

## **The Final Girl versus Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street*: Proposing a Stronger Model of Feminism in Slasher Horror Cinema**

On April 30, 2010, New Line Cinema released *A Nightmare on Elm Street* to theaters across the nation. A remake of director Wes Craven's classic horror yarn of the same title (1984), it (re)tells the story of Freddy Krueger, a child murderer in a largely suburban town, who is hunted down and burned alive by several of his parents after he is released from jail on a legal technicality. Freddy, donning a homemade glove with knives attached to the fingers, returns from the grave years later to wreak revenge. However, he is no longer a mortal being. Freddy has become a supernatural madman who does not roam within the everyday realm of human encounters, but instead stalks his victims in their dreams. He preys upon the children (mainly teenagers) of those who took his life, knowing that if he can kill them in the dream world they will die in the "real" world as well. The original *A Nightmare on Elm Street* helped establish Craven as an auteur with a mastery of the macabre and initiated the sadistic Freddy Krueger (then portrayed by Robert Englund) into the annals of popular culture iconography.

*Nightmare* was a unique twist on the conventional "slasher film" formula, previously popularized by such horror franchises as the *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* series. Slasher films are "characterized by a psychotic human...that kills or stalks a succession of people, usually teenagers, and

predominantly female” (Keisner 411-12) using a variety of mainly penetrative (i.e., stabbing) weapons for each killing. The 2010 *Nightmare* is but a nascent entry in a recent wave of horror cinema remakes of the successful films which gave birth to and sustained the slasher market from the mid-1970s to mid-1980s (including *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* [1974; 2003], *Black Christmas* [1974; 2006], *Prom Night* [1980; 2008], *Friday the 13th* [1980; 2009], *My Bloody Valentine* [1981; 2009], *The House on Sorority Row/Sorority Row* [1983; 2009], and *The Stepfather* [1987; 2009]), before the first cycle of classical slasher films fell into “dormancy” in the late 1980s (Wee 53).<sup>1</sup> While this trend of repackaging old narratives may evince a lack of fresh ideas and storylines in Hollywood, it may also be an attempt of studios to reinvigorate the box office by appealing to older audiences that flocked to these movies during their initial runs before they eventually “aged out” of the younger demographic of typical slasher viewers and avoided contemporary horror releases altogether. Still, if one chooses to return to the slasher tales of the past, one must also return to the old assumptions and conjectures of past discourse on the genre. One persistent concept which has appeared in much scholarship on slasher films has been that of the “Final Girl,” introduced by Carol J. Clover in her seminal book *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992).<sup>2</sup>

This study will first provide background on the Final Girl, as well as other elements of Clover’s work on gender in slasher horror (namely, the masculine killer, the “Terrible Place,” and the phallic weaponry of the films). Then this study will seek to revise two possible misconceptions about the Final Girl and the slasher genre. The first misconception is that the Final Girl is inherently a feminist figure. The second misconception, which will be challenged in the bulk of this study, is that Laurie Strode, the Final Girl of John Carpenter’s *Halloween* (1978), is the superlative model of feminism in the slasher genre; instead, this study will detail why Nancy Thompson, the Final Girl of the original *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, is the stronger model of feminism in classical slasher horror cinema.

## **The Final Girl, Masculine Killer, Terrible Place, and Phallic Weapons**

Clover complicates potential antifeminist assaults on the slasher genre (for its seemingly sexist depictions of the terrorizing and brutalizing of mainly female on-screen victims) by claiming that the Final Girl, the usual surviving female heroine in slasher films, is, at least on the surface, a vision of female empowerment and determination. The Final Girl is admirable in her valor, as “she alone looks death in the face, but she alone also finds the strength either to stay the killer long enough to be rescued...or to kill him herself” (Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 35). Furthermore, even before gaining the viewers’ respect for eliminating or outlasting the killer, the Final Girl is a virtuous character distinguishable from the rest of the film cast because she possesses several exceptional traits: her avoidance of sexual activity, her watchful “paranoia” which allows her to be “resourceful in a pinch” when danger strikes, and her “boyish” (i.e., not girlish and weak) nature (Clover, *Men, Women* 39-40).

In addition to the Final Girl, Clover identifies several others elements which contribute to the slasher genre, three of which are most pertinent to this study. The first is the villain in these genre pieces, often a masculine killer. Clover is especially interested in how the killers in slasher films project a hypermasculine front to compensate for their own “gender distress” and their fear that they will be reduced to, and exposed as, “feminine male[s]” (*Men, Women* 27, 62). That is, the typical slasher killer invests so fervently in an image of violent masculinity and “psychosexual fury,” for they realize that their “masculinity is severely qualified” (*Men, Women* 27, 47). The perspective of the killer is often shown through the use of the “I-camera” (*Men, Women* 48). With the I-camera, the audience can “see through his [the killer’s] eyes and (on the soundtrack) hear his breathing and heart-beat” (*Men, Women* 45) as he stalks and slashes his victims. Though the audience is initially aligned with the killer’s point of view (POV), the Final Girl eventually assumes the gaze for herself (*Men, Women* 60), and “by the end, point of view is hers” (*Men, Women* 45) as the camera stops privileging the killer’s perspective and instead follows the Final Girl as she strikes backs against him.

Another element of the slasher film is what Clover calls the “Terrible Place,” which could most simplistically be seen as the setting in which the slasher film mayhem takes place. Clover writes:

The Terrible Place, most often a house or [the killer’s lair], in which victims sooner or later find themselves is a venerable element of horror...[The Terrible Place] 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. A phenomenally popular moment in...slashers is the scene in which the victim locks herself in (a house, room, closet, car) and waits...as the killer slashes, hacks, or drills his way in... (*Men, Women* 30-31)

According to Clover, the Terrible Place is something the “unwitting victims wander in” (*Men, Women* 30-31), unaware of the danger that lies ahead. Much like the Final Girl and the psychosexual masculine killer, there are gendered implications to the Terrible Place. As Clover states, the Terrible Place in slasher films is frequently “dark and often damp,” and therefore, has a particular “intrauterine” (female) quality (*Men, Women* 48) to it.

