer who is spreading fear in a middle-class community by killing innocent people. At the end, the killer is defeated and the main character (or in some cases more than one) survives. Of course, this is a simplistic approach to the subgenre's narratives. To see deeper into the subgenre's structures, we have to take into account some academic views on the slasher films.

Slashers, being part of the horror genre, haven't been readily accepted by the academic community. The theoretical context of slasher films consists of just two main theories: the analysis of Carol J. Clover, which is about the representation of gender and sexualities in the slasher films, and the structuralist approach of the subgenre by Vera Dika. Those two fundamental theories about slasher films have a very limited scope. Even though the subgenre still exists, there is no academic analysis about the historical and theoretical aspects of these filmic texts. If we look into a slasher film from every decade of the subgenre's life, we will find substantial differences concerning the conventions and the narrative itself. So, in order to better understand the functions of the subgenre, we first have to define its historical periods.

The Classical Period, the Post-slasher Films, and the Neoslashers

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Many academic texts, including Dika's analysis, argue that *Halloween* (1978) is the starting point of slasher films. Of course *Halloween* is a milestone for the whole subgenre and it perfectly combines all of its conventions. However, four years before that, there were another two films which belong to the slasher subgenre. In 1974, *Black Christmas* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* came into theatres and set some basic rules for the subgenre's formula. Therefore, I would argue that the starting point of the subgenre is 1974. Naturally, even before that, there were some films that had influenced the slasher



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films, Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) being the most important.

In *Psycho*, we encounter a next-door guy in the role of the monster. Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) has a split personality (his own and his dead mother's) and he kills all the women that arouse him sexually. The narrative includes a killer, victims and survivors that confront the murderer. There is also a primitive level of violence against women who embrace their sexuality. Linda Williams (2004: 172) points out that *Psycho* 'does mark the important beginning of an era in which viewers began going to the movies to be thrilled and moved in quite visceral ways, and without much concern for coherent characters or motives'. Clover (1992: 23), as well, recognizes *Psycho* as an ancestor of the slasher films.

However, films that were produced before 1974 are not part of the subgenre, but ancestors of it. If we had to label them, we could call them pre-slasher films. These films have set some basic rules and helped in the creation of the subgenre's conventions, but for our purpose the subgenre started in 1974. Of course, like any other genre or subgenre, there are periods of growth and decline. And like any other films, these films are influenced by the social, political and economic aspects of the period that they were/are produced in.

The classical period of slasher films: the beginning of the subgenre

After the success of the first three films of the subgenre (*Black Christmas*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Halloween*), slasher films started to flourish. The early and mid-1980s was an important period of the subgenre in which the slasher formula was standardized. Several films were created and they shared the same basic idea: a killer terrorizes a young community in an isolated place and in the end, a person, usually female, survives. Many slasher film franchises were created in the 1980s, among them two of the most famous of the subgenre: the *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* franchises.

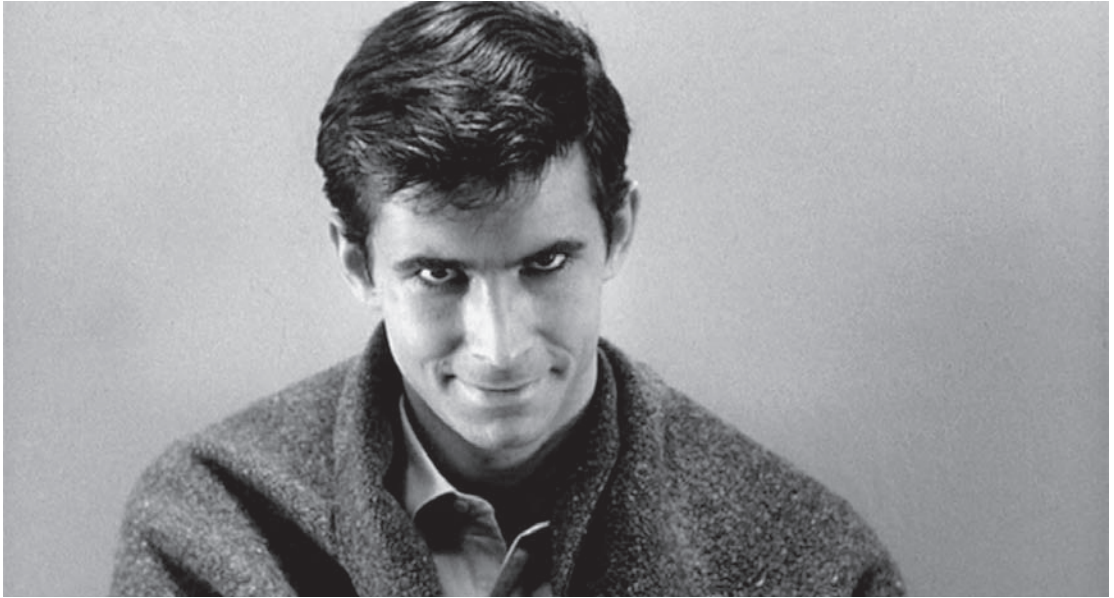
The two important academic approaches to the subgenre that I mentioned earlier address the classical period of slasher films. In her book, *Men, Women and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992), Clover develops the theory of the Final Girl. The analysis of Clover concerns slasher films of the 1970s and 1980s and, specifically, the representation

