

Answer one of the following questions in a 1000-1250 word essay:

~ Question #1 ~

Consider *Martyrs* (2008) as an example of the New French Extremity. What kind of a response does the film set out to provoke in the spectator, and for what purpose? What is the larger social function of depicting such raw, gratuitous acts of violence?

~ Question #2 ~

Discuss *Cloverfield* (2008) as a post-9/11 horror film. How does the film exhibit arbitrary outbursts of violence, position its threatening element as foreign, and stage 9/11-like imagery? What are the larger ideological implications of the film, in terms of American attitudes about foreigners?

~ Question #3 ~

Analyze the representation of the abject in *The Human Centipede* (2009). According to Barbara Creed, what are the three key ways that the popular horror films are illustrative of the work of abjection? How are these characteristics depicted in the film? Discuss some specific examples to support your argument.

~ Question #4 ~

Barbara Creed argues that in popular horror films, the womb is often positioned as abject in two distinct ways (symbolically and literally). Discuss how *The Fly* (1986) illustrates this concept, using specific examples from the film to support your claim. According to Creed, why do horror films depict women/femininity in monstrous ways such as this?

essay guidelines

The following essay is an example of an *A* paper turned in by a student. It provides thoughtful, detailed analysis of the question at hand, while using specific examples to support the writer's ideas. Some further formatting guidelines you should be following include:

- ~ Use specific, detailed examples from the film to support your analysis. This is crucial for writing successfully in this class.
- ~ Avoid using too much summary/exposition. Assume the reader (me) has seen the films, and understands them intimately (because I have, and do).
- ~ Dispatch of any review-type language (ex: The film is a blockbuster extravaganza!).
- ~ Do not ask rhetorical questions, and do not raise questions you do not attempt to answer. Also, do not talk about what the film doesn't do, but rather, what the film *does* do. Be critical and express your ideas.
- ~ Use *italics* for all film titles, i.e. *Citizen Kane* not **Citizen Kane** or Citizen Kane.
- ~ Do not qualify your analysis (ex: I think, perhaps, probably, sort of, etc.). Do not be afraid to make statements and support them with examples/analysis.
- ~ If you refer to a character in the film, research their name (as well as directors, writers, etc.). www.IMDB.com is a great site for information about the films (though not an outside source; see below).
- ~ Don't use quotes as stand-alone analysis, but rather, as support for your own thoughts about the films. I'm interested in *your* perspective, not someone else's.

- ~ Do not simply copy down the readings/interpretations of your fellow students during the discussion and pass them off as your own. If we talk about something in class, I expect you to elaborate with your own perspective to support.
- ~ Use present tense for film criticism (ex: *Citizen Kane* is a good example of... not, *Citizen Kane* was a good example of...).

You are also required to use **at least two** written sources to support your ideas in your papers. For each paper you are to use **a)** one of the chapters/essays read in class as a source, along with **b)** a source outside of the class materials that you have researched either in the library, or online. Wikipedia is not a source. In addition to your two written sources, you may also use other shows/texts as references. Be sure to cite your references appropriately using any citation method of your choosing (MLA Style, Chicago Style, etc.).

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sample essay

Analyze *Halloween* in terms of Carol Clover's five basic conventions of the slasher film How does the film illustrate her conception of the killer, locale, weapon, victims, and the final girl?

A Critical View of John Carpenter's *Halloween*

Viewed as the first truly perfected slasher film, John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) changed the horror sub-genre with its debut. Throughout the film, the spectator watches (often from the perspective of the killer) as Michael Myers stabs his sister Judith to death, brutally murders a host of sexually active teenagers, and attempts to kill the protagonist, Laurie Strode, in the vapid suburbs of Haddonfield, Illinois. *Halloween* is labeled as the first authentic slasher film because it perfectly reflects Carol Clover's cinematic formula that through the years has

“evolved and flourished in ways of some interest to observers of popular culture, above all those concerned with the representation of women in film” (Clover, 39). Clover’s conception of the five elementary aspects of a slasher film has helped to shape and define the horror genre. These five commonalities include: the killer, the terrible place, weapons, victims, and the Final Girl.

After his first murder as a young boy, Michael Myers is put away in a mental institution, only to become “locked in childhood,” with the mentality that sexual activity is punishable by death (Clover, 28). As the “killer” component in Clover’s formula, Myers is masked nearly the entire film. Scenes in which he is unmasked are not by his own hands, but someone else’s: Myers’ father after Michael kills his sister, and during Laurie and Myers’ final encounter as she grasps at his head while they struggle. Another feature of the killer in a slasher film is their supernatural and everlasting abilities. For Myers, after being stabbed, shot multiple times, and thrown from a second story window, he vanishes without a trace at the end of the film. The final moments, however, allude to his everlasting presence, as sounds of his heavy breathing juxtaposed over images of the neighborhood houses verbally assert his immortality.