One last element to slasher films addressed by Clover is the common weaponry used by both the killer and, in the end, the Final Girl. In slasher films, the violent, penetrating weapons of the killers are meant to operate as phallic symbols, showing how the one who thrusts the phallus is the one who is superior. Clover writes that the killer who wields the phallic weapon is dominant over his defenseless victims, until the Final Girl has “manned herself” by adopting her own phallic weapon in order to “unman” the killer and take away his dominance (*Men, Women* 49). By “addressing the monster on his own terms” (*Men, Women* 48) and engaging in a phallic confrontation with the killer, she achieves a kind of genuine masculine strength that the killer, with his faux hypermasculinity, could never attain. Masculinity is, again, privileged, whereas femininity is condemned as dangerous (the “intrauterine,” feminine dangers of the Terrible Place) and now weak, exemplified by the Final Girl’s need to become masculine and abandon her femininity in order to survive.

## Revising Misconceptions of the Final Girl and the Slasher Genre

### *The Final Girl as Feminist?*

One misconception some may hold about the Final Girl is that, based on her gender and ability to overcome a masculine nemesis, she is meant to embody feminist politics. However, as Clover makes clear, the Final Girl is “wholly masculine,” and “applaud[ing] the Final Girl as a feminist development...[is] a particularly grotesque expression of wishful thinking” (*Men, Women* 53).<sup>3</sup> Klaus Rieser, a skeptic of the Final Girl theory, also comments on the Final Girl’s “wholly masculine” identity as anti-woman, for she is a “female figure in a male mold rather than a heroine pursuing a feminine subjective trajectory” (378). Rieser adds that to participate in “the phallic struggle,” the Final Girl is doomed to “accept sexuality on heterosexual and phallic terms” (377), acquiescing to the “hierarchy of [gender] hegemony” and never rejecting gender stratification that is centered on the privileging of (phallic) masculinity (379). Furthermore, Jody Keisner observes that, because of the Final Girl’s inevitable masculinization, “female viewers are not identifying with the victorious Final Girl, but with the unlucky [female] victims” (425) and are more inclined to be disempowered by slasher films, not empowered by the Final Girl.

Rather than fixate on the antifeminism underlying Clover’s Final Girl, this study contends that the Final Girl can be a feminist character if altered slightly. The remainder of this study will first look at one of the more celebrated Final Girls, *Halloween*’s Laurie Strode, as an example of antifeminism in slasher films. Then this study will nominate Nancy Thompson, of the original *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, as the more appropriate model of the Final Girl *and* feminism in the classical slasher horror film.

### *Laurie Strode as an Antifeminist Final Girl*

As the archetype for the superlative Final Girl, Clover offers Laurie Strode, the heroine of John Carpenter’s *Halloween* (1978), performed brilliantly by then newcomer Jamie Lee Curtis.<sup>4</sup> Yet those who are familiar with *Halloween* may question the canonization of Laurie Strode as the ideal Final Girl, especially if one is seeking to honor a Final Girl who is meant to stand for feminist principles. In the film, Laurie, a kindhearted babysitter, spends her Halloween evening looking after a small boy and

trying to reassure him that the “boogeyman” he sees lurking outside is not real. Viewers are well aware that this “boogeyman” (a masked maniac named Michael Myers, who has escaped from a nearby mental institution) is indeed very real, witnessing him slaughter three of Laurie’s friends. When Laurie finally investigates the matter, she is attacked by Michael and flees back inside the home for safety. Michael enters the premises, and Laurie counters him, using a variety of instruments (ranging from a carving knife, to knitting needles, to even a wire clothing hanger) to temporarily wound and subdue him. Laurie only survives, though, after being rescued by Michael’s psychiatrist, who arrives on the scene as Michael is about to strangle her to death, and not by her own efforts (Connelly). As such, Laurie is hardly a bastion of feminist self-empowerment.

Unfortunately, some critics have perpetuated the misconception that Laurie is feminist, or, at the very least, pro-woman. For example, film critics Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert, two of the largest detractors of the slasher genre, have praised both *Halloween* and Laurie Strode. On October 24, 1980, at the zenith of the first cycle of classical slasher films, Siskel and Ebert used a special episode of their televised film review program, *Sneak Previews*, to discuss what Siskel called “a depressing development in American movies”: the slasher film, or what they referred to as the “women in danger” film. Siskel found these films deplorable in that they “played almost in favor of the [male] killer,” with “the dominant image in [slasher films being] women...cowering in the corner, knives being brandished in their faces” as they scream in “abject terror.” Ebert concurred with Siskel’s remark, stating bluntly, “These film hate women.” Although neither critic overtly invoked feminism in their critiques, Siskel did suggest that these films were indeed “against the women’s movement”; Ebert agreed and even reprinted Siskel’s statement on the slasher film being an “anti-women’s movement” genre in some of his later writing.

At the end of the *Sneak Previews* “women in danger” episode, Siskel and Ebert screened a scene from *Halloween*, a film which they claimed was not “in the same category” as the usual woman-hating slasher film. Both Siskel and Ebert revealed that they had given favorable reviews to *Halloween* earlier in their careers. Aside from favoring *Halloween* for its “artistry” over other slasher films, Ebert added that the film positively developed sympathy for its female characters, concluding that “*Halloween*

does not hate women.” Their criticism of slasher films and their endorsement of *Halloween* as an exceptional “pro-woman” slasher film might mislead some to believe that *Halloween* is a feminist text and Laurie Strode is a feminist Final Girl.

In fact, Laurie often seems to reflect the core characteristics of the oppressive “cult of the true womanhood” which restricted the actions of many women during the nineteenth century (Welter). The four cardinal virtues of a “true woman” were: purity, piety, submissiveness, and domesticity. These old-fashioned criteria of womanhood, propagated by many “women’s magazines, gift annuals and religious literature” of the time period, were the qualities “by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society...” (Welter 152). The influence of true womanhood is present in many of Laurie’s behaviors. Laurie is extremely pure and virginal, as shown in a scene in which her best friend, Annie, informs a male acquaintance that Laurie has a crush on him, causing Laurie to become embarrassed to the point of even seeming fearful of men. Although not quite religious in her piety, Laurie is very much concerned about appearing upstanding and moral in the eyes of (male) authority figures; she is reluctant to smoke pot illegally with Annie, and when she does it is followed by guilt-induced worry that Annie’s father, a local police officer, can smell the marijuana on them, the man of the law becoming the substitute for the “man of God.” Laurie is submissive to both her constantly rude and obnoxious friends, but also to her father, whose only scene is of his shouting orders at Laurie as she leaves for school. Lastly, and most profoundly, Laurie is domesticated, using babysitting, thus surrogate motherhood, as her chief means of disposable income. The American film industry of the late teens and early 1920s sought to reverse the effects of true womanhood by producing films brimming with oversexualization, marital mishaps, and tolerant depictions of “fallen woman” to parody its tenets (Fishbein). True womanhood, however, has continued to miraculously exist in many of the ostensibly “pro-woman” Final Girls, including Laurie Strode, which past critics have mistaken as being feminist.

