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***Bad Girls, Bold Wives, Bloody Mothers: Monstrous Women in Film Through
the Lens of Women's Liberation
1960-1981***

A Thesis in English

by

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Abstract

This thesis investigates monstrous women as protagonists in films from the 1960 to 1981. It explores Barbara Creed's analysis on the *monstrous-feminine* -- a figure vilified for her sexuality, reproductive functions and mothering -- in relation to seven films: *Psycho* (1960), *The Haunting* (1963), *Carrie* (1976), *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *The Stepford Wives* (1975), *The Brood* (1979) and *Possession* (1981). These films variously respond to, represent, and punish women's collective efforts through the Women's Liberation Movement, thus revealing growing anxieties over women's rejection of ingrained sexist ideologies and aim to free women from oppressive expectations, regulations and behaviors. The thesis analyzes how films of this time reflected women's adoption of these new ideologies, as the protagonists all aim for freedom in their own ways; however, it also criticizes the patriarchal lens attached to each film, one that ultimately punishes the female protagonists, leaving all but one of them dead. In an attempt to establish these women as monstrous, some films associate the protagonists with abject imagery, wherein their female-ness is portrayed as something repulsive, offensive and dangerous. Such portrayals of women emphasize how these films exploit both an ingrained fear of the female body and a more pressing panic surrounding female freedom in order to justify the eradication of the central women within the films.

Introduction

Why are horror films scary and what can analyzing them reveal to us? This thesis began after I rewatched *Rosemary's Baby* (1963), one of my favorite films and began to analyze how viewers are supposed to see Rosemary. This led me to think about other female-centered horror films that I enjoy, such as *Carrie* (1976) and *Possession* (1981), which is when I realized that a conversation could be made among all three films, in regards to the ways in which women in horror are often presented as monstrous. When researching the idea of “monstrous women,” I discovered Barbara Creed’s 1993 book, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* in which she refutes the idea that women in horror films are always passive in comparison to their male counterparts. She also argues that “when woman is represented as monstrous it is almost always in relation to her mothering and reproductive functions” (Creed 35).

In this thesis, I argue that the female protagonists in the films, *Psycho* (1960), *The Haunting* (1963), *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *The Stepford Wives* (1975), *Carrie* (1976), *The Brood* (1979) and *Possession* (1981) all fit into Creed’s analysis of the monstrous-feminine, as they are portrayed as dangerous due to their sexuality and their bodies’ reproductive functions. While this analysis reiterates the ways in which the horror film evokes fear through the presence of the monstrous feminine figure, it further examines such a figure by relating her perception to the perception of women during Second Wave Feminism. The seven films that I analyze were released between 1960 and 1982. This timeline was specifically chosen, as it parallels the Women’s Movement, or Women’s Liberation Movement, largely based in the United States during the same period. The issues discussed in each chapter shift, as the real-world issues evolve throughout the decade and the Women’s Movement gained traction and further

developed. In the 60's, there was a growing fear of young women craving freedom from social constructs and expectations; in the 70's, this was reflected in the fear of women banding together to fight for bodily autonomy and in the 80's, dread arose when women realized that they did not need to stay in marriages they viewed as unfulfilling, therefore instilling the fear of the nuclear family's downfall. In order to argue this, I incorporate sources that specifically analyze the films I focus on, as well as analyses of the broader complexities of representation of women in horror.

Women's association with monstrosity and the idea of the female monster has existed throughout history, as "all human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about women that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject" (Creed 23). Famous early stories of these monstrous women include the Greek myth of Pandora and the Bible's recounting of Eve and the serpent. In Greek mythology, Pandora was the first woman created and the men who lived before her existed freely without struggle or hardship. However, Zeus created Pandora as punishment to men, who then regarded her as a "beautiful evil." Pandora was tasked with never opening the box in her possession, which contained all the evil missing from the world. However, she disobeyed such orders, thus unleashing such wickedness upon mankind. Similarly, Eve was created after God had already created Adam, the first man and before her arrival, Adam lived peacefully. However, disobeying God's direct orders, she picked the forbidden fruit and like Pandora, introduced sin to humanity. In these origin stories, women are clearly to blame for what seems to be all bad things in the world.

Furthermore, portrayals of women as dangerous continue in stories such as popular fairy tales, where many female villains are also associated with such evil. In these stories, female characters often exist in a binary in which they are either the passive and pure "good girls" or the actively angry evildoers. Creed also comments on such a binary in her essay, "Baby Bitches

From Hell: Monstrous Little Women in Film,” explaining that there is a historical “dual nature of the little girl, her propensity for innocence and evil” (Creed 34). Readers are typically asked to favor the helpless, beautiful girls, therefore instilling a disdain against the villainous women who are often active and fierce, establishing a dichotomy between those women who are gentle, passive, and fair, and those who are active, wicked, and hideous. The wicked women are often revealed to be inhuman in some way, further distancing them from the perfectly human, good girls and as Marcia Lieberman notes in her analysis of women in fairytales, “women who...have power or seek [power] are nearly always portrayed as repulsive...ugly...and witch-like (Lieberman 12). This dichotomy appears again and again throughout time and cultures. Annie Chiponda & Johan Wassermann analyze the portrayal of women in United States textbooks and describe how “the pictures of women in the history textbooks...showed them engaged in predominantly ‘traditionally domestic’ roles,” (Chiponda & Wassermann 16) like nursing babies, caring for children, sewing clothes and cooking. When they were not shown in these roles, they were typically “seen being punished as scolds, witches,” prostitutes, or women “bent on annihilation for the sake of revenge (Chiponda & Wassermann 16). Stories and representation are crucial in that they shape individual and mass perceptions, so the perpetuation of limited and oftentimes negative portrayals of women therefore directly contribute to assumptions about women’s identities, intentions, and place in society.

Additionally, menstruation, pregnancy and birth have historically been used as markers of other-ness and danger. Psychotherapist and author, Rachel Biale writes about menstruation’s demonization, asserting that “many cultures share the same basic psychological components: fear of bleeding, discomfort with genital discharge, and bewilderment especially on the part of men, at the mysterious cycle of bleeding and its connection to conception and birth” (Biale 147). This

fear of the female body also appears in the myth of the “vagina dentata,” or the idea of a sharp, toothed, castrating vagina. Michelle Ashley Gohr discusses the history and implications of the vagina dentata, noting that “this story and its variations can be found in perhaps thousands of cultures throughout history,” (Gohr 28) highlighting a widely agreed upon fear of the female body. The vagina dentata demonstrates this by associating both sexuality and birth with monstrosity, therefore producing a specific warning for men that this evil instrument may exist in any or all women. Gohr argues that there are typically three central components of the basic vagina dentata myth. To begin, there is usually a “highly sought after, yet sexually independent (and oftentimes strong willed/defiant) woman; second, and most obvious, she possesses a secret vagina dentata that she often uses to devour men’s genitalia; and third, there must be a heroic male that comes to ‘rescue’ and tame said woman, thereby stopping her violent, sex-crazed rampage” (Gohr 30). This myth then echoes the notion that women’s sexuality must be eliminated and her power diminished. As a potential partner in procreation, the woman should be “non-threatening” in all ways. Therefore the vagina dentata myths only reaffirm that women pose as threats to the coveted patriarchal establishment. Stories of the vagina dentata, the witch, the sorceress, the vampire, the demon and so on “are manifested within the most patriarchal cultures across the world, all relating the same story of woman as dirty, sinful, voracious” (Gohr 31). Through these depictions, a larger implication can be assumed wherein “women outside of the domestic sphere are responsible for only negative or evil contributions to history” (Chiponda & Wassermann 22).

As described above, the fear of women and the monstrous feminine have existed forever; however, I analyze how the specific anxieties coming out of a shift in women’s expectations may have manifested into visual stories. The chapters transition from a focus on pre-married girls to

married women to *post*-married women in order to better display the changing focus of conversation. The Women's Liberation Movement began in the early 1960's and lasted through the 1980's. This movement, which is historically recognized as part of what is referred to as Second Wave Feminism, challenged conventional norms for women, particularly when it came to sexuality, domesticity, marriage, and motherhood. Before this movement, feminist advocates were primarily focused on overcoming legal barriers and ensuring that women held the same legal rights as men. This new feminist movement was moreso focused on the intersections of the personal and the political. Homemaking was sold to women as the natural and best path, convincing the women entering adulthood that being a stay-at-home wife was the ultimate goal. With this role, women were also expected to be "dependent, passive, nurturing types, uninterested in competition, achievement, or success" (Douglas 17) and should follow the rules set out by the men in their lives.

Betty Friedan's 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique* was a large jumping off point for Women's Liberation, as Friedan, through her conversations with numerous women, revealed the way in which many women viewed being a housewife and mother as unfulfilling and through this publication, was able to help women feel less alone in their fantasized pursuit of personal goals. In the next few years, women would begin conversing, gathering and banding together to advocate for these changes. In 1965, *Griswold v. Connecticut* decided that in the U.S., married couples were allowed to purchase and use contraceptives without any government restriction, thus providing an option for women to plan when or if they had children. In 1966, the National Organization for Women (NOW) was founded as a means for advocating for full equality between men and women and pushing for legislation that would make this happen. Additionally, various liberation groups began forming sporadically throughout the country, particularly larger

cities such as New York, Chicago and Seattle and consciousness-raising groups were being formed in order to gather women and help them to better recognize the unfair treatment that they dealt with on a daily basis. Feminists coined terms such as “sexism” and “sexual politics” to express, as Alice Echols describes, the idea “that sexuality, family life, and the relations between men and women were not simply matters of individual choice, or even of social custom, but involved the exercise of personal and institutional power and raised vital questions of public policy” (Echols ix). As the presence of these groups continued to grow, the nation watched as women took to protesting sexist social ideologies. Women brought to light the embedded issues in the very structures around them, such as “law, tradition, economics, education, organized religion, science, language, the mass media, sexual morality, child rearing, the domestic division of labor, and everyday social interaction, whose intent and effect was to give men power over women” (Echols x). In 1972, The Supreme Court ruled in *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, that birth control could be legally provided to unmarried people, thus contributing to the increased acceptance of sex outside of marriage. The Women’s Health Movement created women’s health initiatives that would establish women-run health centers and publish texts like *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, a book that helps girls and women better understand their bodies, health and sexuality.

Furthermore, feminists increased focus on issues such as assault and in 1973, the first known use of the expression "domestic violence" was used in a modern context, shedding light on spousal abuse and violence within the home. Feminists worked to increase federal funding for organizations that helped prevent and treat violence against women, as well as organizations that helped secure child care for women. Legalizing abortion was also a primary goal and in 1973, the Supreme Court would rule, in *Roe v. Wade*, that a woman could legally obtain an abortion. With such issues, there was backlash anti-feminist groups, especially against feminists’ push to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which did not end up happening. The 1980’s saw a

gradual decline in these organized groups and it was implied that by this time, the Women's Movement had tackled many of the issues raised. By the end of this thesis, I reflect on these last years of this feminist movement and its lasting impact in the final films analyzed, as well as films beyond the 80's.

As mentioned earlier, I construct this thesis primarily using Creed's analysis from *The Monstrous Feminine* in order to analyze how the source of terror in each film is rooted in the protagonist's body. In the book, she also chooses to analyze *Psycho*, *Carrie* and *The Brood* -- analyses which I build upon in order to produce my own interpretation of the films.

Furthermore, I incorporate Carol Clover's analysis of women in the horror film from her famous book, *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, which analyzes gender roles in the horror genre. However, in the films I analyze, I argue against Clover's overarching argument that the audience roots for the female protagonist and instead suggest that the women and their agency are ultimately thwarted, and unlike the "final girls" who successfully defeat their oppressor, every woman in this thesis is killed by the end.

In order to better frame the films in context with their release dates, I focus on Gail Collins' book, *When Everything Changed*, wherein she discusses "what happened to American women since 1960 by combining the public drama of the era with the memories of regular women who lived through it all" (Collins 600). Collins's account of recent history of feminist rights in the United States is extremely relevant, particularly because her timeline begins at 1960 and works through the 1980's, which follows a similar timeline to that of the seven films analyzed. Collins provides a contextual framework, commenting on political and economic events and landmarks, pop culture trends, sexist ideologies, the new wave of feminism and most importantly, how all of these factors shaped women's lives. Her inclusion of personal anecdotes

from herself and over a hundred women reveals these effects and helps to emphasize the overarching shared views of the time, as well as highlight the small-scale victories and mark indicators of a changing society. Additionally, I draw upon Susan Douglas's, *Where the Girls Are*, which has been essential in terms of expanding on the media's role in feminism, particularly during the 50's, 60's, 70's and 80's. In it, Douglas uses specific books, magazines, TV shows, music, news coverage and ads in order to break down the general messages being broadcasted across the United States. As someone growing up in this time, she interjects with personal reflections on her own reaction to these texts

In terms of feminist writings of the time, I use two of Andrea Dworkin's books; first, *Woman-Hating*, then *Right-Wing Women*. In *Woman Hating*, Dworkin reiterates the ingrained portrayal of women as either perfect or evil (also using fairy tales and myth to emphasize this binary) and details how women's defiance against submission results in them being categorized as "carnal, evil, and Other" (Dworkin 26). She advocates for the destruction of a "culture which engineers the deaths, violations, [and] violence" against women and calls upon other women to join such an effort. *Right-Wing Women* is significant in that it evaluates women in the 70's who opposed the feminist movement, as Dworkin attempts to explain why some women work with men in order to place restrictions on women's freedoms. Such women, she argues, only work to restate the ideas that women should always stay subservient and turn to the patriarchy for guidance. I primarily use this text when discussing the "patriarchal mother" figure in the films - an authority figure who supports traditional patriarchal values and who works to suppress the freedoms that the young, female protagonists seek.