The next aspect of a slasher film is the terrible place, “a house or tunnel, in which victims sooner or later find themselves...[where] they survey the visible evidence of the human crimes and perversions that have transpired there...[which] leads directly to the perception of their own immediate peril” (Clover 41). For *Halloween*, there are two terrible places. The first terrible place is the house Myers killed his sister in, where in the fifteen years after her murder it has become “a spook’s house...a haunted house,” as the neighborhood kids say, the kind of weathered and falling apart house you dare your friends to go into in the middle of the night to prove they aren’t chicken. The other two are the houses in which Laurie and her friend Annie babysit, across the street from one another. These terrible places all share the commonality of a female teenager

watching over kids on Halloween night, who then neglects those kids to sneak off to have sex with their boyfriends (except for Laurie). Disregarding their responsibility for sexual activity, the home they took as their job to watch, “a safe haven...that promises to keep the killer out” eventually turns into “walls that hold the victim in,” (Clover, 41). From one house on to another, Michael systematically torments his victims and chases Laurie as she runs for her life.

Clover’s third slasher aspect is the weapon. The most prominent weapon is Myers’ phallic butcher knife, which is “pretechnological [for] stealth, closeness and tactility” (Clover 41-42). Killers usually wield bladed weapons, as blades can easily slice through “flesh or meat itself as that which is hidden from view” (Clover 42). Knives are preferred because blades make no noise, they require no bullets to continue its carnage, and there is no escaping being sliced or nicked by a blade up close. This is evident when Michael impales Bob with a butcher knife, and chases after Laurie during the climactic moments of the film. It is also possible for the killer to be cut by his own weapon, just as Michael is at the hands of Laurie, though he seems to be unaffected due to his superhuman abilities.

Next to last in the list are the victims of slasher films. Almost always multiple, the victims are the sustenance that prolong the life of the film. Once they are all consumed and the last girl escapes, the film is finished and dies, until a sequel or prequel aggregates more victims. The slasher films of the 70’s and 80’s are distinguished from those of the 60’s and earlier, most notably by the portrayal of their victims. Horror movies of the 60’s have victims that are adult women who are sexual transgressors (Marion in *Psycho*, or Mark’s victims in *Peeping Tom*), while the next generation positions young teenagers of both sexes, most whom are sexual transgressors. In *Halloween*, the four teenagers murdered were those whom engaged or were in transit of engaging in sexual activities with the opposite sex: Judith is killed after sex with her

boyfriend, Bob is stabbed after sex with Lynda, Lynda is strangled to death after sex with Bob, and Annie has her throat slashed on her way to see her boyfriend (to have sex). With all of these victims meeting their demise, Bob is the only victim to die quickly and without bloodshed, which coincides with Clover's observation that "the death of a male is nearly always swift," in slasher films, while female deaths "are filmed at closer range, in more graphic detail, and at greater length" (Clover, 35)

The fifth and final elementary aspect of the slasher film is the final girl, and in *Halloween*, Laurie is this last survivor. The final girl lives because she is the only non-sexually active female hence Laurie, with no boyfriend or date to the dance. The final girl is also "watchful to the point of paranoia," and is the one who can sense the killer's presence when others are oblivious to their impending danger (Clover, 42). This is certainly the case early on in the film, when Laurie's friends ignore her anxious feelings about a strange car passing by, or when she glimpses Michael staring at her through a window as she sits in class. Laurie's quick thinking in using the knitting needle and clothes hanger as effective weapons illustrates that she is "intelligent and resourceful in a pinch" (Clover, 42). While she is being chased during the climactic moments, she assumes Michael's knife and stabs him with it, further illustrating Clover's notion of "phallic appropriation," in that her resourcefulness emphasizes the masculinization of her character, in opposition to the sexually disturbed, feminized killer (Clover, 49). Barbara Jane Brickman notes that this battle between the masculine final girl and the feminine killer, "appears much more like a contest between two adolescents, since Michael Myers and Laurie Strode or Sally and Hitchhiker are simply close in age and in social position, not children and not fully adults, like peers or truly siblings" (Brickman, 89). After defeating the Michael and seeing the mutilation of loved ones, Laurie is forced to leave the childhood innocence, the only part of her killed, as she

goes one after the film, transitioning to adulthood. To distinguish herself from the sustenance that prolongs a slasher film, the Final Girl must view the horrors of her friends and family slaughtered, and “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, 43). Laurie fights on despite two failed attempts at killing Michael, finding objects to combat his torment until her and the children are ultimately saved by Loomis.

As the film comes to a close, with its seemingly quiet suburban setting, the vast emptiness of the streets on Halloween night unsettles even the savviest horror film spectator. The images are reminiscent of one’s home, with a connotation of safety, and family, until Michael’s slow heaving breath creeps in over the images, offering the notion that he may still be out there, and that we are not safe from him. *Halloween* takes the comfort of one’s own home and dismantles it by proposing that evil can lurk behind the walls of a well to do home, and in conjunction with its reflection of Carol Clover’s archetypes of the killer, terrible place, weapons, victims, and a final girl, it can be seen as a seminal example of the popular slasher film.

Works Cited

Clover, Carol. “Chapter 5 -- Her Body, Himself.” *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Brickman, Barbara Jane. *New American Teenagers: The Lost Generation of Youth in 1970s Film; Chapter Five: Brothers, Sisters, and Chainsaws: The Slasher Film as Locus for Sibling Rivalry*. New York: Continuum Press, 2012.