### *Nancy Thompson as a Feminist Final Girl*

Clover does eventually concede that more proactive Final Girls would later grace the screen, stating, “After *Halloween*, there are Final Girls who

fight back” (*Men, Women* 37). One specific example she briefly alludes to is Nancy Thompson of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (played by actress Heather Lagenkamp), perceived by Clover as “the grittiest of the Final Girls” (*Men, Women* 38). While Clover associates her alleged grittiness with her toughness in the final climactic duel between her and Freddy, she is also gritty in her stark contrast to Laurie Strode, due to Nancy’s refusal to abide by the arbitrary, female-belittling restrictions of true womanhood. Put simply, Nancy is a feminist Final Girl, and arguably the first and best model of feminism in the classical slasher film.

While Laurie in *Halloween* operates by the sexist principles of “true womanhood,” *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, as James Kendrick writes, “undermines several of the structural components of the slasher [film]...” (19) and thus is more conducive to revisionist feminist values. Although Kendrick’s study is not the first scholarship on both the original *Nightmare* (Markovitz) and the *Nightmare* series (Heba; Trencansky), it is one of the only studies to consider how both gender and the Final Girl theory factor into *Nightmare*. According to Kendrick, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* undermines various components of the standard slasher film, three of which relate to those outlined by Clover. First, the traditional profile of the slasher villain is undermined, as Freddy is a killer who is not driven by “psychosexual fury” (Kendrick 28) and is not represented in constant POV/I-camera shots, with *Nightmare* opting for more “objective detached camerawork that emphasizes the openness of the dreamscape rather than a focused, singular perspective” (Kendrick 24). Second, rather than *Nightmare*’s Terrible Place being a physical location that the victims wander into as in other slasher films, “the Terrible Place is actually the human subconscious” (Kendrick 27), the site of the characters’ fatal nightmares. Third, Nancy is able to defeat Freddy, but not by resorting to phallic violence; Kendrick contends that Nancy rejects Freddy’s “gaze” on her body by turning her back to him in their final encounter (Kendrick 29) and denying him the chance to objectify, and victimize, her.

Inspired by (and in some instances complementing) Kendrick’s scholarship, this study further addresses how, through Nancy, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* undermines, and also brings feminism into, the slasher genre and the Final Girl. Nancy proves her feminist sensibilities in three ways. First, Nancy is not afraid of men (as evidenced by her romance with her boy-

friend, Glen, and her love for her father, Donald Thompson), but she is also not so smitten with them that she loses her selfhood. Second, Nancy does not subscribe to the sanctity of the domestic sphere, defying the reign of her insensible and alcoholic mother, Marge Thompson, and converting her home into practically a “war zone” to battle Freddy. Third and lastly, Nancy uses the powers of her alert, paranoid mind and will (not violence) to defeat Freddy and transcend his domineering masculinity. To demonstrate how Nancy is a stronger feminist version of Clover’s Final Girl than Laurie Strode, this study will explore these three areas of Nancy’s character, shedding light on how feminist ideology has been integrated into at least one successful classical slasher film.

—Nancy and Man-kind

To fairly address the dynamics of how genders intermingle and interact in film, one must first admit that there is often an undertone (sometimes an overtone) of sexuality connected to any meeting between men and women. For feminist film critics, how societal mores of women’s sexuality compare with what is captured on the celluloid is of critical importance. While girls/women have become more sexualized and sexually knowledgeable in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, film can still perpetuate an antiquated, puritanical notion that the most moral woman is the one who is sexually modest and virginal.

The slasher film genre could be culpable in putting cinematic limitations on women’s sexual expression through the genre’s “excessive...displacement of sex into violence” (Linda Williams 2). The annihilation of all promiscuous women is an essential facet of many slasher films, with any episode of flagrant sexuality by women to be followed by a postcoital murder scene in which the sexual “bad girls” are punished for their “exhibition of sexual desire” (Linda Williams 8, 11). As Clover puts it, “sexual transgressors...are scheduled for early destruction” in slasher films (*Men, Women* 33). The Final Girl is not sexually active and is not caught up in distracting sexual escapades like her comrades (*Men, Women* 39). On the basis of this largely accepted convention of the genre (female virginity as survival, female sexuality as automatic death), the Final Girl’s prospects for living are most promising.

In the original shooting script for *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, Freddy Krueger was written as a child molester. Actor Robert Englund recalls:

Wes [Craven] wrote the most evil, corrupt thing he could think of. Originally, that meant Freddy was a child molester. Right while we were shooting...there was a huge scandal based around an area of single parent yuppies in California known as South Bay. Child molesters had descended on this unsupervised flotsam of...children. On the spot we changed the script from child molester to child murderer, mainly so that Wes wouldn't be accused of exploiting the South Bay case. (qtd. in Robb 82)

Therefore, although Kendrick is correct that *Nightmare* never completely articulates the “psychosexual” compulsions of its slasher villain (Kendrick 28), the film was still resorting to a sex-violence paradigm from its very inception.

