

WITH TERROR IN THEIR HEARTS:  
A STRUCTURAL AND TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF GENDER,  
TRANSMISSION, AND THE ENJOYMENT OF HORROR  
IN SLASHER FILMS AND CONTEMPORARY LEGENDS

RHIANNON McKECHNIE







WITH TERROR IN THEIR HEARTS: A STRUCTURAL AND TEXTUAL ANALYSIS  
OF GENDER, TRANSMISSION, AND THE ENJOYMENT OF HORROR IN  
SLASHER FILMS AND CONTEMPORARY LEGENDS

by

© Rhiannon McKechnie

A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

In partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Folklore Department, Memorial University of Newfoundland

May 2010

St. John's

Newfoundland



## Abstract

The contemporary legend canon contains many different kinds of legends, including but not limited to food contamination, embarrassing sexual situations and incidents with automobiles. However, there is a particular subset that involves a maniac (usually assumed to be male) attacking a victim who is usually young and female. I have dubbed these contemporary *horror* legends. They bear a strong resemblance to the violent and gory horror films I watched in my youth, which I refer to as *slasher* films. In these slasher films, teenaged victims are butchered by killers who are frequently male. Are slasher films merely using a different mode of transmission to tell the same stories as contemporary horror legends? In this thesis, I use textual and structural analyses to compare contemporary horror legends and slasher films: their modes of transmission, their depictions of gender and their audiences. Why do we continue to enjoy telling, and watching, these horror stories?

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the many people whose thoughts helped shape this thesis and whose encouragement helped me to complete it.

My supervisor, Dr. Diane Tye, who has patiently guided me throughout a process I'm sure she never expected would take quite this long – thank you for sticking by me and helping me get through this. I literally could not have done it without you!

To Dr. Paul Smith, who helped to shape this thesis in its initial stages and who generously allowed me access to his huge supply of articles and movies, and who continued to send me relevant materials.

To Dr. Diane Goldstein, who not only suggested articles for me to read but who also made the invaluable suggestion of contacting Mikel Koven.

To Dr. Philip Hiscock who made me realize what a valuable treasure I had in a childhood book by Daniel Cohen.

To Dr. Beverley Diamond who works so hard to ensure as many students as possible get some form of funding. Your tireless efforts are appreciated!

To Dr. Gerald Pocius who let me be part of a project that allowed me to work from home as an about-to-be new mom.

To Sharon Cochrane and Cindy Turpin, the goddesses of the department, we would all be lost without you! Thank you for nurturing a nervous pregnant woman, and sharing your own stories and experiences with me.

To Patricia Fulton and Pauline Cox who bent over backwards to accommodate me. An extra special thanks to Pauline for her years of friendship!

To Dr. Mikel J. Koven whose own research has forged the path for me to follow – thank you for the books and for letting me sneak a peak at your amazing movie collection!

To Jim Harper, a writer who refused to let a student pay hundreds of dollars for his out of print book and sent me a copy instead, and who also generously suggested other authors to look at. Thank you for taking the time to help me.

To Dr. Jan Harold Brunvand, whose work inspired me to begin this journey, thank you not only for all the books and papers you've written, but also for an email you sent a curious young undergrad who wondered if she should indeed pursue Folklore. I am so pleased you exceeded my expectations when I finally met you – and I will always be grateful to Mrs. Brunvand for loaning me some of her clothing when Air Canada lost mine!

To Dr. Victor Ehly and all the wonderful professors I was fortunate enough to encounter at Vermont College, your belief in me is what brought me to this point. Without your unswerving faith I wouldn't have dared to dream. None of you will ever be forgotten, but Victor you have served as my mentor for so many years now, you will always have a special place in my heart.

To my parents, Cullene Bryant and Donald McKechnie, who have always encouraged not only my academic pursuits but also my artistic ones (not to mention providing unconditional emotional and financial support over the years – Mom, we couldn't have moved to Newfoundland, or any of the other many places we've gone since, without you!).



To my brother, Alex, who shared slasher films and contemporary legends with me, I can't imagine what sort of thesis I'd have written without your early influence! Thanks for a lifetime of having my back! Also, thanks to you and the lovely Delyana for my precious nieces!

To my wonderful in-laws Joyce and Reg Lapenskie, who may not always understand what I'm doing or why I'm doing it, but who love me anyway.

To Kevin Ashby, my brother-from-another-mother. You are not only one of the most brilliant people I know, but also one of the kindest. Harvard, Oxford, law firms - all would be lucky to have you!

To the late great Mary Elizabeth Mott, the best friend anyone could ever have. Thank you for gifting my life with your presence, your friendship, love, support and encouragement. You will always be missed, but never forgotten.

To my crazy cats Fudge, Chocolate and Oreo "Biss", sometimes you made it a challenge to reach the keyboard or to keep my papers organized, but your purrs and cuddles more than make up for it!

To my amazing children Ava and Luke - you are both the light and love of my life! And although your existence has certainly made this take a lot longer than it should have, I wouldn't trade either one of you for all the degrees in the world!

And finally, to my incredibly supportive husband who is embarking on his own graduate career. This crazy academic path we've somehow found ourselves on may have a lot of twists and turns, but there's no one I'd rather be navigating it with than you! Aren't you glad I'm finally finished??? This stage, anyway...

## Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Chapter 1 In the Beginning: A Frighteningly Good Time!	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Contemporary Legends, Slasher Films and Evolving Modes of Transmission	5
1.3 Structural Analysis	9
1.4 Gender	10
1.5 Informants	12
1.6 Breakdown of Remaining Chapters	16
Chapter 2 From Oral to Visual: The Relationship Between Contemporary Legends and Slasher Films	18
2.1 Contemporary Legends	19
2.2 Slasher Films	31
2.3 Violence in Entertainment History	39
2.4 Contemporary Legends and Slasher Films	48
2.5 Conclusion	51
Chapter 3 Live Through This: A Structural Analysis of Film and Legend	53
3.1 Dundes's Schema in Contemporary Legend and Slasher Films	55
3.2 Dika's Functions in Slasher Films and	

Contemporary Legends	60
3.3 Dika's Past Event in Slasher Films and Contemporary Legends	62
3.4 Dika's Present Event in Slasher Films and Contemporary Legends	66
3.5 Conclusion	82
Chapter 4 Kill or Be Killed: Survivors, Killers and Victims in Contemporary Legends and Slasher Films	85
4.1 Passive Women	85
4.2 The Female Survivors	89
4.3 The Killers	112
4.4 Meaning and Murder	120
4.5 Conclusion	129
Chapter 5 The Horror Fan	131
5.1 Conclusion	159
Chapter 6 In the End: Cut from the Same Cloth?	162
6.1 Introduction	162
6.2 Summary of Previous Chapters	162
6.3 Future Directions for Study	169
6.4 Conclusion	171
Bibliography	172
Filmography	179



## **Chapter 1**

### **In the Beginning: A Frighteningly Good Time!**

#### **Introduction**

I have always had a taste for the macabre and being frightened is my idea of fun. Maybe this has something to do with being born the day before Halloween. I cannot remember the first scary movie I ever saw; I only know that my older brother and I would spend our weekend visits with our father seated in a dark basement watching Jason Voorhees or Michael Meyers chop up hapless victims on a six-foot television screen. Friday afternoons were an exciting time spent raiding the horror section of the video store for the latest in slicing and dicing cinema. By the time I was seven, I was well versed in the realm of horror films, particularly in the sub-genre of the “slasher” film.

Although known by a variety of names including “splatter” (see McCarty 1984), “stalker” (see Dika 1990), “stalk and slash” (see Pinedo 1997), and “slice and dice” (see MacKinnon 1990) the most popular term is “slasher” (see Clover 1992, Koven 2003, Rockoff 2002). Adam Rockoff believes that the slasher film is a rogue genre not easily defined (1) but goes on to say it, “is defined by the method by which its characters are killed” (7). According to Rockoff, unlike the nameless faceless deaths in an action film, the murders in a slasher film are more personal because of our familiarity with the victims; we may not like them, but we know them (9). Isabel Cristina Pinedo says slashers were low-budget films with a mostly adolescent audience whose peak popularity was from 1978 to 1981 (71). Pinedo believes that the slasher film narrative is characterized by a psychotic killer who is masked or hidden and remains largely

offscreen, is usually male, and is driven by a rage derived from a traumatic childhood experience to stalk and violently kill numerous young people, with the exception of a lone female who survives a protracted struggle with the killer (72-73). Cynthia A. Freeland outlines a formula for the slasher film involving an indestructible (usually male) monster who appears to be defeated by a female protagonist until a coda hints at the monster's escape (255). "The slasher subgenre of the horror film shifts emphasis away from plots to monstrous graphic spectacle" (181). "Slasher" is the term I used as a child to describe movies that depict someone killing individuals who are usually, but not always, teenagers. My father did not bat an eye as we pulled cassettes with titles like *The Dorm That Dripped Blood* (1982) or *Sorority House Massacre* (1986), complete with gore-splattered covers, from the shelves. Perhaps he was simply grateful to have something to occupy our time.

When my brother was in the sixth grade, his teacher would "reward" the class every Friday afternoon by finishing off the school week with a "scary story" usually featuring an escaped maniac and a hapless young female or two. My brother would tell these stories to me and I, in turn, would regale my second grade classmates with these tales at recess on Monday morning. I had no idea that I was transmitting contemporary legends. It was not until over a decade had passed and a friend recommended I pick up a copy of Jan Brunvand's *The Vanishing Hitchhiker* that I first heard the term "urban legend". It would be almost another decade until I was a graduate student in folklore and became aware of the term "contemporary legend". There has been much debate and discussion amongst folklore scholars regarding this term.



Gail de Vos says they have been called urban belief legends, urban myths and rumour legends but that they cannot correctly be called urban legends (a term made popular by Brunvand) "because their settings and narration do not often reflect urban centers" (4). She describes contemporary legends as a subset of the larger legend genre.

Legends reflect the real world and are told as if they are, or once were, true. The primary function of legends is to inform and reinforce a culture's beliefs and norms... This subset is "contemporary" because its stories reflect the values, concerns, and worldview of today's society expressed in contemporary terms (de Vos 4-5).

de Vos also says that contemporary legends send simple social messages and "transmit cautionary and traditional wisdom that has been handed down through the generations... Contemporary legends are concerned with the theme of people's fear of the unknown, especially that unknown that exists within oneself" (291).

In *Contemporary Legend: A Reader* Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith do not attempt to arrive at a definition but rather to provide "a list of queries we think relevant to arriving at one" (xxii). Within this list, they include:

Contemporary legend... may be presented in a multiplicity of forms and media... exist in multiple versions over space and time... may be bizarre or preternatural (but less often supernatural)... and/or which may involve either explicitly or by implication behaviour that has cultural restraints placed on it (Bennett and Smith xxii).

Writing in the online journal of film and television studies *Scope*, Mike J. Koven uses the term "urban legends" and defines them as "contemporary orally circulated stories" (1). In *The Bosom Serpent* Harold Schechter uses the terms "urban legend" (xvi), "modern urban legends" (13), "belief tales" (14) and "urban folktale" (14) all to mean a "wildly



improbable yet strangely compelling little anecdote [which] consists entirely of traditional folktale elements...recast in strictly contemporary terms" (xvi).

While there are many kinds of legends that fall within the contemporary legend canon – from food contamination to disgusting accidents to embarrassing situations – it is the ones with violent content, usually a male maniac attacking a young female, that most interest me. Susan Stewart writes that “the horror story is adaptable to narrative techniques of face-to-face communication, the printed text, cinema” (33), and, from my first encounter with contemporary legends, I was struck by their likeness to slasher films. As a graduate student, I decided that the similarities between contemporary legends and slasher films warranted further exploration.

Although many different types of contemporary legends abound, the focus of this study is on those legends in which antagonists either intend to, or in fact do, inflict violence upon victims who are generally young and female. I consider these to be *horror* contemporary legends or what I dub *contemporary horror legends*. I compare these contemporary legends with slasher films: their structures, differing modes of transmission, and depictions of gender, as well as the appeal of horror. I do this through a textual analysis of six contemporary legends: “Aren’t You Glad You Didn’t Turn Out the Lights?,” “The Roommate’s Death,” “The Boyfriend’s Death,” “The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs,” “The Furry Collar” and “The Headless Roommate” and six slasher films: *Black Christmas* (1975), *Halloween* (1978), *Friday the 13th* (1980), *Happy Birthday To Me* (1981), *The Slumber Party Massacre* (1983) and *April Fool’s Day* (1985). In addition, I draw on the views of a group of slasher film fans and several folklore students,

all of whom are fans of horror. Although modes of transmission differ, I ask if contemporary legends and slasher films share the same structure, do they tell the same archetypal story? And why do people continue to enjoy these terror tales? These are the questions that underline this thesis.

### **Contemporary Legends, Slasher Films and Evolving Modes of Transmission**

There is a close relationship between folklore and popular culture. As John Storey argues, “the study of folklore produced not only a concept of popular culture as folk culture, it also helped establish the tradition of seeing ordinary people as masses, consuming mass culture” (15). Media scholar John Fiske further elaborates:

Popular culture is not consumption, it is culture – the active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures within a social system: culture, however industrialized, can never be adequately described in terms of the buying and selling of commodities. Culture is a living, active process: it can be developed only from within...A homogeneous, externally produced culture cannot be sold ready-made to the masses...Popular culture is made by the people (1989 23-4).

Finally, Schechter highlights the reciprocal relationship between folklore and popular culture, saying, “popular works aimed at the general public have always been, in essence, a form of mass-produced folklore” (84-5).

Given these interconnections, Sylvia Grider urges folklorists to pay close attention to popular culture. She cautions that although the mass media is anathema to many folklorists, we must be aware of the effect it is having on traditional forms of narrative: “Other disciplines...have paid considerable attention to the cultural impact of the mass media...But folklorists have been concerned primarily with the influence tradition has exerted on the media and not vice versa” (Grider 1981 131). She coins the

term “media narraform” (Grider 1981 125) as a means of defining children’s oral retelling of mass media depictions of the supernatural. Grider points to children’s television shows and comic books as using traditional legend motifs, and that the narraform’s affinity for the legend is undeniable, which she says, “reinforces the bond between the two modes of communication” (126).

Larry Danielson encourages folklorists to examine all forms of media for examples of the horrifying tales that traditionally have been orally transmitted, saying that folklorists “would gain useful insight into meaning and function if their research nets were more broadly flung. We need to keep eyes and ears open for the appearance of the traditional horror story in film, television, and print” (212). He believes that if we turn our attention to slasher films we can learn more about how contemporary legends are transmitted.

Although Danielson suggests several different media, for the purposes of this study I am focusing exclusively on film. Bruce Jackson, writing in the *Journal of American Folklore*, sees film as the dominant narrative mode and for that reason it must be explored by folklore scholars. Jackson says, “Film and television are far too important to be left to the media studies and literature scholars” (389). I agree with these writers that film is an important mode of transmission that must not be overlooked by folklorists. In fact, I would argue that with films such as the *Urban Legend* series growing increasingly popular amongst young viewers, horror films are becoming a primary source for contemporary legends.



We live in an age of rapidly changing technology. Films are available not only in theatres, they can also be rented in stores, aired on television or even downloaded online. Computers, and particularly the Internet, are providing a whole new forum for folklore. Contemporary legends can be found on websites and in peoples' inboxes. As folklorists, we need to explore these new modes of transmission and see where they will take folklore in the future, and where they are taking it now.

My preliminary research suggests that increasingly contemporary legends are often transmitted through film as opposed to oral narratives. While working in the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archives (MUNFLA) accessioning a collection of essays from a 2004 undergraduate class in contemporary legends, I noticed that the informants, the majority of whom were under the age of twenty-five, usually acquired their variants from the film *Urban Legend* (1997). These students were not sitting around campfires or in darkened dormitory rooms sharing these scary stories. Instead, they were watching the narratives play out on movie and television screens. As Barry Keith Grant points out, "for a generation nurtured on visual imagery, telling ghost stories around a campfire on a dark night can't hold a candle to the increasingly sophisticated techniques of the movies" (xii). The same could be said for telling contemporary legends in darkened dorm rooms. Evidence suggests that film is becoming an increasingly important mode of transmission, and one that must not be ignored.

While folklorists recognize similarities between folk narrative and film, as Koven rightly points out in his article "Filming Legends: A Revised Typology," "our discipline

has been slow to develop any useful methodology for approaching an analysis of popular cinema. We as folklorists and legend scholars do not have a sufficient structural scheme with which to situate these films" (115).

Jackson echoes this criticism, saying that folklorists tend to look at the folklore that is in the film, treating it as "things to be plucked out of a context otherwise lacking folkloric moment" (388). He criticizes this practice because it assumes the film to be a fixed text not influenced by the folk (which in this case would be the viewers) when in fact changes can still be made after a test screening or prior to the film being released on home video or DVD. Although Jackson has a point, really the viewers have little control over what they are seeing, particularly in a theatre. If viewing a film in the comforts of home, the viewer can choose to fast forward or rewind certain scenes, but that is not really changing what has been committed to film by the filmmakers. In that regard, the text is indeed fixed. What is not fixed are the conditions surrounding the viewing experience, and the viewing experience itself. However, this said, identifying folk narrative motifs in films continues to be popular amongst folklorists.

While Julia George identifies motifs in the horror films she studies, she considers aspects beyond motif. George contends that, "Many non-ethnographic fiction films seem to exhibit elements of folk narrative, transposed into a visual rather than primarily an oral mode of transmission. The structure of the film, as well as the themes, present often parallel traditional storytelling methods" (159). My thesis extends George's work that focuses on contemporary legend's links to televised horror films. It also builds on the work of Larry Danielson.

Like George, Danielson also treats the text as fixed. He picks out elements of the slasher film that resemble existing motifs in Ernest Baughman's *Type and Motif-Index of the Folktales of England and North America*. Danielson focuses on the relationship between the contemporary legend "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" and the horror films *Halloween* and *When a Stranger Calls* (1979). However because the slasher film was an emerging sub-genre at the time of his writing, Danielson was limited in the number of slasher films he could discuss. I wish to update his work to include other significant films in the slasher film sub-genre and to expand upon his study by looking beyond common motifs at the similar structures shared by these types of contemporary legends and slasher films.

### **Structural Analysis**

Vladimir Propp's seminal study *Morphology of the Folktale* (trans. 1968), in which he broke down the Russian folktale into thirty-one functions (which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Three), inspired several folklorists, such as Alan Dundes and Cylin Busby, whose work, in turn, has inspired me in this study. I am obviously not the first to apply structural analysis to contemporary legends or to slasher films. Dundes defines structuralism as "the study of the interrelationships or organization of the component parts of an item of folklore" (2007 126). He points out the importance of structural analysis as it allows for cross-genre analysis (Dundes 1963 211), including the cross-sub-genre analysis I am undertaking for this study. I think structural analysis is a useful tool for comparing and contrasting the two sub-genres explored in this study. As Busby says, "it is an essential starting point if we are to attempt a later interpretation.



Structural analysis does lay the essential framework of the text quite bare, and in that sense it can serve as a springboard for a more descriptive ethnography” (17-18).

While Busby uses Proppian analysis to examine food contamination legends, I turn to Dundes’ schema. In building on the work of Vladimir Propp, Dundes transforms Propp’s functions of the Russian folktale into motifemes which he identifies in North American Indian folktales. He finds a common motifeme sequence of Interdiction, Violation, Consequence, and the optional structural slot of Attempted Escape. I am not the first to relate Dundes’ schema to the contemporary legend. For example, Daniel Barnes did so, identifying a similar structure to the folktale of interdiction or warning, violation of interdiction, and consequence of violation. As well, Koven applied the motifeme of interdiction to a new sub-genre, taking it from the oral tale to the filmed one in “The Terror Tale: Urban Legends and the Slasher Film”. Koven studied several slasher films and found their interdiction. In the following pages I apply the entire schema to both contemporary legends and slasher films in order to explore their structures. Because Dundes’ schema was one derived for oral tales, I draw on Vera Dika’s model that reduces the slasher film into seventeen different functions. I want to see how these functions apply to the six slasher films selected for this study and how many of them can be applied to contemporary legends.

### **Gender**

The contemporary legends and slasher films I examine are all built around a central female character. Beverly Crane, Eleanor Wachs and Mary Seelhorst discuss the

role of the passive woman in contemporary legend and her need to be rescued (most often by a man).

Whether the passive woman is locked in a car while her boyfriend goes for help, locked in her dorm room awaiting her roommate's return, or babysitting sleeping children, she is terrified but helpless to remove herself from the dangerous situation. That deed is left to someone else: a heroic rescuer (Seelhorst 1987, 32).

Crane uses a structural analysis of "The Roommate's Death" to explore women in contemporary legends. She calls the final female character a "defenseless survivor" (Crane 1997, 140) who is need of a "defensive helper" (140). Wachs also points out that this female character is depicted as defenseless and is rescued by an authority figure who is usually male. I wish to build on the work of Crane, Wachs and Seelhurst by exploring this frightened female in relation to the victims and killers in the six contemporary legends selected for this study as well as their counterparts in the six slasher films also included in this study.

Women in contemporary legend are not only failed rescuers or passive protagonists, they are also victims. Cylin Busby and Ann Carpenter both explore this aspect, as does Diane Tye who looks at the dangers faced by a woman alone in contemporary legends. Busby says that the women in contemporary legends are usually young (much like the females in slasher films) and they, "do not live happily ever after. They are commonly disfigured, insane, or dead by the end of the tale" (8). Although Busby's study is of contamination legends, her observations hold true for the women in horror legends as well and I will apply them to the six legends that I studied.

Carol Clover has done an extensive study of gender in slasher films and she celebrates the slasher film's final surviving female character. Film scholar Jim Harper

also examines this lone female survivor. I wish to build on their work, paying closer attention to this final female. How does her survival compare to that of the contemporary legend's surviving female? And is it worthy of celebration?

### **Informants**

This study is primarily a structural analysis of examples of contemporary legends and slasher films rather than an examination of elements such as belief or performance analysis. That said, I was curious to find out if fans of horror recognize similarities between the structures of contemporary legends and slasher films. Are fans of the contemporary legend also fans of the slasher film? And if they enjoy both, is it for the same reasons? Finally, where do they encounter contemporary legends? In order to answer these questions, I conducted separate interviews with seven fans of horror: three males and four females. Three of my informants were friends who enjoyed watching horror films together, sharing a particular fondness for the slasher film. My other four informants were Folklore students; two undergraduates and two graduate students. As such, they were acquainted with contemporary legends but they also identified as horror film fans. Initially, I had hoped to extend my research to include more than the seven interviewed, but my attempts proved unsuccessful and so I limited my study to these seven individuals.

One of my informants wished to remain anonymous but because his friendship with several of the other informants might identify him, I gave everyone a pseudonym. One informant chose her own pseudonym, Miss Scarlet. I found my first informant, Kelsey McKenzie, while I was employed at the Graduate Students' Union at Memorial



University of Newfoundland. I discovered that a co-worker was an avid horror film fan. When I approached her about doing an interview, she was quite enthusiastic and offered to pass on my contact information to several of her horror film-viewing friends. Although she put me in contact with six other individuals, only three agreed to be interviewed. Of those three, only two, Tyler McAllister and Fred Sewell, actually participated in the interview process.

I posted emails to the Graduate Students' listserve and also on the Folklore Society's mailing list through Yahoo Groups. One professor, seeing my email on the listserve, posted my information on a website for her distance education class. I found two undergraduate horror fans through the Folklore Society, Brian Sloane and Leanne Price, and garnered two more informants, Susan MacLeod and Miss Scarlet, through my fellow Folklore graduate students.

Kelsey McKenzie, Tyler McAllister and Fred Sewell are all PhD students in the sciences at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN). Kelsey is from Nova Scotia while Tyler and Fred are both native Newfoundlanders raised outside of St. John's. Although all three were residing in St. John's at the time of these interviews, Kelsey has since returned to her home province. Kelsey is in her early thirties and lives with her partner while Tyler and Fred are in their late twenties and are single. The three are part of a larger group of seven friends, all of whom met through their graduate studies at MUN, who enjoy viewing horror films together.

Brian Sloane is an undergraduate student in his early twenties, majoring in Education. He is also a member of the Folklore Society. He is an avid fan of both horror

films and contemporary legends. His fellow Folklore Society member, Leanne Price, is nineteen and an undergraduate Folklore student. Unlike Brian, Leanne is not from Newfoundland but is an Ontarian.

My graduate student informants Susan MacLeod and Miss Scarlett are both with the Folklore Department. Susan is from Cape Breton and Miss Scarlett is from Gander, Newfoundland. Both are in their mid-twenties. Susan prefers contemporary legends to horror films while Miss Scarlett is more of a horror film fan.

I met with each of my informants separately. I presented them with the texts of the six contemporary legend variants selected for this study and then showed them clips from slasher films. The legend texts and film clips were followed by an interview. The entire procedure was tape recorded because I wanted to capture their reactions to the legend texts and the slasher film clips in the moment. The duration of each interview was approximately one hour.

While I have chosen to work with informants of both genders because I believe it provides a more balanced view, Brigid Cherry limits her examination to female viewers of the horror film. She found that her viewers enjoyed special effects, particularly if they were poorly and cheaply done, because they made the film seem unrealistic. This lack of reality of course serves to make the film seem less frightening. I found that my informants of both genders enjoyed the special effects, but preferred good special effects to bad ones. If the effects were convincingly done, they added to my informants' appreciation of the film. If they were poor then they lowered the quality of the film, causing my informants to deem it as bad. This again points to their enjoyment of being

scared within the safe confines of their home or a local movie theatre. But why is there this enjoyment of fear and gore? Freeland says our interest in spectacle may not just be to see suffering and violence, “but also in how and why it is shown” (189). I want to explore the “how” and the “why” with horror fans. Is there as much enjoyment when one is hearing an oral legend versus when one is seeing it depicted onscreen? Or are the grim musings of our own imaginations even more powerful than what filmmakers can portray?

My informants were all adult fans (over the age of eighteen), but there is the common misperception that horror film fans are all adolescent males. Cherry says this causes female fans to feel they must hide their enjoyment of the horror film as they mature. In fact, I found that my informants, regardless of gender, frequently expressed a sheepish reluctance to admit to being slasher film fans. As an adult female fan myself, I can relate to Cherry’s findings and my own informants’ discomfort with identifying as horror film fans. I sometimes get a reaction of barely disguised disgust tinged with faint disdain whenever I tell people what the topic of my thesis is. But I am more concerned with the reactions of horror fans to the films and legends selected for this study.

Just as I examine male and female adult fans, so does Benjamin Meade in his study of the motivations of male and female adults (which he defines as being over the age of twenty-five) in viewing horror films. He found that his female informants enjoyed watching horror films not only for the special effects but also for the sheer excitement of it, the adrenalin rush that came with being safely scared. Like Meade, I am curious as to why people consume horror. Do they enjoy being scared? And if so, why? I discuss this



with my informants, exploring what has scared them and what scares them now. This is similar to what Jackson considers the folklore of audiences.

According to Jackson, the folklore of the audience is what the viewers bring to the film viewing experience, how they behave during it, and how the film affects or influences them afterward. I attempt to explore this with my informants, not only by discussing their horror background but also by watching their reactions to the legend texts and the slasher film clips.

Freeland points out that although the audience may have had a shared viewing experience, they may not agree with or be unified in their reactions to the movie (189). And why should they? As Jackson explains and I explore with my informants, every person is unique. Thus as individuals we bring our own history, preferences and experiences to a film viewing (or legend-telling) occasion. And these factors will colour how we perceive and interpret this occasion.

### **Breakdown of Remaining Chapters**

In Chapter Three I use structural analysis to explore both contemporary horror legends and slasher films, using Dika's seventeen functions of the slasher film and Dundes's legend schema as frameworks for comparing the two sub-genres. I apply the functions and schema to each of the legends and films selected for this study. I move in Chapter Four to focus on what I believe to be the three most significant roles in both contemporary horror legends and slasher films: the killer, the victims, and the final female. Paying closer attention to these elements as they appear in legend and film reveals similarities and differences between these two modes of transmission. My fifth

chapter then explores the audience for contemporary legends and slasher films. In order to do this, I turn to my seven informants and examine why they consume horror. Why do they like to be scared and what scares them? What is their primary mode of transmission of contemporary legends (and if it is film, do they even recognize it as such)? Do they notice similarities and differences between contemporary legends and slasher films? What are their thoughts on the depiction of gender in both sub-genres? Finally, I conclude the study by discussing the findings of earlier chapters and pointing to directions for future investigation.

First, however, I begin by examining the history of violent entertainment that has shaped the contemporary horror legends we tell and the slasher horror films we watch. I trace the history and evolution of the slasher film and its close relationship to the horror contemporary legend. I also introduce the six contemporary legends and six slasher films that form the basis of this study.

## **Chapter 2**

### **From Oral to Visual: The Relationship Between Contemporary Legends and Slasher Films**

Grotesque and horrifying means of entertainment have been in existence for centuries. Public executions have been enjoyed in many societies over the course of time. Violent entertainment has evolved from throwing Christians to the lions to gruesome medieval woodcuttings to the gore of the Grand Guignol Theatre. Modern media provides new opportunities for the vicarious enjoyment of violence. In this chapter I examine the dozen slasher films and contemporary legends that are the focus of this study and I explain why I selected these particular examples. I introduce their plots, discuss the history of the slasher film and explore the contemporary legend's influence on this sub-genre.

While contemporary legends explore many different themes, for the purposes of this study I am focusing on a particular sub-genre of the contemporary legend in which a maniacal killer inflicts, or intends to inflict, violence against young, and predominantly female, characters. I have chosen to explore these "horror" legends within the larger contemporary legend canon because they are the legends I grew up with and with which I am most familiar. As a child I was both an audience member and a transmitter of these types of contemporary legends. Upon examination, I began to notice that the slasher films I had enjoyed as a child bore a striking resemblance to these kinds of legends. I will refer to them as contemporary horror legends throughout this study.

I have limited my focus to six contemporary legends and six slasher films. Cynthia Freeland refers to "numbers" (257) in films. She says they are sequences of



heightened spectacle and emotion (such as songs in musicals and violent murders in slasher films) that are the point of the film, forming the plot and furthering the narrative (Freeland 2000, 257-59). Since murder is a key component of the slasher film (and this sub-genre of film is called “slasher” for the act of “slashing” the victims) it was essential that the legends I selected incorporate this element as well. In five of the six legends, the murder victim is female. In all six of the legends the protagonists are female.

### **Contemporary Legends**

A contemporary legend can have many variants but in order to compare contemporary legends to slasher films for the purposes of this study, I needed to select one variant. I chose versions similar to those I have transmitted. Although there are numerous legends within the contemporary legend canon, in order to make this study manageable I have limited my selection to six: “The Boyfriend’s Death,” “The Roommate’s Death,” “The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs,” “The Furry Collar,” “The Headless Roommate” (also known as “The Decapitated Roommate” but it will be referred to by the former title throughout this study since that is the one by which I know it) and “Aren’t You Glad You Didn’t Turn On the Lights?”.

I selected “The Roommate’s Death” for its influence on other contemporary legends. Jan Brunvand considers “The Headless Roommate,” “The Furry Collar” and “Aren’t You Glad You Didn’t Turn On the Lights?” to be variants of “The Roommate’s Death” (2001:368). Gail de Vos also refers to “The Decapitated Roommate” (her name for “The Headless Roommate”) as “a variant of ‘The Roommate’s Death’ ” (320). “The Boyfriend’s Death” is unique in that it is the only one of the legends to have a male

character die. "The Headless Roommate" is significant for revealing the killer at its conclusion. "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" is a popular legend, one that was recognized by all of my informants and which filmmakers seem to keep finding inspiration from (see: *Halloween* (1978), *Lisa* (1989), *The Ring* (2002) *Scary Movie* (2000) *Scream* (1996), *When A Stranger Calls* (1979), *When A Stranger Calls* (2006)). While "The Furry Collar" was not as popular among my informants, in fact none of them recognized it, I find it to be worthy of consideration as its themes continue to emerge in slasher films. Likewise, "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn On the Lights?" shares similar themes with slasher films. And unlike the female protagonists in the other legends who are terrorized and frightened during the course of the legend, "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn On the Lights?" boasts a female protagonist who is not even aware of the danger in which she has been.

Other contemporary legends, such as "The Killer in the Backseat" (Brunvand 1999, 97; Brunvand 2001, 229; de Vos 1996, 311) or "The Man in the Back Seat" (Cohen 1980, 112), "Humans Can Lick Too" or "The Licked Hand" (Brunvand 1999, 58; Brunvand 2001, 240), "The Hairy Handed Hitchhiker" or "The Hairy-Armed Hitchhiker" (Brunvand 1999, 100; Brunvand 2001, 184) or "The Hatcher in the Handbag" (de Vos 1996, 306), "The Mutilated Shopper" or "The Slasher Under the Car" (Brunvand 2001, 388) or "Ankle Slashers at the Mall" (de Vos 1996, 128) and "The Hook" (Brunvand 1999, 94; Brunvand 2001, 199; Cohen 1980, 106; de Vos 1996, 308) also illustrate a recurring theme of women under threat of violence but since I had to keep my thesis within a manageable length, these legends were not included in my study. The six

contemporary legends selected include the murder of human beings and while these other legends do not, many of the same points can be made between those contemporary legends studied and those omitted.