Lastly, while the horror of the female body is present in each chapter, this idea is most prevalent and most graphic in Chapter 3, where Kristeva's, *Powers of Horror* is most referenced.

Kristeva provides a literary and psychoanalytic analysis of the body's relation to identity and describes how the female body can particularly transgress such boundaries of identity through reproduction. She argues that fear and gagging, is one's reaction to and rejection of substances such as corpses, feces, pus, etc, - or that which disturbs bodily order. That which begins as internal, but moves outside of the body invokes fear, for the whole identity is now challenged. Reproduction then involves birthing, which results in the outpouring of fluids and of another human, and also breastfeeding, which produces milk, therefore situating the maternal as abject and monstrous. Although I do argue that my application of abjection within the readings of these films is done in order to reflect a damaging and patriarchal view, some have argued, such as Imogen Tyler in her essay, "Against Abjection," that using Kristeva's theory "risks reproducing, rather than challenging, histories of violent disgust towards maternal bodies" (Tyler 77). Therefore, it is important to note that I use *Powers of Horror*, from 1981 to contextualize how such discourse in the 70's and 80' could be applied within culture, through films like *The Brood* (1979) and *Possession* (1981), wherein male filmmakers may have used such "biologically essentialist" views of the abject mother to reproduce ideas that women are inherently dangerous.

Two other key analyses in this thesis are Ann Kaplan's *Motherhood and Representation - The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* and Sarah Arnold's, *Maternal Horror Film: Melodrama and Motherhood*, which focus on the mother figure through a feminist lens. Kaplan discusses the mother through the good/bad binary, explaining how mother characters are often portrayed as either "witch" or "angel" in lore, literature and film. She challenges this binary, approaching it from a feminist perspective, as she highlights the overlooked complexities of these different maternal characters. Arnold's book focuses primarily on film analysis, oscillating between close readings of individual movies and a discussion of broader, relevant themes.

Although the mother characters serve different purposes in each chapter, I utilize both of these texts's explanations of the overarching perceptions towards motherhood. Additionally, they expand upon how the horror film naturally "disrupts the ordinary" and provokes anxiety. Such anxieties can range between a number of themes, however I use Kaplan and Arnold to argue how the films of this thesis rely on the fear of women -- their sexuality, menstruation, pregnancy and mothering -- to conjure fear.

In the first chapter, I analyze the films *Psycho* (1960), *The Haunting* (1963) and *Carrie* (1978) in relation to the culture of the 50's and 60's, where young women were beginning to rebel against their mothers due to a growing pushback against the idea that they must also regard motherhood and marriage as their most important and most fulfilling paths in life. This specific dynamic between mother and daughter is analyzed through each protagonist's struggle with mothers in the films. The three unmarried girls, Marion, Eleanor, and Carrie are punished in the films for their so-called rebellious nature by what I refer to as "patriarchal mothers," or mother figures who reject the emerging feminist ideal in favor of the traditional, patriarchal notions about women's independence, sexuality and overall role in society.

The second chapter is an analysis of *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and *The Stepford Wives* (1975) and focuses on female protagonists who are now married women. Here, I examine both films in context with the increased support for bodily autonomy and freedom from male violation of bodies within feminist groups. The Women's Health Movement had also taken flight at this time and was focused on providing women with better healthcare and more information about their own bodies. Additionally, the 1970's featured a rise in the concerns over domestic violence, rape and abortion were extremely relevant and these same issues are then prevalent in the films.

Chapter 1: Mean Mothers and Defiant Daughters

The films, *Psycho* (1960), *The Haunting* (1963) and *Carrie* (1976) can all be read as manifestations of the cultural anxieties brewing in the United States in the 1950's and 1960's. Whereas the previous decades adamantly upheld the traditional ideas that women were to remain docile, nurturing, and devoted wives and mothers, it was in the 1950's that this narrative slowly began to shift. The 1960's marked the beginning of Second Wave Feminism, a movement that challenged traditional ideas about women's sexuality, their bodies, their positions as homemakers and mothers, and their legal rights. In her book, *Where the Girls Are*, Susan Douglas provides insight into the mind of a young girl growing up in the 50's and 60's and she argues that as a teenager experiencing this new wave of feminism, many girls were beginning to question whether they wanted to follow in their mothers' footsteps and become proponents of traditional paths for women, which entailed the denouncing of pre-marital sex, expecting women to get married and produce children, and of course staying at the home which they are expected to care for, along with the said husbands and children. In *Right-Wing Women*, Andrea Dworkin comments on this idea, arguing that "it is not surprising, then, that most girls do not want to become like their mothers, those tired, preoccupied domestic sergeants beset by incomprehensible troubles. Mothers raise daughters to conform to the strictures of the conventional female life as defined by men, whatever the ideological values of the men. Mothers are the immediate enforcers of male will, the guards at the cell door, the flunkies who administer the electric shocks to punish rebellion" (Dworkin 15). Here, Dworkin describes what I will argue is "the patriarchal mother," a figure who illustrates how conventions historically used by the patriarchy, such as demonization of women's bodies and expectation for women to be domestic caretakers, become ingrained in women, so much so that these women become mothers who

enforce similar, negative expectations on their own daughters. This chapter analyzes relationships between mothers and daughters in horror films in the 1960's and 70's wherein the young, unmarried protagonists defy their mothers and are ultimately punished for doing so, demonstrating how the films aim to align viewers with the patriarchal mother.

The plot of Alfred Hitchcock's, *Psycho*, goes something like this: Marion Crane, a young, unmarried woman, steals \$40,000 from her job, in the hopes of using it to pay for a marriage between her and her non-committal boyfriend. Leaving town with the money, she stops at Bates Motel, where she meets Norman, who tells her that the motel is owned by him and his mother, Norma. Shortly after, Marion is stabbed in the shower, by an attacker who appears to be Norma; however, by the end of the film, it is revealed that Norman actually killed his mother long ago, but convinced himself that she was still alive by adopting an alternate personality wherein he acts as if he were her. *Psycho* opens with Marion lying on a hotel bed in her bra and slip, looking up at her lover, Sam - instantly associating her with illicit sexuality. Throughout the scene it becomes clear that Marion dislikes these "meet-ups" and wishes for a more respectable, conventional and domestic relationship - marriage. She tells him that they should see each other "respectably, in [her] house with [her] mother's picture on the mantel," to which Sam replies: "And after the steak, do we...turn Mama's picture to the wall?" Here, in this first scene, the mother is already an established overseer to the daughter. Barbara Creed analyzes the role of gender in *Psycho* in her book, *The Monstrous Feminine*, wherein she notes that Sam's joke about eliminating Marion's mom from their relationship reinforces the idea that "the mother stands for social and familial respectability" (Creed 355). In this opening scene, Marion, in her white lacy undergarments, is painted as a submissive lover whose only wish is to settle into a domestic marriage. However, it is only a few scenes later when this changes. In a spontaneous and illegal

action, Marion chooses to steal one of her boss's customer's money, which she packs away while now wearing *black* undergarments, before driving off with the stash. The shift in Marion's clothing color further complicates the audience's perception of her, as she's exchanged her pure white pieces for the dark black ones, marking her movement down a dangerous path. Marion's anxiety about her decision is shown as she drives on, constantly paranoid that someone has caught on to her plan. In her essay, "The Truncated Road Film, Gothic Automobiles, and Dangerous Women Drivers," Kimberly Monteyne argues that films like *Psycho* and *The Haunting* "exposed and dramatized historical anxieties about the 'dangers' of women appropriating the freedoms and pleasures of the open road connected to car culture" (Monteyne 28). This idea also appears in *The Haunting*, Robert Wiseman's 1963 adaptation of Shirley Jackson's bestselling novel, *The Haunting of Hill House*. It follows Eleanor Lance, a young woman who chooses to partake in a scientist's (Dr. Markway's) investigation at a haunted residence called Hill House. Eleanor has spent the majority of her life taking care of her biological mother, a "mean, old, [lady]," and she says that her mother was "the story of [her] dull old life." Therefore, she goes to Hill House in search of her own identity. She buys new clothes for the occasion, and she declares to her sister and brother-in-law that she wants to use the car that she helped pay for to get there. Though her sister refuses, Eleanor declares, "I mean to take it" and she does exactly that. Without permission granted, Eleanor packs her things and leaves. As she drives alone, she is restless and thinks: "I'm going, I'm really going. I've finally taken a step."

Both Marion and Eleanor use their cars to follow through with a plan that neither of them have gotten permission for. When Eleanor is arguing with her sister over the car, her sister says that "there's a very good reason Mother was afraid for [Eleanor] to go anywhere, and it still

applies.” This line implies that Eleanor cannot be trusted to be anything but a caretaker in the house, which is what she was forced to do for the majority of her life. Her sister also questions Eleanor’s excitement over joining this experiment, saying that Eleanor is “playing this thing so cozy, like [it] was a jailbreak or something.” To Eleanor, however, this opportunity *is similar* to a jailbreak in that she is finally able to break out of the home that she has been chained to through her duties to her mother. Her sister justifies revoking Eleanor’s car privileges by saying: “In any case, Eleanor, I’m sure I’m doing what Mother would have thought best. Although I don’t suppose poor Mother’s wishes mean very much to you.” Like the first scene with Marion, this first scene with Eleanor establishes one very important thing: the daughter is doing something that her mother would definitely disapprove of.

In *When Everything Changed*, Gail Collins comments that “in the movies [of the 1960’s], unmarried women who were sexually active were punished with a life of lonely solitude or sudden death” (Collins 217) which is exactly what happens to Marion, whose trysts force her to occupy the role of both “good” and “bad girl.” Although her intentions may seem respectable (marriage is her ultimate goal), her criminal decision taints the way she is perceived and therefore, she not only turns into a “bad” girl, but also ultimately becomes a dead girl, too. In terms of Eleanor, her sister’s comment that she and her mother had “good reason” to contain Eleanor is only proven true later on, as it becomes clear that there is an inevitable tie between Eleanor and the supernatural occurrences that happens at Hill House. Eleanor’s brashness is also hinted at through her last words to her sister before her trip to Hill House, when she yells: “Now get out before I show you what my nerves can really do!” In reference to her “stealing” of the car, she thinks giddily: “They never have suspected it of me. *I* would never have suspected it of myself.”



Figure 1: Similar shots of Marion and Eleanor who feel guilty after driving off.

The cars in each film therefore signify a new path for the girls and in Monteyne's analysis of the "road film," she notes that films such as *Psycho* and *The Haunting* demonstrate "a social imperative to punish women (especially women drivers) who seek freedom from conventional social roles. [It] neatly combines all the historical anxieties related to nonconformist and socially threatening female identities that negate...the conventional feminine roles of wife and mother and presents them in the figure of the solitary and unmarried female driver" (Monteyne 27). The symbolism of cars as gateways to freedom becomes even more significant when discussing their role in the endings of the films and the protagonists' lives, which I will analyze later.

Furthermore, as previously noted, this chapter focuses on unmarried women and it was during the 1960's when more and more young women began questioning the ideas of domesticity that they learned from the generation of women before them and which they viewed firsthand from watching their mothers. In his article, "'I Am Home.' The Feminist Implications of Identity Loss in Haunted House Narratives," Brian Boylan explains that under a model that "went largely unchallenged until...the 1960's and 1970's...women are defined by their reproductive capacity: their purpose is to bear and rear children. Daughter, mother, wife, and housekeeper - the woman's role in society is defined by her home" (Boylan 22). This inherent association between woman

and home is highlighted in each daughters' opposition to the mother figures, as the mother figures embody the home.

This embodiment is most overt in *The Haunting*, where Eleanor's issues with her biological mother are reflected in her new struggles against Hill House. As Boylan notes, "the haunted house is an especially appropriate metaphor for the subjection of women," (Boylan 22) as it symbolizes the way in which a woman's responsibility to the home can drain her to the point where she is reduced to being dangerously selfless and completely lifeless. In Carol Clover's book, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, she expands on symbols of the house, as she discusses horror films' usage of "The Terrible Place," which is "most often a house or tunnel, in which victims sooner or later find themselves is a venerable element of horror" (Clover 30). In *Psycho*, this is the Bates property, in *The Haunting* it is Hill House and in *Carrie*, which will be discussed soon, it is the Whites' Home. She goes on to say that "the house or tunnel may at first seem a safe haven, but the same walls that promise to keep the killer out quickly become, once the killer penetrates them, the walls that hold the victim in" (Clover 31). As I mentioned above, no film better encapsulates this theme than *The Haunting*.