For *Nightmare*, however, the issue of what is or is not appropriate sexual behavior for women takes on a new form. The troubling factor is no longer a matter of willing penetration, but one of willing control. A woman can ethically choose to be sexual and embrace the companionship of male suitors, but only as long as she is freely choosing to do so. Those who submit to their male counterparts because they are too cowardly to stake a claim on their own bodies or are too infatuated to realize their potential for independence are the ones who suffer. This is best illustrated in *Nightmare*'s two young couples: Tina (Nancy's best friend) and Rod (Tina's tough, rebellious boyfriend), and Nancy and her boyfriend, Glen. Because of his ongoing disputes with Tina, Rod's surprise arrival at Tina's house one evening, where Nancy and Glen are keeping her company after Tina is shaken by a Freddy nightmare she experienced the night before, is not entirely welcome. Nevertheless, while Tina appears extremely agitated and displeased to see Rod, she makes no concerted effort to send him away. Furthermore, when Rod forcefully wraps an arm around Tina and declares authoritatively to the group that he and Tina “have some things to discuss,” she does not resist him, begrudgingly dragging herself away with him. Clearly, Tina allows herself to be dominated by Rod, and her inability to stand up to Rod is mirrored in her failure to withstand Freddy in her eventual second, fatal

nightmare (in which Freddy murders her in her sleep). Rod is apprehended by the police as the prime suspect in Tina's homicide, and is later killed by Freddy while sequestered in jail.

While Nancy and Glen appear to be in love (adolescent "puppy love" at the very least), Nancy is not so besotted by Glen that she is coerced into participating in any actions of which she disapproves. After Rod ushers Tina into another room, Nancy and Glen begin to make out, a far cry from the "modest," androphobic Laurie Strode. When Glen begins pawing at her too aggressively, Nancy complains, "Glen, not now. We're here for Tina now, not ourselves." Obviously, Nancy and Glen's relationship has progressed to the stage where they can share deep kisses and heavy petting without cause for panic, but Nancy is determined to decide where things will progress next on her own terms (hence Nancy and Glen sleep in separate beds in Tina's house, while Tina and Rod fornicate in the master bedroom). Throughout the film, Glen sneaks into Nancy's bedroom to visit her at night, meaning that Nancy is not so prudish as to be horrified at the thought of a male entering her private chambers. In keeping with Nancy's choice of sexual autonomy, though, she does not permit Glen to lie in her bed ("If you don't mind..." she snips at Glen during an attempt to sprawl himself onto her bedspread), and she instead requires him to sit in a chair beside her television, a fair distance apart from her. Whether or not Nancy is a virgin seems immaterial, since the film never goes out of its way to confirm if Nancy is or is not a virgin; what is relevant is that whatever Nancy is, it is by her own choice, not by the types of duress to which Tina is accustomed.

Along with refusing to be sexually subservient to men, Nancy also learns to not depend on men as her saviors, the antithesis of Laurie Strode who, despite initially fighting back against the villain herself, is in the end reduced to a damsel in distress. The men of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* tend to provide false, unreliable security and leave Nancy vulnerable. In addition to utilizing energy pills and caffeine to keep herself awake from Freddy (who now has his sights set on her after Tina is removed from the picture), Nancy haphazardly trusts in Glen to help her combat Freddy. Twice, she opts to voluntarily go to sleep and find Freddy, with Glen agreeing that he will awaken Nancy before Freddy can harm her. On the first occasion, Glen also falls asleep accidentally and Nancy is only saved by her alarm

clock. On the second occasion, Nancy and Glen decide to meet at midnight to enact a similar plan, but Glen falls asleep too soon and becomes Freddy's next victim.

Donald Thompson, Nancy's father and the local chief of police, is also inept in helping his daughter. After Glen's death, she informs her father that she knows where to find his killer, and that she will be pursuing him on her own. Donald, who has never believed Nancy's dream stalker stories, is noticeably frustrated, demanding, "Just tell me who did it! I'll go get him, baby." Nancy, in her wisdom, retorts, "Fred Krueger did it, Daddy. And only I can get him. It's my nightmare he comes to." Donald wants to continue being the police officer, bent on tracking down a culprit and subjecting him to handcuffs and a prison cell. Nancy does not completely disavow this tactic. She is hoping to bring Freddy out of the dream world and into hers by grabbing onto him as she awakens, and she pleads with Donald to "be there to arrest him when I pull him out."<sup>5</sup> Donald placates Nancy, but is absent when she does accomplish this task, leaving her to fend for herself.

In one of the most reality-bending scenes of the film, Nancy receives a phone call from Freddy, right before he butchers Glen. He whispers menacingly, "I'm your boyfriend now, Nancy." Then, on the receiving end, Freddy's tongue inexplicably sprouts and extends toward Nancy in a lascivious fashion. This is obviously meant to perturb Nancy by making her feel almost violated, the tongue imitating the act of cunnilingus. Furthermore, it serves as a blunt statement about the role of men in the film. Freddy could, in essence, just as easily become Nancy's boyfriend, or Nancy's father, because the men in the film are expendable. Among Glen, Donald, and Freddy, each interchangeably tries to exhibit bravado and sheer masculinity (in attempting to colonize Nancy's body, either through shielding it or breaching it) and each proves unsuccessful. Glen dies, Donald neglects, and Freddy (in the end of the film) is conquered. The one who emerges victorious, over Freddy and all the constraints of man-kind, is Nancy.

#### —Nancy and the Home

Authority constantly fails to exert its muscle in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. When Nancy's mother, Marge, takes Nancy to a dream clinic to discover the cause of her nightmares, the clinician gives a candid diagnosis: "I guess what we have is a normal girl who happens to have gone

through...days of hell” (this scientific-medical authority empathizing with Nancy’s trauma over Tina’s death, but failing to realize the magnitude of what is plaguing Nancy). Before her death, Tina calls out, “Please, God,” only to be met by Freddy’s malicious response, as he thrusts his knifed-glove upward and declares, “*This is God*” (a deliberate mocking of the spiritual authority that Tina naively anticipated would help her live and find salvation).<sup>6</sup>