With the exception of "The Furry Collar" I first heard these contemporary legends from my older brother when I was seven years old and he was eleven. He shared them with me because he knew I liked scary stories. Amongst my peers I was primarily the one who transmitted contemporary legends and my main source for the legends I told, aside from my older brother, was Daniel Cohen's *The Headless Roommate and Other Tales of Terror*. I acquired this book at the age of eleven and it was within its pages that I first read "The Furry Collar".

For the purposes of this study I wanted to use legend texts that my informants could read quickly and then discuss them immediately after, within the context of our interview. Cohen's texts are rooted in oral tradition and yet very readable and so I made abridged versions of some of the legends he includes in his book as well as texts provided in Jan Brunvand's *Encyclopedia of Urban Legends*. The Snopes website (<http://www.snopes.com>) provided me with a couple of other brief synopses. Because the primary focus of this study is a textual analysis, I was more concerned that each of my informants be exposed to the exact same text than that the examples I used be transcriptions of oral telling. That the legends were included in collections like Brunvand's and websites like snopes.com, in addition to the fact that I personally had heard them in oral circulation, was enough assurance for me that the narratives qualified as contemporary legends. In the versions I used, I purposely left out any identifying



details such as names or locations so that my informants could imbue them with their own meaning. Since my interviews took place mainly in the afternoon in an empty classroom in the Folklore department, it made recreating a spontaneous, organic legend-telling session impractical. But exposing my informants to the texts did yield some spontaneous legend transmission from several of them. The contemporary legend texts used during my interviews are as follows:

***“The Roommate’s Death”***

*Three sorority sisters had to spend Christmas in their sorority house. They cooked a big turkey together and had plenty of leftovers. One of them got hungry later that night and so she went down to the kitchen. The other two waited and waited for her to return, and began to grow worried. Then, they heard a dragging sound coming up the stairs. Terrified, they dragged a dresser over to the bedroom door. They listened to the sound of scratching against their door until it finally faded away. They cowered in their room all night and, in the morning, managed to flag down the mailman. He came in the front door, went up the stairs, and told the girls everything was all right, but that they should stay in their room. But the girls were too relieved and pulled back the dresser, opened the door – and found their friend with her throat slit. Her fingernails were worn down to bloody stumps because she had been clawing at the bedroom door. If they had just let her in, her life might have been saved.*

This variant is an abridged version of text that appears in Cohen’s *The Headless Roommate* (75-82). Cohen dates this legend’s origins to 1968 “a year or so after the real murder of nine student nurses in a Chicago rooming house” (82). Brunvand, writing in *Encyclopedia of Urban Legends*, indicates that this legend “has been told on numerous college campuses since at least 1961” (358). The contemporary legend website Snopes.com traces its origins to the early 1960s. During the course of my research I discovered much that had been written about this particular legend (see Brunvand 2001, Crane 1977, Grider 1973, Maynard 1998, Seelhorst 1987, Wachs 1990). That so much

thought has been given to it indicates to me its position of importance within the contemporary legend canon.

Key features of the narrative include three girls who stay behind in residence during a holiday (usually Christmas) and become separated. In some variants of this legend, such as Cohen's, there are only two girls and thus one girl is left to cower in fear throughout the night alone. Although I selected the one with two girls left behind, whether there is one girl or two girls does not make much difference as they perform the same function of cowering in a room and avoiding any confrontation with the killer.

The reasons for one girl leaving the room vary and can include her wanting to go get a snack or needing to use the bathroom. The girls left behind hear noises that turn out to be the scratching of the dying girl's fingernails on the door. This is similar to the dead boyfriend's nails scraping the roof of the car in the American variant of "The Boyfriend's Death" (see Glazer 1987). They discover their dead roommate's body outside their door in the morning, sometimes after summoning help from a (usually) male passerby such as a mailman or a deliveryman, indicating that they could have helped their friend if they had only opened door earlier. How the roommate is killed varies from a hatchet to the head (see Crane 1977; de Vos 1996) to a slit throat (see Cohen 1980; Crane 1977).

Brunvand says that contemporary legends such as "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn On the Lights," "The Headless Roommate" and "The Furry Collar" are all merely variants of "The Roommate's Death" featuring as they do the gruesome death of a female companion (358). Brunvand mentions a variant in which the killer is discovered sitting in



a rocking chair holding the dead girl's severed head (359). This is similar to "The Headless Roommate" described below.

***"The Headless Roommate"***

*A girl went out on a date one night while her roommate stayed home. When the girl returned, her roommate was in bed all covered up so she didn't turn on any lights but just got ready for bed. Then her roommate started humming. For awhile, she just ignored it, but she finally grew too annoyed and asked the girl if she would please be quiet because she was very tired and wanted to get to sleep. But the roommate kept humming. Finally, the girl became angry, went over and pulled the covers off of her roommate, only to find her decapitated corpse lying there. But there was still humming. She looked over and standing by the door was a large man in a prison uniform holding a butcher's knife in one hand and her roommate's head in the other.*

This text is abridged from Cohen, (see Cohen 1-7). "The Headless Roommate," like "The Roommate's Death," depicts violence against women with the decapitation of one roommate and the impending death of the second. It is also the only contemporary legend I encountered in which the female protagonist sees the killer. As to the history of this legend, it is present in Cohen's 1980 book and in fact gives it its title *The Headless Roommate and Other Tales of Terror*. de Vos considers it a variant of "The Roommate's Death" and calls it "The Decapitated Roommate," describing it as a "reversal of the traditional legend, the girl who leaves the room is safe while the one who stayed behind the locked door is not" (320). Brunvand also treats this as variant of "The Roommate's Death," "in which the murdered girl's head...is discovered lying in the lap of the insane killer who is sitting in a rocking chair" (359). In Cohen's variant the killer is standing in front of door, blocking the remaining girl's exit (7).

Key features of this narrative include two female roommates, one who is out on date while the other stays home; humming; the surviving roommate's discovery of the



decapitated corpse and her subsequent discovery of killer holding the dead girl's severed head. It employs the same reverse victimization of "The Roommate's Death" used in "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn On the Lights?" in that the girl left behind is the first victim (although in the latter she is also the only victim).

***"Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn On the Lights?"***

*A girl was studying late and went back to her dorm room to get some books or notes. So she wouldn't disturb her roommate, she didn't turn on the lights when she got her stuff off of her desk. Later when she went back to her room, she found her roommate lying dead in a pool of her own blood. A note was written in blood on the mirror. It said, "Aren't you glad you didn't turn on the lights?"*

This text is taken from the website Snopes.com

(<http://www.snopes.com/horrors/madmen/lighton.asp>) with one minor modification.

Borrowing from other variants, I changed the writing of the note from lipstick to blood. I feel blood is more effective as it presents a more frightening image. Brunvand says the message is written in lipstick or blood (187) and is a later version of "The Roommate's Death." He explains that, "There are still two female college roommates, one of whom leaves the room, but now the victim becomes the girl left behind" (Brunvand 2001, 358). Out of all the surviving female protagonists in the contemporary legends I have selected, it is in this legend that she unknowingly has the closest encounter with the killer as she is in the room when the murder is occurring.

Key features of this legend include two roommates, (one of whom stays at home while the other goes out on a date or to the library) and the absent roommate returning (either for the night or to pick up a sweater or book) but not turning on the light. She does not want to disturb her roommate because she is just stopping by briefly or because she

believes her roommate to be asleep or because she hears noises and thinks her roommate is in bed with a companion. Upon her return she finds police investigating the murder or else she discovers the corpse in the morning. It is at this point she also finds the message "Aren't you glad you didn't turn on the lights?" written on the mirror in lipstick or in blood.

It is similar to "The Headless Roommate" in that the girl who stays at home alone is the victim. It is also closely related to "Humans Can Lick Too" (see Brunvand 1999; 2001), in which a nervous girl home alone hears strange dripping noises and so sticks her hand under her bed for reassurance from her pet dog, who she believes is licking her hand. But upon entering the bathroom she finds the source of the dripping sound that has plagued her – it is her dog's gutted corpse hanging from the shower, with the words "Humans can lick too" written in blood on the bathroom mirror. (This is also similar to the dripping of the boyfriend's blood on the car in "The Boyfriend's Death," discussed below, and even the dying roommate's fingers clawing at the door in "The Roommate's Death," as discussed above.)

Brunvand links this contemporary horror legend to, "a classic folk narrative motif (F1036, *Hand from heaven writes on wall*). It also appears in the Bible (Daniel 5:5)" (187). Snopes.com found it to be widespread in 1997 (<http://www.snopes.com/horrors/madmen/lighton.asp>). It was popularized in 1998 when a variant of it was depicted in the film *Urban Legend* (1998) with a girl sleeping with headphones on to block out what she believed to be the sound of her roommate having



rough sex. In the morning she discovered her roommate's corpse and the blood-written message on their mirror.

### ***"The Furry Collar"***

*Two girls were home on vacation from school and were staying alone in one of the girls' homes. It was storming and the electricity went out. While they were lying in bed upstairs, in the dark, they heard a noise. One was frightened, but the other jumped out of bed and put on her robe. The robe had a furry collar around the neck. She went downstairs. Quite a bit of time elapsed and the girl upstairs got more and more frightened. At last she heard the shuffle of feet coming down the hall. At first she was relieved and then she began to worry that it might not be her girl friend, but someone else. She finally decided that when the person came in she would reach up and touch the person's neck and if she felt the furry collar, she would know it was her friend. The steps came closer and closer. The door creaked open and at last the person was right next to her. She reached with both hands and felt the fur and then touched a little higher. All she felt was a bloody stump where her friend's head had been . . .*

This variant was collected from the website Snopes.com, where it is listed as appearing in Duncan Emrich's 1972 collection (<http://www.snopes.com/horrors/gruesome/furry.asp>). Another variant is present in Cohen's *The Headless Roommate and Other Tales of Terror*. Prior to finding a variant on Snopes.com, Cohen's version of "The Furry Collar" was the only one I was familiar with. None of my informants recognized it. I have selected it for this study because although it may seem to be an obscure legend, at least amongst my informants, it still contains murder and violence against women.

Key features of this contemporary legend include two girls alone in a house at night (one girl is the other's guest); the hostess wearing a robe with a furry collar; and strange noises, which the hostess investigates. It concludes with the guest reaching up to feel the furry collar – and instead feeling a bloody stump. This discovery of the corpse



can also be found in “The Roommate’s Death” and “The Boyfriend’s Death” while decapitation is a common element in both “The Headless Roommate” and “The Boyfriend’s Death”. It also bears further similarity to “The Roommate’s Death” by having female characters who are isolated together and then separated from each other after hearing noises.

### ***“The Boyfriend’s Death”***

*A young couple run out of gas in the middle of nowhere. The guy says he’ll go to get gas and that she should lock the door and wait inside the car. When he doesn’t come back for a long time, the girl panics and cowers in the backseat. She hears a scratching noise on the roof and a dripping sound all night long. At dawn, she hears a car arrive. It is the police, beckoning her to leave the vehicle. They caution her not to look back, but she does anyway and there is her boyfriend’s lifeless body hanging upside down from a tree branch, his fingernails scratching against the roof and his blood running down the windshield. Her hair turns white from the shock.*

This text is an abridged version taken from Brunvand’s *Encyclopedia of Urban Legends* (44-5). This contemporary legend is distinct in that it is the only one to feature the murder of a male character. The female remains alive but traumatized. According to de Vos, this particular contemporary legend emerged “during the period of increased sexual freedom in the 1960s and 1970s” (298). Brunvand narrows this range of time, saying that it was first collected in the United States during early 1960s (45). Barbara Mikkelsen at Snopes.com is even more specific, claiming that the earliest documented instance of this legend was its collection from a freshman at University of Kansas in 1964 and it became so widespread that by the 1970s a version existed in Malaysia (<http://www.snopes.com/horrors/madmen/boyfriend.asp>). Mikkelsen also speculates that its origins (as well as those of “The Hook”) might lie in the real life Texarkana Lover’s

Lane murders in 1946 (<http://www.snopes.com/horrors/madmen/boyfriend.asp>; <http://www.snopes.com/horrors/madmen/hook.asp>), during which a serial killer who was never apprehended shot five victims to death and seriously injured three others.

Brunvand says this contemporary legend “migrated to Europe, where a characteristic detail is that the killer has decapitated the boyfriend and is sitting on top of the car bouncing the head on the roof” (45). Mark Glazer believes the European version features a couple who is married, or at least engaged, and that they run out of gas while driving on deserted road, not while parking (94). This legitimizes the couple’s relationship in that they are not just adolescents out getting their sexual thrills in the middle of nowhere but rather a respectable adult couple.

The key features of the narrative include a couple who become stranded in a car together because they have run out of gas; the man leaves the woman to go get gas; and strange noises on the roof of the car frighten the woman. In the American version the police warn the female not to look back but she does and finds the male’s corpse hanging over the car. Her hair often turns white from the shock of the discovery. In the European version a maniac bangs the man’s severed head on the car and a bag or box containing the man’s head is later discovered by the female or the police.

Brunvand says that some versions use the element of a warning on the radio of an escaped maniac, an element also present in “The Hook” (45). In “The Hook” a young couple are in the midst of parking at Lover’s Lane when a warning is broadcast on the radio of an escaped maniac with a hook for a hand in the vicinity. Frightened, the girl begs to leave and the angry young man drives off in a burst of speed only to discover a



bloody hook in the passenger side door. de Vos also notes that “The Boyfriend’s Death” is similar to “The Hook” in function, structure, setting and content with a couple that is isolated and interrupted (by running out of gas in “The Boyfriend’s Death” and by a radio announcement of an escaped maniac in “The Hook”); the boyfriend leaves the area (by himself in “The Boyfriend’s Death” and by car with the girl in “The Hook”); and both narratives have a frightening climax (the discovery of the dead boy in “The Boyfriend’s Death” and of the hook in the door in “The Hook”) (302).

#### ***“The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs”***

*This teenager was babysitting two young kids. They were already in bed when she arrived. Shortly after, she started getting these disturbing phone calls – a man breathing heavily and using obscene language. She called the operator and asked to have the calls traced. Then, she went upstairs to check on the children. It looked like they were sleeping, but as she got closer, she saw that their throats were slit. The phone rang again. It was the operator calling to tell her to get out of the house as quickly as possible because the calls were calling from the upstairs extension. She dropped the phone but she could already hear footsteps behind her. And then she felt the cold press of steel against her neck...*

This text is also abridged from Cohen, (17-22), although he calls it “The Babysitter and the Telephone”. While I am aware of variants in which the babysitter survives or even goes insane, I selected this particular one because of its implied violence against the legend’s female protagonist, concluding as it does with the babysitter meeting certain doom.

Snopes.com says, “like several other adolescent horror legends, seemingly originated (or at least was first collected) in the early 1960s” (<http://www.snopes.com/horrors/madmen/babysit.asp>). Brunvand reports that it was “widely told since the early 1970s” (28). This legend was depicted in the opening twenty



minutes of the 1979 film *When a Stranger Calls*. The 2006 remake of the same name makes the entire plot of the film a depiction of this contemporary legend with a young babysitter terrorized by phone calls and then by the killer himself. However, both of these films were preceded by the 1974 film *Black Christmas* (which was also remade in 2006) in which a group of sorority sisters were terrorized by phone calls coming from a killer inside their sorority house.

Among the key features of this narrative are disturbing phone calls received by a young babysitter who then has them traced (usually by the operator but occasionally by the police) and is informed that the calls are coming from inside the house. Details vary according to the variant: whether or not she lives, how many calls and content of them, how many kids there are and whether or not they live.

### **Slasher Films**

Along with selecting six contemporary legends, I chose six slasher films for analysis. These I picked for their significance within the genre. They are: *Black Christmas* (1974), *Halloween* (1978), *Friday the 13th* (1980), *Happy Birthday To Me* (1981), *The Slumber Party Massacre* (1982) and *April Fool's Day* (1986). With the exception of *Black Christmas*, which I viewed for the first time during the course of this study, I watched each of these films in darkened basements when I was a child. Usually my older brother, but occasionally my childhood best friend, shared the experience with me.

The often-overlooked *Black Christmas* was the earliest prototype of the slasher film because its plot revolved around a series of grisly murders and included an unseen

killer, young female victims and point of view camera shots that appeared to stalk the killer's intended victims. However it is *Halloween* that has invited much analysis from film scholars and fans alike (see Clover 1992; Crane 1994; Dickstein 1995; Dika 1987; Harper 2004; Neale 1984; Rockoff 2002; Wood 1984) as it set the mold for the subsequent slasher trend in horror films with the introduction of an unstoppable masked killer and a lone female who is able to fight back. *Friday the 13th* took the formula of isolated teenagers and a faceless killer and upped the ante by exaggerating the gore content and increasing the body count. *Happy Birthday To Me* included a female killer and was the first to incorporate a double-twist ending. *The Slumber Party Massacre* was the supposed feminist response to the slasher film and *April Fool's Day* took the genre and subverted it by making all of the film's murders an elaborate practical joke.

*Black Christmas* was filmed in Toronto, Ontario in 1974 and starred Olivia Hussey as Jess and Margot Kidder as brash and brazen Barb. Andrea Martin, who would go on to find fame on the Canadian television sketch comedy series *SCTV* (1976), also appears as ill-fated sorority sister Phyl. A group of sorority sisters are celebrating the beginning of Christmas holidays with one last party before they go their separate ways for the holiday season with Jess, Barb, Phyl and housekeeper Mrs. Mac remaining behind. But in the midst of the festivities, they begin to be plagued by disturbing anonymous phone calls. One by one the girls go missing, each death punctuated by a phone call, until only Hussey's Jess remains.

When the body of a 13 year-old girl is found in the park near the sorority house, the police begin to take the phone calls seriously and tap the line, which leads to Jess

being warned that the calls are coming from inside the house. Because she is in the process of breaking up with her boyfriend, suspicion is cast upon him and a final showdown between the couple results in his death. The police come to Jess's aid and at the movie's conclusion she is resting alone in her room when the phone calls begin again. Jess has been left alone in the house with the killer.

It is *Black Christmas* that introduced the use of a camera angle from the killer's point of view, with the film's opening shot tracking the path that the killer takes into the house and up to the attic. However, it is *Halloween* that is often credited with this. The viewer never gets a clear shot of the killer's face but instead hears his heavy breathing. Neither the killer's identity nor his motivation for killing are ever revealed during the course of the film. There is little gore as all but the first murder (asphyxiation by plastic bag) occur off camera. This film is significant for its use of several elements that would become mainstays of the slasher genre: young female victims, confrontation between a lone female and the killer, use of a single location for the majority of the murders, discovery of the corpses, and the killer remaining at large. *Halloween* would employ all of these techniques to its advantage.

Released in 1978, John Carpenter's *Halloween* has become a horror classic. It begins on Halloween night in the town of Haddonfield, Illinois in 1963 when a teenage girl is more interested in seducing her boyfriend than supervising her younger brother. *Halloween* employs the same camera technique as *Black Christmas* did in its opening, using a point of view shot of an unseen killer murdering the teenage girl. The camera



pulls away to reveal the identity of the killer – six year-old Michael Meyers. Fifteen years later he escapes from a mental institution with his psychiatrist, Dr. Loomis, in hot pursuit. Meanwhile back in the town of Haddonfield, Annie, Lynda and Laurie are preparing for Halloween. Annie and Laurie both have babysitting jobs while Lynda intends to see her boyfriend, Bob. Over the course of the evening, Annie, Bob and Lynda are killed onscreen but the gore is again minimal, with only Bob being stabbed. Michael uses his hands to strangle Annie and a phone cord to choke Lynda. Laurie discovers their corpses and must flee from Michael and protect the children. Although she fights back with a knitting needle in the living room and a coat hanger in the closet, eventually it is Dr. Loomis who saves her by firing several shots into Michael, sending him toppling out the second-story window to the ground below. When Dr. Loomis glances over the edge, Michael is gone.

*Halloween* is significant in its introduction of the masked, almost undefeatable killer. He is strong, silent and seemingly able to be everywhere at once, leaving the viewer unsure of when he will strike next. This type of “superkiller” would become an important element in several slasher film series including most of the *Friday the 13th* series with Jason Voorhees.

*Friday the 13th* increases the number of teenage victims and the amount of gore, thanks in no small part to make-up artist Tom Savini, a man synonymous with horror film special effects. The film also increases the isolation of the setting, occurring in a remote summer camp. Like *Halloween* before it, *Friday the 13th* opens with a preface set in 1958 – two young counselors are killed before the opening credits. The scene moves

ahead to “the present day” (the film was released in 1980) where a new group of young counselors are preparing to open camp. On her way up to Camp Crystal Lake, Annie hitchhikes a ride with a faceless stranger and is chased into the woods and slaughtered. Back at camp, Ned, Bill, Brenda, Marcie, Jack and Steve are killed in a variety of gory manners until only Alice is left alive to discover the bodies. Hysterical, she collapses in relief at the sight of Mrs. Voorhees, whose insane ramblings reveal her to be the killer. She is seeking revenge for the drowning death of her son, Jason, at the camp many years ago. Alice manages to decapitate her but is pulled into the water by the disfigured corpse of Jason. However, Alice lies safe and sound in a hospital bed, presumably brought to safety by the police who have no idea about the existence of the boy in the lake she keeps insisting is real.

*Friday the 13th* employs the surprise revelation of the killer’s identity that became a popular feature in slasher films, as well as the element of the killer murdering out of a need for revenge. It is the only film in the series not to have Jason Voorhees as the murderer. He emerges in the sequel and in all subsequent films in the series as a masked, hulking superkiller. Clearly this was influenced by the success of Michael Meyers in the *Halloween* series. The murders in the film were all committed without ever showing the killer’s face or body. Viewers are treated to the sight of gloved hands, a flash of a plaid shirtsleeve, heavy work boots, all designed to lead the audience to believe the killer must be male. *Happy Birthday To Me* also employs this twist ending, but adds a further, albeit far-fetched, wrinkle to it.

Released in 1981, *Happy Birthday To Me* starred Melissa Sue Anderson from the television series *Little House on the Prairie* (1974) and Glenn Ford who, like Donald Pleasance in *Halloween*, plays a psychiatrist. Like both *Friday the 13th* and *Black Christmas*, the film does its best not to reveal the identity of the killer until the surprise ending. Black gloved hands and point of view shots lead the viewer to assume the killer is male. Anderson stars as Virginia, a teenage girl who attends an elite private school and is part of an exclusive clique that dubs itself the Top Ten (and just happens to include a skilled mask maker). It is revealed in flashbacks during the film that the Top Ten had snubbed a birthday party of Virginia's, resulting in a car accident that took the life of her mother and left her suffering from blackouts. Frequent flashbacks are made during the film to the mysterious, and gory, brain surgery she underwent. As Virginia's birthday once again draws near, the bodies pile up and she begins to question her sanity.

Although the killer's face is never shown, the victims seem to be familiar with their assassin, which serves to further fuel the audience's suspicion of Virginia until the film's grim climax when Virginia's father stumbles upon the killer herself – and it appears to be Virginia, hosting a gruesome birthday party at which all of her friends' corpses have been assembled. His corpse soon joins the crowd and then, in the film's first twist, one of the corpses comes to life. It is a previously unconscious Virginia coming face-to-face with her mirror image. Is she suffering from multiple personality disorder? Does she have an insane identical twin? As it turns out, in the film's second, and final, twist, the killer is revealed to be none other than her best friend Ann, sporting a Virginia mask. Ann is seeking an elaborate revenge against Virginia because Virginia is the



product of an extramarital affair between her mother and Ann's father, which broke up Ann's parents' marriage.

*Happy Birthday To Me* is noted for its "stunt" casting of good girl Melissa Sue Anderson as the killer and Glenn Ford as the sympathetic psychiatrist and also for its twist-within-a-twist ending. Along with *Friday the 13th*, it remains one of the few slasher films to feature a female killer. It contains more gore than *Halloween* or *Black Christmas* but not as much as *Friday the 13th*. Surprisingly, there are none of the slasher film clichés of drugs, sex, or nudity.

*April Fool's Day* also uses the female killer/insane identical twin twist. Muffy has invited her closest friends to spend the weekend at her family's summer home. One by one they begin dying until only Kit and her boyfriend remain to face off with the killer. Through a series of clues, they discover that Muffy has an identical twin sister, Buffy, who has been institutionalized, and they suspect that it is she who is on the rampage. A showdown between Kit and Buffy results in the big reveal that she is really Muffy playing the role of a non-existent identical twin and in fact all of their friends are alive and well in the next room. The whole weekend has been an elaborate ruse designed as a test run for a murder mystery weekend Muffy hopes to run as a business.

Although everyone is alive and well, there is yet another pseudo-twist to the ending, designed to give the audience one last shiver. One of Muffy's friends, Nan, is not so pleased to be the victim of an April Fools' weekend prank and so creeps up behind Muffy at the film's end and runs a knife across her throat, releasing a flow of blood. But it is only a trick knife spouting fake blood designed to give make Muffy think she had

been cut. A jack-in-the-box is wound up sinisterly but pops up harmlessly and the film ends with one last teasing “boo” as Nan gives Muffy a kiss on the cheek.

The role of Kit is played by Amy Steel, who also played the lone surviving female of *Friday the 13th Part 2* (1981), and the film’s director is Fred Walton, who also directed *When A Stranger Calls* (1979) (a horror film based on the contemporary legend “The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs”). *April Fool’s Day* is significant for being a clever spoof of the horror film genre and this is also what provides the film with its “twist” ending. Although the murders turn out to be fake, the film is still notable for its use of a female faux-killer.

The 1982 film *The Slumber Party Massacre* was supposedly written as a parody of the slasher genre but it comes off as soft-core pornography. Written by feminist writer Rita Mae Brown and boasting a female director, Amy Holden Jones, this film was hailed as a feminist response to the slasher film.

When her parents go out of town, Trish decides to hold a slumber party for the members of her girls’ basketball team, but new girl Valerie, who conveniently lives across the street from Trish, overhears Diane making fun of her and so refuses Trish’s invitation. Meanwhile escaped murderer Russ Thorn is on the loose and makes his way to Trish’s house where he kills a pizza boy and eventually drills his way inside, beginning to attack the girls. Coach Jana comes to the rescue, but she is met with a drill to the chest. When Valerie begins to notice strange goings-on at Trish’s house, she and her little sister Courtney head over to investigate. Valerie, Trish and Courtney are in the house with the killer and battle it out to the pool in the backyard, where the injured killer is presumably



drowned. But in typical slasher style, he rises from the water to attack once again. Valerie manages to impale him on a machete and the movie reaches its conclusion.

The killer has no motivation for his killings, he kills simply because he is a killer. Trish's friends are slasher film stereotypes – slutty Diane, dumb blonde Kim, token African American Jackie - while Valerie is the virginal good girl who survives the film. Surprisingly, so does the often undressed Trish. *The Slumber Party Massacre* is notable for its female writer and director and its use of excessive gratuitous nudity. Such excess set the stage for subsequent plot-and-clothing-free slasher films, (see *The Dorm That Dripped Blood* (1982), *Sorority House Massacre* (1986), *Sleepaway Camp 3: Teenage Wasteland* (1989)) that seemed to become a staple of the glut of sequels and straight-to-video releases and served to bring about the decline of this sub-genre. However, the very fact that this horror sub-genre once flourished demonstrates that we do indeed enjoy violent entertainment.

### **Violence in Entertainment History**

Our enjoyment of violent entertainment is not without precedent. Adam Rockoff and Kenneth MacKinnon both find the slasher film to be rooted in Paris' Grand Guignol Theatre. Located at 20 Rue Chaptal, it flourished from 1897 until it closed its doors in 1962. Rockoff says that "The Theater of the Grand Guignol was the earliest modern antecedent of the slasher film" (24), dramatizing fictional gruesomely violent atrocities for sixty-five years. According to MacKinnon, productions were based on gore not drama and done for shock effect with themes of pain and terror. Theatre attendance declined after World War II and Rockoff believes this is because the atrocities of the theatre had



been brought to life with the concentration camp horrors of the Nazis. People no longer wanted to see dramatizations of simulated gore and violence – it paled in comparison to reality.

Violence has always been entertaining to the senses. Humanity has turned its eyes to public executions and its ears to oral folk tales. As Harold Schechter points out in *The Bosom Serpent: Folklore and Popular Art*, violence was prevalent in the tales the Grimm brothers collected (2). It remains a part of the stories we tell today, as evidenced by the film industry in general and the slasher film in particular.

Although the content of the slasher film includes more gore and more violence than that found in the contemporary legend, this is not necessarily indicative of our society's decaying morality. As Schechter says, "If these films prove anything at all, it is not that our tastes or morals have degenerated but simply that popular techniques for stimulating violence have come a long way since the wood engraving" (84).

Schechter says that in the Victorian era the *Illustrated Police News* printed pictures of murderers and of executions (83). He goes on to describe the 1893 Edison Company kinetoscope short film *The Execution of Mary Queen of Scots*. Only thirty seconds long, it is a stop motion film showing a costumed actress stepping up to the block. She is then replaced by a dummy and decapitated. The progression from tabloid, such as *Illustrated Police News*, to short films, such as *The Execution of Mary Queen of Scots*, to slasher film, such as *Friday the 13th*, "suggests that the history of popular entertainment consists, to a large extent, of the ongoing efforts of its creators to find new

and increasingly realistic ways of showing people being cut to pieces and killed” (Schechter 2001, 157).

Carol Clover discusses her belief that slasher films have been influenced by Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960) in her book *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Adam Rockoff goes so far as to call *Psycho*, “the first true slasher film” (24). Although I agree that *Psycho* has influenced the slasher film, I do not agree that it is a slasher film. *Psycho* is a film about a man, played by Anthony Perkins, who dresses up as his dead mother and kills the young woman, played by Janet Lee, staying in his hotel by stabbing her to death in the shower. While on the surface they may appear to share some features, Hitchcock’s intelligent, artistic psychological thriller differs from the cheaply produced gruesome slasher film.

Clover claims that *Psycho* set up the template for the slasher film by creating several of its key features (28). There is the recognizably human, although psychotic, killer in the form of Norman Bates and a beautiful, sexually active young woman as the victim in the form of blonde Marian Crane who has been having an affair. Hitchcock also uses a location that is not-home, an isolated Terrible Place, with both the hotel that is off the main highway and the crumbling Victorian home that hovers on the horizon. Then there is the killer’s use of a weapon that can be anything other than a gun, and in this case is a famously wielded butcher’s knife. And finally there is an attack from the victim’s point of view that is shocking in its suddenness and in the use of effects such as the blood splattering down the drain and her lifeless corpse. Although these features can be applied

to contemporary legends as well as slasher films, in so doing we shall see that they really share only a superficial similarity to *Psycho*.

First, Clover mentions the recognizably human psychotic killer. There is nothing in the texts of the six legends used in this study "The Boyfriend's Death," "The Roommate's Death," "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs," "The Furry Collar," "The Headless Roommate" and "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn Out the Lights?" to indicate that the killers are not human and their very actions define them as psychotic. *Black Christmas*, *Friday the 13th*, *Happy Birthday To Me*, *The Slumber Party Massacre*, *April Fool's Day* and *Halloween* all have murders whom we can recognize as human. Although Michael Meyers seems to be superhumanly strong and unstoppable, he still has two legs, two arms, a head and a torso. The extreme violence exhibited by the killers may seem inhuman, but it also exposes them as psychotic. However, unlike Norman Bates, who is institutionalized at the end of *Psycho*, none of these killers are ever apprehended. They remain at large in each of the legends, as well as in *Halloween* and *Black Christmas*. The killer never really existed in *April Fool's Day* and in *Happy Birthday To Me*, *Slumber Part Massacre* and *Friday the 13th*, the killers are themselves killed.

Norman Bates's first victim, Marian Crane, is reasonably young and beautiful. However, she is not as young as the typical contemporary legend or slasher film victim. But Bates's second victim is middle-aged insurance investigator Milton Arbogast. Although we cannot know what the victims in the half dozen contemporary legends look like, we do know that they are young since all are described as teenagers or at most, university-aged students. With the exception of the male boyfriend in "The Boyfriend's



Death” and the unidentified sex of the child victims in “The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs,” the remaining five victims in the contemporary legends are female. The majority of the victims in the six slasher films are all young, either in high school or university, and reasonably attractive. Working woman Marian Crane and middle-aged Detective Arbogast are hardly teenagers nor are they university-aged.

Clover also points to location. *Psycho*’s house and motel were off the beaten path, creating a sense of isolation and the Terrible Place, making the known unknown. This is also true of the dozen locations used in the legends and the films that can transform something as familiar as a girl’s dorm room or as tranquil as a summer camp into an alien and terrifying place.

Houses become places of entrapment in legend and film including “The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs,” “The Furry Collar,” “The Headless Roommate,” *Black Christmas*, *Halloween*, and *The Slumber Party Massacre*. Campuses, summer camps, cabins and the great outdoors become scenes for slaughter in “The Roommate’s Death,” “Aren’t You Glad You Didn’t Turn on the Lights,” *Happy Birthday To Me*, *Friday the 13th*, *April Fool’s Day* and “The Boyfriend’s Death”. The characters are isolated from the surrounding world and there appears to be no escape. Making the familiar unsafe adds to the terror of these tales. Suburbia or summer camps are places where we *should* feel safe. However, they lack the looming physical menace of *Psycho*’s crumbling Victorian home and all but abandoned Bates Motel, which are not comfortable, familiar settings.