of the gender and sexualities of the main characters. She also examines the perspective of the film viewer of those films according to his/her gender.

According to Clover (1992: 26–42), there are six crucial elements in the subgenre: the killer; the location; the weapons; the victims; the shock; and the Final Girl. The killer is usually a male and very often a sexually disturbed person. The archetype figure for those characters is Norman Bates from *Psycho*. Norman had to kill every woman who aroused him sexually. Clover took this theory about sexual punishment and applied it to the whole subgenre. The killer is the person that applies this punishment. He looks like a human, most of the times a male outsider, but at the same time he has some supernatural elements (Clover 1992: 30). The most basic supernatural element is that he cannot be defeated. Another thing that Clover says about the killers is that they are the fixed elements of the slasher franchises, while the victims are the changeable ones between the movie sequels.

The most distinguishable element of the killers is the weapon. Every slasher film's killer can be identified by the weapon that he kills his victims with. Michael Myers uses his knife, Leatherface uses his chainsaw, Freddy Krueger uses his bladed glove and so on. Talking about this, Clover (1992: 31) said that 'the emotional terrain of the slasher film is pretechnological'. In these films, it is unusual to find any sort of guns or technological weapons. The methods of killing are through knives, axes, hammers or any kind of blade.

Based on Clover's approach, the victims in these films are, most of the time, teenagers. Of course, Clover sets the starting point of the slasher victims with an adult character, Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) from *Psycho*. The essential quality of the victims remains the same, as 'Marion is first and foremost a sexual transgressor' (Clover 1992: 33). The differentiation between Marion and the victims from the period that Clover analyses is that the latter were teenagers of both biological sexes. However, sexual transgression was part of their identity and their destruction was inevitable. Any character in these films who smokes, has sex or does drugs has to die. The sex of the victims is both male and female, but there is a differentiation in the way that they are killed. The death of a male is swift and seen from a distance or sometimes even happens off screen and is not viewed at all. On the other hand, the killings of women are filmed at a closer range, in more graphic detail, and at greater



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length (Clover 1992: 35). This distinction between the two sexes is closely connected with the fear of castration by the male audience. Barbara Creed (2002: 74) said about this:

The horror film’s obsession with blood, particularly the bleeding body of woman, where her body is transformed into the ‘gaping wound’, suggests that castration anxiety is a central concern of the horror film – particularly the slasher sub-genre. Woman’s body is slashed and mutilated, not only to signify her own castrated state, but also the possibility of castration for the male.

Of course this does not mean that it is male characters who ultimately survive. Even though the majority of the victims are women, only one character according to Clover is going to survive, and this will be a girl.