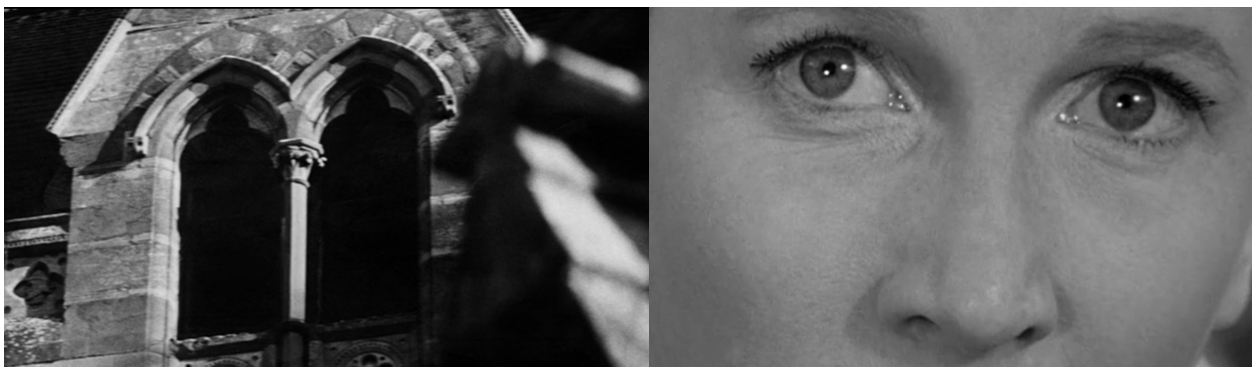


Figure 2: Eleanor and Hill House staring at each other

When Eleanor first arrives at Hill House, she almost immediately recognizes it as a place personified, saying "It's staring at me... it's waiting for me. Evil, patient, waiting." And when

she moves her things into the bedroom she'll be staying in, she feels as though she's "like a small creature swallowed whole by a monster." As Eleanor's new, symbolic mother, it is almost immediately clear that Hill House will be even more relentless on Eleanor, eventually depleting her until there is nothing left. When Dr. Markaway goes over Hill House's history, he notes that the home's founder, Hugh Craine, whose multiple wives all died, left behind one child - Abigail. When Abigail grew old, she took in a companion and apparently "it's with this young companion the evil of Hill House really [began]." The story goes that Abigail died calling for help, but her companion was too busy "[fooling] around with the farmhand on the veranda." This early story reiterates how the rebelliousness and promiscuity of a woman, especially an unmarried one, leads to disaster. What is especially interesting is that this companion is positioned as a parallel to Eleanor, as it is revealed that Eleanor's mother also died while calling out for her companion - her own daughter. Thus, rebellion against one's own mother is also posited as something evil, and it is Eleanor who pays the price. Throughout the film, Eleanor is the primary target of Hill House's haunts. She spends much of her time cowering in fear and at one point, hears banging on the wall, just as she did the night her mother died. The words, "HELP ELEANOR COME HOME" appear scrawled on the walls, telling Eleanor that she needs not have left her designated place. In this way, she is constantly reminded of her wrongdoings as a daughter.

Another film which highlights a rebellious daughter is *Carrie*, directed by Brian de Palma. In it, 16-year-old Carrie White, who happens to possess telekinetic powers, also spends much of the film being punished by her mother, a religious fanatic, Margaret White. The first time we witness Carrie's telekinetic powers in action is in the first scene where we watch her enjoying a shower (more on that further down) in the women's locker room. Out of nowhere, blood begins streaming down her legs, as she experiences her very first period. Terrified, she

screams and her powers blow out the lights above her. Rather than consoling her when Carrie returns home that morning, Margaret harshly lectures her, telling her: “You’re a woman now,” before reciting passages from the Bible. She chants: “And God made Eve from the rib of Adam. And Eve was weak and loosed the raven on the world. And the raven was called sin...and the first sin was intercourse.” As Susan Greenwood emphasizes in her essay, “Feminist Witchcraft: A Transformatory Politics,” Eve’s betrayal in the Bible spurred a universal idea wherein “women became identified with nature, sexuality, evil, and the Devil and had to be controlled, while the male God was uncontaminated by birth, menstruation and decay” (Greenwood 109). These ideas are reinforced by Margaret who teaches Carrie that as a woman, she is inherently shameful and dangerous, directly referring to Carrie as “Witch” and telling her that she’s “got Satan’s power.” Therefore, Carrie is not only punished for simply inhabiting a woman’s body, a body historically condemned for its corruption, but she is also later punished for her powers, as the woman as witch figure is seen as dangerous because she “unsettle[s] boundaries between the rational and irrational, symbolic and imaginary” (Creed 194). Her body is to blame for such powers and a body capable of that should be feared.

Whereas *Carrie* is the most overt in terms of this witch motif, there is also ample evidence of these same fears existing in *The Haunting*. Firstly, it is revealed that Dr. Markaway chose Eleanor to join the experiment at Hill House because she has experiences with the supernatural. A “shower of stones fell on your house for three days,” he says. In *Carrie*, a similar scene was originally to be included in the film. In the beginning, a segment was “scripted and filmed, which featured the Whites' home being pummeled by stones that hailed from the sky”, but “a mechanical malfunction botched filming the night when the model of the Whites' home was set to be destroyed by stones, so the filmmakers burned it down instead and deleted the

scenes with the stones altogether.” This phenomenon of falling stones can be related to Revelation 16:21, a Bible verse which reads: “Rain like big stones fell from the sky on men.



Figure 3: Dr. Markaway joking that the hauntings must be because either Eleanor or Theo is a witch

Each stone weighed about a hundred pounds. Men cursed God because the big rain of stones fell on them. The trouble was very bad.” Here, it becomes clear that the women represent powerful threats that are likely to disturb the patriarchal structures they were

born into. Additionally, with Revelation being the book of the apocalypse, it is easy to make a correlation between women’s power and its invocation of chaos, so much so that it destroys the world as we know it. In his analysis of *Carrie* in “American Cinema in the 70s,” David Pirie argues that the prom scene in *Carrie* symbolizes the apocalypse, saying that the “breakdown of relationships leads directly and concretely to the destruction of the community” (Pirie 24). Carrie ultimately chooses to defy her mother’s requests to stay home in favor of going to the dance with everyone else. When she arrives at the dance, the first song heard sings: “He’s out of control. The devil’s got a hold of his soul.” These lyrics re-establish Margaret’s fears that this dance will encourage Carrie to lean into wicked ways. At first, Carrie is still shy, but her date, Tommy, advises her to stop worrying so much, saying: “To the devil with false modesty.” Carrie, beginning to let loose and laughs: “To the devil,” she agrees. Her agreeance foreshadows the “apocalypse” that Pirie argued. If Carrie’s initial defiance against her mother isn’t enough to warrant punishment, she also unleashes her powers and kills many of the students. Here, the

damage caused can be attributed to both her inability to comply with her mother and her inherently dangerous body. The destruction leaves the town with confirmation that Carrie White was an abomination.

Not only does the woman as witch trope in horror films frame women as originators of chaos due to her physical abilities, but “the representation of the witch [also emphasizes] her as essentially sexual [in] nature” (Creed 214). This sexual nature is another facet that she is punished for. Margaret White prays to God for forgiveness, saying “[Carrie] may have committed the sin of lustful thoughts” and expresses how she agrees with the idea of punishment for such a heinous act. In *The Haunting*, it is revealed that the original father of Hill House, Hugh Craine left behind writings for his daughter Abigail to follow. These writings read: “Lust. daughter, preserve thyself. Hold apart from this world, that its lust corrupt thee not. Could you but hear for a moment the agony the screaming...the dreadful crying out of the lustful...damned for eternity in everlasting flame.” He goes on further to instruct that his daughter should “honor the authors of [her] being - father and mother.” As Richard Pascal argues in his essay, “Walking Alone Together: Family Monsters in *The Haunting of Hill House*,” in Hill House, there is a “calculating maternal possessiveness which is compounded by an overbearing paternal rapacity” (Pascal 473). Although Hugh Craine, as the patriarch, established these expectations for his daughter many years ago as the founder of Hill House, this sentiment still lives within its, or *her*, very structure. In terms of *Psycho*, it is clear that although Marion is not associated with witchcraft in the same overt ways that Eleanor and Carrie are, she does not escape similar punishment for her body and her sexuality.

When it comes to Norma Bates, she is technically *Norman's* mother, but she is also *Marion's punisher*. As the naturally badgering mother, she nags Norman; as the mother that is

affected by the patriarchy, both in terms of her upholding of traditional ideals and the physical “entering” that Norman does to her - she punishes Marion for her body. Marion’s threat is her sexuality and “Norma” is overheard declaring that “[Marion will] not be appeasing her ugly appetite” in *Bates Motel*. When Marion is back in her motel room, she undresses and takes a shower, where she is then stabbed to death by a figure who appears to be Mrs. Bates, but who we later know was Norman *acting* as Norma. Creed notes how “the shower-scene murder awakens our unconscious fears of the mother as parental castrator [since] ‘Mrs. Bates’ appears without warning, just at the moment when Marion is most enjoying the sensual pleasures of her body” (Creed 374). This sudden appearance and subsequent infliction reiterates the always-watching maternal figure who will not hesitate to eliminate the misdeeds of her daughter. Although a detective in the film is also stabbed to death, his death does not produce the same implications as Marion’s does. As Creed says, “it is important to note, however, that it is woman who was punished most graphically by the mother,” (Creed 375), as the camerawork during Marion’s murder emphasizes the direct correlation between her naked body and her enjoyment of the shower and the bloody suffering she must face. A similar correlation is made in *Carrie*, which also features a shower scene. Carrie is shown to us showering after gym class and the film



Figure 4: Marion and Carrie in the shower

utilizes close up shots in order to reveal the way she rubs soap tenderly over her breasts, abdomen and thighs. In these shots, her eyes are closed and her mouth is open in an “o” shape,

which parallels Marion's expressions in the motel shower. Just as Marion's shower directly leads to her stabbing and death, Carrie's shower also precedes the spilling of blood. As discussed earlier, Margaret demonizes this blood, telling Carrie that it is punishment against women for being so devious and lustful. Therefore, both mothers agree that the girls, with their faces mimicking expressions of sexual pleasure, must be punished.

As noted before, Carrie gets her period and lashes out with her powers directly after enjoying her shower. When her classmates witness this, they ridicule her by hurling sanitary pads her way and chanting, "plug it up! Plug it up!" This motif of blood returns during the prom scene, when Carrie's crowning as prom queen is ruined by the pig's blood poured over her, a reminder that she is viewed as dirty, no matter how pretty she may try to be. Therefore, this image reiterates how female bodies are often seen as dirty and unholy. While the mothers in the film have overtly expressed this notion, the fact that another girl was the one to sully Carrie with this blood points to a larger issue. These films highlight how many young girls adopt the ideas taught to them by patriarchal mothers who believe that women's bodies are naturally disgusting and are things that need to be taken care of in one way or another. This idea extends into the notion that other women are naturally cunning and those who wish to be "good girls" should remain chaste in order to prevent themselves from succumbing to their inherent depravity. In *Betrayal and Rejection Among Girls: Girlfighting*, Lyn Mikel Brown notes that many films "send the message that there is one acceptable avenue to power: be nice, stay pure, look beautiful..." and that female characters who "come off too bold, say what [they] think too loudly, take up too much space, [and] express [their] anger and disappointment" are typically associated with being part of "the evil ones" (Mikel Brown 21). There is no denying that by the end, Carrie

has been firmly placed into the group of “evil ones,” and there is no doubt that the other mothers in town used her as an example to their daughters that defying Mother only leads to corruption.

This idea that bold female expression associates her with being an evil girl is also prevalent in *The Haunting*, as Eleanor’s perception of her roommate and friend, Theo, fluctuates; at first, Eleanor views Theo’s daring personality as admirable, but later, she sees it as something despicable. For example, when Theo paints Eleanor’s toenails, Eleanor comments with satisfaction, “Ooh it’s wicked.” Here, Theo tells her: “By the time I’m through with you, Nel, you’ll be a different person,” implying that Theodora will change Eleanor from the quiet and homely girl she is to someone like Theo - unapologetic, independent, and mysterious. This also indicates that Theo has the power to influence other women and therefore, pass on her audacity to other girls, encouraging them to embrace similar traits. In her essay, “‘Whose Hand was I Holding?’ Familial and Sexual Politics in *The Haunting of Hill House*,” Tricia Lootens argues that “Theodora’s mirroring of Eleanor is fortunate, dangerous, erotic,” (Lootens 163) as Theo has the potential to be Eleanor’s “[other self].” Eleanor is drawn to Theo because she wants to be courageous and striking like her, but the internalized comments from her mother convince her that such boldness is associated with defiance and evil. At first, Eleanor says: “I’m stupid and wicked and untrustworthy and not good for anything at all.” These comments about herself stem from a sense of guilt about how she disobeyed her sister and mother’s instructions. However, she later changes her mind, deciding that *Theo* is the issue, telling her: “You’re a monster Theo! You’re the monster on Hill House...you revolt me....I’d rather be innocent than like you...the world is full of inconsistencies, unnatural things. ‘Nature’s mistakes,’ they’re called. *You*, for instance!” Eleanor has now become like her mother in that she is attempting to categorize herself into the “good girl” group by pushing Theo into the collection of evil ones. We can also see how

Eleanor has become almost completely engulfed by Hill House and its traditional ideas during the film's halfway point when she converses with Dr. Markaway. He tells her that he's interested in learning about Eleanor, to which she replies: "Oh. *She's horrible.*" Here, Eleanor is responding from two different perspectives. First, she is responding as herself, from Eleanor's idea of who she is; she views herself as horribly boring, as someone stagnant, someone uninteresting. It is horrible how her mother has stifled her. However, she is also responding from a third-person perspective, that of her deceased mother and sister, under Hill House's influence. In this way, Eleanor is then saying that she is "horrible", in the sense that she is a horrible daughter for running away, for wanting more. She is horrible for fantasizing of freedom, for leaving her mother uncared for. Towards the end of the film, Eleanor has become completely trapped by Hill House. At this point, Eleanor walks along the halls and says: "We killed her. You and I, Hugh Craine. You and I. You and I." At this point, Dr. Markaway's wife is missing, so it seems as though Eleanor is speaking about her here. However, I argue that Eleanor is actually talking about herself. As she realized many times throughout the film, she slowly loses her identity and ultimately, her life, to Hill House, admitting that "[she's] coming apart a little at a time... disappearing inch by inch into [the] house." Thus, it is *Eleanor as Hill House* speaking about the successful stifling of Eleanor Lance, similar to how "Norma Bates" would discuss killing Marion Crane.