Clover’s next point is that any weapon is used other than a gun. Bare hands and sharp blades seem to be the most common methods of murder chosen in film and legend.

In each of the contemporary legends, sharp weapons appear to be the favoured means of murder, with death by decapitation occurring in "The Furry Collar" and "The Headless Roommate". A butcher's knife is specified as the weapon in "The Headless Roommate". Slit throats abound in "The Roommate's Death," "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" and "The Boyfriend's Death". There is no specification of the means of death in "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn On the Lights?" but the victim is described as lying in a pool of her own blood so stab wounds can be assumed since no gunshot wounds are mentioned, nor did the survivor hear any shots.

The killers in slasher films prefer the hands-on approach to killing, coming within touching distance of their victims to murder them with their bare hands or with a weapon that requires close proximity to their victim. Using a sharp implement also allows for more gore displayed in gaping, open wounds and mangled body parts. The first victim in *Black Christmas* is suffocated using a plastic bag; another girl is stabbed with the sharpened horn of a unicorn ornament. Aside from stabbing, Michael Meyers chooses to strangle in *Halloween*, using his bare hands on Annie and a phone cord on Lynda. *April Fool's Day* never shows any murders onscreen but implies hanging and stabbing. The aptly named driller killer in *The Slumber Party Massacre* is noted for being one of the few slasher killers to employ a power tool - an electric drill. Improved technology meant an increase, although not necessarily an improvement, in the amount of special effects and filmmakers had to devise increasingly creative means of death. Characters are dispatched of with increasing gore in *Friday the 13th* including a hatchet to the head, a screwdriver through the throat and a mishap on the archery range, while *Happy Birthday*



*To Me* boasts some of the most imaginative murders including crushing a bodybuilder with his own weights and impaling another teen with a shish kabob. These murders are far more creative than the straightforward stabbing scene in the shower of *Psycho*. However that scene is, as Clover points out, shocking in its unexpectedness.

The murderous action of the contemporary legend is similarly shocking in its suddenness and in the description of its aftermath. It is the discovery of the corpses that make each legend so gruesome. In "The Boyfriend's Death" his corpse is hanging over the car with his blood dripping onto the windshield. The surviving females of "The Roommate's Death" make the grim discovery of their sorority sister's dead corpse with slit throat and fingers worn to bloody stumps. The lone female in "The Furry Collar" actually makes contact with her friend's bloody, headless stump while the roommate in the "The Headless Roommate" sees first her roommate's decapitated corpse and then her roommate's head clutched in a madman's hand. The babysitter in "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" makes the tragic and chilling discovery of the dead children that were in her care and the roommate in "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn on the Lights?" must contend with her roommate's corpse in a pool of blood as well as a blood-written message.

In all six slasher films the murders occur in sudden outbursts of violence. Often the victim is stalked prior to being slaughtered, heightening the tension. Sometimes the audience is teased with the killer's voyeurism only to have him or her not strike. This is much like Norman Bates spying on Marian Crane through a peephole in the wall. In *Halloween* we see Michael prowling around several times before he actually kills any of



the teenagers. The young people in *Friday the 13th* at one point have the feeling they are being watched and two victims do not even realize the person they are greeting with a smile will soon be killing them. Most of the victims in *Happy Birthday To Me* appear to know the killer, and thus never suspect what is coming. Although most of the murders take place offscreen in *Black Christmas*, the first murder does not and is startling in its intensity as the killer attacks her when she opens her closet door. Subsequent shots of her corpse stored in the attic with the clear plastic bag still wrapped around her head are disturbing in their realism. The death scenes and corpses in *April Fool's Day* must be as realistic as possible in order to appear convincing not only to the film's audience but to its final two survivors. And the climax of *Happy Birthday To Me* relies on gory effects to produce a display of corpses seated around a table for one of cinema's more horrifying birthday celebrations. Improvements in technology allowed for slasher films to increase their violent content; thus we go from the mainly offscreen murders of *Black Christmas* and *Halloween* to the effects-laden gore splattering deaths of *Friday the 13th*, showcasing effects expert Tom Savini's work.

Although *Psycho* has a killer, a female victim, an unexpected outburst of violence and a knife blade as murder weapon, it is hardly a slasher film. Its killer is not a maniacal, almost superhuman who stalks a group of young people and kills them off one by one save for a lone female survivor. *Psycho* has only two victims as opposed to the multiple victims of the slasher film. And they are not the youthful victims that are typical of the slasher film. The murder of Marian Crane occurs fairly early in the film. The remainder of the film focuses on Detective Arbogast (who is also murdered), her sister Lila and her

lover, Sam Loomis, trying to trace her steps. The slasher film's plot is built around displaying the murders. *Psycho*'s influence can be certainly be found in the slasher film, particularly in *Halloween* with its aptly named Dr. Loomis and the casting of Janet Lee's daughter, Jamie Lee Curtis. But it is not a slasher film, and its influence is not limited to that one sub-genre but rather can be felt in the horror genre as a whole as well as in the modern thriller.

*Psycho* was not the only influence on the slasher film. Italian giallo movies also had an impact. This highly stylized, violent, gory type of film flourished in Italy from the early 1960s through the 1970s. A killer motivated either by greed, lust, hatred, or psychological disturbance attacks upper-middle class people while wearing black leather gloves. The victims are predominantly female and their murders are graphic. Giallo movies and slasher films share low production values, a silent, stalking, concealed killer, point of view shots, much gore, violent murders, and the surprising reveal of the killer's identity. Yet in spite of being low budget and exploitive, the gialli film pays close attention to cinematography, lighting, music and editing to create a film of violent beauty. Giallo filmmakers such as Mario Bava and Dario Argento are hailed as being on par with Hitchcock.

Two giallo films in particular have clearly had a strong influence on the slasher, and both are Bava films. The first is 1964's *Blood and Black Lace* in which the killers wear white material over their faces to conceal their identities. This is similar to the white Halloween mask sported by Michael Meyers in *Halloween* or the sack that covers Jason's head in *Friday the 13th Part 2* (1981). Bava's 1971 film *Twitch of the Death Nerve*, also

known as *Bay of Blood*, is echoed in 1980's *Friday the 13th*. Thirteen people are murdered in a variety of gory ways in a wooded area near a lake, including four teenagers who are camping out in an abandoned cabin. Several of the murders in this film are copied in later slasher films, most notably a hatchet to the face that is duplicated in *Friday the 13th*.

### **Contemporary Legends and Slasher Films**

In addition to being influenced by different film genres, slasher films have also been influenced by contemporary legends. *Black Christmas* is similar to "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" in that the killer lurks in the house and makes tormenting phone calls. But because it takes place during the holiday season and features a group of sorority sisters, it is also reminiscent of "The Roommate's Death". "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" received full cinematic treatment with 1979's *When A Stranger Calls*. The first third of the film is a depiction of the contemporary legend and the remainder of the film is a psychological study of the killer. Although it does not qualify as a slasher per se, it was originally intended as a sequel to *Black Christmas*. The sequel that had been in the works, about *Black Christmas*'s killer being caught and then escaping to wreak havoc on Halloween, evolved into a stand-alone film during pre-production. It came to be known as *Halloween*. *Halloween*'s working title was *The Babysitter Murders* and enacts the theme of a babysitter in jeopardy that is prevalent in "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs". And *Halloween*, in turn, opened the floodgates of the slasher film sub-genre, which continued to borrow heavily from the theme of young women alone and in danger.



Slasher film plots share similarities to the plots of contemporary legends, and I will explore this further in the next chapter using structural analysis and it is a point I return to in Chapter Five in my discussion of horror fans. In John G. Cawelti's study of formulaic structures in popular culture, he explains that, "a formula is essentially a set of generalizations about the way in which all the elements of a story have been put together" (30). Just as children enjoy the same bedtime story over and over again, adults too, find pleasure, "in certain types of stories which have highly predictable structures that guarantee the fulfillment of conventional expectations" (1). Our previous experiences with this type of formula influence our expectations of an individual version of it, such as when we see a new slasher film or hear a new variant of a contemporary legend. "The Roommate's Death," "The Headless Roommate," "The Furry Collar" and "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn Out the Lights?" all tell a similar story. Whether they are friends, roommates or sorority sisters, they are young girls staying in a house together who become separated. One gets killed while the other is left behind to discover her corpse. The same plot occurs in *The Slumber Party Massacre* when teammates are murdered in a house; *April Fool's Day* when friends are supposedly murdered in a house; and *Black Christmas* when sorority sisters are murdered in a house.

As mentioned above, *Black Christmas* is also similar to the contemporary legend "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" in that a young woman is threatened with phone calls in a house whose other occupants have, unbeknownst to her, been murdered. *Halloween* also expands this story of the threatened babysitter for two of its female characters. Laurie receives a disturbing phone call from the killer, Michael, and Annie is

killed by him while babysitting. Even though there are no children present in the film, the camp counselors of *Friday the 13th* perform a similar function to that of a babysitter and they are certainly threatened: Alice and Bill find a bloody axe in one of the beds.

Slasher films may borrow elements of contemporary legends as well as entire plots. "The Killer in the Backseat" is a contemporary legend that involves a woman driving in her car, unaware that a killer lurks in the backseat. She is usually rescued from certain death by a gas station attendant, a truck driver or her husband. During *Halloween*, Annie enters her car and notices the windows are fogged when Michael suddenly springs up from behind and strangles her to death. When Bernadette enters her car in *Happy Birthday To Me* she is attacked by someone lurking in the backseat. In the variant of "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" used in this study, the babysitter is attacked from behind. *Halloween* also employs this rear attack when Michael approaches Lynda from behind and strangles her with a phone cord. The recent remake of *When A Stranger Calls* (2006) is able to stretch the entire plot of "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" into a feature length film by employing a key feature of the slasher film – a prolonged battle between the final female (in this case the babysitter) and the killer (the man whose disturbing phone calls are traced to the very house in which the girl is babysitting). The 2005 slasher film *Cry Wolf* blends the idea of contemporary legends with modern technology, depicting the latest mode of transmission for legends – the Internet. A group of teenagers use emails to transmit a contemporary legend they have fabricated about a serial killer, only to find it coming true. Contemporary legends certainly play a strong role in these films. But what influence have slasher films had on contemporary legends?



Released in 1998, the slasher film *Urban Legend* has had a notable effect on the transmission of contemporary legends. It features various young university students being killed by means of contemporary legends, such as the young girl who is slaughtered by a killer lurking in her backseat or the girl who discovers her roommate's corpse and the blood-written message "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn on the Lights?" While this film could not exist without the contemporary legends themselves, its depiction of them has served as the variants transmitted by people who have viewed it, including several of my informants. While researching in MUNFLA, I found several interviews with informants whose familiarity with contemporary legends such as "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn On the Lights?" came from having viewed them in *Urban Legend*. Thus instead of a woman rescued by the driver behind her flashing his headlights every time the killer attempted to strike, we have a woman successfully murdered by the killer in her backseat. Thus one film has managed to influence which variants of several contemporary legends are transmitted.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed the selection of the half dozen contemporary legends and the half dozen slasher films used in this study, outlined their plots, given the history of the six contemporary legends, and also suggested some precursors of the slasher film from medieval woodcuttings to the Grand Guignol Theatre to the release of the film *Psycho*. I have also touched upon the influence of contemporary legends on slasher films and how these films choose to utilize contemporary legends to further their



plots. The depiction of contemporary legends in a film such as *Urban Legend* can influence how they are subsequently transmitted.

History shows us that humanity has always had an appetite for gore and violence. Everything from to public executions to Paris' Grand Guignol Theatre have influenced and reflected our taste for the grotesque. Be they wood cuttings or a short kinetoscope film, depictions of violence have always had their place in popular culture, and whether retold orally or reenacted onscreen, violent, scary tales have long held our fascination. Impacted by changing technology, slasher films are simply the next evolutionary step. Although I have touched upon the plots of a dozen selected slasher films and contemporary legends, the next chapter examines the structure of horror in both legends and slasher films by applying Alan Dundes's schema. I also apply Vera Dika's seventeen functions of the slasher film to contemporary legends.

### Chapter 3

#### Live Through This: Structural Analysis of Film and Legend

In this chapter I turn to structuralism as an important starting point in examining the six legends and six films selected for this study, as it allows for comparisons between the two genres to be made more easily. In her work on women in contemporary legend, Cylin Busby uses Vladimir Propp's structural analysis to first classify the legends she collected and then to study how the female characters are depicted within them.

According to Busby, structural analysis "is an essential starting point if we are to attempt a later interpretation. Structural analysis does lay the framework of the text quite bare" (17). Alan Dundes points out the importance of structural analysis for cross-genre comparison in his work on Native American folk tales in "Structural Typology in North American Indian Folktales". Borrowing from Propp's work, Dundes changes functions to motifemes and determines their sequence within a specific culture's folktales. Similarly, Vera Dika finds functions that are repeated in slasher films. In applying Dundes's and Dika's work specifically to the contemporary legends and slasher films selected for this study, I compare my selected contemporary legend texts and slasher films.

In his introduction to *Morphology of the Folktale*, Vladimir Propp defines morphology as, "the study of forms" (xxv) and applies this botanical term to the study of Russian folktales in order to discover how component parts of the tale, which he identifies as *functions*, relate to each other and to the tale in its entirety. Thus it is the structure of the tale that is being analyzed. Propp breaks the Russian folk tale down into thirty-one functions. Although all thirty-one need not always be present, their order

cannot be changed. These include: the introduction of the hero; an interdiction which is then violated; the introduction of the villain; the hero is victimized; a lack is made known; the hero leaves home and is tested; the hero acquires a magical helper; the hero combats and defeats the villain, but is marked; the initial lack is resolved and the hero returns; the hero is pursued; the hero is unrecognized; there is a false hero; the hero completes a difficult task and is recognized while the false hero is exposed; the villain is punished and the hero is rewarded. Propp's interdiction and violation of interdiction are recurring themes in contemporary legends and slasher films. Dundes examines these further in his work on North American Indian folktales, using four motifemes in place of Propp's thirty-one functions.

Dundes identifies the motifeme sequence in narratives as follows: Interdiction (a stated or implied warning not to do something); Violation (of the interdiction); Consequence (the result of ignoring the warning); and the optional motifeme of Attempted Escape, which may or may not be successful. In the narratives Dundes analyzed, the consequence forms the bulk of the narrative, and there can be more than one consequence. For example, there is an implied societal interdiction against premarital sex. Residents of a small town are advised not to be out alone after dark due to an escaped lunatic. A young, unmarried couple violates both this implied interdiction and the stated one by driving to the outskirts of town and engaging in intercourse. The consequences are numerous: they are attacked by a maniac; the boyfriend is killed; the girl is tortured; a hapless hiker who comes across them the next day is driven insane by



the sight of their mutilated bodies. This sounds much like the plot of a contemporary horror legend or slasher film.

### **Dundes's Schema in Contemporary Legends and Slasher Films**

The common theme between the legends and the films selected for this study seems to be one of a lack of supervision, or being alone. When the teen or university aged characters congregate without supervision of some sort, fatal trouble occurs. All of the legends contain an interdiction open to interpretation. Many characters in contemporary legendary venture off alone and pay for their inquisitiveness with their life. The interdiction "Do Not Venture Off Alone" can be applied to the hungry sorority sister who wanders off alone in search of a snack in "The Roommate's Death"; the hostess in "The Furry Collar" who goes off to investigate a strange noise in her home; and the boyfriend who goes off alone in search of gas in "The Boyfriend's Death". As a consequence of violating the implied interdiction and indeed venturing off alone, all three characters are killed.

One can also see "The Boyfriend's Death" as a legend about violating the implied interdiction of not being prepared. When the car runs out of gas (Violation), this forces the boyfriend to go off in search of more fuel (Consequence), ultimately leading to the death of the boyfriend (Consequence) and the traumatization of the girlfriend (Consequence). Mark Glazer says that this is a legend about "taking care of the preliminaries" (107), such as ensuring the car's gas tank is full. According to Glazer, although this legend may appear to be about inappropriate sexual behaviour, he finds it to be about the boyfriend's death due to "not giving proper attention to his car" (107).

"The Boyfriend's Death" and "The Roommate's Death" both contain a secondary interdiction about not looking back, similar to the Biblical story of Lot's wife (Gen 19:17-26). Cautioned not to look back, she does and is turned into a pillar of salt. In "The Boyfriend's Death" the girlfriend is explicitly warned by the police not to look back, but she violates this interdiction and does look back only to see her boyfriend's corpse, the consequence of which is her loss of sanity. The girls in "The Roommate's Death" are told to stay inside the room, but instead they open the door and find their friend's corpse with her throat slit and her fingernails worn down to bloody stubs. The consequence for these girls is that they must now live with the trauma of that sight as well as any guilt they may feel for not opening the door and potentially saving her life. Some variants of "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs," including the filmed version *When A Stranger Calls* (1976), involve the killer telling the babysitter to check the children. She does not, she fails to see the children, and their murders are the consequence of her oversight.

Staying home alone, whether in one's own home or someone else's, can also lead to trouble. The interdiction to not stay alone can be applied to "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn On the Lights?," "The Headless Roommate" and "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs". The consequence for the girl who violates this implied interdiction by staying alone in either her home or someone else's is death in "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn On the Lights?," "The Headless Roommate" and "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs". "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn On the Lights?" clearly states another interdiction in its title, and by obeying it and *not* turning on the lights the surviving girl



has inadvertently saved her own life, which is a far more positive consequence than for her counterparts in the other legends discussed.

The optional Attempted Escape rarely occurs in the contemporary legends. The girlfriend in "The Boyfriend's Death" opts to hide in the backseat of the car while the girls in "The Roommate's Death" barricade themselves inside their room. The female protagonists of "The Furry Collar" and "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn On the Lights?" appear not to attempt any sort of escape. It is too late for the females in "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" and "The Headless Roommate" to attempt an escape since in the former she has a knife pressed to her throat and in the latter there is a large man with a butcher's knife and a severed head in his hands blocking the doorway.

Lack of supervision occurs in all six slasher films. The consequence of this lack of supervision, a violation of the implied interdiction "Do Not Be Unsupervised," is that people begin to disappear and die. Similar to the babysitter of "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs," in *Halloween* (1978) Annie and Laurie are alone in someone else's home babysitting their children while Lynda and Bob are alone in someone else's home having sex. Although all four teenagers are targeted Laurie is the only one who Michael does not kill. Unlike her three friends she sees the killer and unlike the babysitter in the legend, she sees the children she is looking after. The young characters in the remaining five films are left unsupervised: the counselors of *Friday the 13th* (1980) are alone at camp; the sorority sisters are unsupervised in their house in *Black Christmas* (1974); the characters in *April Fool's Day* (1986) are spending the weekend on an island, isolated from the rest of society; and the girls in *The Slumber Party Massacre* (1983) are also on



their own for the night. *Happy Birthday To Me* (1981) implies that it is dangerous to be alone with Virginia, but it is really Ann it is not safe to be alone with.

It is also unsafe to mark certain occasions such as birthdays, Halloween, Christmas, April Fool's Day, Friday the 13th, or simply getting together with friends; the consequence of this is death. It is Virginia's birthday that has caused trouble in the past and in the present in *Happy Birthday To Me* while *Friday the 13th* marks the birthday of drowned Jason Voorhees. Getting together with friends proves dangerous in *April Fool's Day* and *The Slumber Party Massacre*. Whether it is Christmas itself or the opportunity the holidays provide of a practically empty sorority house, the killings punctuate the holiday season in *Black Christmas*. And Halloween marks the anniversary of Michael's initial foray in to murder. Later on in the series the town of Haddonfield bans Halloween in an attempt to stave off any more anniversary attacks from Michael, but of course this interdiction is violated and more murders occur as a consequence.

The interdiction is stated directly in three of the slasher films. Characters are warned that Michael in *Halloween* is dangerous but they do not listen and the consequence is that people die; the teenagers of *Friday the 13th* are cautioned against re-opening the camp but they do it anyway and consequently are killed; the characters should not be alone with Buffy in *April Fool's Day* but they are and so as a consequence they appear to be turning up dead.

There also seems to be a further implied interdiction against mockery of an outsider. Laurie's friends tease both her and Michael in *Halloween* and they wind up dead. The counselors mock Jason in *Friday the 13th* and it is implied they allow him to

drown because he is deformed; they later pay for this with their lives when Mrs. Voorhees kills them and the next generation of would-be camp counselors. Barb mocks the obscene phone caller, who unbeknownst to her is the killer, as well as some of her sorority sisters and is soon murdered in *Black Christmas*. In *The Slumber Party Massacre* Diane mocks new girl Valerie and is later killed after making the gruesome discovery of her decapitated boyfriend. Set as it is during the holiday of the same name, many of the characters in *April Fool's Day* make a mockery of the occasion, with the exception of Kit and Rob, who are the last two standing after everyone else's apparent murder. In *Happy Birthday To Me* some of Virginia's clique members mock her and all of them die. Ann's mockery of Alfred is meant to deflect the audience's suspicion from her. In reality, it is his mask-making skills upon which Ann depends for her Virginia disguise. Thus if an outsider is mocked, the consequence is that those doing the mocking die.

While some of the characters may attempt to escape from the killer in slasher films, they are quickly hunted down. It is only with the final female that the attempted escape becomes a prolonged battle. Laurie runs from house to house and room to room to escape *Halloween's* Michael. Alice runs around camp trying to flee from *Friday the 13th's* killer Mrs. Voorhees. Kit tries running away and then tries reasoning with Muffy in an attempt to escape death in *April Fool's Day*. Virginia attempts to flee the macabre birthday party Ann is hosting for her in *Happy Birthday To Me*. But as evidenced by Dika's final function, no one is free and no one successfully escapes.

Using Dundes's schema, we can see that the predominant interdiction in the slasher films and contemporary legends selected for this study involves lack of



supervision or being alone. When the young characters violate this, the consequence becomes the film's or the legend's main homicidal action. It is the optional motifeme of Attempted Escape that demonstrates a major difference between the legends and the films in this study. The characters rarely attempt any escape in contemporary legends but it is a major component of the slasher films, occurring when the female protagonist realizes there is no escape and so is forced to fight back against the killer. The final female squaring off against the killer is an important function of the slasher film plot but it is non-existent in the contemporary horror legend. This is because it is a device designed to heighten and increase the tension during the climax of the slasher film. It is necessary to draw out the film's ending, just as it is necessary to extend the entire plot, for while a contemporary legend can take only a few minutes to tell, a feature length slasher film must take over an hour to tell its story. Hence we have more murders, a more developed killer and a protracted battle between the female protagonist and the killer. By taking a closer look at Dika's functions, we can examine these differences between the two genres more fully.

### **Dika's Functions in Slasher Films and Contemporary Legends**

Dika's functions expand Dundes's motifemes. Because slasher films are by necessity longer than contemporary legends, they contain more of what Dika calls functions; there are seventeen of them as opposed to Dundes's four motifemes. Dika divides her functions into Past Event and Present Event, with the first four falling in the former category and the remaining thirteen in the latter. The Past Event consists of: 1.) The young community is guilty of a wrongful action; 2.) The killer sees this injury, fault



or death; 3.) The killer experiences a loss; 4.) The killer kills the guilty members of the young community. The Present Event includes: 5.) An event commemorates the Past Action; 6.) The killer's destructive force is reactivated; 7.) The killer re-identifies the guilty parties; 8.) A member of the old community warns the young community; 9.) The young community takes no heed; 10.) The killer stalks members of the young community; 11.) The killer kills members of the young community; 12.) The heroine sees the extent of the murders; 13.) The heroine sees the killer; 14.) The heroine does battle with the killer; 15.) The heroine kills or subdues the killer; 16.) The heroine survives; 17.) But the heroine is not free.

In examining the seventeen functions, there are two in particular which are similar to Dundes's motifemes: the old community warning the young, and the young people paying no heed. These bear a striking resemblance to Dundes's motifemes of Interdiction and Violation. But while Interdiction and Violation of Interdiction may be two important components of Dundes's schema, Dika considers the functions of the old community warning the young and the young people paying no heed to be optional. However, I disagree with Dika's labeling of the function of the old community warning the young people as optional. As we have already examined, there is indeed an implied interdiction regarding isolation in all of the slasher films and contemporary legends used in this study, and I believe it is one that can be applied to any slasher film. The old community represents society at large, and while the warning may not be as direct as when townspeople warn the counselors away from the camp in *Friday the 13th*, every slasher film implies that the young people should not be alone. Whenever they are, they are

murdered. This has become such a slasher film cliché that it was mocked in the self-aware 1996 slasher film *Scream* when film geek Randy explains the supposed rules for surviving a slasher film, cautioning his fellow teenaged partygoers not to venture off alone "...you can never, ever, ever under any circumstances say 'I'll be right back,' 'Cause you won't be back."

Dika says that not all of the seventeen functions either need to be, or are, present in every slasher film. I will examine how these seventeen functions can be applied to the slasher films that I have selected for this study: *Black Christmas*, *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th*, *Happy Birthday To Me*, *The Slumber Party Massacre* and *April Fool's Day*, as well as to the contemporary legends examined in this study: "The Roommate's Death," "The Boyfriend's Death," "The Headless Roommate," "The Furry Collar," "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn on the Lights?" and "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs".

### **Dika's Past Event in Slasher Films and Contemporary Legends**

As mentioned above, Dika's Past Event has four functions: a group of young people who are guilty of doing wrong; the killer witnessing this; the killer suffering a loss as a result of this; and the killer killing the guilty young people. Some slasher films show this entire Past Event, such as *Halloween*, while some open with the killer killing the guilty young people, as is the case in *Friday the 13th*. Still other slasher films open with the Present Event and flashback to the Past Event throughout, as in *Happy Birthday To Me*. In *April Fool's Day* the Past Event is somewhat vague and at the film's conclusion is revealed to be a hoax. *The Slumber Party Massacre* and *Black Christmas* stray from the formula in that they have no apparent Past Event, although the killer is an escaped

murderer in *The Slumber Party Massacre*. *Black Christmas* was released before *Halloween* set the template for a Past Event, so it is understandable that it was not influenced by this later film and thus has no Past Event. (This does not hold true for the 2006 remake of *Black Christmas*, which does include a Past Event.)

Dika's first function in the Past Event is that young people are guilty of committing some sort of wrong which causes injury or death. This is not the case in *Black Christmas* or *The Slumber Party Massacre*. In both *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th*, young people are guilty of neglecting their childcare duties in order to have sex, which in *Friday the 13th* results in the drowning death of young camper Jason Voorhees while in *Halloween* it results in Judith's murder. In both *Happy Birthday To Me* and *April Fool's Day* it seems the young people are guilty not of injuring or killing anyone but simply of existing.

The second function, the killer witnesses the injury or death (or in some cases is the injured victim), does not appear to occur in *Black Christmas*, *The Slumber Party Massacre* and *April Fool's Day*. In *Halloween*, the killer, Michael Meyers, witnesses his sister, Judith, neglecting him and watches as she and her boyfriend engage in sexual activity. In *Friday the 13th*, the killer, Mrs. Pamela Voorhees, may not directly witness her son's drowning, but she is present at the camp when it occurs because she is employed as the cook. In *Happy Birthday To Me* the killer, Ann, does not witness her father having sex with his mistress, but she certainly experiences the aftermath of his affair.



Although we are not certain of the Past Event in these three films, the third function, killer suffers loss, could be said to be present in *Black Christmas*, *The Slumber Party Massacre* and *April Fool's Day* since the killers are all insane and thus have lost their sanity. And we know that in *April Fool's Day* and *The Slumber Party Massacre* the killers were incarcerated, so they not only lost their minds but also their freedom. In *Halloween* the killer might also be said to lose his sanity, and he does ultimately lose his freedom as well, but he also loses something more intangible – his innocence. Not only through witnessing a sex act but also by committing murder, his innocence has been irrevocably shattered. In *Happy Birthday To Me* the killer suffers the loss of a stable, two-parent home and in *Friday the 13th* the killer suffers the most poignant loss of all, that of her only child.

The final function, the killer kills the guilty young people, is not apparent in *Black Christmas*. It is unclear in *The Slumber Party Massacre* and *April Fool's Day* because we do not know if that is why the killer was incarcerated in both films. There does not seem to be any connection between whomever the killer killed in the past and the young people he is killing in the present in *The Slumber Party Massacre*. And in *April Fool's Day* before it is revealed that no such person ever existed. Are we to assume that the fictitious Muffy attacked her identical twin Buffy and that is why she was committed to an asylum? *Friday the 13th* depicts this function in its opening scene when a couple of young camp counselors begin undressing each other only to have the killer attack. The male is killed instantly while the female is chased and cornered. The camera closes in on her screaming mouth and we do not see her death take place on camera, but it is referred

to later on in the film. *Halloween* begins with the entire depiction of the Past Event, featuring all four functions, including Michael's murder of his naked, post-coital older sister. And it is revealed in flashbacks throughout *Happy Birthday To Me* that the killer punished both guilty parties by causing a car accident that killed the mother and seriously injured the daughter. It is the failure to kill the daughter that leads to the Present Event.

Just as *The Slumber Party Massacre* and *Black Christmas* do not have Past Events but instead have a maniacal killer on the loose with no explanation for his actions, so do the six contemporary legends selected for this study: "The Roommate's Death," "The Boyfriend's Death," "The Headless Roommate," "The Furry Collar," "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn On the Lights?" and "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs". There is no Past Event stated or implied in the texts I chose, however when I participated in legend-telling sessions in my childhood I did hear some variants in which it was explicitly stated that a maniac had escaped from an insane asylum so we can speculate that they may have committed some sort of crime in the past and we can certainly conclude that they suffer from a loss of sanity.

The four functions that make up Dika's Past Event exist to give the killer some sort of motivation for his or her murderous rage. They help to propel the film forward and set the plot in motion. As mentioned previously, this is needed in the slasher film due its length but is unnecessary in the much briefer contemporary legend. Thus it is not important that they are not present in any of the legends in this study. However, this also means that the first few functions of the Present Event also do not occur in contemporary

legends since there is no Past Event to commemorate or to punish guilty young people for.

### **Dika's Present Event in Slasher Films and Contemporary Legends**

The Present Event comprises the majority of the slasher movie and contains thirteen functions, beginning with an event that commemorates the past action. Although there is no official Past Event to commemorate, the Present Events in both *Black Christmas* and *April Fool's Day* are built around calendar customs and I find this to be a common theme in slasher films. *Friday the 13th* has sinister connotations since it is a day of marked superstition - and also the birthday of Jason Voorhees. *Happy Birthday To Me* reaches its climax with a macabre celebration of Virginia's birthday. The events of the movie *Halloween* take place on the holiday of the same name and also mark the fifteenth anniversary of Michael's first murder. While there is no particular date on the calendar reserved for the celebration of sleepovers, slumber parties are a part of childhood and adolescence, contributing significant social interaction, and so it is that the events of *The Slumber Party Massacre* occur during such an occasion. If it is not a regularly occurring occasion such as Halloween or a birthday or summer camp then it is an event of social significance such as a sleepover or a school dance. As Jonathan Lake Crane points out, setting slasher films in instantly recognizable locales (such as summer camps or suburban homes) during simple celebrations of shared bonds (such as birthdays, sleepovers or Christmas), "entrenches the horrible deep into the mundane present" (15).

Slasher film scholar Adam Rockoff comments that slasher films are set in locations that are readily identified with adolescence, such as summer camps, high



schools or university campuses (10). The same can be said of the contemporary legends selected for this study. "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn On the Lights?" and "The Headless Roommate" take place in university residences while "The Roommate's Death" takes place in a sorority house. "The Furry Collar" and "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" both take place in houses. "The Boyfriend's Death" occurs in an isolated outdoor location and inside a car, both of which can be easily associated with teenagers, particularly as locations for adolescent sexual encounters since these usually occur in physically isolated, dark places.

Next, the killer's destructive force must be reactivated. A gathering of adolescents, particularly if it is only females, can often spur a killer into action, as is the case in *Black Christmas*. A sorority house full of females is simply too tempting a target. In *The Slumber Party Massacre* an escaped maniac specifically targets Trish, and her friends have the misfortune of being in her house on that particular night. In *April Fool's Day*, it would seem that a collection of adolescents coming to the cabin to enjoy the weekend is enough to spur psychotic Buffy into murderous action. Michael Meyer's killing spree in *Halloween* coincides with his escape from the mental institution and the fifteenth anniversary of his sister's Halloween night murder. The re-opening of Camp Crystal Lake, the site of her son's drowning years ago, incites Mrs. Voorhees to vengeful violence on what would have been her son's birthday in *Friday the 13th*. In *Happy Birthday To Me* it is somewhat more complicated. Virginia's birthday years ago, snubbed by the Top Ten in favour of a party at Ann's house, prompts her mother to confront her lover's legitimate family and eventually leads to a fatal car crash orchestrated by Ann.

But Virginia does not die and so Ann comes up with a new plan – to make her hated half sister her best friend and welcome her into the exclusive clique. The approach of Virginia's birthday once again, along with her acceptance into the clique, gives rise to Ann's bloodlust.