Apart from the killer, the most important character of a classical slasher film is the Final Girl, who manages to stand out from the crowd and becomes the survivor of the film. The term ‘Final Girl’ is the most well-known theoretical approach to the slasher films and it was created by Clover to describe

the female character that survives and defeats the killer. There are two types of ending: the Final Girl will either find the strength to delay the killer long enough to be rescued or she will kill him herself (Clover 1992: 35). As the subgenre evolved after *Halloween*, the Final Girl was also evolving into a more active character that would fight the killer without any help from the rest of the community. From the very beginning, the Final Girl is presented as one of the main characters in the film. The thing that distinguishes her from the rest of the teenagers in the film is that she is not sexually active. From her appearance to her character, she has virginal characteristics that are unique compared to the other characters that end up dead. Other characteristics of the Final Girl are that she is intelligent, resourceful and watchful almost to the point of paranoia (Clover 1992: 39). So, even though she is smaller and weaker than the killer, she manages to eliminate and sometimes kill him.

The second most popular academic analysis of the classical slasher films was made by Vera Dika. Dika’s theory represents a more structuralist approach to the subgenre, which it refers to as ‘the stalker film’. The chronological scope of the analysis is even more limited than Clover’s as it is focused on slasher films from 1978 to 1981 only. Dika, as many academics after her, see *Halloween* as the first slasher film.

The purpose of Dika’s analysis is to define the films of the subgenre as cohesive works that share a distinctive combination of narrative and cinematic elements (Dika 1987: 86). In her analysis of the nar-

rative, she presents a temporal structure that is constituted by two parts (Dika 1987: 93–94). The first part is about an event that occurred some years earlier, the 'Past Event', and is usually about a killer's extreme trauma. The actions of the Past Event are:

- The members of a young community are guilty of a wrongful action.
- The killer sees an injury, fault or death.
- The killer experiences a loss.
- The killer kills the guilty members of the young community.

Whatever are the facts and actions of the Past Event, 'the opening sequence always presents a woman's death and/or an image of her mutilated body' (Dika 1987: 94). Most of the time, the killer is presented as a witness to the injury or death of the woman.

The second part of the structure of those films is set in the present day. In this part, the 'Present Event', the killer returns to take revenge on the guilty parties or on their symbolic substitutes. The killer starts to hunt and slash young victims and the heroine emerges to confront him. In the end, the female protagonist prevails over the killer, but she is not free. According to Dika, the following is a list of narrative functions that characterize the Present Event:

- An event commemorates the past action.
- The killer's destructive impulse is reactivated.
- A seer warns the young community.
- The young community takes no heed.
- The killer stalks the young community.
- The killer kills members of the young community.
- The heroine sees the murders.
- The heroine sees the killer.
- The heroine does battle with the killer.
- The heroine subdues the killer.
- The heroine survives but is not free.

With those fifteen actions (four from the Past Event and eleven from the Present Event), Dika has created a structuralist guide for the classical period of the slasher film subgenre. Even though it is a thorough and detailed guide, it is not always exactly followed by the films of the subgenre. It is worth mentioning that in her essay Dika says that the film *When a Stranger Calls* (1979) is not part of the subgenre, and yet this film is now considered a slasher film.

With the help of those two theories we can define the normality of the classical period as a middle-class, conservative society. The teenage charac-

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ters of the film exhibit delinquent behaviour: they do drugs, have unsafe sex, smoke and drink. The killer, who is the embodiment of otherness, is used by the filmic narrative as a means of compliance and a way for the community to enforce its order. The older community does nothing to protect the teenagers, so the killer slashes and murders them without having to overcome any obstacle. Of course, the killer does not belong to the normality of this cinematic society, so he is, eventually, punished by being defeated.

The only character that can be described as a 'winner' is the final survivor, or in the words of Clover, the Final Girl. It is true that almost all the films from the classical period have a female character that survives in the end. She is rewarded for following all the laws of the community, not doing anything that is contrary to normality.

The normality of this subgenre, as is often the case in cinema, is based on the society in which the films were produced. The classical period started in the mid-1970s but flourished in the 1980s. So, in order to better understand the community of these narratives, we first have to look into the impact of the socio-political conditions in which the subgenre was created and developed.