In *Carrie*, Margaret hates the fact that Carrie is leaving the house to attend her high school prom. She tells her: "You can stay here with me," but Carrie rejects that idea saying, "I don't want to stay with you, Mama." Margaret berates her then, forcing her to "sit [back] down [and] be quiet!" Carrie tells her mother: "I want to try and be a whole person before it's too late for me," which Margaret responds to by throwing a cup of water over her. Here, like the Wicked

Witch from *The Wizard of Oz*, Carrie the Witch's power, or craving for power, is attempted to be diffused by her mother. Additionally, Carrie "like... Norman from *Psycho*," (Creed 221) and Eleanor from *The Haunting*, is also "a divided personality. On the one hand she is a painfully shy, withdrawn, child-like girl who just 'wants to be normal' like every other teenager, while on the other hand she has the power of telekinesis which enables her to transform into an avenging female fury" (Creed 221). At the prom, when Carrie is drenched in blood during her acceptance, she lashes out in an act of rage. Locking all of the gym doors and setting fire to the building, she kills most of the students inside. In a panicked state, she returns home to find that her mother has filled the house with candles, representing her wish to purify Carrie, eliminating her demon nature. Margaret attempts to do this by killing Carrie by stabbing her. In this action, she attempts

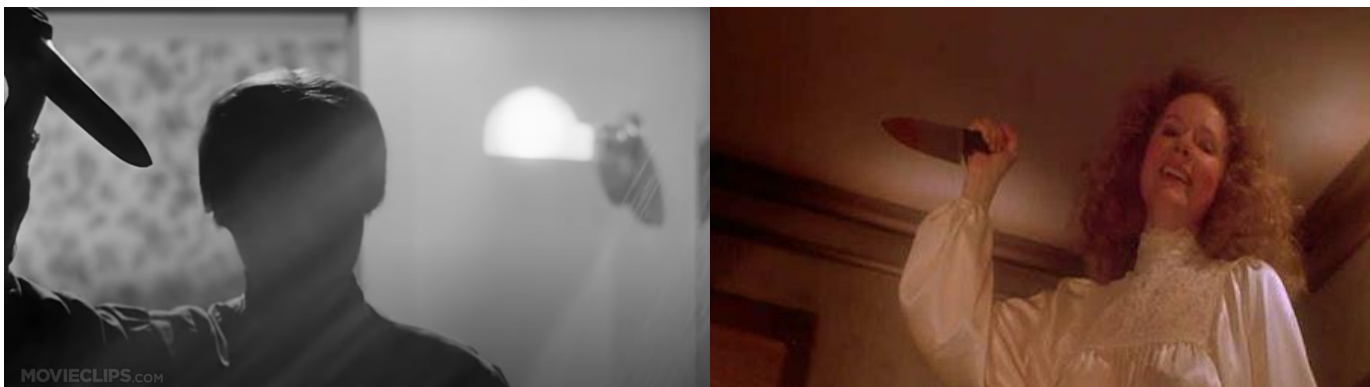


Figure 5: The Mother's Knife

to deter her daughter from causing anymore chaos in the same vein as "Norma's" stabbing of Marion. However, Carrie is able to fight back, ultimately impaling her mother with multiple knives. However, as their house begins to collapse upon itself, then catch fire, Carrie holds Margaret in her arms as they both die. The patriarchal mother in these films is detrimental to the potential growth of her daughters, so much so that they all end up dead by the end. However, it is essential to note that the mother figure is painted as overbearing by nature. Norman makes Norma a killer, but she was already described as a "clinging and demanding woman." Hugh

Craine used Hill House as a means of controlling his daughter, but Markway announces that “it was an evil house from the beginning - a house that was born bad.” Creed describes this strong maternal power, saying that “in Norman's case she is so powerful that he gives up his own identity. She is not an external, separate entity; she is part of the child's inner self, the interior voice of the maternal authority” (Creed 427). This authority is proven to be strong enough to control the daughters, despite how much the women fought back. “Most girls,” according to Dworkin, “however much they resent their mothers, do become very much like them. Rebellion can rarely survive the aversion therapy that passes for being brought up female. Male violence acts directly on the girl through her father or brother or uncle or any number of male professionals or strangers, as it did and does on her mother, and she too is forced to learn to conform in order to survive” (Dworkin 15). This idea is reflected in the endings of each of these films, as it becomes apparent that the daughters, despite how much they may try not to be, are ultimately controlled and repressed by their own mothers.

It is necessary, then, to analyze what these endings make clear to viewers. In *Psycho*, Marion is ultimately punished for attempting to muddle gender roles. The fact that Norman sinks Marion's car, is an attempt to re-establish these gender roles, as he asserts his dominance by eliminating her means of freedom. Though Norman is her violator, it becomes clear that the root of Norman's instability is his aggressive mother. In *The Haunting*, Eleanor, too, is punished for attempting to re-establish her place outside of the home, but she ends up falling into the trap of domesticity somewhere else, with Hill House as the new, domineering mother. Susan Douglas writes: “Embedded in the rather unforgiving gender ideology of the late 1950's was the following contradiction: I was supposed to be, simultaneously, a narcissist and a masochist... The message to women and girls in the 1950's wasn't just ‘Be passive, be dumb, keep your mouth

shut...’ It was worse. It was ‘to really have it all be a martyr’” (Douglas 27). By the end of *The Haunting*, Eleanor convinces herself that there is actually no way that she can thrive outside of the home, and thus, she winds up dead, as well. Eleanor chooses to commit suicide by crashing her car into a tree and, in his action, she negates the car’s potential for travel and movement in order to stay at the home. In the film’s final moments, the film’s opening line: “Those who walk in Hill House, walk alone,” is changed to “we who walk” and it is now Eleanor herself who narrates them; Eleanor has become the exact thing she was afraid of becoming all along. Finally, Carrie’s death eliminates her as a direct threat to the community around her and therefore, things seem to be safe again. However, at the very end, the film depicts the dreams of one Sue Snell - Carrie’s classmate, whose kindness ultimately allowed her survival. In this dream, Sue walks through the rubble left over of the Whites’ home, where a sign reads: **Carrie White burns in hell** (insinuating that Margaret’s candles had the right idea). Sue is tearful, in a white nightgown, flowers in hand. Then, Carrie’s hand shoots up from the ground, bloody, and grabs Sue, threatening to pull her down, too. This final scene represents the power that Carrie still holds, even from beyond the grave.

The next chapter focuses specifically on this growing fear of female relationships during the Women’s Liberation Movement, as many feared the ways in which one “dangerous woman” has the power to influence others. Furthermore, it shifts focus from domineering mothers and their daughters to controlling husbands and their wives. It discusses the conversation occurring in the 1970’s about the detriments of such patriarchal structures which allow for this abuse to take place. Further, it elaborates on the ideas mentioned in this chapter about women’s bodies and sexuality being portrayed as threatening. These bodies are then violated and controlled in ways that best serve the patriarchy.

Chapter 2: Controlling the Body

The previous chapter discussed the presence of a shifting culture in the 1950's and 60's, wherein young girls were beginning to rebel against the idea of immediately becoming wives and mothers once entering adulthood. Whereas that chapter focused on young, unmarried women, this chapter centers around the films, *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and *The Stepford Wives* (1975), which star protagonists who are now wives and mothers. In the context of the Women's Liberation movement, the horror elicited from these films builds on many of the same ideas from the last chapter, such as the fear of unleashed female independence and sexuality, but this chapter analyzes the way in which these films comment on the issue of bodily autonomy, as both women's bodies are violated by their husbands. In this way, the films reflect the debate over abortion (as *Roe v. Wade* was decided in 1973 and ruled that pregnant women could choose to have an abortion). The Women's Liberation Movement was in strong defense of this choice for women, but still faced significant pushback from "anti-choice" advocates, many of whom, attempted to paint the feminists of the time as something dangerous and immoral, in the hopes that people, particularly more women, would stray away from adopting similar ideals. Furthermore, feminists pushed for an increased awareness surrounding domestic violence, rape and all other struggles of bodily autonomy and freedom from male violation of bodies. This chapter reflects such struggles, as the wives of the film must fight against the patriarchal structures that attempt to control her body.

Rosemary's Baby, a film adaptation of a novel by Ira Levin, was directed by Roman Polanski and tells the story of Rosemary and Guy Woodhouse, a married couple who move into a new apartment and are befriended by odd neighbors, Minnie and Roman Castavet. When Rosemary gets pregnant, she becomes suspicious of her husband and the Castavets', eventually

learning that they are all part of a coven that has impregnated Rosemary with the spawn of Satan. Although Rosemary attempts to ward off the coven from controlling her any further, she is unsuccessful and, in the film's last moments, seems to relinquish her resistance, choosing to stay in the coven and raise her son. *The Stepford Wives*, an adaptation of another novel by Levin, is directed by Bryan Forbes. The film follows Joanna Eberhart, who moves with her husband and two children from New York City to the small town of Stepford, Connecticut. As the story progresses, she begins to question the other wives, many of whom seem oddly subservient to their husbands. Eventually, it is revealed that the men of Stepford replace their actual wives with robot clones whose only wish in life is to serve their husbands and children. In the end, Joanna loses her battle against the evil Men's Association and is ultimately turned into a Stepford Wife with the rest of the women. Whereas the last chapter featured protagonists who struggled with the ability to balance personal desires with societal expectations, this chapter focuses more specifically on two women who, despite being wives and mothers, are unafraid to verbalize what they want and reiterate their value of independence. Joanna works as a photographer and she makes it a point to establish her identity, separate from simply being a wife to Walther. For example, during a meeting with a gallery owner, she reveals that her greatest wish is for someone to look at a photograph and say, "that reminds me of an Ingles [because] Ingles was [her] maiden name." Although Joanna has already taken Walther's last name when the two wed, it becomes clear that she is a woman who is unsure whether that decision truly fulfilled her. She also says that she's come to the conclusion that she "just want[s] to be remembered." Here, Joanna is speaking about being remembered as an artist, a visionary, an autonomous individual rather than as an asset to a man or her children. Thus, Joanna's ultimate fear is her identity -- her opinions, interests and agency -- being erased.

At the very beginning of *The Stepford Wives*, as Joanna and Walther pack their car in preparation to drive to their new home, the family witnesses a man walking down the street carrying a female mannequin. Joanna chooses to snap a photo of this incident and her daughter comments on it, saying “Daddy, I just saw a man carrying a naked lady.” Walther then replies to this saying, “Well that’s why we’re moving to Stepford.” This scene demonstrates two things. First, it reveals Walther’s secret reasoning for moving to Stepford - all the wives there are mannequins whose husbands can parade them around. Second, Joanna and Walther’s differing actions foreshadow their opposing mindset when it comes to their views on the female body. Whereas Joanna sees something positive, perhaps liberating, about the “naked lady,” Walther only sees perversion, which is why he, like the rest of the men in Stepford, ultimately agree to total control over the female body, not only in the way it is or isn’t dressed, but they ways in

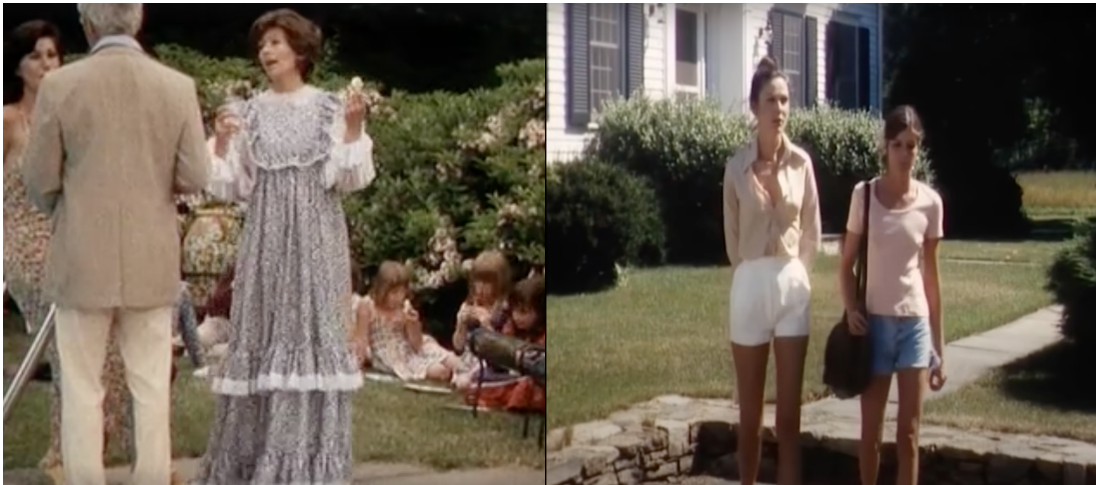


Figure 1: Conservative Gown vs. Shorts & Tees

which it allows women the freedom to express their individuality. Clothing and nakedness become markers of this stark contrast in beliefs. When Joanna meets her friend, Bobbie, for the first time, Bobbie comments that she’s meeting “*the* Joanna Eberhart! Avid shutterbug, ex-Gothamite who misses the noise of the **naked** city!” Bobbie is excited because she feels as

though Joanna shares her longing to be back in a freer environment where women aren't covered up or contained. In Stepford, the wives who have already been "turned" are seen wearing full length skirts and dresses, with long sleeve tops. Joanna and Bobbie, on the other hand, still maintain agency over their bodies and what they choose to and not to wear, which is usually short sleeves or cropped tops with shorts or pants. If they wear dresses, they are typically strappy, tighter fitting ones compared to the traditional type of gowns which express extreme modesty. Although Joanna can turn to Bobbie for a mutual admiration for New York's more liberal environment, she learns that Walther completely disagrees. He tells Joanna that she must come to accept that their new home "is Stepford. It's not New York...These are the people [they] have to live with and... And [those new people] suit [him]," showing that what makes him happy is the best and final decision.