Once this destructive force is re-awakened, the killer must then re-identify the guilty parties. They can be survivors of the Past Event, relatives, or symbolic representations but they are always young. In the rare case when older victims are killed, it is because they had the misfortune to get in the killer's way. In all six slasher films, the killer targets a group of young people: the sorority sisters of *Black Christmas*; the basketball team members in *The Slumber Party Massacre* who happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time; a group of camp counselors who dare to partake in the re-opening of the camp in *Friday the 13th*; and a group of friends in *Halloween*, *April Fool's Day* and *Happy Birthday To Me*. The audience is given the impression that the university students in *April Fool's Day* are being targeted merely because they have the misfortune to be friends with Muffy and to be at her cabin during Buffy's homecoming. The teenagers of *Happy Birthday To Me* are victims of circumstance, killed as part of a plot to make protagonist Virginia think she is losing her mind. The reason for Michael's continued targeting of Laurie Strode is revealed in *Halloween II* (1981) She is his younger sister, secretly raised by another family in town after her parents' death to protect her from becoming a target of her brother's murderous evil.

Because there is no Past Event in contemporary legends there is nothing to commemorate. However, the madman is described as wearing a prison uniform in "The



Headless Roommate,” implying that he is an escaped inmate and the mere fact that he is now back on the loose in society seems to be enough to re-awaken his appetite for murder. Merely being in the presence of young people is enough to spur the killer into murderous action in each of the contemporary legends selected for this study. Females in particular appear to elevate the killer’s bloodlust, as there are only females present in “The Roommate’s Death,” “The Furry Collar,” “The Headless Roommate” and “Aren’t You Glad You Didn’t Turn On the Lights?”. And since there is nothing for the killer to seek revenge for, there are also no guilty parties for the killer to re-identify in any of the contemporary legends. However, the killer does select young people to target as victims in the legends by hiding out in dorms, sorority houses, or peoples’ homes.

As discussed above, the Old Community’s warning to the young people is an optional function. It is present in *Friday the 13th* when Ralph, believed to be the town drunk, warns Annie not to go to the camp and then later breaks into the pantry to warn the counselors away. The warning in *The Slumber Party Massacre* is far less explicit, appearing as a newspaper headline and two newscasts about escaped murderer Russ Thorn. Often, the warning comes too late. *Halloween’s* Dr. Loomis is able to convey the danger the town is in to Sheriff Brackett, but they are not able to warn all of the young people in time. Likewise, the policeman’s warning that the killer is in the house comes too late to save most of the sorority sisters in *Black Christmas*. Constable Potter warns the young community, via Rob, not to be alone with Muffy in *April Fool’s Day* but his warning comes after three young people have already lost their lives. I could not find any evidence of warning in *Happy Birthday To Me*.



The warning is followed by the young community's response, which is to disregard it. In *Black Christmas*, in spite of the policeman's shouted warning that the calls are coming from inside the house and so she must get out immediately, Jess heads up the stairs, calling out to her missing sorority sisters. The teenagers of *Friday the 13th* treat Ralph's warnings as the ramblings of a crazy man and have the town sheriff take him away. Rob does not communicate the constable's warning against being alone with Muffy until only he and his girlfriend remain in *April Fool's Day*. Trish ignores both the newspaper headlines and newscast warning residents about an escaped murderer in the neighbourhood and Coach Jana also changes the station on her car radio when announcers begin to discuss *The Slumber Party Massacre's* escaped murderer. And although *Halloween's* Dr. Loomis does manage to convince Haddonfield's sheriff to be vigilant, the young people are not warned in time and, in spite of his telling her to be careful, Sheriff Brackett's own daughter falls victim to killer Michael Meyers.

In the variants of the contemporary legends I chose to examine, there are no explicit warnings. However, I can recall variants of "The Boyfriend's Death" from my childhood in which there are news reports on the radio of an escaped maniac in the area. I also heard variants of "The Roommate's Death" when I was growing up in which the girls are aware that a murderer is on the loose. In one variant, it is even mentioned that their sorority house is located near a mental institution from which an inmate has fled. In spite of the implied danger behind this, the girls in "The Roommate's Death" elect to stay behind in their sorority house over the Christmas holidays and the young couple of "The

Boyfriend's Death" choose to venture out in a remote location in a car that does not contain enough gas.

Once the killer has targeted potential victims, he (or in some cases she) begins to stalk them. The camera work in the slasher film is designed to play up the stalking effect, filming from the killer's point of view to heighten the dramatic tension. We know from the very beginning of *Black Christmas* that the killer is lurking inside the sorority house and *Halloween* treats the viewer to repeated shots of Michael Meyers lurking in yards, driving by Laurie and her friends and even telephoning her. *Friday the 13th's* killer is at the campsite and plays a menacing game of cat and mouse with all four of the film's females. In *April Fool's Day* the victims are all stranded on a remote island with the killer and are picked off one by one. During *The Slumber Party Massacre* Coach Jana's neighbour mentions that a telephone repair van was outside her home (the killer had killed its previous occupant and was using it to drive around town) and we see the killer stalk Trish and then spy from the bushes outside her house, eventually trapping several characters inside.

The killer in contemporary legends watches his victims while in hiding, usually in close quarters to them. In "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" the killer stalks the babysitter through a series of disturbing phone calls before it is revealed that he is hiding inside the house. But the babysitter is not the only female in contemporary legends to find herself, much like the young people in the slasher films described above, trapped with a killer. The females in "The Roommate's Death" and "The Furry Collar" also have a killer hiding in the house with them while in "The Headless Roommate" and "Aren't You Glad

You Didn't Turn On the Lights?" the young women have a killer not merely in the house with them but in the very same room. In "The Boyfriend's Death" the killer is lurking outdoors, and must pass near the car in order to string up the boyfriend's body above it, all unbeknownst to the girlfriend hiding inside.

Murder is Dika's most important function; it is the whole point of the slasher film. While the stalking that leads up to it is significant, the blood and guts of the kill is the big payoff, and one that grew increasingly bigger as slasher films progressed. Due to their brevity, contemporary horror legends focus on one murder but the slasher film is much longer and has increased its body count over the course of time. It has also increased the number of murders depicted onscreen.

*Black Christmas* and *Halloween* have relatively low body counts and not much gore. Both films are more concerned with creating a disturbing atmosphere. *Friday the 13th* almost doubles the amount of murders from *Halloween*, but several still take place offscreen. The murders that are depicted display much more blood than those in the film's slasher predecessors. *Happy Birthday To Me* also has a higher body count but is lower on the gore, with the significance of the murders lying in the fact that the murderer is trying to make Virginia believe that she is the killer. Viewers are also teased with this given that the victims all seem to know and like their assailant and thus are caught off guard, not expecting an attack. *The Slumber Party Massacre* has the highest number of murders, with eleven people losing their lives. And although the victims are not really killed in *April Fool's Day*, the audience and the characters in the film are led to believe that half a dozen murders have occurred.



If murder is the slasher film's most important function, it is also what gives the selected contemporary legends their *raison d'être*. Although the murders are not described as they occur within the legends, the resulting corpse is a key component of the legend's plot, without which there would be no legend. These particular legends are designed to scare, as are their slasher film equivalents.

The body count is considerably lower in legend than in film; usually there is only one victim, although in the variant of "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" two children are murdered (the number of children killed, their sex and their age varies with the variant and in this particular one they are not assigned any). Of the six legend variants described, only "The Boyfriend's Death" includes a male murder victim, the rest are female. A female roommate is killed in both "The Headless Roommate" and "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn On the Lights?," while a sorority sister dies in "The Roommate's Death" and a female friend in "The Furry Collar". The deaths of the surviving female in "The Headless Roommate" and the babysitter in "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" are implied by the killer's proximity to them and the lone surviving female's fate in "The Furry Collar" is in question.

Dika describes her next function as "Heroine sees extent of murders" (100), which specifically identifies a female as being the one to discover her dead friends' corpses. I call this the *Display of Corpses*, a central hallmark of the slasher film in which the corpses are arrayed in an unusual and gruesome display. The first victim's corpse is on display in the attic in *Black Christmas* and we see the extent of the carnage when Jess peers into her slain sorority sister's bedroom to find the bloodied corpses of Phyl and

Barb. *April Fool's Day* employs the same technique, having Kit and Rob peer into their friends' room aghast, the camera allowing the audience only a peek at the corner of blood-soaked bed sheets. The couple also has the misfortune to see another friend's dead body float by them in the lake and yet another friend's body trussed up and suspended from the ceiling of his room. *Friday the 13th's* Alice discovers some of her friend's bodies at camp and stuffed inside a car and is even attacked by having her friend's body tossed through a window at her.

Other slasher films have the corpses confined to one location where the lone surviving female is trapped and confronted with the sight. *Happy Birthday To Me's* birthday girl Virginia is forced to be the guest of honour at a macabre party surrounded by the corpses of her friends and father in various stages of decomposition. Laurie is tormented with her friends' bodies in one room when she comes across Annie's corpse sprawled out on a bed with Judith Myers's headstone above it in *Halloween*. She turns around to find Lynda's corpse shoved in a cabinet and Bob's corpse suspended in the doorway, preventing her escape. Valerie and her little sister only discover one corpse in *The Slumber Party Massacre* stuffed inside a fridge, alerting them to the danger they are in.

Although *Black Christmas*, *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* let only the lone surviving female discover the corpses of her dead companions, other slasher films do not limit this discovery to the female protagonist. However, when another character is allowed to perform this function they do not live long after. Diane finds her boyfriend in his car with his head cut off, and is promptly slain while the remaining females of *The*

*Slumber Party Massacre* open the door to a pizza delivery man with his eyes drilled out. They are then killed one in front of the other until only the party's hostess, Trish, remains. Virginia's father makes the gruesome discovery of what he thinks are his daughter's victims assembled for a ghastly birthday party shortly before he is killed in *Happy Birthday To Me*. And in *April Fool's Day* Nikki and Hal discover the submerged corpses of three of their friends in a well; the two of them are among the last faux-victims of the film's pseudo-killer.

The discovery of the corpse is the climax of the contemporary legend. There would be no point in murdering the victim if the protagonist did not discover the dead body. In "The Boyfriend's Death" and "The Roommate's Death" the surviving females make the grim discovery in spite of their rescuers' cautions. Although the police tell her not to look back at the car, the girlfriend does and is effectively punished for her disobedience by seeing her boyfriend's corpse suspended over the vehicle in which she had spent the night hiding. The mailman tells the girls in "The Roommate's Death" to stay in the room but they only hear him telling them that everything is okay and are all too eager to open the door, whereupon they discover their friend dead with her throat slit.

Although for some the discovery of the corpse is a revelation of how narrowly they themselves escaped slaughter, for others it lets them know that their time is up. The surviving female in "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn On the Lights?" finds her dead roommate lying in a pool of blood and discovers just how close she came to death herself when she sees the message scrawled in blood on the mirror. But for the female protagonist in "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs," "The Headless Roommate" and



"The Furry Collar" the discovery of corpses alerts her to her own imminent demise.

Finding her roommate's decapitated corpse in bed, she turns around to find the missing head – clutched in the killer's hand in "The Headless Roommate." Decapitation is also visited upon the hostess in "The Furry Collar" and her friend finds this out by touching her bloody stump of neck. When the babysitter discovers her charges are dead, it alerts her to the fact there is a killer in the house in "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs".

Slasher films culminate in a battle between the last remaining female and the killer. In order for this to be accomplished, she must first finally see the killer. In *Halloween* after catching brief glimpses of him throughout the movie, Laurie finally comes face to face with Michael after discovering her dead friends. Immediately after seeing the corpse in the fridge, Valerie hides and sees the killer from her vantage point in *The Slumber Party Massacre*. In *Black Christmas* Jess thinks she is seeing the killer when she mistakenly believes her ex-boyfriend is the one committing the murders, but by the film's end she has yet to see the real killer who is still lurking in the house. Of the six female slasher film protagonists, Jess is the only one who fails to see the killer. Alice mistakenly believes the murdering Mrs. Voorhees to be her saviour in *Friday the 13th* but soon realizes she is in fact the killer. After picking up the various clues left around the cabin, Kit realizes Muffy is really her insane identical twin, Buffy, whom she believes is on a killing spree in *April Fool's Day*. Virginia only sees the killer when Ann reveals herself by removing her Virginia mask (and explaining the motivation for her rampage) during *Happy Birthday To Me's* climactic ghoulish party scene. Of all the women, Jess is the only one who never sees the killer.

Seeing the killer, though, is a rarity in contemporary legend. Although the killer is lurking outside the car, the girlfriend never sees him in "The Boyfriend's Death". The girls in "The Roommate's Death" never lay eyes on the killer in their sorority house. Even though the killer is in the room with her in "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn On the Lights?" the surviving roommate keeps herself in the dark both literally and figuratively and thus avoids seeing the killer and losing her life. Although she has not yet seen the killer in "The Furry Collar" she has felt his handiwork and one wonders if survivor and murderer will soon cross paths. In this variant of "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" in spite of the fact the killer is about to kill her, the babysitter never sees her murderer. Only in "The Headless Roommate" do we have a potential victim who actually sees her murderer before dying. This occurs almost immediately after she makes the grim discovery of her roommate's decapitated body, turning around to see the killer clutching her friend's severed head.

The horrifying revelation of dead companions' corpses may be the climax of horror legends, but in slasher films the climax is the female protagonist's battle with the killer. This difference between the climax of the legend and of the film is the result of the film's increased length. Essentially, the slasher film needs to fill in time, so the battle between the protagonist and the killer became a mainstay in of the sub-genre. Because Jess fails to see the killer, she mistakenly battles her boyfriend in *Black Christmas*. Kit has help from her boyfriend, Rob, in battling who they believe to be Buffy until Rob gets locked in the pantry in *April Fool's Day*. And in *The Slumber Party Massacre* Valerie has help from both her younger sister and Trish, but Valerie is the main combatant.

Laurie has an extended battle with Michael as she tries to protect the children in her care during *Halloween*, attacking him with a knitting needle, and then with a coat hanger when she gets trapped inside a closet, until Dr. Loomis comes to her aid. The remaining heroines battle it out entirely alone. There is no one left alive to come to Alice's aid as Mrs. Voorhees attacks her in *Friday the 13th*. Virginia faces Ann alone, albeit surrounded by corpses, in *Happy Birthday To Me*.

None of the heroines fight back in any of the contemporary legend variants I selected for this study. The babysitter in "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" has no chance to fight because the killer's blade is at her throat before she can move. The surviving roommate in "The Headless Roommate" has limited options as the killer is standing in her doorway with a butcher's knife. We do not know whether the girl in "The Furry Collar" has a chance to fight back or whether she even encounters the killer since the text ends with her fingers touching her friend's bloody stump of a neck. The female protagonists of all six legends are passive. The females in both "The Roommate's Death" and "The Boyfriend's Death" choose not to investigate the strange noises they hear. The girls in "The Roommate's Death" hide themselves inside a room and await rescue while the girlfriend in "The Boyfriend's Death" cowers in the backseat of the car for the night until the police come the next morning.

The result of the battle between the girl and the killer is that she subdues or even kills the killer. But as Dika points out, not every function needs to be present in a slasher film, and indeed this one is not. Although she battles someone, the last girl standing does not manage to kill or even subdue the killer in *Black Christmas*, *Halloween* or *April*



*Fool's Day*. In *Black Christmas* it is not even the killer whom Jess is battling; it is Dr. Loomis who seemingly kills Michael in *Halloween*; and in *April Fool's Day* Kit never even comes close to killing the killer because all is revealed to be an elaborate hoax. And in *Happy Birthday To Me* and *The Slumber Party Massacre* it is more a case of the killers managing to kill themselves when they both impale themselves on blades held by their intended victims; Ann, the killer of *Happy Birthday To Me*, on the knife she gave Virginia to cut the cake at her gruesome birthday celebration and Russ Thorn, the killer in *The Slumber Party Massacre*, on the machete Valerie had taken for her own protection. *Friday the 13th's* Alice manages to kill the killer when she takes an axe to Mrs. Voorhees and slices off her head.

None of the characters in any of the contemporary legend variants manage to attack, let alone kill or subdue, the killers. Given that only two actually encounter the killer (the surviving roommate in "The Headless Roommate" and the babysitter in "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs") and that of those two only one actually sees the killer (the girl in "The Headless Roommate"), there is no opportunity for a confrontation between murderer and potential victim, and thus no chance for the girl in the contemporary legend to fulfill this function.

Dika's second last function is "Heroine survives" (100) and can be found in both slasher film and contemporary legend. Jess's fate remains uncertain at the end of *Black Christmas*, since unbeknownst to her the killer remains in the house, but we never see her die onscreen before the final credits roll. Sometimes there is only one girl left standing, at other times she is not alone. Valerie, little sister Courtney and party hostess Trish all

survive Russ Thorn's fatal power drill rampage in *The Slumber Party Massacre*.

Everybody lives to tell the tale of *April Fool's Day*, but Kit and Rob believe they are the only two survivors until the film's finale. Virginia is the sole survivor of *Happy Birthday To Me*; Laurie is the only teen in *Halloween* to face Michael Meyers and survive; and Alice alone manages to live to see another day in *Friday the 13th*. And even though they may survive in one film, sometimes they are killed off in subsequent sequels in the series. Alice and Laurie fall victim to this; Alice is executed by Jason Voorhees in an act of vengeance for his mother's death at the beginning of *Friday the 13th Part II* and after eluding him through several showdowns during the franchise, Michael finally succeeds in killing Laurie at the beginning of *Halloween: Resurrection* (2002), the eighth and so far final installment in the franchise.

Although she may not be considered a heroine by definition, there is often one lone female who survives to the end of a contemporary legend. In the variant of "The Roommate's Death," there are two females who survive. A lone female survivor is present in "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn On the Lights?" and "The Boyfriend's Death". Although her fate is in question, the girl in "The Furry Collar" is alive at the end of the text. The females in the variants of "The Headless Roommate" and "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" manage to make it to the end of the narrative, but know their deaths are imminent.

In spite of her survival, according to Dika's final function this female is not free. *Black Christmas* provides a blatant example of this with the killer's presence in the sorority house – Jess is literally not free. Virginia is also about to lose her freedom at the

end of *Happy Birthday To Me* because the police walk in to find her surrounded by corpses and holding the knife upon which Ann has just impaled herself and thus implicated Virginia in all of the slayings. Sometimes the loss of freedom is more figurative than literal. Valerie cannot seem to free herself of killer Russ Thorn in *The Slumber Party Massacre* in spite of using her machete to hack off his hand, slice open his stomach and plunge him into the pool. We learn in *Slumber Party Massacre 2* (1987) that Valerie is not yet free from the traumas she endured this night and has been institutionalized. After Dr. Loomis fires several rounds into Michael and sends him plunging off a balcony, both he and Laurie believe they are free of *Halloween's* killer but a quick glance over the balcony reveals Michael's body is not to be found. *Friday the 13th's* Alice is not quite free of the Voorhees family – having dispatched of Jason's mother she finds herself attacked by Jason himself when his decomposing body rises out of the water. Kit is the only female character to be truly free at the film's conclusion since the supposed slayings were all revealed to be fake in *April Fool's Day*. However, she may not be so eager for a weekend getaway at a friend's cabin, particularly not if the invitation comes from Muffy. The audience is led to believe that Muffy's own freedom may be in danger when Nan grabs her from behind and slits her throat, but the knife is quickly revealed to be a fake one and the gag is Nan's way of seeking retribution.

Similar to her slasher film sister, the last surviving female in contemporary legends is rarely free, either. Although the girlfriend lives to see another day in "The Boyfriend's Death" she has lost her boyfriend and her mind. Likewise, the girls in "The Roommate's Death" must live with the knowledge that not only is their friend dead, but



her death may have been preventable had they simply responded and opened the door. And although keeping the lights out may have saved her own life, the surviving girl in "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn Out the Lights?" may well be plagued with guilt about not turning on the lights and potentially saving her friend. The girl's freedom in "The Furry Collar" is questionable since she may be the killer's next victim, and if she is not she must live with the memory of feeling her friend's bloody stump. The girl in "The Headless Roommate" is hardly free since she is facing a killer who is holding her roommate's severed head in one hand and a butcher's knife in the other. And the babysitter of "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" has a knife at her throat, almost guaranteeing a permanent end to her freedom.

### **Conclusion**

By applying structures such as Dundes's schema of Interdiction, Violation, Consequence and Attempted Escape or Dika's seventeen functions of the slasher film, one can see that, in spite of some differences, slasher films and horror legends tell the same story. The two sub-genres contain the same elements of a killer, predominantly young victims, a single setting and a female protagonist. An examination of the structure of each shows that differences are due to the difference in transmission between an oral narrative, which lasts only a few minutes, and a feature film, which must last eighty minutes or more. But both follow the same basic structure: a young female protagonist's friend(s) or acquaintance(s) is or are murdered; she discovers the body or bodies; she is the last survivor (although this does not necessarily mean that she will ultimately survive); and the killer remains at large.

The slasher film follows this simple structure even as it expands upon the plot of the contemporary legend. It does so in three ways: by increasing the number of murders; having the female not only survive but also battle the killer; and by making the killer a character. This is accomplished by giving the viewer camera angles that appear to be from the killer's point of view; leading the audience to believe another character is the killer; and the revelation of the killer's true identity during the film's climax. And it is how the climax plays out that highlights the difference between the contemporary legend and the slasher film.

In the contemporary legend the climax is the discovery of the corpse. At this time, the final female realizes that she is next or that she could have saved her friend if she had taken action; she often goes insane. In the slasher film the climax begins with the female protagonist's discovery of her friends' corpses. This results in her discovering the killer (or having the killer suddenly appear), which leads to a protracted battle between the two in which she appears to fend off the killer. Like the female survivor of contemporary legends, she too is traumatized.

Main differences lie in the contemporary legend's lack of a backstory (Dika's Past Event) and the slasher film's extended battle between the female protagonist and the killer. These differences are, in large part, a result of the slasher film's need to be a feature length story. Adding a battle and a backstory extends the plot, such as it is, of the slasher film. The lack of a backstory in the contemporary legend adds to the killer's air of mystery. Not only is their history and psychological makeup not described, neither is their physical appearance. Often, it is what we imagine that can frighten us even more

than what is described or depicted, and so leaving these details up to the listener can serve to heighten their fear. While structuralism highlights the differences between the horror legends and the horror films used in this study, it also serves to illustrate how similar the two sub-genres are. By examining the killer and the protagonist in more detail in the next chapter, we can see how the slasher film evolved from the contemporary legend.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Kill or Be Killed: Survivors, Killers and Victims in Contemporary Legends and Slasher Films**

Chapter Three demonstrated that slasher films and contemporary horror legends share a similar structure and thus tell a similar tale. Differences between the two sub-genres largely reflect the differences in transmission and length between a contemporary legend and a feature film. As a result of the slasher film's need to expand the story from a short oral expression into a feature length film, the female survivor of the contemporary legend becomes the female survivor who fights back in the slasher film, the killer who strikes at random in contemporary legends becomes the killer who seeks revenge in the slasher films, and the lone murder victim of contemporary legendry becomes the increasing body count of slasher films. In this chapter I explore these characters – the female protagonist, the killer and the victims – and by doing so highlight differences between the contemporary horror legend and the slasher film.

#### **Passive Women**

While I was teaching a workshop on contemporary legends to middle school children, one young girl wondered why it was almost always women who were the victims in these legends. Another female student shot back saying, essentially, that this was because the legends originated in the fifties during time of rampant sexism and inequality, and were designed to keep a woman in her place – the home. Both girls got me wondering about exactly how women were portrayed in contemporary legends.

Ann Carpenter calls the surviving woman in contemporary legends a "victimized female" (212), adding that, "She does not act heroically; rather, she passively endures her suffering" (212). Carpenter writes that, "The victimized female of legend cannot avoid her suffering and usually cannot overcome it, perhaps reflecting cultural doubts about how to solve the problems faced by modern woman" (216). Carpenter further suggests that these passive females serve as role models for young girls to emulate, conditioning them to fear and pain, whereas young boys are taught to be aggressive, which is why male characters cannot be substituted for females in most victim stories (216). In her study of "The Roommate's Death," Lara Maynard says contemporary legends such as this one reflect women's fear of violence and our subsequent shame about this fear (112).

The men in contemporary legends rarely endure as much suffering as the women. There is only one horror legend that features a male murder victim, "The Boyfriend's Death". Otherwise, it is women being left to die at the killer's hands. Men may suffer embarrassment at being caught unclothed (see Brunvand 1999, 33-4; Brunvand 2001, 430-31), farting in a room full of people (see Brunvand 1999, 34-6; Brunvand 2001, 142-3), or planning an extramarital tryst (see Brunvand 1999, 32-3; Brunvand 2001, 430-31), but their humiliation is hardly life-destroying. The woman scorned who sells her husband's car for far less than it is worth does have the last laugh, but nonetheless her husband has still abandoned her for another woman (see de Vos 1996, 116-17; Brunvand 1999, 77-9; Brunvand 2001, 316-17). In contemporary legends men can be killers or rescuers but they are rarely victims.

Carpenter calls for further inquiry into this topic:

Much more research is needed to uncover why we almost always picture our victims as being females instead of male. Moreover, we need more study to learn why we so frequently add the victimized aspect to every female image (Carpenter 1981, 215).

Maynard concurs, feeling that contemporary legends such as "The Roommate's Death" are "primarily told by females" (99), and as such should be interpreted and analyzed by female scholars. She insists that male scholars who wish to interpret them must take the time to talk to the women who tell them instead of making assumptions about women's reactions to and interpretations of these legends. In light of both Maynard's and Carpenter's words, I examine how females are portrayed in the six contemporary horror legends discussed in this study. All are weak and ineffectual when it comes to saving themselves, or their companions.

Although she is understandably traumatized, unlike the final female in the contemporary legend, the slasher film's female protagonist does manage to mount an offense against her attacker but other female characters in slasher films do not fare as well. Unlike the female victim in contemporary legends who is killed simply because she is in the wrong place at the wrong time, the slasher film's extraneous females meet a grisly death at the hands of the killer, often after engaging in sexual behaviour, alcohol, or drug use. But then, so do the males with whom they engage in this illicit behaviour.

In his study of sexist jokes as a form of male bonding, Michael A. Messner says that these jokes may allow men safe expression of their anger, explaining that, "the subordination of men at work has given rise to a male concept of freedom based on the violation of women" (92) – and certainly this violence against women is exemplified in slasher films. One might argue that films such as slashers, which depict violence against



women, treat them like brainless sex objects, and annihilate them serve the same purpose as a the sexist jokes do, which is to provide an outlet for aggression, particularly that of men directed at women. In this study, I hope to show that the violence in slasher films is indiscriminate and knows no gender.

Steve Neale sees a predominance of women in slasher films being victims of violence and aggression and finds that this is because we live in a patriarchy that subjects women to men's violence. To Neale, slasher films simultaneously assert male aggressive power and also men's fear of female sexuality. If that is the case, then men must also be afraid of their own sexuality because it is not only the female who is butchered post-coital but also her sexually active male partner. Isabel Cristina Pinedo says that, "a substantial portion of the violence that the slasher film celebrates is female-on-male retaliatory violence" (80). And yet, this retaliatory female is not allowed to celebrate her violent retribution. What then are we to make of this female figure who fights back against her assassin?

Carol Clover says that this female-victim-hero emerged in the mid-1970s as a reaction to women's liberation. She combines the functions of the suffering victim and the avenging hero by fighting back against the killer, providing the film's climax (34-5). Dika calls her "an enfeebled hero, one that has an inherent weakness but who is now able to surmount [her] failings and triumph over evil" (121). However, her triumph over evil is usually short-lived. The killer rises again to shed fresh blood in the slasher sequels, often beginning with her. Clover dubs this female character "the Final Girl" (35) and adds that this Final Girl, "may for better or worse, be the main contribution to popular

culture of the women's movement" (162). However, I think she is hardly a feminist example. She survives by fluke and, even though she appears to best the killer, does not emerge empowered from the experience.

Pinedo sees the Final Girl in a similarly heroic light and speaks about women in slasher films as being portrayed either as victims (the numerous females who are murdered) or as heroes (the lucky few who manage to become the Final Girl). Pinedo proclaims that, "[t]he surviving female of the slasher film may be victimized, but she is hardly a victim" (87). And yet by Pinedo's own admission, once the Final Girl has (seemingly) dispatched the killer, she is no longer able to be violent and returns to meekness and passivity. She is not able to celebrate her triumph and revel in her newfound female power but instead must revert to the role of submissive female, much like her inactive contemporary legend counterpart. By exploring the final female characters, the last girl standing, in both contemporary legends and slasher films, I will show how even though she may appear to be heroic on film, she is really cut from the same passive cloth as her contemporary legend counterpart.

### **The Female Survivors**

The female survivor is a central figure in slasher films and contemporary legends. In both, she manages to avoid being murdered. But it is *how* she manages this that highlights the difference between the two genres. In contemporary legends she passively relies on the help of rescuers who are usually male, but it is her apparent evolution beyond this in slasher films that makes her seem a stronger figure than her contemporary legend counterpart. In slasher films she rises up to fight back against her assailant. And

yet, this is not a victorious act of self-rescue but rather a desperate one. She does not emerge triumphant, but traumatized, much like the female survivor in contemporary legends. And just as the female protagonist of legend survives by chance so does the slasher film's female. For just as she has the good fortune to hide successfully from the killer in contemporary legends, so she is fortuitous enough to strike out at the slasher film's killer at the most opportune moment. While her battle against the killer may make her seem more heroic, ultimately the fighting female of slasher films is just as passive as the hiding female of contemporary legends.

I have labeled her in contemporary legends as "The Girl Left Behind." She is either physically left behind by her companion or has left her companions behind and is returning to them. All six of the contemporary legends in this study include a female protagonist who at some point in the legend is left on her own. In "The Boyfriend's Death" the girlfriend is left behind while her boyfriend goes in search of gas; the two sorority sisters are left behind in "The Roommate's Death" when their friend goes in search of a snack; and the visiting girl in "The Furry Collar" is left behind when her friend goes in search of the source of a strange noise in the house. All three are soon left behind in life when their friends are killed. Such is the case for the babysitter in "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" when her young charges are killed and for the roommates in "The Headless Roommate" and "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn On the Lights?" when their roommates are killed unbeknownst to them. The isolation of The Girl Left Behind is a key feature of the contemporary legend, and sets the stage for the main homicidal action.



In the six movies selected for this study, there is always a final female figure that must square off against the killer. In *Halloween*, that girl is Laurie Strode; in *Friday the 13th* it is Alice; in *Black Christmas* it is Jess; and in *Happy Birthday To Me* it is Virginia. *The Slumber Party Massacre* is unique in that it has three girls who survive to the film's conclusion, but only one of them battles and manages to subdue the killer, and that girl is Valerie. In accordance with Clover's "Final Girl" (35), Adam Rockoff says that there is sometimes a Final Couple (19), and indeed among the six films selected for this study, there is one Final Couple – Kit and Rob in *April Fool's Day*. However, during the film's climactic encounter with "Buffy," Rob is locked in the pantry, leaving Kit to face off against the killer alone. Even though it is a Final Couple, it is ultimately up to the female to dispatch of the killer's threat.

The Girl Left Behind and The Final Girl share characteristics in that both are female and both are young, usually university or high school aged. The babysitter from "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs," the visiting friend in "The Furry Collar," Laurie in *Halloween*, Virginia in *Happy Birthday To Me*, and Valerie in *The Slumber Party Massacre* are all teenagers in high school. The sorority sisters from "The Roommate's Death" and "The Headless Roommate," the roommates of "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn On the Lights?," *Friday the 13th*'s Alice, Jess of *Black Christmas*, and Kit from *April Fool's Day* are all university aged. The girlfriend in "The Boyfriend's Death" is assumed to be young (and is described as such in some variants).

While little description is given of any of the female characters in contemporary legends, in his book *The Headless Roommate and Other Tales of Terror* Daniel Cohen

attempts to flesh out the legends, making them short stories, and providing descriptions of many of the female characters. His female victims are usually studious, unattractive, occasionally overweight, and inexperienced with the opposite sex. The Girl Left Behind is often outgoing, friendly, intelligent, attractive and tactful. This is most notable in his version of "The Headless Roommate". Sorority sisters Tina "a real beauty" (Cohen 1980, 1) and Louise "homely" (Cohen 1980, 1) are the Girl Left Behind and the victim respectively. Liz, the victim in "The Roommate's Death" Barnes describes as "fighting a lifetime battle against fat" (78) and "steadily losing the battle and gaining weight" (78) while he calls survivor Cindy "rail thin" (78). In Barnes's tales, it is the beautiful people who survive, at least for the time being.