The 1980s was a very conformist decade for the United States. In 1980, Ronald Reagan was elected president of the United States and the country entered a more conservative socio-political era. Reagan was in office from 1981 to 1989, a period when countless classical slasher films were produced. William J. Palmer (1993: ix) says that the 1980s, in its social history, was a sequel and he calls it 'the Fifties II'. Both the 1950s and the 1980s politically embraced the ascendancy of style over substance. The major issues of American social history were explored and disseminated to a mass audience through the movies (Palmer 1993: x). Reagan had aligned himself with conservative religious groups such as the Moral Majority, the forerunner of the Christian Coalition (Benshoff and Griffin 2004: 323). Reagan and these groups based their political beliefs on the 'family values' idea, which, according to Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin (2004: 323) 'was basically an anti-feminist, anti-gay program to keep straight white men in control of the nuclear family and at the top of the socio-cultural hierarchy'. One of the most famous political actions that Rea-

gan took was cutting the budgets for social projects. The so-called Reaganomics consisted of radically reducing social spending, Medicare and social security, cutting \$25 billion in 1981 alone, while cutting taxes over a five-year period by \$750 billion (Fhlainn 2007: 195). These conservative ideas and actions characterized a large part of the political stage in the United States in the 1980s, when and where the subgenre flourished.

We also have to take into account another social fact that was occurring at this time. In 1981, the *New York Times* ran its first story about a newly identified disease, AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) which had first been named GRID (gay-related immunodeficiency) (Benshoff and Griffin 2004: 325–26). Because AIDS is a sexually transmitted disease one of the most immediate consequences of the epidemic was a remarkable increase in concern with sexuality (Parker 2001: 164). Many right-wing politicians and religious leaders used AIDS as ‘proof’ of God’s vengeance against homosexuals (Benshoff and Griffin 2004: 326).

The interplay between the conservative ideas of Reagan’s era and the AIDS epidemic provides the basis for the punishment of the sexual act in slasher films of the classical period. The narratives of these films are about young people who have unprotected sex and then die. In those days, AIDS was equivalent to death and this equation became a convention of the classical period of the subgenre. The normality of these films is based on the society of middle-class America and their otherness is influenced by its main concern. Back then, society was trying to link AIDS to homosexuality. Here, we have to point out that the killer is often a male with homosexual or even transsexual characteristics. So, the otherness of the classical period is not just based on the AIDS concern, but it also takes on the form of what society blames for it. A homosexual figure kills sexually active, straight teenagers because they don’t obey the rules of the conservative community. As a matter of fact, the cross-dressing killer had become such an overused stereotype that it is now some sort of a cliché (Benshoff and Griffin 2004: 322).

The classical period lasted until the end of the 1980s. The subgenre’s formula and conventions became so predictable that slasher films started to decline. In the beginning of the 1990s, the only slashers that were produced were sequels from famous franchises and any new slasher film was consigned to video, unable to find national distribution (Rockoff 2002: 177). There was an urgent need for the resurrection of the subgenre and renewal of the formula. Under these conditions, the subgenre entered its second period.

The postmodern period of the subgenre: post-slasher films in the 1990s

As I have argued, slasher films of the classical period started to become predictable and they needed to be renewed – something that happened with postmodernism. This shift took place in the 1990s. Before we go any further, we have to understand what postmodern means and what the characteristics that became part of the subgenre are.

Postmodernity is a fluid concept that was coined in the 1970s. To understand it better, we first have to define what modernity is. Modernity is a historical period that starts around the seventeenth century and ends with World War II. The modernist perspective believed that society was improving. As Kendall R. Phillips (2005: 169) argues: ‘...technology was improving, people were learning more about our world, and economic and democratic structures were becoming more just and effective’. In postmodernity, people started to become more sceptical and western civilization began to lose faith in this progress. As Phillips (2005: 171) continues, ‘...for many, particularly academic critics, the postmodern era is an important step away from the rigid optimism of the modern age’.

The main characteristic of the postmodern that became part of the subgenre was the element of parody and pastiche. Fredric Jameson (1991: 16–17) argued that ‘pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style [...] the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a now global culture’. Slasher films started to mock the conventions of the classical period by self-referential elements in the narrative. As I argued above, the conventions had become widely known and the narratives of the films were predictable. So, the slasher films of the 1990s played with this predictability and included hyperconscious characters that knew the formula of the subgenre and were trying to alter it.