The most ineffectual authorities in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, however, are the parents (particularly Marge, who has sole custody of her daughter). Their ineffectiveness at protecting their children is entrenched in events from even before Freddy could enter their sons and daughters’ dreams. Pat Gill explains, “Slasher films show teenagers in peril, with no hope of help from their parents. . . . generally too busy or too involved in their own problems or pleasures to help” or, as is more applicable to the parents of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, they “have created the monsters. Some action in their past has brought about this relentless evil force to wreak havoc among their children” (17). When the Elm Street parents burn Freddy alive out of vengeance, they unknowingly unleash a greater malevolence that they cannot contain. The uncovering of what they perpetrated against Freddy reflects their inability to maintain their pure, suburban façade, by exposing them as cold-blooded killers equally indicted in shedding blood as Freddy. The undermining of self-righteous suburbanites and their overinvestment in the seeming blissfulness of suburbia has been a common theme in slasher films,<sup>7</sup> and Craven is recurrently interested in exploring how evil may rear its ugly head within the family unit (Sharrett 140-42). Two of Craven’s earliest films, *The Last House on the Left* (1972) and *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), dealt with the idea of normal, suburban-esque families who become “uncivilized” after their lives and the lives of their loved ones are endangered, retaliating violently and savagely against their adversaries.<sup>8</sup>

Societal control is often especially crucial to enforce on teenagers, as teenagers represent a juncture in which parental authority begins to wear away, but the “law of the land” has not completely shaped them into functional, moral adults (White 15), freeing them to assemble their own codes of conduct, separate from what society stipulates. Nancy is one such teenager who does not care for the demands of authorities. She sneaks out of her

home after curfew to visit Tina, and this is but the first in a string of acts of insolence against her mother and the rule of the house.

In *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, Nancy's home becomes the Terrible Place of the film. Even if, as Kendrick argues, the nightmares of the human subconscious are the "terrible" landscape for Freddy's violence (27), the nightmares still take place on Elm Street—that is, an alternate, nightmarish version of Elm Street. The thin delineation between the settings of the dreamworld and the real world symbolizes that "although fantastic in nature, much of the film [is] rooted in the realities of suburban American" (Robb 65-66) and the dark recesses of humanity that suburbia would rather turn a blind eye toward. Most of Nancy's nightmares occur in the nightmarish version of her own suburban home. Robin Wood writes that, in many horror films, the Terrible Place is often a "Terrible House" where "the dead weight of the past crush[es] the life of the younger generation" ("An Introduction" 188). In *Nightmare*, the "weight of the past" in Nancy's house is the hidden crime that Nancy's parents committed against Freddy. Nancy's house and her mother, the head of the household, are just as deadly for Nancy as Freddy. While not dark, damp, and intrauterine like the Terrible Place of many slasher films, *Nightmare's* demonizing of Nancy's mother and the maternal-domestic realm continues the trend of representing the slasher film's Terrible Place as a place of feminine influence.

As opposed to babysitter Laurie Strode in *Halloween* or the usual slasher film character, Nancy never feels complacent or safe in her home. It gives her no asylum from her nightmares or from Freddy, and she is smart enough to know that about her Terrible Place from almost the start. Therefore, while Laurie Strode thrives in the domestic sphere and the sanctuary of the house, Nancy is always looking to escape or subvert it.

The maternal parent has frequently been construed as a figure of monstrosity in horror cinema (Creed),<sup>9</sup> and, of course, Marge's participation in Freddy's burning has inadvertently caused her to inflict Freddy's sadism on Nancy. She is also a lackluster parent, adamant that Nancy is delusional for believing in this nightmare predator (even though she knows the truth about Freddy) and constantly turning to the various bottles of gin she has hidden around the house, nourishing her alcoholism rather than grappling with her troubles. The kind of affection one may expect to find in a healthy mother-daughter relationship is not present when Marge and Nancy

share the screen. Nancy is repeatedly cold and indifferent to her mother, sometimes refusing to engage in eye contact with her and outright ridiculing her. For instance, even when Marge attempts some form of nurturing parenting by “heating up some warm milk” for Nancy to enjoy before bedtime, Nancy reacts not with gratitude, but with disgust: “Warm milk? Gross.” In their most explosive quarrel, in which Nancy learns Freddy Krueger’s name and is trying desperately to pry information about him from her tightlipped mother, Nancy jabs at her mother’s alcoholism. Nancy teases her, stating sarcastically that she, too, should start drinking like Marge, to “avoid everything that’s happening by getting good and loaded.” Then, when Marge continues to insist that Nancy needs to sleep to “feel better,” Nancy shouts, “Screw sleep!”, snatching one of Marge’s bottles from her hand and smashing it on the ground.

Eventually, as Nancy matures and her mother regresses into drunken puerility, Nancy has to assume the role of the parental authority. Popular films of the 1980s (slasher films, teen comedies, coming-of-age chronicles, and so forth) tended to feature teenage characters who express resentment toward adults and dread becoming exactly like their parents (Wood, “Images” 347-48). Gill elaborates, “None of the parents [in slasher films], even the most well-meaning and kind, ever succeeds in making the connections necessary to create a functioning family. As a result, children [may] become shallow, selfish replicas of their parents, susceptible to deadly mishaps and grisly predators...” (29). Nevertheless, Nancy does not become her mother (irresponsible, selfish, and in denial), but becomes the proverbial *parent she never had*. While the apparent signifiers indicate that she is increasingly turning into an adult (an elderly-appearing gray streak forms in her hair after one frightening matchup with Freddy, and Nancy drinks coffee as compulsively as any adult would), a scene in the final act displays just how different the maternal Nancy is from Marge. Before facing Freddy for the last time, Nancy tucks her inebriated mother into bed, telling Marge that she loves her and assuring her that all will be well. Marge drifts into sleep, with her bottle on her side table (much like an infant consoled by his/her baby bottle) and her trust completely in Nancy’s hands. Marge is now the dependent of her daughter; Nancy is now the authority, albeit more self-aware than most.

This is not to suggest that Marge does not attempt to guard her daughter. Marge covers all the windows of the house with metal bars, to shelter Nancy from the evil she believes is outside the home. This shows how oblivious Marge is (either in actuality or by her own volition to not listen to Nancy) about Freddy's manner of attack. Freddy does not need to enter the home from outside, because he is already inside, waiting inside Nancy's head for his opportunity to pounce after she closes her eyes.