Clover says that the Final Girl is not fully feminine, she is boyish and this is spelled out in androgynous or feminized masculine names such as "Laurie" (40). But Jim Harper insists, [t]here are many more Final Girls with purely feminine names than there are those with androgynous ones" (38). Harper does credit her with taking on "the traditional male hero role" (38). Vera Dika, likewise, says that, "she is represented as being female with male characteristics" (121). And Isabel Cristina Pinedo equates the last surviving female not with masculinity but with lesbianism. While I agree with Clover that the Final Girl demonstrates a resourcefulness and an awareness beyond that of her friends, she is not always sexually inactive nor is she boyish. *The Slumber Party Massacre's* athletic Valerie is extremely feminine to the point Diane is jealous of her beauty. With her long hair, skirts, maternal instinct and culinary skills, *Halloween's* Laurie is almost the epitome of femininity. Kit may wear a loose tie in one scene in *April*



*Fool's Day*, but that is more a symptom of 1980s fashion than of her inherent masculinity; she also sports long blonde hair and a buff boyfriend. Virginia is envied by other girls for her beauty and her appeal to the opposite sex in *Happy Birthday To Me*. In *Friday the 13th* Alice adopts characteristics of the feminine role as she sticks to sketching and preparing coffee while the men around her chop wood and fix the generator. Jess, who wears skirts and long hair, demonstrates her female fertility with her pregnancy in *Black Christmas*.

How sexually active the girls in contemporary legends are is never fully described, but it can be implied. In Cohen's version of "The Headless Roommate" he says that pretty, outgoing, "dazzling" (2) roommate Tina "would come home late on a Saturday night from a party or a date... This particular Saturday evening started out like so many others – Tina was going out" (2-3). Is Tina having sex during these various dates and parties? Cohen does not specify, but we do know that she is out of the house that night because she is going on a date to a party with a boy. Although she resists his drunken advances, Tina proves herself to be a risk-taker, and puts her own safety at risk, when she abandons her date and hitchhikes home (Cohen 1980, 3-4).

In legends such as "The Headless Roommate" or "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn Out the Lights?," where female characters return home to find it the scene of a grisly murder, their reasons for having been out in the first place vary with whatever variant is being told. Sometimes she has gone out to study, like the girl in the variant of "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn Out the Lights?" included here, but sometimes she



has gone to a party or on a date, like Tina in Cohen's variant of "The Headless Roommate". Sexual activity can be implied from this, but it is not a given fact.

In "The Roommate's Death" and "The Headless Roommate" they are sorority sisters, who by popular stereotypes are assumed to be snobby, not too bright, and sexually active (particularly with their male fraternity counterparts). Are the girls in "The Furry Collar" sexually active because they are college-aged? There is nothing in the text either to imply or state this explicitly.

Teenaged girls are often feared to be fornicating with their boyfriends while babysitting. Apparently this continues to be a concern for many people. When my husband and I were recently trying to find a babysitter for our young daughter, people warned us not to hire an older teenager or young university student because she would be more interested in having sex with her boyfriend on our couch than in taking care of our daughter. The teenaged girl in "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" gives no indication for such behaviour, but in some variants she at first thinks the caller may be her boyfriend. She may or may not be sexually active with him.

Certainly the strongest implication for sexual activity comes with "The Boyfriend's Death". This particular legend features a young couple in a car off in the middle of nowhere. However, they are there because they accidentally ran out of gas, not because they had agreed to drive off somewhere isolated to engage in sexual activity. Although Lover's Lanes are often located seemingly in the middle of nowhere, this couple is not described as being at a particular one; they are instead stranded. It would not seem to me that the boyfriend deliberately staged this because he does not attempt to

seduce his girlfriend, instead he immediately sets about to find gas, instructing her to stay behind and lock herself in the car. However, in some variants they are there specifically to “park,” although whether the girlfriend is aware of this is debatable. In Cohen’s text he states that it is the boyfriend who is “looking for a nice dark deserted spot to park” (90). Unfortunately, he frightens his girlfriend with a scary story and she insists on going home (Cohen 1980, 92). When he turns the key in the ignition the car will not start – it has run out of gas. But this is not a deliberate set-up on his part, because he “knew he had been low on gas, but he was low on money too, and figured he had enough gas to get through the night. He had figured wrong” (92). Ultimately Cohen’s boyfriend is punished for his sexual proclivity by being strung up over his car with his head ripped off (96). His girlfriend “won’t go out on dates anymore” (Cohen 1980, 96).

While we can imply many things about the state of the Girl Left Behind’s virginity, we cannot be certain about any of them. But in slasher films the Final Girl is depicted as virginal. Virginia’s very name implies virginity in *Happy Birthday To Me*. Laurie is in fact a virgin and is teased by her sexually active friends for her chastity in *Halloween*. Harper says that “John Carpenter’s original intention in representing Laurie as an awkward virgin was to indicate that she is repressed and dysfunctional, just like her brother Michael, although not to the same degree” (38). Clover describes the Final Girl as sexually inactive (39). However, as demonstrated by Jess’s pregnancy in *Black Christmas* and Kit’s discussion of losing her virginity in *April Fool’s Day*, this is not always the case. Regardless, The Final Girl is never depicted onscreen having sex, undressing, or being naked. In fact, she is not depicted as being sexual at all. We do not know if Alice is



a virgin in *Friday the 13th* but she does resist Steve's advances and even though we see her playing strip poker, she is the only player who remains almost fully clothed. Valerie in *The Slumber Party Massacre* is depicted as shy and prudish, and although the other girls in the film are frequently undressing, Valerie manages to avoid being nude onscreen even during a shower scene.

This value placed on virginity is not without precedent; one need not look any further than the Bible and the Virgin Mary. Virgin births occur in a variety of mythologies. The Egyptian sun god, Ra, is born of a virgin. The virginal Isis gave birth to Horus. In Greek mythology, Hestia, Athena and Artemis are valued virgin goddesses. But unlike the slasher film's Final Girl, Artemis is also a skilled huntress.

In many religions and societies throughout history, virginity is prized. Ancient Rome had its sacred Vestal Virgins who, before puberty, were sworn into thirty years of celibacy in the service of the goddess Vesta. After she completed her three decades of service, a former vestal virgin was considered an honour to marry. But if she did not maintain her vow of abstinence, she was buried alive in a small underground cell with a minimal supply of food and water (see Staples 1998). A Muslim bride's virginity is so important that its presence must be verified by laying white cloth beneath the newlywed couple about to consummate their union; the bride's honour is protected only if those sheets emerge bloody. Geraldine Brooks writes about just how important this wedding night ritual is:

For generations, women had resorted to filling their vaginas with blood-soaked sponges or splinters of glass to compensate for lost hymens. Only peasants in remote villages still paraded the bride's stained garments for public inspection (Brooks 1995, 57).



Brooks adds that even for the contemporary urban Islamic bride, there is pressure to prove her virginity, "If she didn't bleed, she could be handed back in disgrace to a family that might be come enraged enough to kill her" (57).

These so-called "honour killings" occur among Arabs in the Persian Gulf, Turkey, Iraq, Palestine, Pakistan, India, and Saudi Arabia, as well as among Bedouins. Women are killed because they have besmirched the family's honour through supposedly immoral behaviour. This can range from merely attracting the attentions of a male to having sex outside of marriage – it does not matter whether the sex was consensual or not. Brooks says, "The killer usually becomes a local hero: a man who has done what was necessary to clear his family name" (49).

Women's sexuality has long been a fearsome thing. From the massacre of women during the Early Modern European and Massachusetts witch hunts to Marc Lepine's shooting of female students at Montreal's Ecole Polytechnique on December 6, 1989, men have always been trying to place a cap on women's sexual powers. Ayaan Hirsi Ali writes of the fear in Islam of women's sexuality, saying that the men are helpless to resist and so cannot be held responsible for their actions:

When it concerns their sexuality, men in Islamic culture are seen as irresponsible, unpredictable, scary beasts who immediately lose all self-control upon seeing a woman...a Muslim man has no reason to learn to control himself. He doesn't need to and he isn't taught to. Sexual morality is aimed exclusively at women, who are always blamed for any lapse...For this reason girls have to cover themselves, make themselves invisible (Ali 2006, 21-2).

This covering can range from a headscarf to full body and facial coverage. But Islam is not alone in its seeming condemnation of female sexuality.

Early Christianity saw the stifling of women in the church. They were not allowed to take an active role, become priests or popes. The closest a woman could get to holding a high office in the church was becoming a nun. Woman was blamed for man's suffering, beginning with Eve, whose temptation of Adam led to original sin; a woman's pain during labour and her monthly bleeding were seen as her punishment. The Bible even claims that a woman is considered unclean during her period and this contamination rubs off on anything she touches, anyone who touches her, and even anyone who touches anything she touches (Lev 15:19-30). Orthodox Jews do not allow men to touch women during menstruation, Hindu women must be purified, and menstruating women are considered unclean in many hunter-gatherer societies (see Houppert, 1999). The power of the period must also have been a source of amazement for early humanity; it must have been a fearsome thing for ancient men to see the women bleed regularly but never die. How were they to make sense of this but by either revering her or repressing her?

Although not a slasher film, the horror film *Carrie* (1976), based on Stephen King's book of the same name, uses the onset of puberty to explore the horrifying results of what happens when a repressed young girl's burgeoning sexuality is unleashed. Hell hath no fury like a virgin scorned, particularly when she has telekinesis. Mocked by her classmates and raised by a fanatically religious mother, Carrie White knows nothing about what to expect when she begins menstruating in the shower. Terrified at the sight of her own blood, Carrie is a sobbing mess, tormented by her female classmates. Their cruelty reaches new heights when they arrange to have Carrie crowned Prom Queen and cover her in a bucket of pig's blood. Carrie's newfound powers of telekinesis are



unleashed on her unsuspecting schoolmates and she traps everyone in the gymnasium and proceeds to burn it down, then makes her way home. Disgusted by her daughter's coming of age, her mother attempts to kill her and both mother and daughter are eventually trapped in their home and consumed by fire. Carrie's burgeoning sexuality is so powerful and so fearsome it cannot be controlled and erupts in a fiery burst of death and destruction. Naïve and virginal though she may be, when pushed to the breaking point Carrie pushes back with vengeance and purpose. The slasher film's Final Girl does not possess such power.

The Final Girl must be virginal because this represents goodness. However, she must not be strong or violent. As Harper points out, "[e]ven though she is often the instrument of the killer's destruction, there is always a fair amount of clichéd feminine activity, such as screaming and looking to males for defence" (38). When she does manage to fend off the killer, it is merely by fluke born of desperation.

Both the Final Girl and the Girl Left Behind are threatened with the killer's violence (whether they are aware of the threat or not). For the Final Girl, this threat results in a climactic battle to the finish. The same cannot be said for the Girl Left Behind in contemporary legends. She rarely, if ever, encounters the killer even though the killer is murdering someone nearby. The roommate in "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn on the Lights?" is actually in the room with the killer while her friend is being murdered. The girls in "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" and "The Headless Roommate" are the only two to encounter the killer within the legend's text, which renders them fully



aware of the threat on their lives. The Girl Left Behind in the remaining three legends only becomes aware of how close the threat of danger was after the fact.

However, in the slasher films selected for this study, each Final Girl must wage a bloody battle for her life against the killer. Laurie is chased by Michael from house to house in *Halloween* (1978), tortured with the sight of her friends' corpses and by Michael's inability to be defeated. She stabs him with a knitting needle and coat hanger but is eventually trapped in a closet by him. In *Friday the 13th* (1980) Alice must also deal with seeing her friends' dead bodies, including having one corpse thrown through a window at her and another corpse strung up between the trees on her path as she attempts to flee the camp. Mrs. Voorhees plays a game of cat and mouse with her until Alice finally heaves a machete and blindly strikes out at her tormentor, decapitating the killer. Virginia in *Happy Birthday To Me* (1981) is rendered unconscious by her would-be killer and then finds herself as guest of honour at a birthday celebration featuring the corpses of her friends and family. She struggles with Ann over a knife, finally succeeding in killing her. Valerie fights not only for her own life but for that of her sister and fellow survivor Trish in *The Slumber Party Massacre* (1982) as all three girls make repeated attempts to stop Russ Thorn and his killer drill. Valerie even manages to chop off his arm and drop him in the pool, but he emerges from the waters to attack once again and she must finally impale him on a machete. In *April Fool's Day* (1986) Kit is subjected to the gruesome sight of two friends' blood-soaked bodies and is then separated from her boyfriend and left to face off against "Buffy." She pleads for her life but before she must take violent action, the supposed murders are all revealed to be part of an elaborate hoax. In *Black*

*Christmas* (1974) Jess is chased and stalked by someone she believes to be the killer. She finds her friends' corpses and reacts in violent self-defense, only to have it revealed in the film's closing frames that she did not kill the correct person. Another battle may ensue, but perhaps she will not be lucky enough to escape with her life this time.

Both *The Girl Left Behind* and *The Final Girl* suffer the loss of friends, loved ones or companions. The girls in "The Roommate's Death" and Jess in *Black Christmas* suffer the loss of sorority sisters. The girls in "The Headless Roommate" and "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn on the Lights?" lose their roommates while the female protagonist of "The Furry Collar," *Halloween's* Laurie, and Virginia of *Happy Birthday To Me* lose their friends. The babysitter in "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" loses the children she was supposed to be taking care of while the girlfriend in "The Boyfriend's Death" loses her partner. Kit in *April Fool's Day* and Alice in *Friday the 13th* lose both old friends and new acquaintances. In *The Slumber Party Massacre* Valerie loses her basketball teammates and coach. These losses serve to further isolate the surviving females in the legends and films.

After being threatened with violence and enduring the loss of her companions, the *Girl Left Behind* in contemporary legend is often rescued by a helper who is usually male. Beverly Crane calls this an "authoritative male helper" (147) while Mary Seelhurst refers to this helper as the "heroic rescuer" who is usually male (32). Eleanor Wachs adds that this rescuer is not only male, but he is usually her husband or boyfriend or an authority figure such as a police officer (144). This is the case in both "The Roommate's Death" and "The Boyfriend's Death" when the surviving females, hiding in fear, are



beckoned to safety by male authority figures. For the girls in "The Roommate's Death" that figure is the mailman who they summon, and for the girlfriend in "The Boyfriend's Death" it is the police who urge her to leave her car. Had none of these male helpers happened by, one wonders if the girls would have ever left their hiding places.

The Final Girl's ability to rescue herself is demonstrated in her evolution beyond the need for a male helper. *Black Christmas* has protagonist Jess being kept under watch by the police. The film blends both the female saving herself and the presence of a male rescuer by having the police rush in just as Jess has dispatched of the person whom she believes to be the killer. The role of male helper is solidified in *Halloween* with the character of Dr. Loomis, who comes to Laurie's aid during her battle with Michael when it seems she is about to fall victim to the killer. Although Laurie has managed to evade Michael's knife and to attack him on more than one occasion, when he places his hands around her neck she is suddenly incapable of saving herself and must rely on Dr. Loomis, who fires the shots that send Michael tumbling out the window. *Happy Birthday To Me* also makes use of the helpful male psychiatrist with Virginia's Dr. Faraday urging her to figure out what the connection is between her and her six slain friends. It seems he may be able to rescue her from herself, until we see Virginia bludgeon him to death. When Virginia's father arrives and sees the display of corpses, it seems he may be able to reason with his daughter and rescue her from her descent into madness, until she kills him. (She is later revealed to be Ann in disguise.) *Friday the 13th* tricks the viewer, and Final Girl Alice, into believing Mrs. Voorhees is a rescuer. She appears just as Alice has



made the discovery of two of her friends' corpses but she quickly reveals herself to be the killer and not the kindly older woman she appears to be.

On the rare occasion that the helper is female, she is less of an authority figure – she is not a police chief, a psychiatrist or a sheriff; she is a telephone operator, a middle-aged mom or a high school girls' basketball team coach. Furthermore, her help is ineffectual, for it comes too late and proves futile. The female operator in “The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs” gives the babysitter the news that the calls are coming from within the house after the babysitter has already made the grim discovery of the murdered children and seconds before she feels the killer's blade against her throat. The operator's warning to get out of the house comes too late. When Coach Jana, believing something is awry at Trish's house, finally heads over to investigate in *The Slumber Party Massacre*, she appears to be fulfilling the role of rescuer when she manages to enter the house and successfully keep the killer at bay, even stepping forward to protect Trish. But it is in that moment that the killer makes a surprise attack, slicing open her abdomen and rendering her yet another victim to his drill. All of Trish's friends, their boyfriends and her neighbour have been killed so Coach Jana's help comes far too late to save any of them, and it is a failed attempt at rescue, resulting as it does in her own death. It is up to the film's Final Girl Valerie to rescue not only herself, but her sister and Trish as well. Thus it would seem that in order to be a successful helper, one must also be a *male* helper.

Reliance on a helper is not the only thing that separates the Girl Left Behind from the Final Girl; seeing the killer is another important feature of the Final Girl. It is significant because it allows the Final Girl to actively engage with the killer. The Final

Girl always sees the killer; the Girl Left Behind usually does not. She only becomes aware of the threat when it is too late – after her friends are dead and, in some cases, when she herself is about to be. It is in seeing that the Final Girl is able to battle the killer for her life. Her ability to see, battle and subdue the killer sets her apart from the other female characters in the film. It is her seeming self-reliance that distinguishes the slasher film's Final Girl from the contemporary legend's Girl Left Behind.

Out of all six of the horror legends selected for this study, not once does a Girl Left Behind ever fight with the killer. Although the surviving roommate sees the killer by the conclusion of "The Headless Roommate" and although the babysitter can feel the killer's blade at her throat by the end of "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs," neither female ever battles the killer in the legends. The surviving roommate of "The Headless Roommate" does have the distinction of being the only one of the six Girls Left Behind to see the killer, but it does not appear to serve her any benefit during the text.

By contrast, in all six of the slasher films in this study the Final Girl battles the killer, or at least someone she believes to be the killer. Jess in *Black Christmas* and Kit in *April Fool's Day* both square off against someone they incorrectly believe to be the killer while Laurie of *Halloween*, Alice in *Friday the 13th*, Valerie of *The Slumber Party Massacre* and Virginia in *Happy Birthday To Me* each survive confrontations with the killer.

The Girl Left Behind has nothing to fight back against, since the killer never attacks her. She does not so much survive the slaughter as she avoids it. The girlfriend in "The Boyfriend's Death" hides in the car and the sorority sisters in "The Roommate's

Death" hide out in their room; all of them managing to avoid certain death. The visiting friend in "The Furry Collar" remains in the bedroom, avoiding an investigation of the strange noise and thus avoiding a similar fate to her hostess', at least for the moment. The girls in "The Headless Roommate" and "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" have nowhere to hide and the killer's attack on the babysitter is so sudden that she has little opportunity to fight back. In "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn On the Lights?" the returning roommate is shielded from the gruesome spectacle by the lack of light. Because the cover of darkness hides both her and the killer, she avoids becoming another murder victim.

Much like the Girl Left Behind's survival in the six legends, the Final Girl's survival is also a matter of luck. Although Alice, Valerie and Virginia each appear to best the killers in *Friday the 13th*, *The Slumber Party Massacre* and *Happy Birthday To Me* respectively, they each achieve this through an act of chance. Alice swings out with a machete in desperation and has the good fortune to decapitate Mrs. Voorhees. Valerie also happens to be holding a machete upon which Russ Thorn impales himself when he lunges to attack her again. Ann stabs herself upon the very knife she had given Virginia to cut the cake with. Although each of these Final Girls seems to succeed in killing the killer, this is not the result of an empowered woman coming to her own defense, but rather a desperately afraid female who happens to be holding a blade upon which the killer meets his or her end. The Final Girl does not progress into a strong, self-reliant woman throughout the course of the film and seems no more emboldened after having killed the killer than she did prior to this act.



Beyond the six examples that are the focus of this study, there may appear to be an evolution in contemporary legends towards a female protagonist capable of self-rescue. In "The Hairy-handed Hitchhiker" a young woman offers a ride to what appears to be an old woman carrying a large handbag (see Brunvand 2001). But when she notices this supposed female's hairy hands she becomes suspicious and manages to convince her passenger to vacate the car due to mechanical difficulties. She then drives away. While she has avoided meeting an untimely end, she has not physically fought back against her would-be assassin. Rather, she has outsmarted him. A variant of this legend is set in a mall parking lot (see de Vos 1996). Returning from shopping, the woman sees what appears to be an old lady sitting in her car who claims to be disoriented. The woman again notices something is amiss with this hairy-handed "female". She offers to give the woman a drive but claims she must return to the mall because she forgot something. Once there, she summons the help of a male security guard. She may have outsmarted her foiled assailant, but once again must rely on a male helper to completely extricate her from a dangerous situation and make her world safe once again. Mary Seelhorst believes that the female in contemporary legend is beginning a process of evolution away from a weak woman who can only wait for rescue or death, to a woman who is capable of outsmarting her attempted attacker. Seelhorst points to what she calls the heroine of the legend discussed above (but which she calls "The Assailant in Disguise") as an example of this evolution at work. Instead of falling victim to a man disguised as an old woman, this contemporary legend's female protagonist outthinks him and leaves the scene of the would-be crime. Seelhorst praises her as a female character who is quick-thinking, level-

headed and not awaiting rescue (31). However, I do not find this praise to be entirely warranted. While she may not await rescue, she certainly seems to seek it out. She does leave the vicinity of her would-be attacker, but only to summon help from the mall security guard (whom one would presume to be male). While she may be thinking and taking some action, she is ultimately still incapable of self-rescue, relying as she does on a helper.

Some people telling the story emphasize that given the right strategy and with enough courage, a modern young woman may extricate herself from a dangerous situation rather than having to summon male assistance in the person of the mall security guard (Brunvand 2001, 185).

In this study, I will show that this evolution of a woman-as-victim into a woman capable of self-rescue is more evident in slasher films. But even the slasher film female only saves herself by chance and becomes, like the contemporary legend female, a passive, traumatized woman by the film's end.

The Final Girl also appears to have undergone a metamorphosis of sorts since the films included in this study were made. However, her growth has not occurred within the slasher film sub-genre but rather within the realm of science fiction. In 1979 the sci-fi slasher film *Alien* was released. Responding to what they believe to be a distress call, the seven member crew of deep space mining ship Nostromo land on a seemingly desolate planet. Their lives are threatened when, unbeknownst to them, an aggressive, intelligent extraterrestrial hitches a ride by impregnating itself in one of their bodies. It is the character of Ripley who saves the day and defeats the alien presence. Ripley is tough, fierce, fearless and female. However, the role was originally intended for a man (see

Lacey 1998 218). Of course, because she is female even this hardened character must be subjected to stripping down to her underwear in front of the camera.

The idea of a woman who fights back – and means it – was expanded in the 1991 film *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. Sarah Connor has been institutionalized since the events of the first film, in which an unstoppable cyborg, dubbed The Terminator, is sent back in time to kill her before she gives birth to her son. In the future, he will be the leader of the human resistance against the Skynet computer system. Although she and her son both survive to the end of the first film, as happens to so many women who survive in both contemporary legends and slasher films, Sarah Connor is institutionalized. But she has spent her time getting buff, sculpting her body into a lean, mean, and very muscular fighting machine. Her son and his cyborg protector help to break her out of her prison when yet another seemingly unbeatable cyborg comes after them. She fights back against this robot that wants to destroy her son, but she is of course unable to completely stop him without the help of uber-male Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Strong women may be in short supply in legend and film, but on television they began to flourish in the mid-1990s. The concept of a fighting female who makes no apologies for her strength was brought to television in the 1995 series *Xena: Warrior Princess* (note that this was not called *Xena: Warrior Goddess* or simply *Xena: Warrior*). Played by tall, dark-haired Amazonian Lucy Lawless, Xena was able to perform amazing feats of strength but it was hinted that she was the daughter of a god, hence the super powers.



Joss Whedon chose to take the idea of the tiny, blonde female usually at the killer's mercy and make her the killer with his 1997 television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Petite blonde Buffy Summers annihilated an endless array of vampires and demons but her powers were also supernatural. Even someone like super-spy Sydney on television's *Alias* (2001) or masterful martial artist The Bride in the *Kill Bill* (2003; 2004) movies has special skills and is specially trained; she is not your average woman. And this is where they differ from their contemporary legend and slasher film counterparts. The Girl Left Behind and the Final Girl are ordinary females caught in extraordinary circumstances.

The hallmark of the Final Girl and the Girl Left Behind is that they both survive to the end of the tale (although they may not be destined to live for much longer). Although all six of the Girls Left Behind in the contemporary legends are indeed alive by the legend's conclusion, the lives of the babysitter from "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" and the roommate in "The Headless Roommate" are in certain peril. The visiting friend in "The Furry Collar" is still alive, but if the killer remains in the house and eager for more victims, then she may not be for much longer. The girlfriend in "The Boyfriend's Death" is driven insane by the legend's events. The Girls Left Behind in "The Roommate's Death" and "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn Out the Lights?" survive physically unscathed.

All six Final Girls are alive when their film's closing credits roll. But Jess's survival is in question at the conclusion of *Black Christmas* because she is in the house alone with the killer. By the end of *Halloween* not only is Laurie still alive, but it appears

the killer is as well. Her survival is not destined to last indefinitely and, after besting Michael Myers through two more sequels she is killed at the beginning of *Halloween: Resurrection* (2002). Likewise, Alice lives through *Friday the 13th* only to die at the beginning of *Friday the 13 Part 2* (1981). While Virginia may still have her life at the end of *Happy Birthday To Me*, she will not have her freedom for much longer since Ann framed her for the murders. Kit survives through the finale of *April Fool's Day*, if a little worse for the wear, not on her own merit but because the whole thing was a hoax. Valerie is alive at the end of *The Slumber Party Massacre* but it is revealed in the sequel that she has been institutionalized. There is no reward for the Final Girl's survival. And this may serve as a reflection of women's place in society. While we may have made great strides: we have earned the right to vote, to pursue higher education, to protect our reproductive health, to seek employment in previously male-dominated areas; we are still not on equal footing with men: we do not always receive equal work for equal pay, we are harassed when attempting to break into a male-dominated job, we are still physically violated by men. Similarly, while the Final Girl may have made great strides in battling for her life, she is still not on equal footing with the killer and is murdered in a subsequent sequel. One might almost see it as her punishment for success – in daring to best the killer she is rewarded with either insanity or death, or sometimes both.

Clover points out that similar to the epic, the slasher plot revolves around the Final Girl's struggle against, and eventual triumph over, evil (40). But it is a temporary triumph; the Final Girl is often killed in subsequent sequels and at best, she is institutionalized. Isabel Cristina Pinedo points out that once the Final Girl has killed the

killer she loses the ability to be violent and returns to passivity (86). I found this to be true of the six Final Girls included in this study. Jess, Alice and Laurie of *Black Christmas*, *Friday the 13th* and *Halloween* respectively, are all sobbing messes that need to be carted off to hospitals. Valerie needs to be institutionalized after her ordeal in *The Slumber Party Massacre* as is *Halloween*'s Laurie eventually. Virginia is "caught within the confines of the frame and reinstated as spectacle" (Pinedo 1997, 86) by the end of *Happy Birthday To Me* when police come upon her holding a knife and surrounded by corpses. *April Fool's Day*'s Kit is the only Final Girl who never gains the ability to be violent, trying instead to reason with "Buffy" until all is revealed to be a hoax, at which point Muffy takes centre stage while Kit fades into the background. None of these women go on to become heroic slayers of evil time and again. They do not become empowered from their situation, they do not emerge as tough, strong women ready to dispatch of evil serial killers at a moment's notice. Instead, they are traumatized from their experience.

The Final Girl is assigned the tasks of seeing the killer, battling the killer and stopping the killer (through either injury or death) whereas the Girl Left Behind rarely, if ever, sees the killer and never engages in battle with the killer or prevents further carnage. This difference between the two female characters is again largely due to the expansion of this surviving female's role to fit from a legend into a feature length film. The Final Girl's ability to fight back against the killer in a slasher film may make her seem heroic in comparison to the Girl Left Behind in contemporary legends, but she is



actually just as passive, and instead of becoming empowered from the experience, she is weakened by it.

### **The Killers**

The killer in slasher films has gained prominence over his contemporary legend counterpart, evolving from a hidden figure to an iconic one. The killer progresses beyond being a largely invisible character in contemporary legends to a more developed one in slasher films, one who is even given a motivation for his or her crimes. The killers in contemporary legends and slasher films both choose victims who are predominantly young and both killers are somewhat hidden, with the killer in contemporary legends rarely being seen and the killer in slasher films often having his or her face concealed. However, slasher films have increased the amount of gore and the number of bodies to make their killer so over-the-top and beyond the bounds of reality that they are almost cartoonish. Although both killers appear similar, and the slasher film killer even seems to undergo an evolution to become a more developed character, in the end the slasher killer is more of joke than his mysterious contemporary legend compatriot.

The idea of a killer lurking in presumably safe places such as a summer camp or a suburban neighbourhood is a chilling one, and it is not unheard of for murderers to attack people in their own homes. We may not expect a killer to manage to break into our home and slaughter our roommates, but it would not be too farfetched to believe that such a thing could occur. On the night of July 13th, 1966, Richard Speck broke into the residence of Chicago nursing students, killing eight of them and leaving one girl alive (see Breo and Martin 1993). It is, however, unrealistic to think that a middle-aged

woman, operating alone and without using a gun, could kill an entire group of camp counselors, four of whom are muscular, athletic young men as is the case in *Friday the 13th*. It is also unrealistic to think that the killer could not be stopped, even when shot with several bullets and sent plunging from a balcony, as happens to Michael Meyers at the end of *Halloween*.

These horror legends and slasher films would not exist were it not for the killers in both. But while they may appear to be cut from the same cloth the slasher film's killer has evolved into a pop culture entity beyond the boundaries of film whereas the killer in contemporary legends remains an undefined, although threatening, figure. Killers in contemporary legends are such undeveloped characters that they are not even given names. No physical description is provided nor is the gender identified, with the exception of "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" and "The Headless Roommate." In the former, the title reveals the killer's sex as do the phone calls, which are described as being disturbing and from a man. The killer in "The Headless Roommate" is the only one amongst the six to be given a description, that of a large man. Unlike their unseen contemporary legend equivalent, slasher film killers are usually given names. In *Halloween*, it is Michael Meyers; in *Friday the 13th*, Mrs. Voorhees; Ann in *Happy Birthday To Me*; escaped inmate Russ Thorn in *The Slumber Party Massacre*; and "Buffy" St. Clair in *April Fool's Day*. The killer in *Black Christmas* says "Agnes, it's Billy," during one call, but given the fact that there is no Agnes in the film causes one to wonder if "Agnes" and "Billy" are merely parts of his delusion.

The killers in contemporary legends are given no description because, with the exception of the killer in "The Headless Roommate," they are never seen by any of the female protagonists in the legends. They remain hidden throughout the course of the legend, and thus the danger they present is concealed, with the surviving female protagonists usually never seeing the killer but only the aftermath of his actions. The description of the murders as they occur are not included as part of the text. Such is the case in "The Roommate's Death," "The Boyfriend's Death" and "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn Out the Lights?". The female protagonists in all three texts only encounter their companions' butchered corpses the next morning when it appears the killer has left the vicinity; they have been spared the same fate as their friends. "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" and "The Headless Roommate" are exceptions to this because the legends conclude with the implication that the female protagonist is about to be killed as well. The life of lone girl in "The Furry Collar" may also be in jeopardy, since we do not know whether or no the killer will stop at only one murder in this house.

Similarly, slasher film killers are hidden, sticking to the shadows and stalking their potential victims from a distance. Russ Thorn spends much of *The Slumber Party Massacre* in the shadows and hiding in a van. *Black Christmas*' killer remains a shadowy figure, never allowing anyone to get a clear look at his face. And although she is there in plain sight for the entire film, it is not until near *April Fool's Day*'s conclusion that "Buffy" is revealed to be the fake killer. Thus she manages to keep her true nature, and her true identity, concealed throughout most of the film. In fact she is concealing something much more significant: that the whole weekend has been a hoax.



The theme of concealment continues with slasher film killers frequently employing the use of a mask, an item that has become a staple of the slasher killer's wardrobe. *Halloween* originated this with Michael Myers. During the film's opening, young Michael dons a clown mask to kill his sister. As an adult, he wears a white mask to commit his murder spree. *Happy Birthday To Me* was inventive in its use of masks with Ann, however improbably, donning a Virginia mask to lure in her victims and drive the real Virginia insane. In *Friday the 13th* only the killer's hands and feet are shown wearing thick gloves and boots and thus giving the impression of being male and concealing the killer's true identity. Although Mrs. Voorhees never wears a mask, when her son Jason takes over for her in the remainder of the franchise, he wears a sack over his head in the first sequel before acquiring his famous hockey mask in the third film and wearing it for the remainder of the *Friday the 13th* series.

In keeping with giving the killers more of an identity in slasher films than in contemporary legends, these cinematic killers are also often given a motive for their murders. Mrs. Voorhees is seeking revenge for the drowning death of her only child, Jason, in *Friday the 13th*. Ann in *Happy Birthday To Me* is making her half-sister Virginia pay for their father's extramarital affair. For some, they are committing murder for no other reason than because they are insane. Such is the case with "Buffy" St. Clair in *April Fool's Day*, Michael Myers in *Halloween*, Russ Thorn in *The Slumber Party Massacre* and the killer in *Black Christmas*. The nameless killers of contemporary legend kill for a similar reason – because they can.

The slasher killer does undergo an evolution from a vague, undefined entity into a formidable, if cartoonish, foe. This process is demonstrated in the six films selected for this study. In the first film, *Black Christmas*, the killer is never given a name or a motive, and his face is never clearly shown. Although *Halloween* does name its killer, his face is concealed with a mask and he kills because he has no conscience; he is pure evil. The violence of both killers is made all the more frightening because of its senselessness. But after *Halloween*'s success, all subsequent films felt a need to increase the amount of bloodshed and bodies. In the process, they succeed in destroying the killer's silent, stalking mystique, turning the once imposing slasher film killer into a parody of itself.