Even though it is highly common to argue that *Scream* (1996) was the beginning of the post-slashers, I would have to disagree. The starting point of the postmodern period lies two years before *Scream*, in a film by the same director, Wes Craven, *New Nightmare* (1994). *New Nightmare* is the seventh film of the *A Nightmare on Elm Street* franchise and it came out a decade after the first film. In this film, we see almost all the actors, producers and crew of the first film of the franchise playing themselves. Freddy Krueger escapes, comes into the real world and hunts the people that worked in the first film. Heather Langenkamp, the actress who played the final survivor



in the first film, is the one that confronts and kills the 'monster'. *New Nightmare* not only plays with the conventions of the subgenre, but it also has self-referential elements about the nature of film-making. A characteristic example is that Craven appears in the film and says that the only way to defeat Freddy is to make a sequel in order for him to be 'captured' in the narrative.

New Nightmare was not a big economic success, grossing only \$19.7 million worldwide (according to *Box Office Mojo*). On the other hand, the next post-slasher was *Scream* and it grossed \$173 million worldwide (again according *Box Office Mojo*). The later film's economic success and popularity are the two main reasons why *New Nightmare* is so neglected and *Scream* is wrongly considered by many as the starting point of the postmodern phase. *Scream* was the first part of a slasher tetralogy that improved the reputation of the whole subgenre.

The *Scream* films are innovative and progressive. Along with *New Nightmare*, they introduced the elements of self-referentiality and intertextuality to the subgenre. Television commercials for the first *Scream* featured the line: 'Someone has taken their love of scary movies one step too far' (Wyrick 1998: 123). Sarah Trencansky (2001: 71) says that 'Wes Craven's 1990s version of the slasher reveals the ethos that would become the dominant slasher type for this decade'. The subgenre had taken a turn away from the punishment of sexuality and desire, towards a more postmodernist approach to the formula. Two more very popular post-slashers of this decade are *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997) and its sequel *I Still Know What You Did Last Summer* (1998).

Post-slasher films became the dominant trend of the decade and there were postmodern elements in almost every film of the subgenre. Another filmic example of this postmodern turn is *Halloween H20: 20 Years Later* (1998). Its self-referential and intertextual elements include Jimmy (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) wearing a hockey mask just like Jason's from the

Friday the 13th franchise, or when Molly (Michelle Williams) is in class and sees the killer outside the window, something that is reminiscent of a scene with Laurie (Jamie Lee Curtis) from the first *Halloween*. There are also elements that connect the film to the most well-known pre-slasher film, *Psycho*. Janet Leigh, who was Marion in *Psycho*, plays the secretary of the school, Norma, in this film. There is a scene where she speaks with the character played by Curtis, Laurie. In their dialogue there is the quote: 'If I could be maternal for a moment...' which is a reference to reality, because Leigh is Curtis's mother. After this dialogue, Leigh leaves in a car of the same model as the car from *Psycho*, while the music playing in the background is also from this film. Even the licence plate is the same as the one in the second car Marion buys in *Psycho*.

The postmodern period lasted for a short period of time. In the beginning of the new millennium, slasher films started to change once again and neo-slashers appeared. Of course, even though the postmodern period came to an end, that does not mean that slasher films of the 2000s and 2010s do not have postmodern elements. As a matter of fact, several neoslashers, such as *The Cabin in the Woods* (2011) and *Behind the Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon* (2006), have pure postmodern narratives. Because it lasted for a short period of time, while postmodern elements persisted, the postmodern period could be considered a transitional period from classical slashers to neoslashers. However, the postmodern period is very important for the subgenre because it helped slasher films to branch off in a new direction away from sexual punishment and leaving behind the standardized classical conventions.

Neoslashers: the subgenre in the new millennium

At the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium, the subgenre of slasher films was in decline. By mid-2001, slashers had once again reached a crossroad and critics pronounced that films in which much of the terror was left to the imagination, like *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *The Sixth Sense* (1999), heralded an end to the graphic violence of the slasher subgenre (Rockoff 2002: 193). The postmodern period was a reaction to the standardization of the conventions, but it was not strong enough to last more than a decade. The socio-political conditions of the 2000s, however, upheld another resurrection of the subgenre with a radical change of the formula and the conventions.