The exact reason why these people suit him so well is because he's decided that Joanna's bold personality pales in comparison to a wife unchanged by the shifting climate of free women. Once Joanna realizes the Men's Association's plan to turn every woman in Stepford into "the perfect wife," herself included, she confides in Walther, telling him that she is frightened and wants to leave Stepford. He dismisses her feelings, calling her crazy and irrational. He also says that it is a positive thing that someone like Bobbie finally changed, explaining that it was actually something "good [because] she had to clean [her home] sooner or later, [since] it looked like a goddamn pigsty!" He then turns the focus on Joanna: "When are things going to start sparkling around here? That's what I'd like to know," suggesting that Joanna "[pay] a little more attention to [her] family and a little less to [her] goddamn picture taking." Here, Walther admits that Joanna's problem lies in the fact that she is not all-consumed with her children and husband, but rather still values her independence and her career. In the "The New York Radical Feminists

1969 Manifesto”, it claims that “man establishes his manhood in direct proportion to his ability to have his ego override woman’s and derives his strength and self-esteem through this process. This male need, though destructive, is in that something personal. It is not out of a desire to hurt the woman that man dominates and destroys her; it is out of a need for a sense of power that he necessarily must destroy her ego and make it subservient to his” (New York Radical Feminists 380). The ideology described here seems to encompass the Stepford Men’s Association’s mindset in regard to their views on their wives. More than just as a personal slight to these women, they use the “turning process” in order to reiterate the power dynamics wherein the man is in control of all his wife says and does. These automatons therefore alleviate the men’s fear of their wives acting in any unexpected or progressive way.

In *Where the Girls Are*, Susan Douglas describes the perception of feminist protesters in the early 1970’s, saying that these “women protesters clashed starkly with the women...on TV,” because these were not the “young, perfectly groomed, always smiling, never complaining, demure, eager to please” caricatures, but rather they were women who actually

yelled, argued, and accused; they raised their fists and shook them...They violated the nation's most sacred conceits about love, marriage, the family, and femininity. They denounced illegal, back alley abortions [in favor of safe and legal procedures and]...they talked back to men... expos[ed] the gender biases...[and] insisted...that motherhood, marriage, sexual behavior, and dress codes all had to be [reconsidered] (Douglas 166).

As mentioned previously, many people, especially men, aimed to dissuade women from becoming “man-hating feminists” or put more plainly - many men disliked the idea of women challenging the sexist ideals that had been pushed on them for years. Therefore, many girls were

taught “the patriarchal lesson...that female friendship is dangerous, suspect, or unimportant. (Mikel Brown, 21). In both films, Rosemary and Joanna’s relationships with other women are vilified or destroyed by the men, with both protagonists’ husbands disliking the way in which the female relationships encouraged their wives to speak up and against the injustices being done to them.

In *Rosemary’s Baby*, Rosemary is gaslighted by Guy, her husband, and her neighbors, Roman and Minnie Castavet. While it is obvious that she is not doing well physically, Rosemary’s concerns over her health are ignored and diminished. However, during a scene when she throws a party, Rosemary has the opportunity to seek comfort in a group of her female friends. They form a protective circle around her, even kicking Guy out of the room, telling him, “Sorry, girls only!” Here, Rosemary’s anxieties are temporarily calmed as her female friends are not



Figure 2: Rosemary’s girlfriends

disqualifying her fears, but rather encouraging her to express her feelings and “cry [her frustration] out.” They also agree with her concerns about her physical state, acknowledging that “pain like that is a warning that something isn’t right.” Additionally, Rosemary has a friendly conversation with a young girl, Terry, who lives in the same building and shares in Rosemary’s uneasiness about the new environment. Terry’s eventual fate and Guy’s disapproval of Rosemary’s friendships ultimately reveal how such connections are held in contempt, which I will expand on shortly. In *The Stepford Wives*, Joanna’s uneasiness about Stepford is only shared by two women, Bobbie and Charmaine. Bobbie is a quick-witted, vocal woman who despises the

rigid social norms that the Stepford wives have seemed to conform to. Charmaine, a more minor character, enjoys playing tennis in her free time and enthusiastically agrees to join Joanna and Bobbie's own *Women's Association*. Joanna tells Bobbie that she "messed a little bit with women's lib in New York," to which Bobbie says, "Didn't we all?" Joanna then says: "I'm not contemplating any Maidenform bonfires, but they could certainly use something around here." In the late 1960's and early 70's, consciousness raising groups were popularized by feminists who attempted to help women understand the ways in which sexism and oppression affected their lives. It is revealed in the film that a Women's Association did once exist in Stepford, but given the film's reveal about the Stepford men, it becomes obvious that such discussions between women must be stopped. Joanna also sees a female therapist towards the end of the film, who unlike all of the men she has turned to, recognizes that her concerns are justified. The therapist comforts her by saying that "a city-to-suburbs move for a woman with interests other than purely family can seem like a jaunt to Siberia" and tells Joanna that she should flee her seemingly dangerous situation and "get the hell away [without telling her] husband or anyone." While the woman may not completely understand the inner workings of the Men's Association, she is able to recognize how the patriarchal structures hurt Joanna and Joanna's uneasiness about her situation symbolizes a real-world conflict that many women have had to face. In Betty Friedan's hugely impactful book, *The Feminine Mystique*, she details the ways in which many women seemed to be unhappy with their roles as housewives, but did not know exactly how to deal with this unhappiness. She describes that "if she tried to tell her husband, he didn't understand what she was talking about. She did not really understand it herself. Women in America found it harder to talk about this problem than about sex. Even the psychoanalysts had no name for it. When a woman went to a psychiatrist for help, as many women did, she would say, 'I'm so

ashamed,' or 'I must be hopelessly neurotic" (Friedan 46). Because they had been expected to fulfill a very specific role, their admission that this role was anything less than perfect left them distraught. Gail Collins, author of *When Everything Changed*, says that women "were being duped into believing homemaking was their natural destiny by gushy, unrealistic articles in women's magazines—all edited by men" (Collins 85). As explained by these comments, women felt ashamed for wanting to be more than just housewives and mothers and it wasn't until they began speaking these feelings aloud with other women did they realize that first, this was a shared experience and second, they were capable of eliciting change.

The Men's Association hopes to destroy this realization by re-programming the women to believe that domestic life is the most fulfilling, which is evident when Joanna asks one of the Stepford wives, Carol, if it "ever bother[s] [her] that the most important organization in Stepford is sexually archaic," to which Carol replies: "Archaic?" Joanna further explains: "Old-fashioned. Out-of-date." The eradication of this word in the new and "improved" wives signifies the eradication of more modern notions of female independence, mainly that the woman's place is not solely limited to the house. These women are only required to possess a limited vocabulary and education in order to be the women that these men want and a lot has to be subtracted to get them there including their language; they're unable to think about something that they have no words for. Therefore, from the feminist perspective, it can be argued that the film reflects women's fear of societal and patriarchal control.

Thus, although both protagonists find comfort in having these female companions, the men in the films attempt to ruin these friendships. First, Guy and Rosemary discover that Terry has supposedly committed suicide, but it is later implied that she was murdered by Castavets for most likely refusing to inhabit the role that is later forced upon Rosemary. Later, Guy openly

demeans Rosemary's friends, who have clearly influenced her into speaking her mind, as she firmly states that she is no longer going to see Saperstein, the only doctor that Guy and the Castavets insist on. More so, she says that she is trading the "health" drink that they recommend for a different one that actually makes her feel good. Angrily he responds, "I won't let you do it, Ro!" before commenting that Rosemary's friends are "some not-very-bright bitches" and that "it isn't fair to Saperstein," to which Rosemary yells back, "What about what's fair to me!" What is prevalent here is Guy's attempts to isolate Rosemary, especially from her liberal, female friends who clearly have her best interests -- health, agency, happiness, freedom -- at heart. Just as Walther has chosen himself and the Men's Association above Joanna, Guy has chosen himself and the coven above Rosemary, seeing her as merely a vessel and therefore, he insists on her submission to the patriarchal figures whose interests best align with him and that can best control her. Further, his labeling of her friends as ignorant and "bitchy" reflect the ways in which men during the 1970's labeled feminists as stupid and angry.

In *The Stepford Wives*, Charmaine is the first to be separated from Joanna and Bobbie. After one particular weekend, Charmaine reveals that she no longer needs a maid, as she'll be doing all of the housework, and she also reveals that she is having her tennis court bulldozed over. As her reasoning, she says: "I want to please [my husband] now...All I ever thought about before was just me." Here, it is revealed that when "turning" their wives, the Stepford men ensure that the women's sense of selfhood is obliterated in the process. The means that allow Charmaine to enjoy her coveted hobby has been literally destroyed, pushing the New Charmaine towards wanting to clean instead. The second, and more important, female companion who Joanna loses to the Men's Association is of course, Bobbie. The same woman who appreciated Joanna's "messy, beautiful kitchen" is now ashamed of having been a "joke" and a "slob."

Douglas describes the way in which men were upset that during the feminist movement, as their wives, who were “supposed to defer to her husband as head of the house,” had begun discussing their issues with other women by doing things like “holding consciousness-raising meetings in the living room to discuss [her husband’s] failure to help with the baby or give her the right kind of orgasm.” (Douglas 134). The men in Stepford do not give Joanna the chance to participate in a fully formed Women’s Association because they eliminate the women who would be interested in joining and replace them with faux women who would never dare to criticize their husbands. At one point, Joanna and Bobbie overhear an already-turned wife, Patricia, having sex with her husband, during which she yells: “Oh, Frank. You’re the best! You’re the Champ! You’re the *Master!*” This reveals that the Stepford men only want women who do the opposite of criticize them; in fact, these new and “improved women” are so submissive to their husbands that they even refer to them as “masters.”

In terms of these “masters,” it is important to build upon the idea mentioned previously that Rosemary and Joanna are trapped within a male-dominated system that controls their autonomy. In *The Stepford Wives*, Walther tells Joanna that “every important guy in town is a member [of The Men’s Association] - the TV executive, shrink, scientist, police chief, fire chief, head of the hospital, guy who runs the phone company” etc. This is significant in that the list details structures of male authority, therefore allowing men to dictate all that occurs within Stepford and all that the women can or cannot do. Since it’s revealed that The Men’s Association replaces their wives’ bodies with ones they find more attractive and useful to them, it is then apparent that if every important figure in Stepford is a part of such an organization, it is impossible for Joanna or any other untouched woman to find an establishment in town that is not run by someone attempting to control her body. When it comes to Rosemary’s experience, Karyn

Valerius argues in her essay, “*Rosemary's Baby: Gothic Pregnancy, and Fetal Subjects*,” that her “exploitation occurs precisely within the privacy of her doctor-patient relationship, her home, her marriage, her body and even her desires” (Valerius 121). The phrase, “the personal is the political” or “the private is the political” was a popular slogan that feminists used to rally women in support of Women’s Liberation and these relationships work to demonstrate that. Like with Joanna, the plot against Rosemary highlights how the patriarchal structures in her life are set up in a way that allows such trauma to occur. In *When Everything Changed*, Gail Collins notes that “doctors, who were overwhelmingly male, had an authoritarian attitude toward all patients in the postwar era, but they saw more women, and they were particularly inclined to treat female patients as children who panicked easily and were better off knowing as little as possible” (Collins 235). This issue of male dominance, particularly over women’s bodies parallels the issue of bodily autonomy in regard to issues like sexual assault abortion, a topic which was and still continues to be heavily debated in the US today. In 1970, the book *Our Bodies, Ourselves* was published by a nonprofit organization of the same name and revolutionized women’s relationships with their bodies by rejecting “doctors who were condescending, paternalistic, judgmental, and noninformative” by creating a compilation of women’s descriptions of their own bodies and experiences. The book helped make more women informed on issues such as sexual assault and violence, reproductive health, and abortion. Publications like *Our Bodies, Ourselves* further emphasized the importance of women’s awareness of their own bodies and therefore, speaking with other women in order to help them understand these issues as well. Guy, the Castavets’ and Dr. Saperstein’s isolation of Rosemary from any of these women help them “assume a paternalistic authority that enables them to easily discredit her as psychotic and later, Guy unsuccessfully attempts to convince Rosemary that she has suffered a psychotic episode

brought on by ‘prepartum syndrome’ (Valerius 120). Such emotional abuse reiterates the aim of Women’s Liberation in terms of freeing women from the reliance on men to help them understand and make decisions about their own bodies.