In *Friday the 13th* Mrs. Voorhees accomplishes things no mere mortal can. She is able to kill people half her age – and men twice her size – and then string up their bodies in creative poses or toss them through windows. Ann, even in the guise of Virginia, is another improbable killer offering her victims in a fanciful display of violence, including impaling one unlucky fellow on a shish-ka-bob during *Happy Birthday To Me*. “Buffy” is another unlikely killer in *April Fool's Day*, managing to string up the supposed corpses of several male victims while severing the body parts of others. But it is *The Slumber Party Massacre*'s Russ Thorn who is the most over-the-top in his use of the drill, sending sprays of blood flying through the air. Although the news is rife with tales of home invasions and it is certainly not unheard of for a killer to gain access to his or her victim's home and dispatch them within, these slasher films take something that may initially seem believable and turn it into the improbable.

But the killer in the contemporary horror legend retains an air of mystery and thus of believability. Why does he kill? Why not? There are no reasons given for why he commits murder or why he chooses the victims he does. Because we do not know his motivations and he strikes randomly, it makes his violence more frightening than the far-fetched vengeful machinations of slasher film murderers.

But what does the concealment of the killer represent? A fear of the unknown? A fear of change? And how does this interpretation apply to the evolution of the killer in the slasher film? Be it a slasher film or a contemporary legend, the killer represents our fear of changing society and technology. In his facelessness and relentlessness he is robotic, a machine. Not only does he represent our fear of change, he also represents our fear of our own inner darkness.

Morris Dickstein says that the Cold War era gave birth to monster movies of the 1950s, which reflected our fear of nuclear war and of foreign enemies (142). In the 1960s, the counterculture's mistrust of the establishment and fear of becoming mindless working drudges enslaved by the government was reflected in zombie movies. Subsequently, the post-Vietnam era of the 1980s saw the effects of free love and drug indulgence result in increased death – overdoses, AIDS and other STDs. This, coupled with a fear of changing technology and women's increasing liberation, resulted in a boom in slasher films where a faceless, machinelike, unstoppable killer (similar to the seemingly unstoppable computers that threatened to take over people's jobs) attacks predominantly young people (who represent the future). This results in a final showdown with a young woman who is almost like a throwback to females of another era with her



virginal, prudish behaviour, and thus very unlike her increasingly liberated sisters.

Therefore concealment of the killer is an important element not only in slasher films but in contemporary legends as well.

The rarely seen murderer in the contemporary legend represents hidden danger, not only to his would-be victims but in society at large as well. In all but "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" and "The Headless Roommate," the killer remains hidden from both the characters and the audience. And even in the case of former the babysitter never actually sees the killer; instead she feels a blade pressed to her throat. The killer is only ever revealed in "The Headless Roommate" when the female protagonist comes face to face with him – and her roommate's severed head.

The killer in *Black Christmas* is as vague and undefined as the killers of contemporary horror legends, never revealing his name, his face, or his motive. In *Halloween*, the killer may be given a name and emerge from the shadows to have a showdown with Final Girl Laurie, but his face remains hidden, as do his motives for murder. He also proves unstoppable, his body disappearing after being shot and falling from a second-story window and creating the slasher film's first un-killable "superkiller". *Friday the 13th* ushers in a heightened amount of gore with its murders, acts that middle-aged Mrs. Voorhees hardly appears physically capable of. Mrs. Voorhees may not need a mask, but her identity as the film's killer is concealed until the climax, beginning the slasher film trend of a surprise "twist" ending.

Capitalizing on this new trend of surprise endings, *Happy Birthday To Me* employs an even more far-fetched "twist" when its killer is revealed to be Ann wearing a

Virginia mask. The petite high school student hardly seems to have the physical strength required to crush a bodybuilder with his own set of weights nor to dig up and arrange all of the corpses for the film's grisly birthday party scene. Yet this scene is key in showing off the slasher film's increasing use of special effects.

Russ Thorn's drill attacks are so over-the-top as to be almost laughable in *The Slumber Party Massacre* and in fact slasher film expert Adam Rock says that the feminist filmmakers Amy Jones and Rita Mae Brown intended it as a parody (139). Thorn's attacks seem merely to be an excuse to send sprays of blood shooting across the screen. *April Fool's Day* is a pseudo-parody of the slasher film, its plot being an elaborate hoax designed by the would-be killer to test drive a murder mystery weekend at her family's sumptuous summer homestead. Thus the improbability of a young woman being able to fell large, athletic men proves true when it is revealed none of the murders actually took place.

The slasher film's superkiller has become predictable in his inability to be permanently killed. The killer rising up after being felled by the Final Girl's weapon of choice has become yet another cliché of the slasher sub-genre and is also another example of the slasher film drawing out an aspect of the plot in order to fill screen time and deliver cheap thrills to the audience. But it also serves to lessen the killer's menacing impact. Why should we care if in *The Slumber Party Massacre* Valerie succeeds in disabling Russ Thorn's drill, slicing his arm and sending him into the pool, when we know he will, true to form, rise again in the next shot? And he does, emerging from the

pool to attack Valerie once more, sustaining an attack from Trish before taking one final leap at the Final Girl.

While killers in both sub-genres share the element of concealment, they apply it differently. The contemporary legend killer remains physically concealed, usually unseen by the survivors in the legends and therefore rarely physically described. The killer in slasher films is seen not only by the victims and the survivors, but also by the audience and therefore frequently uses a mask as a form of concealment. The unseen attack of the contemporary legend's killer, who then seems to disappear back into the world from which he came, is far more effective at frightening the listener than the repeated attacks of the superkiller are at scaring the viewer. Of course allowing the killer to be indestructible also allows for a sequel, perhaps even a series of sequels, creating a slasher film franchise. The slasher film killer has progressed into an actual character, one with a first and last name, with a past, and with a motive. But this does not succeed in making the killer any more believable. Whatever trauma the killer suffered in the past, it certainly does not match the level of violence the slasher killer's appetite for murder demonstrates. In fleshing out the killer for the purposes of extending the slasher film plot, this formerly mysterious character loses the mystique still possessed by the killers in contemporary legends. The contemporary legend's killer is quick and brutal and still at large. The slasher film killer is simply waiting for the next film to appear.

### **Meaning and Murder**

In these tales fraught with violence, gore and death, what are we to make of all this murder? In order to find any meaning in it we must determine what prompts the



killer's rage for violence and what indicators, if any, there are for who will be a victim in both contemporary legends and slasher films. Sex, smoking, drinking and drugs seem to go hand-in-hand with death in slasher films, but can the same be said for contemporary legends? A closer examination of the underlying messages in each sub-genre will reveal whether or not these messages are the same.

While the slasher film features multiple murders, the contemporary horror legend usually hinges on only one murder. Whether or not this murder is the work of a serial killer, and thus this victim is but one of many, the focus of the legend is on one particular murder. It is this particular victim's death that forms the crux of the legend. Any further murders would only serve to lengthen, and perhaps even complicate, the plot. And unlike slasher films, contemporary legends are meant to be brief. Thus, the climax of the text centers around one murder – a roommate in “The Roommate's Death,” “The Headless Roommate” and “Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn out the Lights?”; a friend in “The Furry Collar”; and a boyfriend in “The Boyfriend's Death”. “The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs” is an exception to this, since the number of children killed varies with the variant; sometimes, there is only one child killed.

According to Isabel Cristina Pinedo, the killer in slasher films is a male psychotic “propelled by psychosexual fury” (72) deriving from a traumatic childhood experience that leads him to stalk and kill many young people. Although the killer in contemporary legends can be similarly described as being an assumed to be male psychotic who stalks and violently kills young people, nothing is ever said about this killer's childhood experiences so we cannot know if the murders are spurred on by some sort of

psychosexual disorder. Is the killer in "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" driven to kill children because they represent the end result of sexual intercourse? Why then kill the teenaged babysitter? Is it significant that the killers in "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn On the Lights?" and "The Headless Roommate" have left their victims' corpses in bed? The only characters who might be considered to be in a sexually compromising position are the boyfriend and girlfriend in "The Boyfriend's Death." They are secluded and alone together, perhaps for the purposes of a sexual encounter – is the boyfriend's death punishment for this? If so, why is the girlfriend spared? In some ways, her punishment is more severe than his. No merciful death for her. Instead, she must endure a terrifying night, see his mutilated corpse, and become institutionalized. This seems a high price to pay for spending some time alone with her boyfriend.

We do not know that the killers in the contemporary legends are operating from a place of psychosexual fury, but we can ascertain they are psychotic in their fury since their victims' existence seems to be all that is required to incite the attacks. The contemporary legend's killers are not given the same amount of attention that the slasher films' killers are. Even amongst the killers in the six films used in this study, though, not all of them can be said to be acting out of rage from a childhood experience that prompts a psychosexual fury.

*Black Christmas* gives no reason for its killer's madness, but he has chosen to strike out at a group of sorority sisters and he also kills a young girl in the park. The only male he kills is the police officer guarding the house. It seems he kills females without regard for age or appearance, murdering both the middle-aged housemother and a child,



the plain and shy Phyl as well as brash and beautiful Barb. Is there a particular reason that he has selected these girls and this sorority house or was it simply the availability of an open window that gave him opportunity to strike? His rampage appears to be random.

Russ Thorn's motivation in *The Slumber Party Massacre* is similarly vague. He does appear to stalk Trish at the beginning of the film, lurking in the bushes and then again in her schoolyard before attacking her slumber party guests that night. While there are obvious phallic associations to be made about his use of a power drill as a murder weapon, all the audience knows of him is that he killed six people in the community in 1969. Viewers do not know whether the attacks were sexual in nature nor do they know the sex or the ages of any of the victims. Certainly Thorn attacks scantily clad young women in the film, but he also strikes out at a middle-aged male neighbour, the fully-clothed gym coach and telephone repairwoman as well as a couple of visiting teenage boys. Whoever crosses his path is fodder for his drill.

Mrs. Voorhees murders camp counselors in *Friday the 13th* because she is seeking revenge for the drowning death of her only child, her son, Jason. She believes his death to be a direct result of camp counselors having sex instead of supervising him. She says that he was not like other children, he was special, and flashbacks reveal him to be deformed. It is implied that the counselors stood by and did nothing while the other campers taunted him and drove him into the lake. No one tried to save him because no one wanted to touch the disfigured child. She perceives all camp counselors as being irresponsible and thus responsible for her son's death. The year after his death, she kills two young counselors about to have sex. Many years later when the camp is about to



reopen, she begins killing off all of the new counselors, regardless of the fact that they were not present when her son died and that they are not all having sex.

In *Happy Birthday To Me*, Ann also kills young people to suit her need for vengeance, even though they are not directly responsible for the injustice she feels was visited upon her in childhood – the break-up of her parents' marriage. Her victims are just pawns in a twisted game she is playing with her real target, Virginia. Her father had an affair that resulted in Virginia's birth and destroyed Ann's family life. She managed to kill Virginia's mother and make it appear as if it were a car accident, but she did not succeed in killing Virginia herself. Years later she lures Virginia into a false sense of security by believing they are friends and including her in the exclusive Crawford Top Ten clique. Then she begins to murder Virginia's new friends while attempting to make everyone believe that Virginia is the killer. Ann's need to kill stems from the result of her father's sexual activities.

Sex appears to be deadly in slasher films, but what about in contemporary legends? The characters in the six legends selected for this study are all high school or university-aged students, placing them in their late teens or early twenties at the latest. Some of them are also sorority sisters, such as the girls in "The Roommate's Death." There is the stereotype of hard partying, morally and sexually "loose" sorority girl; high school and university students are often viewed as immature and irresponsible – irresponsible with their alcohol consumption, irresponsible with their sexual activity, and even irresponsible with their vehicles, as is case with the boyfriend in "The Boyfriend's Death" who "forgets" to put in gas in his car prior to driving out into the middle of

nowhere with his girlfriend. But just because she has a boyfriend, are we to assume the girlfriend in "The Boyfriend's Death" is indeed sexually active, or if she has engaged in sexual activity that she has also engaged in intercourse? By the same token, if the babysitter in "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" has a boyfriend, which she does in some variants, is she sexually active with him? Are we to assume the sorority sisters are also sexually active simply because they are out of high school and in a sorority? And would the possibility that all of these girls may indeed be sexually active be enough to warrant their deaths?

It would seem that the girls who are killed are the ones who seem more virginal than the girls who survive. Cohen describes Louise in "The Headless Roommate" as "homely" (1) and someone who would "sit alone in this room every weekend...she didn't really feel like going out" (2); Liz in "The Roommate's Death" as "steadily losing the battle [against fat] and gaining weight" (78); and Roberta in "The Furry Collar" as taking on a much more subdued persona when at home than the one she exhibited at college, "Roberta, so vivacious at school, seemed to adopt the family melancholy when home" (46) and Roberta herself says, "Getting away to college was the happiest day of my life, coming back here was like coming back to prison" (47-8). Since Roberta lives in such isolation and in a self-described prison, it is unlikely that she is getting out on many dates or having much sex. The legends lack the same direct statement that the characters are smoking and/or drinking, that the slasher films possess (if someone is depicted drinking or smoking the seasoned viewer knows this person will die during the course of the film, and if they are shown having sex then theirs will be the next death). Whether or not the

females in contemporary legends have been drinking or smoking prior to their deaths is not as overt in the legends as it is in the films. So are we to assume the implication is there simply because they are young women?

Teenagers are often forced to have sex in isolation – in the backseats of cars in Lover's Lanes, in dorm rooms or fraternity houses, or when mom and dad are away. Being isolated makes them obvious prey – so are they being killed for their sexual activity or because they are easy targets? Contemporary legends seem to have a stronger message about staying with the crowd, not being separated, not going off on your own or being left alone. And most importantly, do not be a vulnerable isolated woman. "The Boyfriend's Death" includes all of the above but can also have the added implication of a taboo against premarital sex.

The most dominant message that contemporary legends seem to be sending is one against being isolated from one's companions. The reason why a girl is left alone varies. Sometimes it is because her roommate is studying at library, sometimes it is because her roommate is out on a date. Whatever the reasons, the result is the same: if a girl allows herself be left alone, then she is going to be killed. "The Boyfriend's Death" is the only one of the six legends in this study to include a couple who are out in an isolated area together, and even then it is not usually the girlfriend's choice to be there. In the remainder of the legends, it is girls who are alone in dorm rooms or houses. Cohen describes the location in "The Furry Collar" as "the great, grey, gloomy Victorian monstrosity that was the Decker house. It was twenty miles from the nearest town" (45). The house the babysitter in Cohen's "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" must babysit



in is described as being, "outside of town and pretty isolated" (17) with "no neighbors nearby" (17). In "The Roommate's Death" Cohen says that on sorority row there was not, "a single light on in any of the houses except one" (75) a "big, empty sorority house...depressing, and just a bit scary, particularly at night" (77). It is isolation and death that go hand-in-hand in the contemporary legends.

While the teenage characters in slasher films are also isolated, it is their engagement in sexual activity that acts as a precursor to their deaths. Rockoff says that once they have sex they are then brutally punished in order to, "satisfy the hierarchical Puritanical ideology which still pervades our society" (81). But Harold Schechter says that slasher films are unjustly denounced for being misogynistic:

...they are really projections of adolescent anxieties common to both sexes. And to the degree that the victims are more frequently females, the movies (again, like the folktales) reflect the traditional warnings that young women receive about the dangers of putting themselves in sexually vulnerable situations (15).

Sex equating death has become such a slasher film cliché that it prompted a character in the 1996 film *Scream* to proclaim the supposed rules for survival:

Randy: There are certain rules that one must abide by in order to successfully survive a horror movie. For instance, number one: you can never have sex. Big no-no! Big no-no! Sex equals death, okay?

And indeed it would appear that those who have sex pay for it shortly after with their lives. Judith Meyers is killed by her younger brother, Michael, at the beginning of *Halloween* after he has witnessed a sexual encounter between her and her boyfriend. He later murders dumb blonde Lynda and her boyfriend Steve post-coital. Two young camp counselors sneaking off for a romantic tryst are butchered at the beginning of *Friday the 13th* and later in the movie another couple is killed after having sex. Diane and her

boyfriend are both killed in *The Slumber Party Massacre* while preparing to have sex. Promiscuous Nikki appears to be murdered in a bed filled with blood during *April Fool's Day*. Jess and her boyfriend are never shown having sex in *Black Christmas* but they obviously have at some point in the past because she is pregnant with his child. He is later killed and her life hangs in the balance when she is unknowingly left alone in the sorority house with the killer. While no couples are depicted having sex in *Happy Birthday To Me*, the movie's main homicidal action is the result of the killer's rage over a sexual affair.

However, sexual activity or inactivity is not the only thing separating the victims from the survivors. Alcohol, smoking and drug use all signify "bad" people in slasher films. But does this make them deserving of death? *Scream* also comments on this through the character of film buff Randy:

Randy: Number two: you can never drink or do drugs. The sin factor! It's a sin. It's an extension of number one.

And once again, characters who are shown indulging in such vices are quick to become fodder for the film's killer. Barb in *Black Christmas* not only drinks and smokes but she also dares to talk back to the killer on during one of his threatening phone calls. Her sorority sister and fellow victim, Phyl, may not be all that bad but nor is she all that attractive, thus marking her as victim much like her homely contemporary legend counterparts. Their housemother is an alcoholic, thus her fate is sealed as well. And even Jess seems marked for death with her unwanted pregnancy an indication of her sexual activity.

Annie in *Halloween*, although not naked is depicted undressing onscreen, smokes pot (interestingly enough with Laurie) and plans to meet up with her boyfriend, shirking her babysitting responsibilities and placing them on Laurie. She lacks Laurie's fridity, studious nature and maternal instincts so she cannot be the Final Girl and is instead the first of Laurie's friends to be killed. Alice is lured into drinking alcohol, smoking pot and playing strip poker with two of her fellow camp counselors in *Friday the 13th*. These two counselors are, of course, the killer's next two victims.

Trish in *The Slumber Party Massacre* does survive to the movie's end, perhaps because she shows compassion for the film's Final Girl, Valerie. However she also appears naked onscreen several times and organizes a slumber party to which her friends bring drugs and alcohol. Although all of the girls at the party indulge in the drugs and alcohol, Trish is the only one not killed. She does, however, witness the deaths of all of her friends, her basketball coach, and her neighbour. She also attempts to stab the killer, but is unsuccessful in her attempt. She is a sobbing, traumatized mess by the film's conclusion. But she is alive.

### **Conclusion**

Murders are key elements in both contemporary horror legends and slasher films, however they serve different purposes in both sub-genres. In contemporary horror legends one murder is used to serve as the tale's climax; the survival of the Girl Left Behind is the focus, and her reaction to the murder serves as the legend's denouement. But slasher films are much longer than contemporary legends and by necessity must include more murders in order to fill time. In the slasher film it is the Final Girl's



discovery of the murder victims' corpses that signal's the climax, a prolonged battle between the Final Girl and the killer, is about to occur. In contemporary legends girls die because they are in the wrong place at the wrong time; the legends do not have as an overt anti-sex, drugs, drinking and smoking message, as do the films. But are the film characters who drink and have sex doing so to represent bad behaviour teenagers must not engage in or risk punishment? Or are they simply engaging in typical teenaged behaviours? And if this behaviour is typical, then might we assume that the characters in contemporary legends do so as well since they are also teenagers?

A killer presents concealed danger to a group of young people, commits murder, and leaves one female alive. The killer is only given a backstory and the female is only given the power to fight back in order to make the film last longer than the few minutes it takes to tell a contemporary legend. However much the slasher film's longer length necessitates these additions to the plot, it is still telling a very similar tale to the contemporary horror legend. The killer in contemporary legends may be human but in slasher films is an undefeatable superhuman; the female protagonist may cower in contemporary legends but strike back at her assailant in slasher films; and there may be only one victim in the legends and many in the slasher films. However it is my belief that these differences are merely surface details and that when broken down into their basic elements, these two different sub-genres are telling the same gore-filled story of violent killers and traumatized females. The way the story is told changes, but the story itself does not. How do fans of these two sub-genres perceive these stories and why do they consume them in the first place? A closer examination of the horror fan in the next

chapter may explain why horrific expression of our fears can be a cathartic, and enjoyable, experience.

## Chapter 5

### The Horror Fan

In preceding chapters, I discussed the evolution of contemporary horror legends and slasher films and examined structures as well as the presence of killers, survivors and victims in both sub-genres. But what I have not yet touched upon is the horror fan. Who tells these grisly legends and watches these violent films - and why? In order to explore these questions further, I spoke to seven informants, three males and four females, who self-identified as fans of horror. The group includes four Folklore undergraduate and graduate students (Susan MacLeod, Brian Sloane, Leanne Price and Miss Scarlet) and a trio of horror film fans (Tyler McAllister, Kelsey McKenzie and Fred Sewell). Because several of my informants requested anonymity, I have assigned them all pseudonyms, with exception of Miss Scarlet who chose her own. This chapter considers the enjoyment these fans find in the legends and films. Finally, it discusses the role of gender, a subject they identify as significant.

As I have demonstrated in the preceeding chapters, contemporary legends and slasher films share a similar structure of young people getting killed by a psychotic murderer leaving one female alive at the end, and they have the same elements of victimized females, killers, and female survivors. Many have similar plots, such as a babysitter in peril in "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" and *Halloween* (1978) or the sorority sisters whose lives are in danger such as the characters in "The Roommate's Death" or *Black Christmas* (1974). Again as I have argued, I believe there is enough evidence to suggest that slasher films are variants of contemporary legends, using a



different mode of transmission. However, while over half of my informants were students of folklore as well as fans of slasher films, none of them *consciously* made the connections I draw between the two sub-genres. This is not to say that they do not recognize underlying commonalities, however. As Dundes speculates:

Storytellers in some sense do “know” the structural patterns which underlie their narratives. I suspect that children do in fact extrapolate folkloristic patterns such that they are well able to pass judgment as to whether a given folktale or riddle is being properly told. Even if individuals cannot articulate the patterns...that does not necessarily mean that the informants are not aware of the underlying patterns (Dundes 2007 129).

Those I interviewed indicated sometimes obtaining their contemporary legend variants from filmed depictions, such as the ones in *Urban Legend* (1998). They also pointed to similarities shared by the legends and films. Sewell says, “the babysitter one with the phone call upstairs...Well, the rest of them [contemporary legend texts and slasher films clips] seemed to be more or less variations on that sort of thing”. MacLeod, herself a student of folklore, noticed with *Black Christmas* and *Halloween*, that, “they were doing a different take on the babysitter caught in the house with the murderer”. Then she asked, “Is it related to the one about the boyfriend’s death if they die after sex?”

While some saw slasher films as extending earlier contemporary legend texts, my informants also distinguished between the two sub-genres. They informants largely defined the legends by their moral lessons and the films by their gore. Brian Sloane illustrates this in his definition of the contemporary legend:

It seems to be a more modern version of a morality play or something like that. It’s a story that’s told that can be very realistic...but the details are generalized...they almost seem to teach a lesson at the end like to not look back or to listen to your parents or to be an attentive babysitter.

However, he describes the slasher films primarily in terms of gore:

For me, a slasher film is- I picture the teen romp sort of movies with a bunch of teenagers going in the woods and drinking and a deranged killer coming after them and killing them with a knife or an axe or something... Usually it seems to be more about blood and guts moreso than it is about creating spookiness or creepiness or anything like that (Sloane 2004).

Sloane goes on to point to the film's moral lessons but he emphasizes their graphic violence: "The bad people always died", thus slasher films are, "sort of morality plays, I guess you could say. They have that morality lesson there to a certain extent. Even if the movies mask it a little more". Susan MacLeod believes that contemporary legends contain an element of believability so that people can relate to them whereas slasher films are, "not a very sort of involved plot just a lot of shock and blood and guts and murder". Leanne Price also says that contemporary legends are "believed to be true" and "moralistic" whereas slasher films are "Blood and guts. Gory". Miss Scarlet says that "Slasher, to me, and urban legends are two different things, definitely", adding that contemporary legends are, "pretty much all of those that were comodified as the *Urban Legend* films" whereas in slasher films themselves, "everybody's there and they're always in couples and some guy just decides to kill them all and he slashes throats or stabs them all or whatever and one by one kills all of them".

Kelsey McKenzie also notes the moralistic nature of the contemporary legends, defining them as:

something that gets kind of passed down and the elements are the same but...the actual details might get changed that nobody can either kind of prove or disprove...but there's always kind of a moral element to it you know? If you do this or if you don't watch out for this then what would be the repercussion.



But for slasher films, she simply states, "There has to be lots of gore". And although she does not find a moral lesson contained within the films she does believe they can provide a lesson in sensibility, saying, "you could learn stuff from them too, they're kind of educational. Just reaffirming common sense, don't walk down a hallway that isn't lit, don't walk down a street if you can see anything" (McKenzie 2004). However, her film viewing companions do not detect the moral element of the contemporary legend. Fred Sewell says that the contemporary legend is, "a horror story sort of and it's been passed down...but they're all not true basically". Tyler McAllister also mentions the element of transmission, saying, "the story sounds probable but there's something very strange at the end that can't be explained. You know, something that passes along easily from person to person". But similar to all the other informants, Sewell and McAllister both define slasher films by their gory content. Slasher films are, "heavy on the gore basically. Not really believable" (Sewell 2004).

McAllister mentions the role of gender in his definition of slasher films:

Some unreal monster that isn't easily killed and really just, they seem like they kill just for the fun of it...and ninety-nine percent of the time it's a female who is the victim and a male is the slasher.

In fact all of my informants had a lot to say about victims, killers, and gender in both the contemporary legend and the slasher film. For example, as discussed in the previous chapter, a central figure in both contemporary horror legends and slasher films is the killer. But it is only in the slasher films that these killers are given an identity, and it is only in slasher films that this identity may be that of a female. Some of my informants found this to be merely a ploy used by the films to entertain and to shock while others



believed it to be a subverting of society's perception of women. McKenzie says this gender switch occurs strictly for entertainment purposes because slasher films are "meant to titillate, so to speak" whereas contemporary legends are "meant to entertain as well as educate". For McAllister it is a matter of believability. "When you have a female slasher it's so different that people maybe pay attention more. I think with urban legends it's easier to believe a female being the victim and not the killer". Miss Scarlet views it as an issue of perception:

...psychologically it's somehow more disturbing to have a female who could do that [be a killer] because females are perceived as motherly and there's this perception of them in a certain way... I think it's just that if you really want to shock someone, you'll have a female murderer.

Sloane suggests that contemporary legends may be lacking in female killers because of societal expectations whereas the slasher films include them to trump viewers' expectations:

That it's not right for a woman to be a killer or even the physical thing again, that she wouldn't be strong enough to be the killer. Or maybe it's a message that women don't have the capacity to be as evil or sadistic as men... Maybe society expects to a certain extent that men be more violent than women and that women be more passive... It might be for the sake of unpredictability in some cases. Because in a lot of slasher film it's more about the question of unpredictability. They don't want you to find out who the killer is until later... the women killers... they look much more weak and innocent and then they turn out to be psychotic at the last minute.

MacLeod and Price also both indicate that the slasher film includes a female killer in order to give the sub-genre some variety.

...the slasher filmmakers are just trying to engage a wider audience by having somebody who is a female killer, that that might appeal to different people who are more frightened by it. Maybe it's just something new, brings something new to the genre.

Similarly, Price speculates that female killers are used in the movies but not in the legends, "Maybe just to add some variation on the genre".

Adam Rockoff agrees, believing that female killers are employed in some of the most successful slasher films, but that these are also earlier slasher films (6). Although it is true that the successful *Friday the 13th* franchise began with a female killer, Mrs. Voorhees, and was indeed one of the earlier slasher films, released in 1980, the female killer has also been featured in more recent slasher films such as *Scream 3* (2000) and *Urban Legend* (1998). Clover believes that the female slasher film killer strikes due to anger resulting from being abandoned or cheated on by men in her adulthood (29), but I question if this is true in every case. Of the six films explored in this study, half of them feature female killers, none of whom are committing murder in retaliation for perceived betrayal by men in their adulthood. Ann in *Happy Birthday To Me* (1981) is indeed feeling abandoned, and perhaps even cheated, by her father who was carrying on an affair that resulted in an illegitimate daughter. But this occurred in her childhood, not her adulthood. Mrs. Voorhees in *Friday the 13th* (1980) can certainly be seen to be acting out for an issue that occurred in her adulthood, but it has nothing to do with men abandoning her but rather camp counselors not being vigilant while her son went swimming, which resulted in his drowning death. And while "Buffy" in *April Fool's Day* (1986) is simply an identity created by Muffy to fool her friends into believing she has an insane identical twin who is killing everyone, "Buffy's" supposed issues stem from being insane since childhood not from any untoward treatment by men in her adulthood. While the female killer may be considered unique, the female victim is perceived as being very common.



In contemporary legends, the victims are almost always female whereas in slasher films it seems to be more evenly divided. My informants found that the females in the contemporary horror legends, whether they lived or died, are all portrayed in one manner: as victims. Price says that women in the contemporary legends are presented as, "Victims...they're always totally helpless". And McKenzie similarly states that in contemporary legends and slasher films, "women are the victims". MacLeod agrees, saying that the characters in contemporary legends who are, "obviously victims...[are] usually female" and that likewise the characters who are, "Always victims" in slasher films are women. Sewell disagrees, believing men and women are both treated violently in equal amounts in slasher films. "[It's] pretty even... most of these killers in the movie they don't care if it's male or female that they ultimately kill". Sloane does not specify gender, simply saying that, "the people that die in them always seem to be the ones who don't do the right thing" (2004). And while McAllister said that in the films and legends, "the female was the victim most times" (2004) in terms of who would be treated violently specifically in a slasher film, "it's everybody" (2004). Price found the slasher films to be unflattering in their depictions of both genders, saying, "I find while these movies don't portray women very well they also don't portray men very well. I mean most of the guys are pretty daft".

In the half dozen contemporary legends I examined for this study, the murder victims were females in all but "The Boyfriend's Death". The gender of the children killed in "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" was not specified. In the six slasher films viewed for this study, I found the number of female and male murder victims to be fairly



evenly distributed. Harold Schechter agrees. "Though critics decry "slasher" films as misogynistic porn, the victims of the mythic serial killer are as likely to be men as women" (Schechter 47). Clover argues that males' death scenes are swift and frequently occur offscreen whereas women's deaths in slasher films are given more screen time and filmed at closer range, drawn out with graphic detail (35). Vera Dika agrees that men are either killed quickly or offscreen and that the women are, "subjected to long, humiliating struggles before they are killed" (124). She even believes that Final Girls and female killers, such as Alice and Mrs. Voorhees in *Friday the 13th*, are humiliated. She gives the example of Alice and Mrs. Voorhees wrestling in the mud, stumbling and falling, and Mrs. Voorhees' final humiliation with her "ludicrous" slow-motion decapitation shot (Dika 1990, 124). However that is a hallmark of the slasher film: over-the-top, even ludicrous, violence. When the sub-genre was infancy, the female deaths may very well have outnumbered the males, such as in *Black Christmas* in which a killer attacks a sorority house or *Halloween* where a female and her female friends are targeted, but only by a small margin.

The majority of the murders in *Black Christmas* occur offscreen with only the first murder, a female who is suffocated, getting screen time. The deaths of two sorority sisters, the housemother and a young male mistakenly believed to be the killer are implied; a male police officer is discovered with his throat slit; and a young girl's murder is mentioned but not depicted nor is her corpse displayed. *Halloween* opens with the murder of a teenaged female. A male truck driver's corpse is discovered; Annie is strangled in her car; Bob is stabbed; and Lynda is strangled with the phone cord. While

more screen time may be given to the females' deaths, Bob's is certainly the more gruesome way to die and his corpse is left impaled in the kitchen, although no gore is shown. However, as the slasher sub-genre increased in popularity with films such as *Friday the 13th*, death became an equal opportunist with just as many males as females meeting grisly ends depicted in gruesome detail on camera. Vera Dika concurs, saying, "the victims in *Friday the 13th* are equally represented by male and female characters" (123). Marcie is indeed killed by an axe to the head while wearing her underwear and a t-shirt after engaging in consensual sexual intercourse with her boyfriend Jack, but he does not escape unscathed. He dares to light up a joint after having sex, and unbeknownst to him is lying beneath his friend's corpse located on the bunk bed above him. Drops of blood begin to drip onto Jack's face and the audience is then treated to the sight of a screwdriver working its way through his neck to an explosive gush of blood. Jack's death is as drawn-out and gory as his girlfriend's and he too is caught in a vulnerable state lying in bed post-coital.

Even *The Slumber Party Massacre* (1982) with its driller killer slaughtering three teenaged girls having a sleepover, a hapless female technician, a female basketball coach, and a teen girl in school after hours, also includes the on-screen deaths of two teenaged boyfriends, a nosy male neighbour and the killer himself. And not one but three females survive to the film's conclusion. In *Happy Birthday To Me* only one female's death is depicted onscreen at the beginning of the movie while one other girls' corpse is discovered later and the female killer is killed at the film's conclusion. Three teenaged boys, a male psychiatrist and the Final Girls' father are all killed onscreen while two



more male corpses are discovered, making the male deaths far outnumber the females. And while none of the murders turn out to be real, there are still more male victims than female in *April Fool's Day*, with only two females compared to five males.