In 2000, George W. Bush was elected president of the United States. His presidency lasted from 20 Jan-

uary 2001 to 20 January 2009. The presidency of Bush had various similarities with Reagan's. As Murphy Jarrett (2004) points out, 'Both bore strong ideological agendas of supply-side tax cuts and increased defense spending, and depicted the world in stark terms like "the evil empire" and "the axis of evil"'. The United States entered a conservative period that was ideologically very similar to the 1980s and focused on 'family values'. What stigmatized the presidency of Bush and forced society into conservative beliefs was the War on Terror, which was a result of the events of 9/11.

On September 11, 2001, Islamist insurgents hijacked four commercial airliners and crashed them into the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington DC, destroying the World Trade Center and killing almost 3000 people (Holloway 2008: 1). The 9/11 attacks were described as an act of war whose closest parallel was the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. As the attack on Pearl Harbor forced the United States to enter World War II, so 9/11 forced the country into the War on Terror (Schmid 2005: 63). Unlike other American wars, such as the Vietnam War that was hotly contested throughout the United States, the 9/11 attacks galvanized the American public into a call for action (Dixon 2004: 1). There are indeed a lot of similarities with 9/11 and Pearl Harbor because, as Marcia Landy (2004: 83) points out, 'both events were responsible for bringing "the country together" in the desire to "punish the aggressor", the ambiguity of "intelligence failures", and the display of heroism in the midst of disaster'. So, the 9/11 attacks had a tremendous impact on American society and played a crucial role in the big change in the politics of public security.

As I have argued above, in the conservative period of the 1980s, one of the main concerns of society was the AIDS epidemic. In the conservative period of the 2000s, the main concern of the public was terrorism. At first glance, 9/11 and the AIDS epidemic have nothing in common. However, both concerns were catalysts for an increase of conservatism and the spread of fear throughout the American community. After those two events, nothing was the same, neither in the United States nor worldwide.

After 9/11, there was a big question about cinema and especially horror films: how could American audiences want to see images of violence, having tasted real horror? Some critics, on the other hand, viewed horror as the perfect medium for representing 9/11 and everything that came after it (Briefel and Miller 2011: 1). Several trends dominate the post-9/11 horror, such as marauding giant monsters, home-invasion films, new genres like 'torture porn'



films, and many remakes, with most of them focusing on xenophobia and revenge (Miller 2011: 225). Within this context, slasher films started to flourish and neoslashers came to the forefront. The new films had almost nothing in common with the classical conventions of the subgenre.

Neoslashers are divided into two big categories: the remakes and the originals. A couple of years after 9/11, remakes of classical slashers started to come out. The first remake was *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003), followed by *Black Christmas* (2006), *When a Stranger Calls* (2006), *Halloween* (2007), *Prom Night* (2008), *My Bloody Valentine* (2009), *Halloween II* (2009), *Friday the 13th* (2009) and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (2010). These are just some examples of neoslashers that are based on films from the classical period. Of course, the remake trend was very popular in the whole genre of horror and included films such as *The Wolfman* (2010) and *The Omen* (2006). Kevin J. Wetmore (2012: 196) says that the remake slasher film combines two elements: 'a nostalgia for a time in which America was strong (or at least perceived as strong on defence and the promotion of sexual morality), and the fear and nihilism of the post-9/11 horror film, resulting in an uneasy balance'. As I have argued, the 2000s had numerous similarities with the 1980s with regard to the political administration. The subgenre expressed this through the extensive remakes of films from the 1980s. But this nostalgia was influenced by the post-9/11 fear that was widespread in society.

Apart from the remakes, there are also original neoslashers. These filmic texts can be further categorized into a variety of subcategories, such as post-postmodern neoslashers, films that are part of a classical slasher franchise, or even mockumentary neoslashers. Examples of original neoslashers are *Freddy vs. Jason* (2003), *All the Boys Love Mandy Lane* (2006), *Behind the Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon*, *Hatchet* (2006), *Hatchet II* (2010), *My Soul to Take* (2010) and *The Cabin in the Woods*. However, the main question is how these filmic texts are different from the classical period and the postmodern period of the subgenre.