In terms of reproductive rights, it is revealed in *The Stepford Wives* that The Men’s Association takes control of these rights during the turning process. This becomes evident when Joanna, after realizing that Bobbie has been turned, stabs Bobbie in the stomach. In her essay, “The Cyborg Mystique: *The Stepford Wives* and Second Wave Feminism,” Anna Krugovoy Silver argues that “the symbolism here is overt: Joanna proves Bobby's nonhumanness and nonfemaleness by striking her in the part of the body in which Bobbie would carry a child” (Krugovoy Silver 70). Whereas Bobbie had previously made it a point to tell Joanna that she’s always one to carry tampons, “now her inability to bleed, surely an allusion to menstruation as well as her uterine wound, speak to her separation from nature. She looks like the perfect woman, cleans and has sex like the perfect woman. Bobbie is in fact a sterile, unnatural nonwoman” (Krugovoy Silver 70). Thus, the men use their wives’ bodies in order to produce heirs, but afterwards, choose to obliterate their ability to reproduce once they feel as though the bodies (and the wives) have served their purposes as child bearers. Although these new “wives” are treated as though they are “the perfect women,” with no will, no sense of self, and no independent view of the world, it becomes clear that the lens through which such perfection is perceived is a patriarchal one.

Rosemary’s Baby focuses even more on this control of the body and with it, comments on female sexuality and subsequently, female shame. At the beginning of the film, the audience situates Rosemary as the initiator of sex with her husband, as she tells him, “Let’s make love” when they first move into their new apartment. Another night, she plans to conceive and in this

scene, the color red is used predominantly and basically for the first time. There are red roses, a fire is going, and Rosemary wears red silk pajamas. The use of red associates her with passion and lust and foreshadows danger. That night, her plan is thwarted by an interruption by the Castavets and the night that Rosemary does end up conceiving turns out to be something very different than she originally planned. First, Rosemary's ability to make conscious decisions is damaged by the drugged beverage that the Castavet's secretly instruct Guy to ensure that she drinks. The drink puts her to sleep and it is when she is unconscious that the Coven, now joined by Guy, watch as their leader, Satan himself, rapes her. Therefore, her own interest in sexuality is demolished and instead, her body is used against her will for the benefit of the coven and their leader. The Castavets' and the coven's violation of Rosemary's body can be paralleled by the way in which they violate her home. In her essay, "Mommie Dearest: *Aliens, Rosemary's Baby* and Mothering," Rhona Berenstein argues that "Rosemary's and Guy's apartment, instead of forming a self-contained unit, becomes sort of vaginal passage from the Castavet's place" (Berenstein 66). Thus, they secretly enter her private space through the hidden hallway between their apartments, and they physically enter her body, or rather the Devil does, by penetrating and impregnating her. While the rape ritual is occurring, Rosemary realizes that she is trapped within some kind of nightmare. She then notes that in fact, "this is no dream - this is really happening!" Violation against women is not just a bad dream or unwarranted fear - it is a gruesome reality that many women have been forced to endure.

Furthermore, the emphasis on Rosemary's sexuality is significant when discussing how the film, like the Coven, uses it against her. In Lucy Fischer's book, *Cinematernity: Film, Motherhood*, she argues that Rosemary's fate, the "devious denouement" of her pregnancy, "assigns her blame. It is *she* who has most wanted a child: even in her drugged stupor, she pleads

to make a baby. It is *she* who has arranged to live in the Branford [apartment], despite its chilling reputation. It is *she* who has pushed intimacy with the Castavets; Guy had originally warned: ‘If we get friendly with an old couple...we’ll never get rid of them.’ Thus, the ‘New Eve’ is charged with original sin” (Fischer 82). This reiterates the idea that women were to blame for the repercussions of their own mistakes. Just as Eve was punished for her “betrayal,” Rosemary is also punished for her own thoughtlessness. Feminism at this time challenged the ever present “victim-blaming” wherein many men viewed violence against women as justified. As discussed in the previous chapter, women’s sexual desire is usually punished in horror films of this period and the fact that Rosemary is punished by having to carry the Devil’s child can be analyzed in two ways. First, it highlights the abnormality of women; if a woman’s body has the power to carry an evil monster, then she herself cannot be fully separated from such wickedness; after all, her body shelters it. Next, Rosemary’s baby is an example of a woman being forced to shelter a being that she did not intend to carry. If read from a feminist perspective, the film can be analyzed as an example of the ways in which the patriarchy forces women to carry out a pregnancy, even if that fetus was conceived through rape. Sarah Arnold, author of “Maternal Horror Film, Melodrama and Motherhood,” argues that in many pregnancy-centered horror films, the mother must not only:

sacrifice herself to the child, [but] she must begin this journey towards sacrifice upon the moment of conception. Rather than experience this sacrifice as a form of victimisation, in which she effectively loses her child to a higher patriarchal authority, in the context of the films she learns to embrace this, to appreciate her role, however marginal.... [These] films point to the means by which patriarchy contains the abject reproductive female; by eliminating maternal omnipotence

through the prioritization of the child... and by positioning the ‘paternal’ as the originating generative force (the female reproductive body being a mere vessel) (Arnold 169-170).

The ending of the films reflect this, as in both movies, the patriarchal groups use the protagonists’ children in order to lure them into their final positions. In the final scene of *Rosemary’s Baby*, Rosemary stops arguing with the coven when she hears her child begin to cry. Roman sees this and tells her to “just be a mother to [her] baby” and “rock him.” Suspiciously, Rosemary says: “You’re trying to get me to be his mother,” to which Roman replies: “Aren’t you his mother?” As Rosemary soothes her child, a song begins to play. Sung by Mia Farrow, the actress who plays Rosemary, the tune is called, “Sleep Safe and Warm” - a lullaby, low and soothing, with Farrow singing “la la la” softly. Here, it becomes clear that Rosemary has chosen to accept her “natural” role as nurturing mother, despite the fact that it is to the demonic child of her rapist. As Arnold notes: “Evident in the pregnancy horror, are themes of maternal absence and self-sacrifice, maternal neglect and selfishness” (Arnold 157). It can easily be argued that Rosemary should reject the coven and the child that she shares with Satan; however, the film has her relinquish her fighting. She stays by her son’s side. Arnold notes that “the pregnant woman serves as a vessel for a superior being (she is marked as either good or bad depending on the degree to which she concedes or resists legitimate authority). She may exude omnipotence, her pregnancy may mark her as



Figure 3: Rosemary changing her mind after seeing her baby

special, unique, or original; however, she must, ultimately, be contained” (Arnold 158).

Rosemary’s submission to her son and this new group marks her as a “good mother” in the eyes of the coven, Guy included. The fact that she was able to carry out this pregnancy definitely marks her as special and necessary, which Roman tells her this, saying: “He chose you out of all the world, Rosemary. Out of all the women in the whole world, He chose you. He arranged everything 'cause He wanted *you* to be the mother of His only living Son.” This is a parody of Mary’s Annunciation in the Bible, wherein she was chosen as the “perfect woman,” pure enough to be suitable for birthing the son of God. Of course, neither Mary nor Rosemary asked for such a harrowing task. Guy even tries to convince Rosemary that the situation was actually a positive one, telling her: “You weren’t hurt, really.” Her own pain and trauma is minimized, with the physical violation and emotional manipulation being a sacrifice for a supposed glorious result - a baby. Therefore, Rosemary's final act of love towards her child leaves the audience with the notion that women have an intrinsic desire or duty to fulfill the role of mother and nurturer, despite the circumstances that allowed her to get there. In *The Stepford Wives*, the men kidnap Joanna’s children and when she goes to find them, the sounds of them crying out for her lure through the dark home and into the room where the Robot Joanna waits for her. Robot Joanna uses a pair of pantyhose to strangle the true Joanna - the symbolism here being that the expectations for Joanna to be more feminine ultimately killed her. In the next and final scene of the film, Joanna is seen pushing her shopping cart around the grocery store, dressed in a conservative gown, eyes blank, as she murmurs niceties to the other Stepford wives, having now become one of them. The significance in Joanna’s wiped, blank eyes comes from her identity, or previous identity, as a photographer, someone who expresses themselves through visual art. This new being no longer has the eyes of Joanna and she can no longer pursue what she loves because

she can no longer see that she ever cared for anything more than husband, housework and homemaking. With Rosemary nearly killed and the true Joanna Erberhart now dead, it becomes obvious just how dangerous these traditional perceptions of women can be.

In her book, *Woman Hating*, from 1974, Andrea Dworkin writes: “Unless the structure is totally transformed, we can expect that when women no longer function as biological breeders, we will be expendable. As men learn more and more to control reproduction, as cloning becomes a reality, and as the technology of computers and robots develop, there is every reason to think that men as we know them will use that control and technology to create the sex objects that will gratify them” (Dworkin 191). These exact fears are played out in *The Stepford Wives* and *Rosemary’s Baby*, the latter also building on women’s fear of lacking reproductive rights, all of which are issues being raised and discussed throughout the US in the early 70’s. This chapter detailed the ways in which the female body is controlled and abused and it began discussing how many, especially men, feared that the Women’s Liberation Movement would influence women so much so that this control could ultimately be lost. As the predecessor to the Chapter 3, which focuses on *Possession* and *The Brood*, these films highlight the successful containment of the female body problem. Stepford, as a town, is extremely well-maintained and clean. As for the women, the Stepford wives are “robots, separate from all human physiological processes, [so they] do not menstruate and cannot have children...they do not age, wrinkle or gain weight” (Krugovoy Silver 70). Therefore, the men here do not have to deal with the bleeding and oozing of the female body that the men in the later films encounter. The next chapter details further how the “female body problem” is addressed in the media and how that body is often controlled. It also builds on Dworkin’s idea that “women live with those who oppress them, sleep with them,

have their children” (Dworkin 23). What happens when women stop doing those things? And how do the films portray these women?

Chapter 3: Rejecting Marriage: Single Women Make Monstrous Mothers

While the first chapter examined the unmarried woman who struggled for independence and self-definition and the second chapter focused on the married woman and mothers who struggle with bodily autonomy, this chapter focuses on what I call *post-married* women, as represented in the films, *The Brood* and *Possession*. The protagonists in these films have gotten married and had children, but have now chosen to get divorced. Because the feminist movement of the 60's and 70's challenged traditional expectations placed on women, many feared that women's aversion to such roles would result in chaos, particularly when it came to the familial structures. Gail Collins states that

By 1980, the [U.S.] government would note that the number of divorces was setting a record for the eighteenth consecutive year and was three times as high as it had been in 1962. There were a lot of theories about what made so many marriages collapse at once. The sexual revolution was one favorite culprit.... And a lot of people blamed the women's liberation movement...[The] feeling was that this was an indication feminists were angry people, that they had bad marriage -- that this was living proof (Collins 382).

I argue that this idea that Collins discusses -- wherein women's reevaluation of their body, sexuality and independence directly resulted in the dissolution of structures like marriage -- is reflected in *The Brood* and *Possession*, which were released in 1979 and 1981 respectively. This chapter analyzes the ways in which these films portray the post-married protagonists as unlikeable and dangerous. This is achieved through an emphasis on abject imagery, which serves to make viewers see them in a negative light. Susan Douglas writes that during the Feminist Movement, "neither the print media nor television devoted news time to inequities in marriage,

divorce, and child-rearing. Critiques of marriage in the family were much too explosive and hit too close to home for male journalists to be comfortable analyzing them” (Douglas 187). Marital and familial structures had to be exempt from scrutiny because of the perception that upholding them directly correlated to upholding morals, values and order. Therefore, when feminists did criticize them, “such criticisms were...easy to dismiss as looney and bizarre. This [then] reinforced the media's insistence that the personal was still the personal and should never be politicized” (Douglas 187). Although control over women themselves was beginning to falter, the media could still control the way in which these liberated women were portrayed and therefore many female characters were also labelled as “looney,” “bizarre,” unwell. In her book, *Motherhood and Representation - The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama*, Ann Kaplan says that in the 1980's, a “perhaps, cultural reaction to the prior decade when women's liberation had been a main theme” resulted in films and TV shows presenting a “nurturing father figure.” This poor man had been left with handling “the domestic terrain” due to his wife, or ex-wife, “abdicating her role as wife and mother to pursue her own ends” (Kaplan 184). I argue that *The Brood* and *Possession* are both films that aim to establish the father characters, Frank and Mark, as the stable and “good” parental figures, in comparison to the mothers, Nola and Anna, who are associated with imagery that paints them as monstrous. As Sarah Arnold notes, “the theme of woman as pregnant grotesque is central to many horror films where woman is depicted as monstrous because she is capable of breeding and giving birth in abnormal ways” (Arnold 163). I use this idea in combination with Creed's notion of the monstrous feminine and Julia Kristeva's idea of abjection in order to illustrate how these films rely on viewers' disturbed reactions to the protagonists' bodily functions.

The Brood, a horror film directed by David Cronenberg, follows Frank, a man struggling to gain legal custody over his five-year-old daughter, Candie from his now ex-wife, Nola. Nola is currently undergoing psychotherapy at an institute where Dr. Hal Raglan performs what he calls, “psychoplasemics” - a method which allows mentally disturbed individuals to release their trauma through a manifestation of physical lesions on their bodies. It is later revealed that Nola has the unique ability to turn her anger into more than just lesions, but rather can create entire beings. She ends up with a brood of children who are shown to be evil, as they murder anyone who Nola seems to be upset with. In the end, after witnessing her birth another one of these creatures, Frank kills Nola, killing all members of her brood as well. He is successfully able to eliminate Nola as a threat and he and Candie drive away from the traumatic scene. *Possession*, directed by Andrzej Żuławski, follows Mark and Anna, another couple soon to be divorced, who share a son, Bob. Throughout the film, Mark expresses anger, often through violence, towards Anna’s choice to leave him, which she first does in favor of another man - Heinrich, but later, chooses to be with a monster, one which she created. Anna and Mark’s tumultuous relationship comes to an end when they are gunned down, leaving their son, Bob, in the hands of both his schoolteacher (a woman who looks exactly like Anna) and Anna’s now fully-formed monster (a creature which looks exactly like Mark).