Rockoff says that deaths are swift and do not linger on the victims' agony and that men and women are killed indiscriminately with no conscious choice on the part of filmmakers to have women die worse deaths than men, because, "death is not gender-biased. It is a unisex curiosity" (9). Finally, Isabel Cristina Pinedo believes that victims in slasher films are, "subjected to high levels of explicit, sexualized violence, especially if female" (16), adding that, "[h]er death, and the anticipation of her death, occupies substantially more screen time and is more erotically charged than that of her male counterpart" (75). But Pinedo also argues that women are prominent as victims and as heroes (16). While I am not sure that the Final Girl necessarily qualifies for hero, she does qualify as a survivor, no matter how temporary her survival may be.

While gender appears to play a role in who survives and who does not in both contemporary legends and slasher films, morality is also a frequent indicator of who will meet an untimely end. Although contemporary legends are regarded as morality tales by most of my informants, the same is not true of slasher films. Whereas in the films the girls who party, drink, do drugs and have sex are the ones who die, in contemporary legends it is often her proclivity for partying that saves her from the killer's blade. Usually the girl left at home to study, the one who is dateless for the evening, is the one who is the first to die as is the case in "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn Out the Lights?" and "The Headless Roommate". Even the girlfriend who is off with her



boyfriend in the middle of nowhere manages to live while her boyfriend is killed in "The Boyfriend's Death". Most of my informants believe that contemporary legends contain moral lessons and that the Girl Left Behind displays certain, none too heroic, characteristics.

MacLeod views the women in contemporary legends as ineffectual: "I think a lot of them seem really passive, they don't seem very rational...very weak...not the most intelligent" (2004). McAllister echoes this, "There was a lot of cowering...Usually the guy went to get help and the girls stayed in the room and hid" (2004). McKenzie expounded on similar observations:

The women generally don't do as they're either told or advised. So if it's a get out of the house what's the first thing they do? Go up the stairs. You know. Don't go in the basement, what's the first thing they do? Instead of hauling ass out the front door they go down the stairs.

Sloane similarly notices this tendency but he interprets it as a resistance to authority.

It seems like the majority of the time they didn't seem to do what they were told...it seemed like if an authority figure would tell them to do something in a lot of the stories they didn't listen, like the police telling the girl not to look back and in "The Roommate's Death" the mailman telling them everything was fine but to not open the door.

He further believes that, "they can do the quote unquote right thing or they can do the wrong thing and they almost seem to do the wrong thing or the gullible thing or the stupid thing" (Sloane 2004). And Miss Scarlet also felt that the female characters in contemporary legends could do with a bit more backbone, if not common sense.

...first they do something kind of stupid like go somewhere by themselves or stay by themselves, like the boyfriend leaves her in the car and she stays. But then they're always afraid, they always cower in the backseat or they cower inside the room instead of opening the door and finding their friend out there and possibly

saving her life. Like they do something dumb like go by themselves or they don't heed a warning or whatever...they're totally pansy-assed girls.

Price is the lone voice of dissension, believing that because the deck is unfairly stacked against the Girl Left Behind, contemporary legends do not always, "necessarily all come across as cautionary tales ... it kind of seems in pretty much all of them they never had a chance. It's always way too late by the time the phone rings or once they notice the roommate is missing".

McAllister finds similarities between women in contemporary legends and slasher films. "Usually they were the ones that were helpless, they were the ones that were scared, being chased" (McAllister 2004). He notes that the women in the contemporary legends at least managed to hide and criticizes the women in slasher films for their inaction: "instead of running the woman just stands there and screams" (McAllister 2004). Sloane shares a similar assessment of the females in both contemporary legends and slasher films: "they always seemed to go where they shouldn't go or stay around too long when they should've just left and let common sense prevail". Miss Scarlet believes that the weak, inactive female characters of the legends transfer easily to the screen. "That same kind of stupidity and fear, cowardice, is present but I think it's multiplied to a much greater degree in the movies; they're running *up* the stairs or they're cowering *in front* of someone" (Miss Scarlet 2004). McKenzie states it simply, but her words imply that the female character has indulged in some sort of sexual behaviour or semi-nudity due to her half-dressed state, "Big hair, no pants, she had to die". This raises the issue of moral messages in slasher films: are characters killed for indulging in sexual behaviour?



Rockoff says that post-coital killings in slasher films are not a comment on morality but rather a device to titillate the audience with nudity; both good and bad girls are killed. But in all six of the films included in this study, the girls who are killed are indeed "bad" either because they have consumed alcohol, done drugs, engaged in sexual behaviour or some combination of all three. However, supposedly "bad" girls can sometimes survive to the last reel, as evidenced by Trish's continued presence at the conclusion of *The Slumber Party Massacre* in spite of having indulged in drink and drugs and appearing nude onscreen. Likewise, *Black Christmas*' Final Girl Jess can hardly be considered "good" within the narrow confines of the definition as it applies to slasher films, for she is pregnant and intending on having an abortion. Kit in *April Fool's Day* engages in intercourse with her boyfriend and Alice in *Friday the 13th* drinks, indulges in marijuana and plays strip poker. But both these female characters are never depicted naked onscreen, a key hallmark of who will die and who will not.

Athletic, pretty outcast Valerie in *The Slumber Party Massacre*, responsible, studious Laurie in *Halloween* and kind, beautiful Virginia in *Happy Birthday To Me* are all "good girls," not engaging in sex, drugs, smoking or drinking, and surviving to the final reel. And although she is bratty and disobedient, she is a child and a virgin and thus Valerie's little sister Courtney also survives in *The Slumber Party Massacre*. Every female character killed in each of these six films is, by definition a "bad girl" because she either drinks, smokes, does drugs, engages in sexual behaviour, is cruel to the Final Girl, appears onscreen in some degree of undress, or a combination of all six of the above. It would seem to me that the determining factors of which female will live and which will



die is nudity and kindness to the film's Final Girl – if she appears onscreen naked, whether or not she has indulged in any of the other above-mentioned vices, she will die. This is why Alice can drink and smoke and still survive to the conclusion of *Friday the 13th* and Kit can have sex but still triumph in *April Fool's Day*. However, if a female character does appear naked, this too can be overcome if she is nice to the Final Girl. This is why Trish can appear naked, drink and do drugs and still make it intact to the end of *The Slumber Party Massacre* (but it is also her indulgence in all of those vices which prevent her from being the film's Final Girl and make her attack on the killer unsuccessful).

While I believe kindness and nudity to be markers of who will live and who will die, Sewell abides by the rules for surviving a horror film outlined in the 1996 film, *Scream* (see quote in Chapter 4): "if you have sex that you're dead, if you're off drinking or getting high or whatever that you're dead. So don't ever go off by yourself and say "I'll be back" cause you'll die" (Sewell 2004). These types of behaviours, according to Sloane, are not only wrong, but punishable by death. "...you go to a horror movie expecting the people who do the wrong things to die and it's sort of poetic justice in a certain way, you know. It give you the sense of morbid justice or something like that, it's interesting" (Sloane 2004). To Miss Scarlet, who will be targeted by the killer is, "very predictable... If two people are segregated from the rest of the group then they're going to get killed. And usually it has to do with cues about how weak or how frail a certain female is, then you know she's just going to be knocked off" (2004). MacLeod attributes death to lack of intelligence and survival to being morally upstanding.

The ones who get murdered often seem to be the ones who are not necessarily the brightest ones. They may be the prettiest ones. But the ones who are left to tell the tale often seem to be quite levelheaded...She's not loose, she's not promiscuous sexually, so she's the one left to tell the story.

But this lack of female intelligence angers Miss Scarlet. "It really bothers me the stupidity, like, girls are always portrayed as blonde bimboes in these movies and I always think if that was me, I would not be- I would be the smart one, you know?" (Miss Scarlet 2004). Miss Scarlet is not the only horror film fan amongst my informants to put herself in the beleaguered female victim's place.

All four of my female informants spoke of what they would do in similar situations. Price simply wondered but came to no conclusions. "You gotta think what would you do in that situation though, where would you go, what would you do?" (Price 2004). McKenzie critiques the lack of intelligence and insists, like Miss Scarlet, that she would be wiser. "... you're the dumbest person on the planet, what are you doing...what would I do in that situation? Well I'd be scared but I wouldn't be that dumb" (McKenzie 2004). But MacLeod offers no heroics, saying that if she were merely being stalked by a killer, never mind attacked, "I would have a heart attack!" (2004).

While McAllister cannot put himself in the female character's place, he does sympathize and offers an explanation as to why, particularly males, relate to the female victims.

I think it's probably easier for people to feel sorry for females. A lot of guys have egos and don't necessarily like male characters or can't relate to them as easily as to females and it's harder to feel sorry for a guy who's, you know, being an ass or trying to pick up a girl in the movie. And you're like, Ah, he's a jerk.



Unlike McAllister, MacLeod finds it to be more a matter of shock value than empathy, but she similarly finds it less disturbing to see male victims than female ones.

Someone who is believed to be the weaker sex and the more vulnerable sex and the more emotional sex, perhaps that just heightens the whole shock factor of it, that this is happening to a woman. If it was happening to a man perhaps it wouldn't be so shocking for people to see a man, a big strong man, being chopped down, you know?... But there's always something a little bit shocking, anyways for me, you know, to see a young girl who's defenseless or something just chopped up to bits.

But Price expresses scorn for this image of the helpless, and thus passive, female:

Girls in their underwear, smoking pot. It would've been nice to see one of these girls haul off and give Jason a kick in the 'gnads or at least have them duck not just stand there, "I'm gonna die and there's nothing I can do about it. I shouldn't have had that joint".

Whether they were sympathetic to her plight or frustrated by her inaction, my informants seemed more consumed by and aware of the fate of the female characters than the male ones. In part this is due to the fact that there are mainly female characters in all of the legends discussed. And in both the contemporary legend and the slasher film, in the end audiences are usually left with only a female character to embrace or disdain.

In spite of their dissatisfaction with the depiction of women, many of my informants did indeed notice that it was female characters who survived to the end of the contemporary legend or slasher films. MacLeod notes that in contemporary legends, "it's usually a female that's left standing to witness...all of this violence". And also in slasher films, "I do get the sense there would be one person left to face off, and that it would be female" (Miss Scarlet 2004). Sewell notices this as well, saying, "That seems to run through almost all of them, there's always a female left". McKenzie notes that while the



female protagonists in the slasher films become active, in contemporary legends they never do:

In some of the better kind of horror movies you'll at least get one heroine that will fight back or instead of just running shit-scared through the woods be like, okay, enough's enough. They'll get some adrenaline going, get their own hatchet and wait for them. That kind of thing. Whereas in these urban legends you don't get that kind of response... I think in movies they tend to be a bit more proactive.

This begs the question, why leave the final confrontation against an unrelenting killer up to a lone female?

I believe this is done for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it heightens tension to have a lone vulnerable female because it is less believable that she could successfully defeat a (usually) male killer. Secondly, this predominantly male-female violence is a depiction of man's violence to woman. Sloane theorizes on this, saying, "it probably reflected a certain aspect of society, that the husband was allowed to be physically violent with his wife, at least legally anyway. I mean morally it's still wrong, but it seems to be that may be more acceptable". MacLeod considers this further:

Women are not violent by nature; they are defenseless perhaps, by nature, which is not necessarily the case. People who get killed in the slasher film they're not in a situation where they can outwit the killer. It's just physical body on physical body and they haven't a chance, so it does sort of- they're put in a situation where they are defenseless. I don't know if that's a metaphor for the whole gender or what.

And finally, it is also scarier for the audience to see woman as prey since she is generally perceived as the weaker sex. "It's much easier to feel sorry for a female. They're normally thought of as being more helpless, I think" (McAllister 2004). MacLeod expresses a similar view:

You expect a woman to scream, you expect a woman to make a big emotional fuss over what's happening to her and I don't know if people would react the same way if they saw an eighteen year old man who's a football player, screaming, if it would be quite as shocking as a woman. You would think, "Oh my gosh, who would ever do that to a woman?"

But McKenzie thinks a female is left to battle against the killer in part to arouse the audience. "Boobies. Running boobies are always good, yeah" (McKenzie 2004).

Sloane, however, sees female survival as a reflection of society's standards of morality.

Maybe it has to do with the morality thing because it seems like society a lot of times puts a lot of the issues of morality on the woman...Maybe [the slasher film] reflects that because you have the amoral killer versus the moral character who usually lives at the end, who's usually the female who doesn't do the things like doing drugs or drinking or having sex... Maybe if you're a good moral woman you can win at the end of the day.

McKenzie and Miss Scarlet connect the survival of the female with the survival of the species. "It's the ultimate kind of survival of the fittest. Somebody's got to survive, how do they do it?" (McKenzie 2004). Miss Scarlet elaborates:

I think it's kind of a strange little twist to the plot considering they're taking out all the girls because they're weak and it's a girl who finally takes out the- or, who survives. It makes me wonder if there's not some kind of element of survival of the fittest...If you were to get into strange analysis of Darwinist thought and what's required for the survival of the species...it almost seems like it's like that. Oh, everybody else can get killed but as long as we have one final female standing it's all okay. It's kind of strange in that way.

But whether or not this survival puts women in a positive light is an issue upon which my informants stand divided.

I do not see the female's survival in the contemporary legend as a heroic act; it is instead an act of chance, she remained hidden or happened to leave the light off at the most opportune moment, which frequently leaves her traumatized beyond recovery.



Likewise in the horror film I do not consider her apparent triumph over the killer as empowering because she is either rendered insane or killed off in subsequent sequels.

None of my informants believed the female's survival in contemporary legends to demonstrate particular strength or intelligence. They saw these characters as, "passive...very flighty and emotional. Gullible" (MacLeod 2004); "gullible...stupid" (Sloane 2004); "totally helpless" (Price 2004); "stupid...afraid...they always cower" (Miss Scarlet 2004); "cowering...helpless...scared" (McAllister 2004) although he did concede that, "they're in some isolated situation where they can't easily get away. They're not usually in public" (McAllister 2004), but they still do nothing to ameliorate their situations. They are, according to one informant, "the ultimate victim" (McKenzie 2004). They are both incapable of self-rescue and of rescuing their companions. But the final female in slasher films is not much better.

While the Last Girl Standing does manage to do battle with the killer, she does not manage to save any of her friends from death. And her own survival is hardly a cause for celebration. But some of my informants believe that a female is the film's last survivor in order to present an image of a strong woman. Sloane suggests this.

It may be as well to try and represent a strong female in a certain way. Like maybe horror movies and those sorts of things are progressive in a certain way because it almost seems like the female is the last one that does stand up against the killer and generally especially in horror movies they usually win, even if they get beaten up in the process. So it could be sending a message that women can be strong and things like that even if lots of women in the movies are killed as well.

McKenzie also sees the lone woman's survival as victorious.

It's that much more of an uneven fight. Whereas if you've got a male killer versus a make victim you're like okay, there might be a chance here, but it's all that much more rewarding if at the end of a film it's this young typically teenage early



twenties woman that outwits this six foot five two hundred and fifty pound psychotic killer. You don't need the brawn; your brains can sometimes get you out of a bad situation. The victory in the end is that much greater.

Miss Scarlet, on the other hand, does not see the female's survival as a triumph; it is too little too late.

I never get the sense at the end I should feel proud that a woman survived it. As much as the gender stereotypes are horrible, having a female survive at the end doesn't seem to make- it doesn't seem to fix all the bad stereotypes that went into it at the beginning.

Although she is a woman surviving male violence, it does not automatically qualify her as an example of a strong feminist image.

Pinedo writes that, "it is a test of our mettle to survive the ordeal, and yet the ordeal itself is not without its pleasure" (50). Pinedo finds that the stress someone viewing a horror film experiences is turned into a pleasurable sensation because they know there is really nothing to fear; the film-viewing experience is a bounded one as the fear of physical violence never materializes since the film ends. Although she is writing about the horror film audience, the same can be said for the contemporary legend fan. What is it about horror that makes it so enjoyable to certain people?

John G. Cawelti claims that when we watch a formulaic slasher film, we face violence, danger and death, "but in such a way that our basic sense of security and order is intensified rather than disrupted, because, first of all, we know that this is an imaginary rather than a real experience, and, second, because the excitement and uncertainty are ultimately controlled by the familiar world of the formulaic structure" (16).

For my informants, the enjoyment of horror in oral or visual form comes from the fact that it is a frightening experience occurring in a safe environment; they are

experiencing the event vicariously, it is not actually happening to them. If it becomes too terrifying or too disturbing to continue, they can stop listening to the legend or stop watching the movie. Thus, it is a "safe" experience. However for my seven informants, being frightened is what they expect from a contemporary horror legend or a slasher film. For them, ceasing to listen or watch would defeat the purpose of the experience.

Miss Scarlet elaborates on this, explaining that it is the element of control that makes the fearful event, such as viewing a slasher film, fun:

I think it's one of those living vicariously through a movie. No one obviously wants to be in a situation where they're being hacked to death, nobody's looking for that. It's kind of like going on a roller coaster- you get that thrill but then you can walk away from it. You can be afraid but you're in control of what's causing your fear because of ever got to the point where you couldn't take it anymore you can just turn it off... You don't hope for that kind of experience but you're in control of it and so you can kind of live your fear but you're in no danger.

Sloane concurs, applying a similar outlook to his enjoyment of slasher films and contemporary legends:

I guess it's the surprise and things like that, while at the same time you know that you're safe. There's nothing at risk really. It's just fun. It's a chance to get startled and be surprised and things like that, and I guess it's a certain amount of excitement that you're allowed to encounter without hurting yourself.

For Sloane, the element of surprise heightens his enjoyment, which he likens to being startled. This can cause rapid heart beat, sweaty palms, in short, an adrenaline rush. For Sewell, being frightened is fun because, "it's a bit of an adrenaline rush". It is both the believability of the contemporary legends and the adrenaline rush of the slasher film that entertains my informants. While they feel secure in the knowledge that it is unlikely they will ever be attacked by a psychotic killer, the faint possibility that it just might happen keeps them excitedly on edge when hearing a legend or viewing a slasher film.



McAllister says, "The situations and their actions are a little bit easier to believe in the legends". But for Price the enjoyment comes in believing they are not true. "I find them interesting, you know, how details change and everything but you know the basic premises in most of them tend to remain the same...I knew [they] weren't true and that kind of piqued my interest" (Price 2004). McKenzie appreciates their open-endedness, saying, "A happens then B happens, then C happens then period. There's no kind of resolution, they're kind of left more open".

Similarly, in viewing slasher films many of my informants attribute their enjoyment to the fact that they are not real. Sewell simply states, "lots of blood and gore and graphics and this kind of stuff, but you know it's not real." McAllister also points to the lack of reality in slasher films. "They're scary and they're intense, but they're not real. It doesn't seem like a fear that I'd ever have to deal with so it's kind of a different scary". McKenzie also appreciates slasher films as an escape from the ordinary, saying, "it's not the everyday. I like the adrenaline rush of being scared." Price also appreciates the adrenaline rush, explaining, "there's a little bit of a rush. Especially, I mean, if you're watching something like this, you can totally remove yourself from it. You can have your little scare and then get over it and go on." Sloane agrees, stating, "I mainly watch horror movies for the escapism." Price adds that slasher films are "candy for the brain." Miss Scarlet shares this opinion, elaborating:

I think they're kind of kitschy. They're quirky and kind of kitschy. They're pure fromage. I mean you kind of get a thrill out of it when you're actually watching it but I don't think anybody necessarily sits at home thinking that it's something that could happen to them.

MacLeod marvels that they can hold our attention.



I do like slasher films to a certain extent but they have to be really really frightening, scary, like not just hacking somebody's head off. Big deal, beheading. But if there's torture then that would engender something and create some fear...It catches your attention more than anything else you would watch on television, I think. I don't know what other kind of film or show would evoke such a strong and immediate response in you. And I think it's incredible to have that sort of reaction to something that you're watching on a piece of metal in a box. It's really quite incredible.

My informants' enjoyment of contemporary legends seems to derive from the fact that they lack the intensity of slasher films. The impact of the legends only seems to increase when presented within the context of a slasher film, such as *Urban Legend*. The visual element of film gives informants that much-needed jolt of pleasurable fear, which may be contributing to the decline of the oral contemporary legend. In essence, what is occurring is that the people are being sold back their own previously free contemporary legends in the form of filmed entertainment that they must pay for. This actually may not be a bad thing. People enjoy watching these legends depicted onscreen. Some want to see how they will depict the killers; others want to see how the killings will be committed.

Sloane appreciates being able to see the killer's relentlessness depicted onscreen.

For me atmosphere is more important than buckets of blood...there was something about the fact that they were slow and relentless, just like Michael Meyers or Jason for example. They don't have to go fast to catch you. They'll wind up doing it somehow.

MacLeod shares this appreciation of the unstoppable killer, adding that she also enjoys being able to see the killer's physicality depicted:

You know that he's going to get to you at one point in time but he's not going to speed up or he's not going to get into an argument with you or anything he's just going to come at you until you're dead... I'm not familiar with any urban legends that actually describe what the killer looks like so it [the slasher film] puts a face on the killer.

McAllister feels that because the contemporary legends usually lack a physical description of the killer, this lends to their credibility whereas the superkillers depicted in slasher films are unbelievable.

That's part of what makes it [the legend] easy to believe, you never see the killer, then it can be your next door neighbour or it can be anybody. So I think it's probably easier for people to pass them on that way. They can picture somebody they know as the killer whereas in horrors nobody knows somebody who lives at the bottom of the lake.

For Sewell, it is finding slasher films hard to believe that make them enjoyable. "When it's over the top and you know it's not real then I can handle it...I don't love seeing really really gross stuff or anything like that...we'd pick 'em apart too, that's part of it as well because most of the older ones are cheaply made" (Sewell 2004). And McKenzie shares Sewell's enjoyment in analyzing how the films are made.

Even from a technical point I find it fascinating. How did they do that? That is just as important to me as the storyline. If some of them look really fake, you're just like, oh man I could have done that with a bucket of corn syrup and some red dye but if it looks really good it's just like oh man I wonder how they did that... You don't need a lot of blood, although it's cool, you don't need a lot of naked women...it's the music or whatever the killer looks like or how he does it. It's as much atmosphere and mood as it is everything else... It's entertaining!

But deriving pleasure in watching a legend being depicted onscreen is not the only reason the folk enjoy being sold their own legends in filmed form; it is also because film is, quite simply, the current popular mode of transmission for contemporary legends.

Increasingly, people are not sitting around their dorm rooms telling these legends as much as they are in the theatres watching films that depict them, such as *Urban Legend*. Sylvia Grider's discussion of what she calls, "media narraforms" (1981 125)



almost seem to predict transmission's mutating form in the face of changing modes of mass media:

The media narraforms thus embody a symbiotic relationship between the media and oral tradition: the media provide the content, and oral tradition provides the situations and format for the performance of these contemporary, hybrid narratives (1981 126).

McAllister only recognized the contemporary legend texts used in this study from filmed variants, identifying "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" as a scene from *Black Christmas*. "It seems like they've been in almost every- like a horror movie of some kind" (McAllister 2004). MacLeod only became familiar with contemporary legends after enrolling in Folklore as a graduate student and taking a course titled "Legend." "My only familiarity with them is the familiarity I gained hearing them in class. I actually haven't heard any of these growing up" (MacLeod 2004). Instead, she told me that she played Bloody Mary during her childhood and heard a legend about a haunted residence on campus when she was an undergraduate (MacLeod 2004). But there were no late night legend telling sessions for MacLeod. Sewell recognized both "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" and "The Boyfriend's Death" from Boy Scouts campouts during his childhood. He was the only one of my informants able to relate a local legend called "The Webber," which he says is, "about a Newfoundland monster or whatever, the only difference was that...his head actually was gone and the blood was dripping from the stump of his neck on to the car. And I think they said that the Webber was supposed to have a hook for a hand" (Sewell 2004). While Sewell's familiarity with contemporary legends began with Boy Scout camp, Price's began with a legend set at Boy Scout camp. "Well, the "Roommate's Death" one, the first time I heard that it was at Boy Scouts at a



cabin in the woods so different variation same story, bloody knuckles on the door” (Price 2004). But her main source of contemporary legends growing up came from books. “*Tales for the Midnight Hour*. I had it when I was probably ten years old... it was basically urban legends and in a narrative format for kids...I remember I read *The Vanishing Hitchhiker* when I was in junior high” (Price 2004). But film has also served as a source of contemporary legends for her. “I remember a couple of these [contemporary legend texts] being in the *Urban Legends* movie” (Price 2004). And Miss Scarlet even uses the same movie as part of her definition of contemporary legends. “It’s pretty much all of those that were commodified as the *Urban Legend* films” (Miss Scarlet 2004).

Television is another source for contemporary legends. Both Miss Scarlet and Sloane mention the television series *Urban Legend*. Miss Scarlet says, “there’s even a TV show, I think. There was a series, anyway.” For Sloane, it provided him with a variant of a contemporary legend he had never heard before. ““The Roommate’s Death” was fairly recent that I saw it on the t.v. show *Urban Legends*” (Sloane 2004). Price also mentions the newest mode of transmission for contemporary legends: the Internet. “I discovered Snopes a few years ago when I was getting bombarded by email forward with versions of stories I’d heard as a kid” (Price 2004). Clearly, oral is not the only, or even the most common, mode of transmission for my informants; films, books, television, and the Internet are all major sources of contemporary legends.

We live in an increasingly technological society, and perhaps this is playing a part not only in a shift in the way contemporary legends are transmitted, but also in desensitizing recipients to the violence and gore sometimes contained within the texts.

Two of my informants speculate that television's increase in violent content makes people less prone to being affected by things like contemporary horror legends and slasher films. MacLeod speaks about contemporary legends specifically when she says, "obviously this serial killer is on the loose, which is frightening, but how many times do we watch things about serial killers or people getting maimed or killed on television all the time, even on the news. It's nothing new." Miss Scarlet, however, speaks specifically about slasher films:

I think at this point we're so inundated with other forms of violence that are perhaps more real, like if you think about *CSI* or *Without a Trace* and that kind of thing, it seems a little more possible, maybe. And if you're seeing death constantly in that kind of detail all the time, anyway, why would a slasher film thrill you, you know what I mean? We've gotten to a point where nothing shocks anybody anymore. And I think that twenty years ago when I was five years old and started watching slasher films, and I really was young when I was watching them, it was shocking to see that kind of thing because you weren't going to see it on TV or anywhere else. But now you can turn on the tv any time you want and the sex, the drugs and the horrific violence is there for anybody to witness whenever they want.

Television, like film, is not only providing viewers with large doses of violence and bloodshed, it is also giving them a source for contemporary legends by dramatizing them.

Slasher films can also be considered dramatizations of contemporary legends, and not just because they may include depictions of contemporary legends but because they share the same overall structure of a violent killer (usually assumed to be male) attacking young people and leaving one (usually female) survivor. Rockoff calls contemporary legends modern day folktales and says that cautionary morality tales sell novels, not movie tickets (146). However, the popularity of slasher films, and their close association



with contemporary legends that this study has attempted to show, prove otherwise. Gail de Vos claims:

Scary stories reflect universal concerns nearly as old as storytelling itself. The legends not only illuminate these anxieties but also serve to instill and ingrain them in the members of each new generation (1996, 290).

But do slasher films serve the same function?

My informants consider contemporary legends as more effective cautionary tales than slasher films that are characterized by over-the-top violence and killers of unbelievable relentlessness and indestructibility. Their views support my argument discussed in previous chapters, that it is necessary for the slasher film to include an increased amount of violence and murders, and a prolonged battle between the female protagonist and the killer, to indeed be a feature length film. Ironically, the very things that aid in making the story a feature film are also what make it unbelievable. In contrast, the focus on one victim and a human killer makes contemporary legends seem more plausible. And the fact that the legends tend to be orally transmitted also gives them a sense of immediacy - they happened nearby and to somebody someone the teller knows knows. Even when the contemporary legend is being transmitted via email, it is still sent by someone the recipient knows, thus lending it an air of credibility. It is this element of plausibility, however slim, that allows the contemporary legend to function as a cautionary tale. Inversely, because the slasher film lacks any sort of plausibility, it fails to serve as a cautionary tale. Thus, the fans I interviewed defined slasher films first in terms of their unbelievable displays of violent gore, whereas they considered contemporary legends to have both an air of believability and a moral lesson.



## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have looked at how a particular group of fans regard contemporary legends and slasher films. In particular, I explored what they thought about constructions of gender in the contemporary legends and slasher films selected for this study. I did not interview my informants to discover the role of contemporary legends and slasher films in their lives but rather to uncover why they enjoy horror and what similarities, if any, they identify in these sub-genres. Although they did not identify common underlying structures or overtly state that they felt the slasher film was an extension of the contemporary legend, their comments do reveal that audience members recognize similarities between the sub-genres. For example, they highlighted common plots and characterized the female characters in the contemporary legend texts as stupid, helpless and useless. While none made my argument that the Final Girl in the slasher films only survives by fluke, neither did they see her as a great feminist heroine. They understood the concluding battle between the Final Girl and the film's killer as a depiction of the battle of the sexes with woman represented as the weaker gender. They enjoyed being scared within the confines of a "safe" experience they can control and the resulting adrenalin rush; they also enjoyed the gore and the special effects.

In our interviews, only two of my informants mentioned hearing contemporary legends while growing up and one had never even heard of contemporary legends before taking a university course in Folklore class. All seven informants pointed to television, film and the Internet as sources of transmission for them. Their experiences demonstrate the need for folklorists to explore other modes of transmission in order for our discipline

to continue to grow and move forward. This is a subject I discuss further in the concluding chapter.

## **Chapter 6**

### **In the End: Cut from the Same Cloth?**

#### **Introduction**

In this comparison of contemporary legends and slasher films, I have looked at questions of transmission (what modes are being used), structure (what story is being told), and enjoyment (who are the fans of these two sub-genres and why they enjoy them) of six contemporary legends and six slasher films. In my final chapter, I conclude by summarizing the points of my previous chapters and opening up areas for further study.

#### **Summary of Previous Chapters**

My first chapter included discussion of previous work done in various areas, including contemporary legends and slasher films with Larry Danielson's appeal to folklorists to explore other forms of media; Bruce Jackson's specification that we should study film, the dominant narrative form; Mikel J. Koven's call for a methodology for folklorists to analyze filmed versions of contemporary legend texts (see Koven 2004); and Julia George's examination of horror in film, television and print and in particular the motifs found in horror films. I referred to work done at the intersection of folklore and popular culture by scholars such as John Storey, John Fiske and Harold Schechter, as well as Sylvia Grider's encouragement to folklorists to examine what effect mass media is having on traditional narratives. I also looked at structural analysis, touching upon the work of Vladimir Propp and his functions of the Russian folktale; Dundes's schema applying functions as motifemes in North American Indian folktales; Daniel Barnes's use of Dundes's schema to contemporary legends; Cylin Busby's structural study of women



in contemporary legends; and Vera Dika's structural analysis of slasher films. I examined work done on women in contemporary legends and slasher films, including Beverly Crane's study of "The Roommate's Death"; Ann Carpenter's exploration of woman as victim in contemporary legends; studies by Eleanor Wachs and Mary Seelhorst that both touch upon the contemporary legend's passive female in need of a rescuer, who is usually male; Carol Clover's examination of gender in slasher films; and Jim Harper's look at the slasher film's female survivor (which is situated within a larger study of the slasher film). I concluded by introducing my informants, and the interview process itself. I also provided a breakdown of the remaining chapters.

In Chapter Two I introduced the six contemporary legend and the six slasher films I used in my study and explained why I chose these particular ones. The texts of the legends were included within the content of the chapter and I traced their histories. I discussed the plots of the slasher films included in this study and went on to trace the history and evolution of the slasher film from woodcuttings in medieval times to the Grand Guignol Theatre in Paris to *Psycho* in 1960, as well as the influence of Italian *gialli* films. I paid particular attention to the influence that contemporary legends have had on the slasher film because I believe that this has had an influence on how contemporary legends are transmitted. I mentioned John G. Cawelti's work in literary formula and how that applies to both contemporary legends and slasher films. I concluded by pointing out that no matter the mode of transmission, horror has held our interest for centuries.

My structural analysis of contemporary legends and slasher films is outlined in detail in Chapter Three. I began by discussing Vladimir Propp's use of morphology and outlined his thirty-one functions for the Russian folk tale. I then apply Dundes's schema of Interdiction, Violation, Consequence, and the optional Attempted Escape to both the contemporary legends and the slasher films selected for this study. In so doing, I discovered that the main interdiction is the same in both legend and film: lack of supervision, the consequence of which provides the homicidal action of the plot. Because slasher films are of a longer duration than contemporary legends, their plots must be stretched out and so they contain much more of this homicidal action. And although Attempted Escape is an optional motifeme according to Dundes, it is what sets the films apart from the legends. It is rarely present in contemporary legends but essential in slasher films because it provides the climactic battle between the killer and the Final Girl.