In post-9/11 America, the fear of a pointless death is one of the main concerns.

As I have argued above, in the classical period, the dominant element of the genre's conventions was punishment of sexual desire and this was based on the combination of the conservative ideology of American society and the AIDS epidemic. The equivalence of sex to death was an essential part of the narrative of slashers in the 1980s. In the 2000s, American society was once again going through a conservative period, but sex was not a major issue. The 9/11 attacks transformed the subgenre and it started to represent the social anxieties of the new millennium.

A good example of this shift is the remake of *Halloween*. In the first film in 1978, Michael (age of 6: Will Sandin; age of 23: Tony Moran) kills without any conspicuous reason and embodies pure evil. In the neoslasher version of *Halloween* in 2007, we see Michael (age of 10: Daeg Faerch; adult: Tyler Mane) as a kid for almost half of the film. We see his problematic family, his bad childhood and his doubtful social environment. There is also a connection with the female protagonist, Laurie (Scout Taylor-Compton), who is now his sister. Thus, in the rest of the film, he hunts her for a reason. After the 9/11 attacks, the subgenre started to look in depth at how evil was created, and the killers now had more realistic motivations and a three-dimensional psychological structure.

Since there are no moral rules connected with sexuality in neoslashers, there is a transformation in the way that the victims are selected. In the classical period, because of the AIDS epidemic, everyone who had sex ended up dead and only the girl who had virginal characteristics survived. Furthermore, both the victims and the survivor were, most of the times, teenagers. In neoslashers, the selection of the victims is totally different. Some of them are connected to the killer, so there is a realistic justification for the murders, while others are killed because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. They do nothing 'bad'; they don't break any laws, ethical or legislative, and they don't even know the killer. There is no rule about the selection of the victims or about their age. This is closely connected with the 9/11 events. A lot of people were in the World Trade Center and they had no connection to the reasons that caused the terrorist attack. The 9/11 victims were not aware of what was going to happen and they did not even know the names of their killers. In post-9/11 America, the fear of a pointless death is one of the main concerns. This social anxiety became part of the neoslasher formula.

This radical change of the way the victims are selected has led to another shift regarding the survivors. The Final Girls, as Clover described them, no longer exist. Because there is no punishment of the sexual act, there is no reward for those who do not express their sexual desires. Final Girls of the classical period were defined by their virginal characteristics. In neoslashers, this convention is not part of the subgenre's formula. In the new millennium, there could be more than one survivor, either women or men, while sometimes the character that has the characteristics of the Final Girl ends up being the killer. Two examples of this extreme situation are *Scream 4* (2011) and *All the Boys Love Mandy Lane*.

There is no apparent rule about the way victims are selected and there is no apparent convention concerning the survivors. Every filmic text must be examined separately, with a focus on the socio-political and social class structures. Then, based on these structures, we can understand the link between the survivors and the way they have been selected. In the classical period, this process was easier because of the standardization and repetition of the formula. The neoslasher period is very important to the subgenre because it changed the classical conventions of sexual desire and created its own rules in accordance with the new fears and agonies of society.

Conclusion

Slasher films are not favoured as subjects of analysis by the academic community, even by those who deal with the horror genre. Clover and Dika are two of the few that dealt with the slasher film and their theories are still important for the theoretical approach to those films. However, they have some disadvantages, the biggest being that they have a limited scope of application. Both theories are about the classical period of the subgenre.

Even though the subgenre has existed for almost four decades, no one has tried to categorize the films into periods. The conventions and the formula have changed through time, and the subgenre is evolving in accordance with the socio-political circumstances. As I have indicated, the history of the subgenre can be divided into three periods: the classical period (1974 until the end of the 1980s); the postmodern period (1990s); and the neoslashers (2000 until now). This categorization will provide a useful tool for the academic community and it can be used in order to

distinguish the filmic texts of the subgenre in accordance with the period in which they were made.

Contributor details

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