The boundaries of the home are permeable, not warding off evil when Freddy can so easily disturb its occupants. (Furthermore, Freddy certainly does not abide by the customs of etiquette and respect for the homes of others, splattering the bedroom walls of both Tina and Glen in blood after destroying them.) Nancy realizes this, and she equips the house with various booby traps to fight Freddy when he arrives (including trip wire, a swinging sledgehammer above a doorframe, and an exploding lamp with a gun powder-coated light bulb). While Marge invests in the fantasy of the home as a place of peace, Nancy turns it into a battlefield, adopting an almost militaristic, warrior persona that in no way conforms to the delicate domesticity and "feminine mystique" stereotypes of a woman in the home. Marge, who tries to imprison Nancy inside the home and foolishly remains loyal to the home as safe, is ultimately slain by Freddy (the only adult to be tormented, but appropriately since her burgeoning infantilism makes her just as childish as Freddy's usual targets). Conversely, Nancy prevails due to her preparedness and ingenuity, all because of her awareness that the home, that Terrible Place, would not spare her from Freddy's wraith.

#### —Nancy and Feminist Retribution

The entire *A Nightmare on Elm Street* series has been noted for how its young protagonists set about destroying evil and reinstating order through relatively unorthodox measures. In Heba's account of the *Nightmare* series, this is accomplished through two means. First, they elect to disregard the order of any authority figure who cannot possibly fathom the gravity of their horrific ordeal (as previously discussed). Second, they devise innovative methods and strategies for tackling Freddy, since his supernatural existence does not make him susceptible to the usual protocol for vanquishing one's foes. Of all the heroes and heroines who have clashed with Freddy, Nancy's methods are perhaps the most feminist in style. Nancy's process

for surviving and eventually defeating Freddy is twofold: first, she becomes paranoid and therefore is constantly monitoring her environment for looming threats, and second, she uses her mind and willpower (as opposed to pugnacious violence) to rise above Freddy.

—Nancy and Paranoia

While paranoid female characters may be perceived by some as reducing all women in horror tales to “pure victims” who do not possess the bravery to lash out at their oppressors, others may champion paranoia as a form of self-defense (Meyers 88-89) that seems feeble only because one has been socialized to believe that such “feminine” defenses are without merit. This defensive, self-preserving paranoia may stem from what Sandra Lee Bartky deems an alert “feminist consciousness” that is necessary for recognizing oppression in all its forms before striving to purge it from society (28-30). Paranoia is integral to the Final Girl; she is, after all, “watchful to the point of paranoia; small signs of danger that her friends ignore, she registers” (Clover, *Men, Women* 39). In *Halloween*, Laurie practices her own brand of paranoia at first. She is aware of the fact that Michael Myers is watching her from outside her high school and spots him following her home afterward. Once she arrives at her babysitting job that night, though, she discards her paranoid instincts, becomes absorbed in her guardian duties, and does not see that he is still close by.

Female paranoia in *Nightmare* has been discussed before, most notably by Jonathan Markovitz. He suggests that Nancy’s paranoia, leading her to avoid sleep and frantically convince her friends and family that she is in danger, is what “saves Nancy in the long run, for it is only because she is afraid that she feels the need to take appropriate precautions” (214). According to Markovitz, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and other horror/slasher films could serve as a commentary on how Western women react to their treatment by man-kind; he explains, “To the extent that [horror] films encourage us to see female paranoia as a reasonable response to a world that is hostile to women, they can offer important critiques of existing power relationships” (219).

Where Markovitz’s analysis of paranoia/power in *Nightmare*’s gendered characters does not venture is to examine how paranoia/power is also reified in Craven’s filmmaking techniques. In film, power is often cen-

tered in the perspective of the camera. As Laura Mulvey famously explains, “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking is split between active/male and passive/female” (837). Thus, a dichotomy of men as the “lookers” (viewers) and women as the “looked at” (viewing objects) is formed in film (Mulvey 837). The active male viewing gaze has been inspected in much film scholarship, but particularly those dissecting the slasher genre. Consternation pervades some film criticism over the degree to which the subjective I-camera in slasher films (frequently the perspective of the killer as he hunts his victims) identifies viewers with the villain (the male), and not with the victims (usually female) (Prince 16; Twitchell 296). Even *Halloween* uses the I-camera as the killer’s POV, though more sparingly than other slasher films.

In *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, though, the subjective POV shot for Freddy is used only three times, all of which take place during chase sequences (twice with Nancy and once in Tina’s first nightmare). This does not assert identification with the killer, but insight into how Nancy and Tina’s paranoia has caused them to become hyperalert to Freddy’s presence. In other words, the POV is not so much from Freddy’s eyes, but more from within their minds as they remain attentive to Freddy’s tracking them. The POV-paranoid gaze of the camera, then, is assisting these women, not demeaning or objectifying them. In fact, the scene of the most overt female victimization (Tina’s second nightmare and death) is without a POV shot, as Tina abandons her paranoia (her only chance of eluding Freddy by knowing exactly where he prowls) and has no adequate defense.<sup>10</sup> Nancy’s paranoia keeps her alive, granting her a much more fortunate fate than those in the film who do not exercise the same amount of caution.

—Nancy and Nonviolent Mind and Willpower

When Nancy reaches the moment when she must put a stop to Freddy, she seems to flash back to earlier conversations she had with her mother and Glen. Before Nancy put Marge to bed, Marge remarked, “You face things. That’s your nature. That’s your gift. But sometimes you have to turn away, too.” Just hours before, Glen and Nancy shared lunch and talked about different approaches to dreaming. Glen offered findings from his research on the Balinese philosophy of dreams and how the culture copes with nightmares: “They turn their back on it. Take away its energy and it disappears.”

After being pulled out of her dreams and subjected to Nancy's succession of booby traps, Freddy is enraged and intends to "split [her] in two." Nancy is not scared, as she delivers a commanding speech standing just inches away from him: "It's too late, Krueger. I know the secret now. This is just a dream. You're not alive. This whole thing is just a dream...I take back every bit of energy I ever gave you. You're nothing. You're shit." Nancy turns around, her back to him (the advice of Marge and Glen), and casually starts to walk away. Freddy jumps forward swiping at her with his glove, but he fades away into "nothing"-ness and Nancy leaves without a scratch. By understanding the truth behind his subsistence (his living off the fears of others, which create the building blocks of their nightmares) and electing to stop psychologically feeding into him, Nancy is able to overthrow him without resorting to the violence he used to persecute her mother and peers.