One of the first things that viewers learn about Nola in *The Brood* is that she has been in this mental institution for some time now. This then immediately positions her as a questionable mother who left her home and daughter before Frank overtly expresses these same sentiments. After he picks Candie up from Nola’s care, he soon realizes that his daughter’s back is covered in cuts and bruises and he immediately threatens to stop allowing Nola visitation rights. He expresses his fear to his lawyer, saying: “If I give Nola enough time, she’ll hurt the kid. I know

she will.” Because the film follows Frank’s journey, his opinion here that Nola is surely dangerous is taken more seriously. In the instances where we do follow Nola’s story, she is shown undergoing her therapy sessions with Dr. Raglan and in them, she reveals how she was traumatized at the hands of her own mother, telling Raglan that “mummies don’t hurt their own children...they sometimes do. Sometimes when they’re bad mummies, fucked up mummies...like mine was...fucked-up and bad.” This leads to the first instance of one of Nola’s brood children acting out Nola’s anger. When Nola’s mother is left to watch Candie, the children break into the kitchen (knocking over cartons of milk and juice) and beat her to death. Here the message is: Bad mummies eventually do get what they deserve.

In *Possession*, When Anna tells Mark that she has regrets about marrying and having a child with him, he is immediately defensive and begins arguing. She tells him, “No one is good or bad, but if you want, *I’m* the bad one.” Anna’s comment here exhibits the way in which women who chose to end their marriages were often villainized. Mark then turns aggressive, attempting to attack her, as if to punish her for regretting marriage and motherhood. Later, he gets angry when she asks for time to think, asking her: “[To] think about what?” to which Anna says: “To think about me!” At another point, he brutally beats her and screams, “Fuck your needs!” Mark despises Anna’s agency so much so that he emotionally and physically harms her for it. Additionally, his possessive nature dominates their relationship, with him constantly asking Anna where she is, needing to keep tabs on her emotions and actions at all times. During one tense scene, both Anna and Mark cut themselves with an electric knife. Mark, in what can be read as an act of kindness, carefully bandages Anna’s neck. However, Mark’s attempt to heal Anna’s wounds can be read as a larger symbol of his attempt to “heal” her from her taste for independence, something that must surely be a temporary, fix-able “illness”. Further, this



Figure 1: Mark's Wrapping a Bandage/Collar around Anna's neck

bandage can also be seen as a collar, as it is wrapped around her throat and therefore symbolizes another attempt to mark his dominance and silence her voice. Marks sends a private investigator to follow her more closely and when this man enters Anna's apartment, one she purchased to live alone in, she tells the investigator that she does not feel comfortable with him there. He ignores

her requests and stays anyway. In her essay, "Monsters Within and Without: Reading Female Identity Through Monstrosity in in Andrzej Żuławski's *Possession*," Nikola Grbavac argues that Anna's apartment is a "womb-like space, a feminine arena" and it is where Anna "is free to explore her desires, and exist outside the prescribed, structured existence" (Grbavac 31). It is no wonder then that Anna reacts so vigorously to an attempted attack on such freedoms. When read as a symbolic womb, Mark and the detective's violation of Anna's apartment call back to the ways in which Walther, The Men's Association, Guy and the Coven worked to invade the bodies of Joanna and Rosemary, as discussed in the last chapter. Here, Anna is able to keep such a violation from going any further. She becomes angry, screaming: "I don't want you here!" and kills him. Directly afterwards, she unwraps Mark's bandage, free of the collar, happy to have the apartment to herself again.

In her book, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Julia Kristeva describes what she names as the "abject," - something that disrupts "borders, positions, [and] rules" and "does not

respect identity, system, order” (Kristeva 4). Because the abject is something which disturbs us by evoking disgust, terror, and aversion, Barbara Creed uses Kristeva’s theory in order to build upon Creed’s idea of the monstrous feminine, arguing that “Kristeva is attempting to explore the different ways in which abjection works within human societies, as a means of separating out the human from the non-human and the fully constituted subject from the partially formed subject” (Creed 42). The monstrous feminine figures are examples of how these human vs. non human categories are complicated and Creed argues that women are constructed as abject beings “in relation to [Kristeva’s] notion of (a) the ‘border’ (b) the mother–child relationship and (c) the feminine body” (Creed 43). I will first discuss the mother child relationships in the film, followed by the ways in which the feminine body is presented (and villainized), then explain the border’s status by the end of each film.

Throughout *Possession*, Mark forms a relationship with Bob’s schoolteacher, Helen. Helen could be Anna’s twin, as the two look exactly alike, except where Anna wears dark colors, Helen wears white, where Anna has blue eyes, Helen’s are green and where Anna wears her hair down, Helen’s is contained, twisted into a neat braid. Helen is happy to enter Mark’s home. The audience is shown that she must care deeply for Bob, as she kindly tucks him into bed and reads him a story. Afterwards, she chooses to wash Mark’s dishes without being asked. In *The Brood*, Frank also forms a relationship with his child’s teacher, Ruth, who kindly looks after Candie. He invites her over to dinner one night, where Frank describes his current situation with Nola. He says that his troubles are happening because he “got involved with a woman who married [him] for [his] sanity hoping it would rub off. Instead, it worked the other way.” Ruth empathizes with Frank, telling him that “[Candie] obviously needs mothering and isn’t getting it.” The school teachers in both films function as foils to the “terrible” mothers who are not treating their

children nor their husbands the way that was traditionally expected of them as wives and mothers. Although Nola and Anna have chosen to remove themselves from the home in order to work on their mental health, it is still associated with bad mothering in the films. Helen and Ruth, on the other hand, not only choose to care for children as their career, but also willingly take time to nurture Bob and Candie in their spare time. Nola later finds out that Ruth has visited Frank and Candie's home and she angrily calls her, screaming: "You bitch! You're killing my family!" through the phone. Soon after, Nola's raging children kill Ruth in her classroom, in front of all her students. This action only proves that she, like Anna, is an evil killer, nowhere near good mother-figures like the kind, all-giving school teachers who have now taken it upon themselves to fill the void that the absent mothers have left. Mark says that he is "at war against women. [That] they have no foresight. There is nothing about them that is stable, there's nothing to trust. They're dangerous." In "The Dread of Women," Karen Horney argues that "man strives to rid himself of his dread of women by objectifying it. 'It is not,' he says, 'that I dread her; it is that she herself is malignant, capable of any crime, a beast of prey, a vampire, a witch, insatiable in her desires. She is the very personification of what is sinister'" (Horney 135). As Douglas argued earlier, the largely male-dominated media during Women's Liberation pushed the narrative that many feminists were dangerous by portraying them that way in fiction. In these stories, the husbands are not to be blamed for their aversion to, or even violence against their ex-wives, since the films prove that the men had good reason, as these women are continuously shown to be unstable and deadly. In the later half of *Possession*, after Anna has already killed the private investigator and his boyfriend, she admits out loud that she "can't exist by [herself] because [she's] afraid of [herself] because [she] is the maker of [her] own evil." Anna's own



Figure 2: Nola's Monstrous Birthing Scene

words, paired with her actions of murdering people and later, literally creating a large monster, only reiterate Mark's analysis of women: they really are dangerous.

Throughout the film, it is hinted that Anna is storing/creating some kind of creature in her apartment. As it grows, it becomes a large squid-like creature before eventually becoming a doppelganger of Mark. This doppelganger will be discussed in more detail later, but for now, it is important to pay attention to the fact that it is essentially Anna's offspring. In *The Brood*, when Nola's monster children retrieve Candie from school, they bring her back to Nola's living quarters where she and her brood reside. Frank plans to approach Nola calmly and distract her long enough for Dr. Raglan to grab Candie and escape; however, when Nola sees Frank she reveals that she is "pregnant" with another child. She lifts her arms above her head in order to show him her stomach; attached to it is a grotesque sac, which she bends over and bites in order to allow her new "child's" body to exit and thus, be born. As she holds this creature, she slowly licks away its blood and placenta. Her very humanity is called into question during this scene, as "Nola [is] like a creature in the wild, completely at home with her bodily instincts and reproductive functions" (Creed 136). Frank watches this with an obvious amount of disgust on his face, which Nola responds to saying: "I disgust you. I sicken you. You hate me." Here, Nola's body is abject, as it creates something unnatural and potentially evil. And it is exactly this

transgression that contributes to the horrifying aspect of the film. In *Of Woman Born*, Adrienne Rich explains that “the woman’s body, with its potential for gestating, bringing forth and nourishing new life, has been through the ages a fields of contradictions: a space invested with power, and an acute vulnerability; a numinous figure and the incarnation of evil; a hoard of ambivalences, most of which have worked to disqualify women from the collective act of defining culture” (Rich 105). Rich’s point emphasizes how abjection is applied to pregnant bodies, as the complexities that go along with pregnancy muddle perceptions and bring the woman’s identity into question. Dr. Raglan emphasizes that Nola is “not [the creatures’] *surrogate* mother, [but in fact], she’s their *real mother*...they’re her children.” In the chapter discussing *Psycho*, I emphasized that the mother, Norma Bates, was to blame for turning Norman into a “monster,” with her incessant nagging and demeaning attitude. Here, however, Nola’s mother is much more dangerous. She did not *turn* a human into a killer - she created a monster, something unnatural before its birth and thus, the violation is rooted in her body. Her existence is the offense. Arnold argues that “it is this very ambivalence about the identity/ies of the maternal body that the horror film seems to play upon...The pregnant body becomes a site of crisis, which is worked through by either rendering the pregnant body as a polluted host that requires regulation or by splitting the identity of the pregnant woman into mother/child and thus safely containing her within patriarchy” (Arnold 156). These women’s bodies are scary because they have disrupted the very borders that Kristeva described, the ones that we rely on in order to assess human-ness. We view those who disrupt borders -- pregnant women -- with fear and apprehension, as they have now become contaminated carriers, or “polluted hosts.” They are abject beings that straddle the line between human and nonhuman and they are powerful enough to straddle the line of life vs. death, since she holds a being that is not yet alive within her. The

fixing that Arnold says wherein the pregnant woman's identity is "split" into "mother/child" cannot be accomplished in these films because the "children" are not children at all. According to the doctors in the film, Nola's offspring "[have] never really been born;" rather, she is a mother to abominable alien beings. Anna is somehow able to create a full being, some kind of monster who has achieved the ability to shapeshift, but this creation process is a complete mystery, never explained to us. Thus, whatever ability Anna holds is made that much more frightening. Nola and Anna don't conform to the rules; instead they create new processes that refuse order altogether. These women are not safely contained by the patriarchy. That is the terror in each film.

Building upon Nola's "disgusting" birthing scene and this dissolution of order, I now turn to a key scene in *Possession* that uses these same ideas. During one scene, Anna walks through a dark, empty subway station, grocery bags in hand. Then, she begins to laugh hysterically and violently smashes her bags of food against a wall. Here, her cartons of milk explode, coating the walls and her face, white liquid dripping down her body. She stops laughing; instead, she cries out, grunting as she thrashes her head, moving her body in a way that would signal, well, *possession*. She eventually falls to the ground, still screaming, and rolls around in the, now-dirtied, milk. Then, sits up and spreads her legs open, as what seems to be vomit spills from her open mouth. Blood and other unknown fluids seem to leak out from every orifice. As Creed



Figure 3: Abjection: Anna's Miscarriage

explains, “images of blood, vomit, pus, shit, etc., are central to our culturally/socially constructed notions of the horrific,” (Creed 50), meaning that in terms of pregnancy, these abject fluids signify some kind of collapse in meaning. Kristeva argues that through that the action of vomiting, she “expel[s] *herself* [and]...spit[s] *herself out*,” resulting in her “abject[ing] *herself* [using] the same motion through which [she] claim[s] to establish *herself*” (Kristeva 3). Thus, although Anna expels the abject from her, the very fact that the abject once resided within her makes her abject, too. It is later implied that this was Anna’s suffering of a violent miscarriage and she describes these events to Mark, who replies: “You look uglier. You’ve hardened. For the first time, you look vulgar to me.” In both this scene and Nola’s “birthing” scene from *The Brood*, the husband’s express overt horror towards their ex-wives’ bodies, specifically in regard to birth. This holds true for the audience as well, as both birthing scenes make us see these women through a lens of disgust and distrust.