Just as I applied Dundes's schema, originally devised for legends, to both legend texts and slasher film plots, I also applied Vera Dika's Seventeen Functions, originally applied to slasher films, to both slasher films *and* contemporary legends. Once again, I found optional functions (in this case the warning of the old community to the young and the subsequent violation of this which are similar to the Interdiction and Violation in Dundes' schema) to be essential functions in both contemporary legends and slasher films. Whether they are stated outright or simply implied, I believe the main interdiction in both sub-genres is Lack of Supervision, and as soon as the character violate this by being alone, the main murderous action of the legend's or film's plot can begin. Dika's



functions also include four that comprise the Backstory, giving us insight into the killer's background and the motivation for the murderous mayhem that ensues. However, because contemporary legends are simply short, oral narratives they do not require the amount of time a filmed horror tale does and so are neither needed nor included in the contemporary legend – the killer kills; we do not know who they are or why they are, we simply know they are. And, for the purposes of the contemporary legend, that is all we *need* to know. The main differences I found between contemporary legends and slasher films, aside from their different modes of transmission, were the killer's backstory, the increased body count and the battle between the last female and the killer, none of which are present in the contemporary legends included in this study but all of which are essential to the slasher film.

I explored in more detail the roles of killer, female and victims in Chapter Four. I traced the fighting female in television series such as *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997), but pointed out how these women had a supernatural boost of power. I found that although the women in slasher films, unlike their sisters in contemporary legends, fight back, this is not because they are brave and fierce female warriors but merely because they are desperate or lucky. While a (usually male) rescuer did not appear in every legend included in my study, I did notice that the final females in each of the contemporary legends I examined were always weak and did nothing to help themselves, or their companions, from the frightening situations they were trapped in. I found that no matter the type of contemporary legend, the dominant portrayal of woman was that of victim. Female survivors in both sub-genres subsequently are reduced to



quivering, sobbing, frequently insane or catatonic messes and in the case of slasher films are killed off in future sequels. And keeping the killer alive for these future films, as well as giving them a backstory to flesh out the character, I believe ruins the mystique still possessed by the mysterious murderers of contemporary legends.

Fans of horror were the focus of Chapter Five. I briefly introduced my seven self-identified fans of horror (Folklore graduate and undergraduate students and a trio of friends who enjoyed watching slasher films). Four of my informants were females and three were males. They all enjoyed being scared for the adrenaline rush it gave them, but they also appreciated the fact that this fear occurred within a “safe” context, something that was not actually happening to them but which they could experience vicariously through the legend or film. While they did not specify that slasher films are variants of contemporary legends, as I believe they are, my informants did indeed draw similarities between the structures of both. They all found the female characters in the contemporary legends to be helpless and stupid and were frustrated by the females’ lack of action. Their feelings about the Final Girl were mixed. All four female informants put themselves in her place, wondering what they would have done – all but one felt they would do *something*. One male informant wondered what he would do in a similar situation but came to no conclusions. One female informant felt the Final Girl existed solely to titillate audiences with her physique while another felt that no matter how victorious she may emerge, her chance to do battle with the killer did not compensate for the previous female stereotypes found within the film. Males had more sympathy for the way females were depicted in slasher films and one informant even said it was easier to relate to the female

victim than to the male. Several informants viewed the final battle as a depiction of the battle of the sexes, and some even saw it as survival of the fittest.

To my informants, contemporary legends contained moral lessons and were more believable than over-the-top, gore-filled slasher films. Only two informants actually reported hearing contemporary legends while growing up. Six informants had encountered contemporary legends primarily on television and on the Internet. One informant had never heard any contemporary legends until she took a Legend course as a graduate student in the Folklore department. All seven, however, had grown up watching at the very least one slasher film. This suggests a lack of oral transmission amongst contemporary audiences for legends and films. More seem to be finding their folklore using modern media than using face-to-face communication.

This leads to the central question underlying this thesis: Are contemporary legends and slasher films using different modes of transmission to tell the same stories? Can slasher films be considered variants of contemporary legends? My findings support Harold Schechter's position that slasher films are modern variants of contemporary legends. Schechter explains that they are transmitted technologically instead of orally. Writing about movies in the introduction to his book, Schechter says that they are "technologically advanced modes of providing the folk – the mass audience – with the same archetypically entertaining stories that, in other times and places, have been transmitted through oral means (anecdotes, ballads, marchen, etc.)" (x).

My analysis confirms Mikel Koven's point that many differences between contemporary legends and slasher films stem from the fact that contemporary legends



lack sufficient narrative content to sustain a feature length film. Koven argues that several legend texts must be incorporated into one movie (Koven 2002 123). And he cites *Urban Legend* (1998) as an example of such a film, since it features enactments of "The Killer in the Backseat", "The Boyfriend's Death", "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn on the Lights?" and an oral version of "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs". Here I would challenge Koven's view in every case, however. I believe that slasher films do not always incorporate several texts but can sometimes embellish the plot of a single text to make it fit into a ninety minute or two hour cinematic screening, as evidenced in the recent remake of *When a Stranger Calls* (2006), in which only "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" is depicted for the film's entire eighty-seven minute duration. This is accomplished, in part, by prolonging the battle between babysitter and stalker. And this is not merely a current horror film trend; it can be seen in several seminal 1970s slasher films such as *Halloween* (1978) in which a babysitter is in peril, and *Black Christmas* (1974) in which a sorority sister is tormented by phone calls coming from within her sorority house. Thus, slasher films contain more than just motifs from different tales or texts from various legends. They, in fact, contain the very same story told in the legends. To examine them only for motifs' sake is not enough.

Contemporary legends and slasher films share a similar structure of young people getting killed by a psychotic murderer leaving one female alive at the end, and they have the same elements of victimized females, killers, and female survivors. Many have similar plots, such as a babysitter in peril in "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" and *Halloween* or the sorority sisters whose lives are in danger such as the characters in "The



Roommate's Death" or *Black Christmas*. Both sub-genres appear to have an underlying preoccupation with the danger of individuals being isolated and unsupervised. Given these similarities, I believe there is enough evidence to suggest that slasher films are variants of contemporary legends, using a different mode of transmission. Although the modes of transmission may change, the stories we are transmitting remain the same. Any differences that arise are because of the medium, the need for a film to be much longer than an orally transmitted legend. But slasher films and contemporary legends are indeed telling the same story. There is a timelessness and universality to the tales, which is why it seems we are telling the same stories over and over. It is only how we are telling them, and learning them, that is evolving.

#### **Future Directions for Study**

This study suggests that there appears to be a movement away from oral transmission; it is no longer everyone's primary means of transmission. Folklore needs to expand its focus to include film and television; it cannot just be face-to-face communication in small groups – it needs to account for how people interact with increasingly technological modes of transmission such as film, television, email, websites and social networks on the Internet. Danielson says that the contemporary legend can appear on television, in the movies, and in the news as easily as it can in conversation. "It is comfortable in the expressive culture of a society where ghosts no longer threaten us, but maniacs abound" (Danielson 1979, 211). Danielson advises folklorists to pay attention to slasher films in order to understand how contemporary legends are transmitted, as well as how they function in current society (219). My findings support

Danielson's view. A deeper examination of *how* people are transmitting contemporary legends, and how they are learning them, is called for. Folklorists have more to learn about how new media and new technology are affecting the transmission of various forms of folklore, not only the contemporary legend but also the joke, the ditty, the Märchen.

This study also suggests the benefit of future work that examines the inner structures of genres. I have explored the structural components of contemporary legends and slasher films, building on Propp's original work with Russian folk tales, but could there also be structural similarities between slasher films and folk tales or Märchen?

A final focus of this study has been the depiction of gender in contemporary legends and slasher films. This is a vast topic and to look at whether females or males are predominantly targeted by the killers is worth a study in its own right. If contemporary legends serve as cautionary tales playing upon women's anxieties, and men's fears about female power, then what are slasher movies saying about female agency? Why are there so few female killers in slasher films and none at all in contemporary legends? I looked at the patriarchal repression of female sexuality across various cultures, religions and mythologies, but this subject is so large and can only be touched upon within the confines of this particular thesis. There are many topics for future research within it including so-called "honour" killings, the Witch Hunt, historical and mythological depictions of women's sexuality. What do folklore representations suggest about women's sexuality and gender relations more generally?

## **Conclusion**

It would behoove us, as scholars and as folklorists, to examine different modes of transmission. This study suggests that the day is approaching, if it is not already here, when oral contemporary legend is eclipsed by other media, including film. However, the enjoyment people find within the context of a safely bounded fearful experience does not appear to be diminishing. People continue to seek that jolt, that adrenaline rush; horror tales, whether in the written word (books, emails, newspaper articles, filmed depiction (slasher film, newsreel) or oral telling (face-to-face interaction, newscaster) are not losing their appeal and can be found everywhere. Contemporary legends can be found onscreen – from movie screen to television screen to computer screen. The stories that were once told around glowing campfires or darkened dorm rooms are now not only being depicted in films but also appearing online, in people's inboxes. It will be important to incorporate these new forms into our future analysis in order to more fully understand the role of these narratives in our changing society.



## Bibliography

Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. 2006. *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam*. New York: Free Press.

Barnes, Daniel. 1966. Some Functional Horror Stories on the Kansas University Campus. *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 30: 305-312.

---. 1996. Interpreting Urban Legends. In *Contemporary Legend: A Reader*, ed. Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith. New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc. 1-16.

Baughman, Ernest. 1966. *Type and Motif-Index of the Folktales of England and North America*. The Hague: Mouton & Co.

Bennett, Gillian and Paul Smith, ed. 1996. *Contemporary Legend: A Reader*. New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc.

Breo, Dennis L. and William J. Martin. 1993. *Crime of the Century: Richard Speck and the Murder of Eight Student Nurses*. New York: Bantam Books.

Brooks, Geraldine. 1995. *Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women*. New York: Anchor.

Brophy, Philip. 2000. Horrality – The Textuality of Contemporary Horror Films. In *The Horror Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder, London: Routledge. 276-284.

Brunvand, Jan Harold. 2001. *Encyclopedia of Urban Legends*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

---. 1998. *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

---. 1999. *Too Good To Be True: The Colossal Book of Urban Legends*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

---. 1981. *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends and Their Meanings*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Busby, Cylin. 1994. This is a True Story: The Roles of Women in Contemporary Legend. *Midwestern Folklore* 20: 3-62.

Carpenter, Ann. 1981. Woman as Victim in Folklore. In *Legendary Ladies of Texas*, ed. Francis Edward Abernethy. Dallas: E-Heart Press. 211-216.

- Cawelti, John G. 1977. *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Cherry, Brigid. 1999. Refusing to Refuse to Look: Female Viewers of the Horror Film. In *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies*, ed. Richard Maltby and Melvyn Stokes, London: British Film Institute. 187-203.
- Clements, William M. 1991. Interstitiality in Contemporary Legends. *Contemporary Legend* 1: 81-91.
- Clover, Carol J. 1992. *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Cohen, Daniel. 1980. *The Headless Roommate and Other Tales of Terror*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Crane, Beverly. 1997. The Structure of Value in "The Roommate's Death": A Methodology for Interpretive Analysis of Folk Legends. *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 14: 133-151.
- Crane, Jonathan Lake. 1994. *Terror and Everyday Life: Singular Moments in the History of the Horror Film*. London: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Danielson, Larry. 1979. Folklore and Film: Some Thoughts on Bauman Z500-599. *Western Folklore* 38: 209-219.
- de Vos, Gail. 1996. *Tales, Rumours and Gossip: Exploring Contemporary Folk Literature in Grades 7-12*. Englewood: Libraries Unlimited, Inc.
- Dickstein, Morris. 1995. The Aesthetics of Fright. In *Flesh and Blood: the National Society of Film Critics on Sex, Violence, and Censorship*, ed. Peter Keough, San Francisco: Mercury House. 136-147.
- Dika, Vera. 1990. *Games of Terror: Halloween, Friday the 13th, and the Films of the Stalker Cycle*. Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.
- Dundes, Alan. 1971. On the Psychology of Legend. In *American Folk Legend: A Symposium*, ed. Wayland D. Hand. Berkeley: University of California Press. 21-36.
- . 1963. Structural Typology in North American Indian Folktales. In *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes. N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc. 206-217.
- Emrich, Duncan. 1972. *Folklore on the American Land*. Boston, MA: Little Brown & Co.



Fiske, John. 2003. Understanding Popular Culture. In *The Audience Studies Reader*, ed. Will Brooker and Deborah Jermyn. London: Routledge. 112-116.

Freeland, Cynthia A. 2000. *The Naked and the Undead: Evil and the Appeal of Horror*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Gelder, Ken, ed. 2000. Introduction to Part Nine. In *The Horror Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder. London: Routledge. 273-275.

George, Julia. 1982. The Horror Film: An Investigation of Traditional Narrative Elements. *Folklore Forum* 15: 159-179.

Glazer, Mark. 1987. The Cultural Adaptation of a Rumour Legend: "The Boyfriend's Death" in South Texas. In *Perspectives on Contemporary Legend II CECTAL Conference Papers Series, No. 5*, ed. Gillian Bennett, Paul Smith and J.D.A. Widdowson. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press/CECTAL. 93-108.

Goss, Michael. 1990. The Halifax Slasher and other Urban Maniac Tales. In *A Nest of Vipers: Perspectives on Contemporary Legend V*, ed. Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press for the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research in association with CECTAL. 89-100.

Green, Thomas A., ed. 1997. *Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music, and Art, Volume 2: I-Z*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.

Grant, Barry Keith, ed. 1984. Introduction to *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*, ed. Barry Keith Grant. Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press. iii-xiv.

Grider, Sylvia. 1973. Dormitory Legend-Telling in Progress: Fall, 1971–Winter, 1973. *Indiana Folklore: Journal of the Hoosier Folklore Society* 1: 1-32.

Harper, Jim. 2004. *Legacy of Blood: A Comprehensive Guide to Slasher Movies*. London: Headpress.

Houppert, Karen. 1999. *The Curse: Confronting the Last Unmentionable Taboo: Menstruation*. New York, N.Y.: Farrar, Streus and Giroux.

Jackson, Bruce. 1989. A Film Note. *Journal of American Folklore* 102: 388-389.

Kendall, Kathleen. 2002. Who are You Afraid Of?: Young Woman as Consumers and Producers of Horror Films. *FEMSPEC* 4(1): 82-89.



Keough, Peter, ed. 1995. Introduction to *Flesh and Blood: The National Society of Film Critics on Sex, Violence, and Censorship*, ed. Peter Keough. San Francisco: Mercury House. ix-xii.

King, Cynthia. 2000. What's So Funny? Humor in Horror Films. *Creative Screenwriting* 7 (4): 47-53.

King, Stephen. 1974. *Carrie*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.

---. 1981. *Danse Macabre*. New York: Berkley Books.

Koven, Mikel J. 2008. *Film, Folklore and Urban Legends*. Lanham, MA: Scarecrow Press, Inc.

---. 2002. Filming legends: A Revised Typology. *Contemporary Legend* 5: 114-135.

---. 2003. Folklore Studies and Popular Film and Television: A Necessary Critical Survey. *Journal of American Folklore* 116: 176-195.

---. 2006. *La Dolce Morte: Vernacular Cinema and the Italian Giallo Film*. Lanham, MA: Scarecrow Press, Inc.

---. 2004. The Terror Tale: Urban Legends and the Slasher Film. *Scope: An Online Journal of Film Studies*. Institute of Film Studies, University of Nottingham, (May), <<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/film/journal/articles/tale-of-terror.htm>> (accessed 16 Feb. 2004).

Laba, Martin. 1986. Popular Culture and Folklore: The Social Dimension. In *Media Sense: the Folklore-Popular Culture Continuum*, ed. Peter Narvaez and Martin Laba. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Press. 9-18.

Lacey, Nick. 1998. *Image and Representation: Key Concepts in Media Studies*. New York: Palgrave Publishers Ltd.

Lyman, Peter. 1989. The Fraternal Bond As a Joking Relationship: A Case Study of the Role of Sexist Jokes in Male Group Bonding. In *Men's Lives 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed*, ed. Michael S. Kimmel, Michael A. Messner, Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon. 86-96.

MacKinnon, Kenneth. 1990. *Misogyny in the Movies*. Toronto: Associated University Presses.

MacLeod, Susan. 2004. Interview. July 12.

- Maynard, Lara. 1998. Locked Doors: Bearer-Centered Interpretation of "The Roommate's Death" and Other Contemporary Legends of Special Relevance to Females. *Contemporary Legend* 1: 97-115.
- McAllister, Tyler. 2004. Interview. June 28.
- McCarthy, John. 1986. *Psychos: Eighty Years of Mad Movies, Maniacs, and Murderous Deeds*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- McKenzie, Kelsey. 2004. Interview. June 23.
- Meade, Benjamin. 1999. Adult Motivations for Viewing Horror Films. PhD diss., University of Kansas.
- Mitchell, Carol A. 1977. The Sexual Perspective in the Appreciation and Interpretation of Jokes. *Western Folklore* 36 (4): 303-329.
- Modelski, Tania. 2002. The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film and Postmodern Theory. In *The Film Cultures Reader*, ed. Graeme Turner. London: Routledge. 268-275.
- Mulvey, Laura. 1975. Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. *Screen* 16 (3): 6-18.
- Narvaez, Peter. 1992. Folkloristics, Cultural Studies and Popular Culture. *Canadian Folklore Canadien* 14: 15-30.
- Narvaez, Peter and Martin Laba. 1986. Introduction: The Folklore-Popular Culture Continuum. In *Media Sense: The Folklore-Popular Culture Continuum*, ed. Peter Narvaez and Martin Laba. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Press. 1-8.
- Neale, Steve. 1984. Halloween: Suspense, Aggression and the Look. In *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*, ed. Barry Keith Grant. Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 331-345.
- Niles, John D. 1994. Folklore on Film. *Folklore in Use* 2: 25-36.
- Parr, Elizabeth. 1971. The Film and the Folk: Authentic Nostalgia. *Journal of Popular Culture* 4: 943-946.
- Pinedo, Isabel Cristina. 1997. *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press.



- Polan, Dana B. 1984. Eros and Syphilization: The Contemporary Horror Film. In *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*, ed. Barry Keith Grant. Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 201-211.
- Preston, Cathy L., ed. 2000. *Border Crossings: Legends, Literature, Mass Media, and Cultural Ephemera*. St. John's, NL: International Society for Contemporary Legend Research.
- Price, Leanne. 2004. Interview. July 13.
- Propp, Vladimir. 1968. *The Morphology of the Folktale*. Trans. Laurence Scott and ed. Louis A. Wagner. Austin, TX: The University of Texas Press.
- Radway, Janice A. 1984. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press.
- Riesman, David. 1970. The Oral Tradition, the Written Word, and the Screen Image. In *Film and the Liberal Arts*, ed. T.J. Ross, New York, N.Y.: Holt Rinehart and Winston, Inc. 251-259.
- Rockoff, Adam. 2002. *Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film, 1978 to 1986*. McFarland & Company.
- Scarlett, Miss. 2004. Interview. December 7.
- Schechter, Harold. 2001. *The Bosom Serpent: Folklore and Popular Art. Second Edition*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Seelhorst, Mary. 1987. The Assailant in Disguise: Old and New Legends about Women Alone in Danger. *North Carolina Folklore Journal* 34: 29-37.
- Sewell, Fred. 2004. Interview. June 27.
- Sloane, Brian. 2004. Interview. July 7.
- Smith, Paul. 1999. Definitional Characteristics of the Contemporary Legend. *FOAFtale News* 44: 5-8.
- Snopes.com: Urban Legends Reference Pages*. Ed. Barbara and David P. Mikkelsen. 1995. Urban Legends Reference Pages. 12 Nov. 2003 <[http:// www.snopes.com](http://www.snopes.com)>.
- Staples, Ariadne. 1998. *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins: Sex and Category in Roman Religion*. New York: Routledge.



Stewart, Susan. 1982. The Epistemology of the Horror Story. *Journal of American Folklore* 95: 33-50.

Storey, John. 2003. *Inventing Popular Culture: From Folklore to Globalization*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Tye, Diane. 2005. On their Own: Contemporary Legends of Women Alone in the Urban Landscape. *Ethnologies* 27 (2) 219-236.

Wachs, Eleanor. 1990. The Mutilated Shopper at the Mall: a Legend of Urban Violence. In *A Nest of Vipers: Perspectives on Contemporary Legend V*, ed. Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press for the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research in association with CECTAL. 143-160.

Widdowson, John. 1982. The Bogeyman: Some Preliminary Observations on Frightening Figures. *Folklore* 82: 99-115.

Williams, Linda. 1996. When the Woman Looks. In *Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, ed. Barry Keith Grant. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, Austin. 15-34.

Wood, Robin. 1984. An Introduction to the American Horror Film. In *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*, ed. Barry Keith Grant. Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 164-200.

## Filmography

Abrams, J.J., Ken Olin, Jennifer Garner, Michael Vartan, Victor Garber, Touchstone Television, ABC. 2001-2006. *Alias*. Television series. USA.

Alexander, Andrew, Joe Flaherty, Eugene Levy, Andrea Martin, John Candy, Catherine O'Hara, Dave Thomas, Rick Moranis, Old Firehall Productions, CanWest Global Television Network, CBC. 1976-1981. *Second City TV*. Television series. Canada.

Bava, Mario, Guiseppe Barilla, Marcello Fondato, Alfredo Mirabile, Massimo Patrizi, Cameron Mitchell, Eva Bartok, Ariana Gorini, Emmepi Cinematografica, Woolner Bros., Allied Artists Pictures, Media Home Entertainment. 1964. *Blood and Black Lace*. 1 videocassette (88 min.) videorecording. Culver City, CA: Media Home Entertainment.

Bava, Maria, Giuseppe Zaccariello, Filippo Ottoni, Claudine Auger, Luigi Pistelli, Laura Betti, Nuova Linea, Image Entertainment. 1971. *Twitch of the Death Nerve*. 1 DVD (84 min.) digital recording. Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment.

*Bay of Blood* see *Twitch of the Death Nerve*

Blanks, Jamie, Silvio Horta, Brad Luff, Jared Leto, Alicia Witt, Rebecca Gayheart, Joshua Jackson, Sony Pictures, Columbia TriStar Home Video. 1998. *Urban Legend*. 1 videocassette (100 min.) videorecording. Culver City, CA: Columbia TriStar Home Video.

Brock, Deborah, Roger Corman, Crystal Bernard, Cynthia Eilbacher, Atanas Ilitch, Nelson Entertainment, Concorde Pictures. 1987. *Slumber Party Massacre II*. 1 DVD (90 min.) digital recording. USA: New Concorde Home Entertainment.

Cameron, James, William Wisher Jr., Stephanie Austen, Linda Hamilton, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Edward Furlong, Tristar Pictures, Artisan Home Entertainment. 1991. *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*. 1 DVD (139 min.) digital recording. Santa Monica, CA: Artisan Home Entertainment.

Carpenter John, Debra Hill, Moustapha Akkad, Irwin Yablans, Jamie Lee Curtis, Donald Pleasence, P.J. Soles, Compass International Pictures, Media Home Entertainment. 1978. *Halloween*. 1 videocassette (92 min.) videorecording. Culver City, CA: Media Home Entertainment.

Carpenter, Stephen, Jeffrey Obrow, Stacey Giachino, Laura Lapinski, Stephen Sachs, Daphne Zuniga, New Image, Video Treasures, Media Home Entertainment. 1982. *The Dorm That Dripped Blood*. 1 videocassette (90 min.) videorecording. Culver City, CA: Media Home Entertainment.



Clark, Bob, Roy Moore, Gerry Arbeid, Marty Adelstein, Olivia Hussey, Margot Kidder, John Saxon, Andrea Martin, Film Funding, Famous Players, Warner Home Video. 1974. *Black Christmas*. 1 videocassette. (98 min.) videorecording. Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video.

Craven, Wes, Kevin Williamson, Cathy Konrad, Harvey Weinstein, Bob Weinstein, Neve Campbell, Courteney Cox, David Arquette, Drew Barrymore, Skeet Ulrich, Live Schreiber, Dimension Films, Miramax Films. Buena Vista Home Entertainment. 1996. *Scream*. 1 videocassette (111 min.) videorecording. Los Angeles, CA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment.

Craven, Wes, Kevin Williamson, Cathy Konrad, Harvey Weinstein, Bob Weinstein, Neve Campbell, Courteney Cox, David Arquette, Jada Pinkett, Sarah Michelle Gellar, Jerry O'Connell, Live Schreiber, Dimension Films, Miramax Films. Buena Vista Home Entertainment. 1997. *Scream 2*. 1 videocassette (122 min.) videorecording. Los Angeles, CA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment.

Craven, Wes, Kevin Williamson, Ehren Kruger, Cathy Konrad, Harvey Weinstein, Bob Weinstein, Neve Campbell, Courteney Cox, David Arquette, Scott Foley, Parker Posey, Carrie Fisher, Dimension Films, Miramax Films. Buena Vista Home Entertainment. 2000. *Scream 3*. 1 videocassette (117 min.) videorecording. Los Angeles, CA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment.

Cunningham, Sean S., Victor Miller, Ron Kurz, Stephen Miner, Betsy Palmer, Adrienne King, Kevin Bacon, Paramount Pictures, Paramount Home Video. 1980. *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*. 1 videocassette (95 min.) videorecording. Hollywood, CA: Paramount Home Video.

De Palma, Brian, Paul Monash, Stephen King, Lawrence D. Cohen, Sissy Spacek, Piper Laurie, John Travolta, P.J. Soles, United Artists, MGM/UA Home Entertainment. 1976. *Carrie*. 1 videocassette (98 min.) videorecording. Century City, CA: MGM/UA Home Entertainment.

Frank, Carol, Ron Diamond, Roger Corman, Nicole Rio, Angela O'Neill, Wendy Martel, Pamela Ross, Concorde Pictures, Concorde-New Horizons, Warner Home Video. 1986. *Sorority House Massacre*. 1 DVD (75 min.) digital recording. Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video.

Hitchcock, Alfred, Robert Bloch, Joseph Stefano, Anthony Perkins, Janet Leigh, Vera Miles, John Gavin, Shamely Productions, Paramount Pictures, MCA/Universal Home Video. 1960. *Psycho*. 1 videocassette (109 min.) videorecording. Universal City, CA: MCA/Universal Home Video.

Jones, Amy Holden, Rita May Brown, Michelle Michaels, Robin Stille, Michael Villella, New World Pictures, Embassy Home Entertainment, New Concorde Home



Entertainment. 1982. *The Slumber Party Massacre*. 1 DVD (82 min.) digital recording. USA: New Concorde Home Entertainment.

Lambert, Mary, Michael Dougherty, Dan Harris, Matt Bierman, Jefferson Richard, Kate Mara, Ed Marinaro, Lillith Fields, Columbia Pictures, Screen Gems, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment. 2005. *Urban Legends: Bloody Mary*. 1 DVD (93 min.) digital recording. Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment.

Miner, Steve, Ron Kurz, Frank Mancuso Jr., Lisa Barsamian, Amy Steel, Adrienne King, Betsy Palmer, Georgetown Productions Inc., Paramount Pictures, Paramount Home Video. 1981. *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> Part 2*. 1 videocassette (87min.) videorecording. Hollywood, CA: Paramount Home Video.

Morgan, Glen, Roy Moore, Michelle Trachtenberg, Lacey Chabert, Andrea Martin, Oliver Hudson, Dimension Films, Corus, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Home Entertainment. 2006. *Black Christmas*. 1 DVD (84 min.) digital recording. Century City, CA: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Home Entertainment.

Ottman, John, Silvio Horta, Paul Harris Broadman, Scott Derrickson, Brad Luff, Joseph Lawrence, Eva Mendes, Jennifer Morrison, Matthew Davis, Columbia Pictures, Sony Pictures Entertainment. 2000. *Urban Legend: Final Cut*. 1 DVD (99 min.) digital recording. Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Entertainment.

Rosenthal, Rick, Debra Hill, John Carpenter, Larry Brand, Sean Hood, Moustapha Akkad, Malek Akkad, Bob Weinstein, Harvey Weinstein, Dimension Films, Miramax Films, Alliance Atlantis Home Video. 2002. *Halloween: Resurrection*. 1 DVD (89 min.) digital recording. Toronto, ON: Alliance Atlantis Home Video.

Rosenthal, Rick, John Carpenter, Debra Hill, Moustapha Akkad, Irwin Yablans, Jamie Lee Curtis, Donald Pleasence, De Laurentiis, Universal Pictures, MCA/Universal Home Video. 1981. *Halloween II* 1 videocassette (93 min.) videorecording. Universal City, CA: MCA/Universal Home Video.

Scott, Ridley, Dan O'Bannon, Ronald Shusett, Sigourney Weaver, Tom Skerritt, Harry Dean Stanton, John Hurt, Gordon Carroll, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Home Entertainment. 1979. *Alien*, DVD (116 min.) digital recording. Century City, CA: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Home Entertainment.

Sherman, Gary, Karen Clark, Frank Yablans, Stacey Keenan, Cheryl Ladd, D.W. Moffett, Jeffrey Tambor, United Artists, CBS/Fox. 1990. *Lisa*. 1 videocassette (92 min.) videorecording. New York City, NY: CBS/Fox Video.

Simpson, Michael A., Fritz Gordo, Robert Hiltzik, Jerry Silva, Robert F. Phillips, Pamela Springsteen, Michael J. Pollard, Double Helix Films, Anchor Bay Entertainment. 1989.

*Sleepaway Camp 3: Teenage Wasteland*. 1 DVD (80 min.) digital recording. Troy, MI: Anchor Bay Entertainment.

Tapert, Robert G., John Schulian, R.J. Stewart, Sam Raimi, Lucy Lawless, Rene O'Connor, Ted Raimi, Kevin Smith, Bruce Campbell, Hudson Leick, Studios USA Television, Universal Television, MCA Television. 1995 – 2001. *Xena: Warrior Princess*. Television series. USA.

Tarantino, Quentin, Lawrence Bender, Bob Weinstein, Harvey Weinstein, Uma Thurman, Lucy Liu, Darryl Hannah, David Carradine, Viveca A. Fox, Miramax Films, Alliance Atlantis Communications, Miramax Home Entertainment. 2003. *Kill Bill Vol. 1*. 1 DVD (111 min.) digital recording. New York City, NY: Miramax Home Entertainment.

Tarantino, Quentin, Lawrence Bender, Bob Weinstein, Harvey Weinstein, Uma Thurman, Lucy Liu, Darryl Hannah, David Carradine, Viveca A. Fox, Miramax Films, Miramax Home Entertainment. 2004. *Kill Bill Vol. II*. 1 DVD (137 min.) digital recording. New York City, NY: Miramax Home Entertainment.

Thompson, J. Lee, John Saxton, Peter Tobin, Timothy Bond, John Dunning, Melissa Sue Anderson, Glenn Ford, Tracey Bregman, CFDC, Columbia Pictures, RCA/Columbia Pictures Home Video. 1981. *Happy Birthday To Me*. 1 videocassette (111 min.) videorecording. Culver City, CA: RCA/Columbia Pictures Home Video.

Verbinski, Gore, Koji Suzuki, Ehren Kruger, Naomi Watts, Amber Tamblyn, DreamWorks SKG. 2002. *The Ring*. 1 DVD (115 min.) digital recording. Universal City, CA: DreamWorks SKG.

Wadlow, Jeff, Beau Bauman, David Bartis, Jared Padalecki, Jon Bon Jovi, Hypnotic, Rogue Pictures, Universal Pictures. 2005. *Cry Wolf*. 1 DVD (90 min.) digital recording. Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures.

Walton, Fred, Danilo Bach, Frank Mancuso Jr., Deborah Foreman, Deborah Goodrich, Ken Olandt, Griffin O'Neal, Leah Pinsent, Amy Steel, Paramount Pictures, Hometown Films, Paramount Home Video. 1986. *April Fool's Day*. 1 videocassette (88 min.) videorecording. Hollywood, CA: Paramount Home Video.

Walton, Fred, Steve Feke, Doug Chapin, Carol Cane, Charles Durning, Colleen Dewhurst, Columbia Pictures. 1979. *When a Stranger Calls*. 1 DVD (97 min.) digital recording. Culver City, CA: Columbia Pictures Home Entertainment.

Wayans, Keenan Ivory, Lisa Blum, Harvey Weinstein, Bob Weinstein, Shawn Wayons, Marlon Wayans, Carmen Electra, Anna Farris, Cheri Oteri, Dimension Films, Buena Vista Home Entertainment. 2000. *Scary Movie*. 1 DVD (88 min.) digital recording. Los Angeles, CA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment.



West, Simon, Fred Walton, Steve Feke, Jake Wade Wall, Paddy Cullen, Camilla Bell, Tommy Flanagan, Screen Gems, Sony Pictures. 2006. *When a Stranger Calls*. 1 DVD (87 min.) digital recording. Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures.

Whedon, Joss, Fran Rubel Kuzui, Kaz Kuzui, Sarah Michelle Gellar, Alyson Hannigan, Nicholas Brendon, Anthony Stewart Head, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Television, The WB Television Network, UPN. 1997 – 2003. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Television series. USA.

Wilder, Laura Ingalls, Kent McCray, Michael Landon, Melissa Gilbert, Melissa Sue Anderson, Karen Grassle, Alison Arngrim, NBC. 1974-1983. *Little House on the Prairie*. Television series. USA.