Nancy does not conform to the textbook Final Girl, who selects a phallic device of her own (as Laurie Strode does with her knitting needles, wire hanger, and knife in *Halloween*) to outman(euver) the killer. While arming herself to match the killer's violent masculinity might allow Laurie and other Final Girls to survive, "becoming the man" hardly seems a mission that a feminist Final Girl would choose to undertake. Moreover, as Tony Williams astutely argues, even *heroic* violence in film is still a perpetuation of "patriarchal violence" (168). Nancy defies stilted constructs of violent heroism by using her mind and willpower against Freddy instead of a knife, axe, or other standard phallic weapon. Nancy preserves her status as a woman so as to "emasculate" Freddy while being knowingly nonviolent, and her rejection of masculine violence occurs in conjunction with what Kendrick interprets as her equally important rejection of the masculine gaze when she diminishes Freddy's gaze by turning around and not letting him look her in the face (Kendrick 29). In the end, Nancy does not become a *masculinized* woman (like Laurie Strode); she becomes a woman who is simply intimidated by masculinity no more.

## Conclusion

Clover's model for the exemplary Final Girl in slasher films (Laurie Strode in *Halloween*) appears to take on anti-feminist principles of both the

stifling “cult of true womanhood” (extreme purity, passive subordination to men, self-imposed relegation to the domestic setting, and acquiescence to a masculine moral code) and blatant masculinity (fighting with phallic violence and without feminine paranoid insight). Nancy Thompson in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, opposite to Laurie Strode, breaks the bindings of what is traditionally associated with a “proper” woman and sculpts her own womanly, non-masculinized identity (through her interactions with men that never verge on dependency, her refusal to accept the home as her primary sphere, and her use of an exceedingly attentive mind and non-violence to succeed) which undermines and transforms many of the antifeminist elements of Clover’s Final Girl.

Nancy (not Laurie) should be the classic blueprint for how feminism may be incorporated into future horror franchises, both those handling original stories and even remakes. This is especially important since A) some horror filmmakers may, as a result of misreading of Clover’s work or indulging past critics’ unjustified praise of Laurie Strode as a feminist icon, incorrectly look to Laurie Strode as the best model for combining feminism and horror, and B) the original *Nightmare* series admittedly fell short in espousing feminist doctrine after its first chapter and focused more on developing Freddy’s personality and mythology. Therefore, drawing upon Nancy as the quintessential horror feminist paragon could assist slasher filmmakers in aligning their projects (as well as all sequels, prequels, and spin-offs) with a feminist agenda, infuse them with progressive feminist hero(in)es, and steer them in a more courageous, feminist direction.

**Kyle Christensen**  
**Monmouth College**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Between the original cycle of slasher films and the newest cycle of slasher remakes, a middle cycle—which produced such works as *Scream* (1996), *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997), *Urban Legend* (1998), and *Valentine* (2001)—helped briefly revitalize the genre in the mid-1990s—early 2000s.

<sup>2</sup> Clover's scholarship on slasher films and the Final Girl began with "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film" (1987), a revision of which serves as the first chapter of *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*.

<sup>3</sup> Ryan Lizardi deserves recognition as one of the first scholars to highlight that Clover herself does not see the Final Girl as feminist (116). Lizardi's pioneering work on slasher remakes also shows how these contemporary films tend to be less feminist than those of the classical slasher cycle, with slasher remakes often hyperemphasizing the "misogynistic torture" of women more than their predecessors (118).

<sup>4</sup> Despite acknowledging that 1974's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (with its own Final Girl, Sally) actually preceded 1978's *Halloween* (*Men, Women* 36), Clover maintains, "Jamie Lee Curtis [is] the *original* Final Girl!" (*Men, Women* 232n, emphasis added).

<sup>5</sup> Some may infer that this statement carries a sexual (possible rape) connotation, in which Nancy can "pull him out" and *depenetrate* his invasion of her dreams. That being said, the other half to this formation, the dream world as a vaginal or womb-like landscape, is inconsistent, since Freddy also penetrates the dreams of Rod and Glen. Kendrick should be credited for his discussion of the mixed gender coding of *Nightmare's* victims (23).

<sup>6</sup> Freddy's response to Tina's plea to God could also be read as a mocking of the virtue of piety in the cult of true womanhood.

<sup>7</sup> "The locale of teen slasher films—the small town or attractive suburb—revisits the setting of family television programs of the 1950s and early 1960s. Slasher films seem to delight in undoing the happy domestic scenes . . ." (Gill 21).

<sup>8</sup> Both *The Hills Have Eyes* and *The Last House on the Left* were also recently remade, in 2006 and 2009, respectively.

<sup>9</sup> In her psychoanalytical analysis of horror films, Barbara Creed interprets the horror film's fascination with the body and the display of blood and gore as reminiscent of a child's bodily, pre-symbolic connection to the mother, a connection the child later rejects in order to enter the (paternal) symbolic world.

<sup>10</sup> Although Tina's second nightmare does include a Steadicam shot tracking Tina as she runs from Freddy, it is most likely not from Freddy's POV and/or Tina's paranoid gaze of Freddy following, since it cuts immediately from a shot of Freddy standing still and laughing as Tina scurries. Furthermore, as Kendrick explains, this scene (the first to show Freddy on screen for an extended time) is meant to signify that Freddy can be "literally omnipresent" in the dream world, so that, for example, Freddy is able to defy logic by jumping from one side of the screen to another (24). This scene's heavy-handed establishment of Freddy's omnipresence means that it need not rely on Freddy physically moving about in pursuit of Tina, because he is everywhere at once.