Furthermore, when Mark finally sees Anna’s monster, it is completely bloody, oozing with what appears to be milk. Sophie Sexon and Rachel Frances Sharpe argue in “Mother’s Milk



Figure 4: Anna’s Leaking Monster

and Menstrual Blood in *Puncture: The Monstrous Feminine in Contemporary Horror Films and Late Medieval Imagery*,” that this specific visual “reinstates how certain abject qualities of femininity and maternity are ‘naturally’ monstrous by layering the functions of bleeding and

lactating onto the horrifying creature” (Sexon & Sharpe 18). As noted before, abject imagery is associated with corruption and evil. When Henreich describes Anna’s apartment to Mark, he tells

him that “there are corpses in there. At least two bodies. I thought she was pulling my leg, but no, there's blood...A monster...but it was alive. She cuts us to pieces, Mark!” Here, Anna’s



Figure 5: Spilled Milk in *The Brood*

unorthodox and violent ways are a direct threat to the men in her lives. Abject imagery is paired with Anna’s killings throughout the film, as each murder she performs “feature[s] abject fluids. For instance, [the detective’s

lover], Zimmermann, is beaten to death with a jar of milk, and [Anna’s friend], Margie dramatically bleeds to death. The film relies heavily on the use of abject fluids to inspire horror and fear, which is then focused back on Anna’s maternal body” (Sexon & Sharpe 19). This combination of fluids and death also occurs during a scene in *The Brood* where Nola’s brood kill her mother, as the camera’s focus on the leaking milk and juice insinuate that what is about to take place will be something corrupt. Nola and Anna’s excrement and use of fluids identifies them as the monstrous-feminine because they use their bodies to inflict death and destruction. Mark tells Anna: “When I’m away from you, I think of you as an animal or a woman possessed.” Andrea Dworkin states that “the arrogance which informs man’s relation with nature (simply, he is superior to it) is precisely the same arrogance which informs his relationship with woman (simply, he is superior to her). Here we see the full equation: woman = carnality = nature” (Dworkin 207). This is especially prevalent as Creed argues that films that pair abjection and the monstrous feminine “point back to a time when the ‘fusion between mother and nature’ that Kristeva writes about [may have] existed” (Creed 56); Therefore, the films highlight how the female body becomes inevitably monstrous in the eyes of

the patriarchy, as its maternal power exhibits a place of liminality, disrupting that border between life and death, subject and object, inside or outside.

At the end of *The Brood*, Frank as the good father is ultimately successful in saving Candie from Nola's monstrous clutches, as he strangles his ex-wife and leaves with Candie, hoping to create as much distance as possible from her and this traumatic experience caused by her mother. However, as the film closes, a close-up of a lesion is seen on Candy's arm, which indicates two things. First, the film described that the patients who have these lesions have undergone psychological sufferings that manifest themselves physically. This then reiterates the trauma that Nola, a terrible mother, left on Candy. Second, this shot implies that Candy has inherited Nola's abilities and that eventually, she too, may birth her own monstrous children. As shown earlier in the film, Nola is explained to be "a victim of her upbringing...mainly a victim of her mother and the latter is a victim of her own mother, and so on. [Therefore], women's destructive emotions, it seems, are inherited" (Creed 140) through the female line. More than certain temperaments and behaviors, it is now clear that Nola's abnormalities -- her physical, unexplainable powers -- can also be inherited, as proven by Candie. This fear of power is reminiscent of Carrie's powers of telekinesis, as discussed in Chapter 1; in Stephen King's novel of the same name, it is overtly stated that Carrie's abilities (her Telekinesis Gene) could only be found in women and such powers had been passed down to her by her grandmother. This once again proves how the female body often portrayed as being inherently dangerous and is used to blame destruction on.

By the end of *Possession* Anna and Mark have died, leaving Bob as an orphan. It is implied that Helen, his teacher, will take care of him, as the two of them are seen in the apartment together. In the doorway, we see Anna's fully formed monster/Mark's doppelganger

waiting to enter. Bob begs Helen not to open the door and he runs upstairs into the bathroom. The last shot of Bob in the film is him face down in a full bathtub - seemingly dead. Anna's abandonment has caused Bob so much pain that it has actually ruined his life. After this shot of the bathtub, the camera goes back to Helen who is downstairs and who is startled by the flashing lights and loud sounds, as explosions and crashes happen outside. As a final mention of symbolic borders it is necessary to analyze the role of The Berlin Wall in the film. The Wall is an image that appears in the first scene of the film and reappears throughout the rest of it. The symbol of a wall establishes an immediate split (The Berlin Wall establishing a separation of East and West Berlin); the split in the case of the film being between Anna and Mark as their relationship splits up and Anna and Mark's differing views of themselves and each other. Whereas Mark believes it is Anna's duty to return to him, Anna feels that she can and should cultivate her own space and identity, apart from solely being a housewife and mother. Because it was Anna's decision to end their marriage, she has created the split and because of her abject body, she also embodies the split. Grbavac argues that The Berlin Wall "functions both as a physical representation of oppressive regimes and a metaphor of the split, a tear in the fabric of reality, a disruption. The wall in *Possession* represents a barrier between two worlds" (Grbavac 59) and as Kristeva notes, the abject "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 4). At the end of the film, Anna, Mark and possibly Bob are now dead. At the very end, standing in the apartment is Helen, who is startled by the loud sounds of explosions and sirens coming from outside. While we are not told what these noises are caused by, we can be sure that nevertheless, chaos has ensued. In Chapter 1, I argued that in *Psycho* and *Carrie*, the protagonists' association with stones falling atop a house referred to the book of Revelation in the Bible, signifying a broader idea that their actions could cause chaos, even having the

potential to bring on the Apocalypse. The commotion at the end of *Possession* features this apocalyptic sort of ending, one made possible by the disintegration of borders, of order, of familial and marital structure. These women have spurred society's downfall.

When discussing the way in which feminism and independence intersected, Collins quotes novelist, Erica Jong, who in 1975 defined the feminist as “a woman who assumed self-dependence as a basic condition of her life” (Collins 443). When discussing backlash to the Feminist Movement of the 70's and 80's, Douglas describes how many believed that “feminism, in this view, should only redraw the workplace, and [even then] only slightly. Other regions of society, like a man's home, his marriage, his family, should be cordoned off from feminist surveyors” (Douglas 187). In these films, it is clear that the women's needs are trivialized or demonized in order to steer the conversation back to the negative, even monstrous, attributes of her decisions. The female body is used to emphasize abjection, eliciting disgust both from the men within the film and the audience as well, influencing them to take the side of the father. Ann Kaplan notes that at this time, “anxiety [emerged] just because there is now the ‘question’ of whether or not to mother, and of what sort of context for mothering one wants or deems essential” (Kaplan 182). As argued in the earlier chapters of this thesis, motherhood is a central theme in many horror films from the early 60's to the early 80's, with *The Brood* and *Possession* illustrating the most evil of all. Creed argues that *The Brood* ultimately posits two desires illegitimate: “First, the desire -- conscious or otherwise -- for woman to give birth without the agency of the male; and second, woman's desire to express her desires, specifically her anger.” (Creed 142). Nola and Anna do not need Frank, Mark or any other man to help them make these creatures. And so these films leave us with confirmations that motherhood is a necessary evil, that it is plainly gross; we are taught that women looking for freedom are cunning, chaotic

evildoers; that women can make monsters because they are monsters; that men and society at large suffer at the hands of these women. Their freedoms should be re-thought.

Conclusion

Although many have argued, as I do, that the horror films play on the historical fear of female-ness, this thesis has shown that setting these films in the context of the second wave of the women's movement can help better understand specific anxieties that, paired with the monstrous feminine, work to elicit fear in audiences. Therefore, it becomes clear how women seeking independence were seen as threats, with these newly emboldened women being the result of the second wave of feminism.

In terms of directors, although the films were directed by men and in them, the protagonists are assaulted and/or killed, the seven films in this thesis can be and have been considered to be feminist texts. Despite the fact that their struggles ended in tragedy, to dismiss the significance of the protagonists' actions would mean a failure to recognize progressive representations. While I've analyzed the films primarily to identify their patriarchal perspective, that is only to reflect how I view the aims of these filmmakers, in a time where feminist ideals were largely feared. Thus, I cannot leave my analysis without acknowledging the importance of bold, powerful and active women on screen. Particularly, I want to reflect on the second chapter and its distinction from the other two. Whereas it is clear that *Psycho*, *The Haunting*, and *Carrie* align us with the mother who punishes the daughter and *The Brood* and *Possession* align us with the husbands who punish their ex-wives, the second chapter's focus on *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Stepford Wives* arguably aligns us with the female protagonists, making things somewhat more complicated. Both films definitely showcase patriarchal violence against women, but by closely following Rosemary and Joanna, the films' endings, wherein the protagonists ultimately lose their battles to the patriarchy, could arguably demonstrate a critique of patriarchal structures, rather than a fear of women. This complexity reflects the debate over how films are determined

to be feminist pieces or not. Typically, feminist films are noted for shedding light onto inequality, injustice, or differential treatment faced by women and focusing on the female experience. However, films that utilize negative stereotypes about women and abuse female characters in the process are often at the center of feminist criticism, specifically because they can be used as examples of the struggles faced by women, showcasing the lack of positive representation in the media. This kind of resistant reading that interjects unintended analyses points to the complexity of these feminist/anti-feminist films. Although we may sympathize with Rosemary, the only protagonist to still be alive by the end of her film, the monstrous abject figure is still relevant in that her pregnancy does instill, if not true fear then a lasting question: if it is possible for God to impregnate woman, then does that mean it is possible for Satan as well?

Furthermore, it is necessary to acknowledge other limitations of my analysis. Firstly, there has been much criticism on Second Wave feminism, particularly on its primary focus on middle class, white women. Aside from *Carrie*, where the Whites can arguably be classified as working class, all of the protagonists in the films analyzed fit firmly into this middle class/white category. This lack of diversity in representation therefore coincides with the lack of representation within this specific Second Wave. Additionally, because most of the analysis situates horror as solely elicited from female-ness, there is a lack of inclusion in terms of intersectional issues, such as a second layer of fear paired with simply female-ness, such as the “other-ness” of minority groups - women of color, lower class women and queer women. My analysis of *Psycho*, for example, fails to mention any analysis on Norman’s crossdressing and many modern critics have argued that it is ultimately Norman’s transgressive identity that elicits fear. Additionally, in my analysis of *The Haunting*, I do not include an examination on Eleanor (and Theo’s) possible lesbian identity, something widely discussed in analyses of Jackson’s novel

and its multiple adaptations. This inclusion could reiterate the “bad girl” label in the eyes of the patriarchal mother, marking Eleanor’s autonomy as even more dangerous than originally thought, especially because Additionally, many the mainstream movement of feminism also took part in vilifying lesbians and “were often skittish if not hostile toward lesbianism” (Echols 211). Extended analysis would then be necessary to explore these added implications. As mentioned in the introduction, the use of abjection is not without its drawbacks. It should once again be clarified that my description of reproductive and maternal functions as abject, threatening or abominable are only used as a means of demonstrating the films’ intended perception of the mothers, as a reiteration of patriarchal ideology. Although women are not inherently abject, she is often presented as such.

If I was to continue this analysis, I would look to more recent films, particularly those from the 2000’s and early 2010’s in order to analyze the monstrous-feminine figure in conjunction with more modern theories and circumstances. There are many examples of what could be defined as the monstrous-feminine in films such as *Ginger Snaps* (female werewolves), *Jennifer’s Body* (possessed killer) or *The VVitch* (woman as witch, *again!*), revealing that such a figure continues on through fiction. All seven films analyzed in this thesis are directed by men and much criticism has been written about the ways in which the male gaze has contributed to the portrayal of the female characters in such films. Therefore, in an expanded analysis, I would also aim to include close reading of specifically female-directed horror films, with notable examples being *Raw* (female cannibal), *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (female vampire), *The Lure* (murderous mermaids). By including an analysis of these films alongside the analysis in this thesis, I would be able to compare these new portrayals of the monstrous-feminine to those portrayed by men decades earlier. Furthermore, I’d investigate a more current popularity,

particularly among feminists, surrounding female monsters and how they have been reappropriated as overarching symbols of admirable power, rather than simply treacherous beings.

The monstrosity associated with each female lead certainly shifts throughout the films. In *Psycho*, the scariest thing Marion does is simply stealing from a man, a crime that causes no physical harm. Furthermore, she does not even survive the entire film, with her death happening just past the halfway mark. Compare this to Nola and Anna in the final chapter, wherein they cause the deaths of multiple people and survive until the second-to-last scenes. However, although they, themselves, are not physically present in the last scenes, the “monsters” that they have created are. Anna’s shapeshifting being looms outside of the doorway, threatening to enter, and in *The Brood*, Nola leaves behind a daughter who seems to be just as dangerous as she was. Therefore, although Anna and Nola are killed, their danger lives on, past the end of the films. As described previously, Women’s Liberation was met with substantial backlash, with anti-feminists arguing that feminists should not be re-thinking traditional structures and women should accept their “natural” roles. Unlike the mothers in the first chapter and the husbands in the second, the men in these films were too late in containing the monstrous women and therefore, the films can also be read as embodying the lasting threats of the Women’s Movement. Marion and Eleanor were stopped from finishing their journeys, Rosemary and Eleanor were separated from their female companions, and whereas Carrie only threatens to turn Sue Snell into a monster during her dreams, Nola and Anna have made such nightmares real. Despite anti-feminists disdain, by the 1980’s, the Women’s Movement had influenced millions and had fundamentally altered how patriarchal systems were viewed. You could kill a feminist, but feminism was here to stay.

The thesis has led me to think about why the horror film, specifically, is often analyzed through gender and a tentative answer would be that the horror film typically operates through the model of terrorizer vs victim. Because of the binary previously discussed wherein women have historically been portrayed as either pure or evil, meek or monstrous, it would seem that women are quickly assigned one of the two roles and this is where the analysis of representation comes into play. As Creed emphasizes, many critics have demonstrated how women are often shown as passive victims in horror, a portrayal largely criticized for denying female characters depth and for using female suffering in order to elicit a kind of perverse pleasure in audiences. On the other hand, the monstrous feminine fits into the opposite role of active, abhorrent threat, one also criticized for lack of depth, as well as perpetuating fear of women. Going forward, it is necessary for filmmakers to pay closer attention to the ways in which female characters are written and portrayed. Allowing female characters to occupy the space between the strict binary would allow for more complex and realistic representations. In terms of portrayals of violence, there must always be an attempt to balance showcasing violence against women in order to highlight the real-world atrocities and sexism endured daily by women, while at the same time, ensuring that she is not reduced to a victim or an object.

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