## Works Cited

- Bartky, Sandra Lee. "Toward a Phenomenology of Feminist Consciousness." *Feminism and Philosophy*. Eds. Mary Vetterling-Braggin, Frederick A. Elliston, and Jane English. Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams, 1977. 22-37. Print.
- Black Christmas*. Dir. Bob Clark. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1974. Film.
- Black Christmas*. Dir. Glen Morgan. Dimension Films, 2006. Film.
- Clover, Carol J. "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film." *Representations* 20 (1987): 187-228. Print.
- . *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992. Print.
- Connelly, Kelly. "From Final Girl to Final Woman: Defeating the Male Monster in *Halloween* and *Halloween H20*." *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 35.1 (2007): 12-21. Print.
- Creed, Barbara. "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection." In *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Sue Thornham. Washington Square, New York: New York University Press, 1999. 251-66. Print.
- Fishbein, Leslie. "The Demise of the Cult of True Womanhood in Early American Film, 1900-1930: Two Modes of Subversion." *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 12.2 (1984): 66-72. Print.
- Friday the 13th*. Dir. Sean S. Cunningham. Paramount Pictures, 1980. Film.
- Friday the 13th*. Dir. Marcus Nispel. New Line Cinema, 2009. Film.
- Gill, Pat. "The Monstrous Years: Teens, Slasher Films, and the Family." *Journal of Film and Video* 54.4 (2002): 16-30. Print.
- Halloween*. Dir. John Carpenter. Compass International Pictures, 1978. Film.
- Heba, Gary. "Everyday nightmares." *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 23.3 (1995): 106-15. Print.
- Hills Have Eyes, The*. Dir. Wes Craven. Vanguard, 1977. Film.
- Hills Have Eyes, The*. Dir. Alexandre Aja. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2006. Film.
- House on Sorority Row, The*. Dir. Mark Rosman. Film Ventures International, 1983. Film.
- I Know What You Did Last Summer*. Dir. Jim Gillespie. Columbia Pictures Corp., 1997. Film.
- Kendrick, James. "Razors in the Dreamscape: Revisiting *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and the Slasher Film." *Film Criticism* 33.3 (2009): 17-33. Print.
- Keisner, Jody. "Do You Want to Watch? A Study of the Visual Rhetoric of the Postmodern Horror Film." *Women's Studies* 37 (2008): 411-27. Print.
- Last House on the Left, The*. Dir. Wes Craven. Hallmark Releasing Corp., 1972. Film.
- Last House on the Left, The*. Dir. Dennis Iliadis. Rogue Pictures, 2009. Film.

- Lizardi, Ryan. "'Re-Imagining' Hegemony and Misogyny in the Contemporary Slasher Remake." *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 38.3 (2010): 113-21. Print.
- Markovitz, Jonathan. "Female Paranoia as Survival Skill: Reason or Pathology in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*?" *Quarterly Review of Film & Video* 17.3 (2000): 211-20. Print.
- Meyers, Helene. *Femicidal Fears: Narratives of the Female Gothic Experience*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2001. Print.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. Eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. 833-44. Print.
- My Bloody Valentine*. Dir. George Mihalka. Paramount Pictures, 1981. Film.
- My Bloody Valentine*. Dir. Patrick Lussier. Lionsgate, 2009. Film.
- Nightmare on Elm Street, A*. Dir. Wes Craven. New Line Cinema, 1984. Film.
- Nightmare on Elm Street, A*. Dir. Samuel Bayer. New Line Cinema, 2010. Film.
- Prince, Stephen. "Graphic Violence in the Cinema: Origins, Aesthetic Design, and Social Effects." In *Screening Violence*. Ed. Stephen Prince. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000. 1-44. Print.
- Prom Night*. Dir. Paul Lynch. AVCO Embassy Pictures, 1980. Film.
- Prom Night*. Dir. Nelson McCormick. Screen Gems, 2008. Film.
- Rieser, Klaus. "Masculinity and Monstrosity: Characterization and Identification in the Slasher Film." *Men and Masculinities* 3.4 (2001): 370-92. Print.
- Robb, Brian J. *Screams & Nightmares: The Films of Wes Craven*. Woodstock, New York: Overlook Press, 1998. Print.
- Scream*. Dir. Wes Craven. Dimensions Films, 1996. Film.
- Sharrett, Christopher. "'Fairy Tales for the Apocalypse': Wes Craven on the Horror Film." *Literature Film Quarterly* 13.3 (1985): 139-147. Print.
- Siskel, Gene, and Roger Ebert. "Women in Danger." *Sneak Previews*. Public Broadcasting System. 24 Oct. 1980. Television.
- Sorority Row*. Dir. Stewart Hendler. Summit Entertainment, 2009. Film.
- Stepfather, The*. Dir. Joseph Ruben. New Century Vista Film Company, 1987. Film.
- Stepfather, The*. Dir. Nelson McCormick. Screen Gems, 2009. Film.
- Texas Chainsaw Massacre, The*. Dir. Tobe Hooper. Bryanston Distributing, 1974. Film.
- Texas Chainsaw Massacre, The*. Dir. Marcus Nispel. New Line Cinema, 2003. Film.
- Trencansky, Sarah. "Final Girls and Terrible Youth: Transgression in 1980s Slasher Horror." *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 29.2 (2001): 63-73. Print.
- Twitchell, James B. *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. Print.
- Urban Legends*. Dir. Jamie Blanks. TriStar Pictures, 1998. Film.

- Valentine*. Dir. Jamie Blanks. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2001. Film.
- Wee, Valerie. "Resurrecting and Updating the Teen Slasher: The Case of *Scream*." *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 34.2 (2006): 50-61. Print.
- Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." *American Quarterly* 18.2 (1966): 151-74. Print.
- White, Emily. *Fast Girls: Teenage Tribes and the Myth of the Slut*. New York: Berkley Books, 2003. Print.
- Williams, Linda. "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess." *Film Quarterly* 44.4 (1991): 2-13. Print.
- Williams, Tony. "Trying to Survive on the Dark Side: 1980s Family Horror." In *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*. Ed. Barry Keith Grant. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996. 164-80. Print.
- Wood, Robin. "Images and Women." *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*. Ed. Patricia Erens. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990. 337-52. Print.
- . "An Introduction to the American Horror Film." *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*. Ed. Barry Keith Grant. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1984. 164-200. Print.

**Kyle Christensen** is an instructor in the Department of Communication Studies at Monmouth College in Monmouth, Illinois. He recently received his M.A. in communication, along with a graduate certificate in women's studies, from Northern Illinois University. His research interests include third-wave feminist rhetoric, feminist masculinity and sexuality, and depictions of gendered violence and sexuality in popular culture. For "The Final Girl versus Wes Craven's *Nightmare on Elm Street*," he wishes to thank Professor Gretchen Bisplinghoof and Madelyn Ethington, as well as the anonymous reviewers, all of whom provided feedback on earlier drafts.