THE EVIL WOMAN IN CINEMATIC REALMS:

THE EVOLUTION OF SUPERNATURAL FEMALE ANTAGONISTS IN ENGLISH-SPEAKING NORTH AMERICAN FANTASY AND HORROR FILM OF THE 21ST CENTURY

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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July 2020

Abstract

This thesis argues that with the beginning of the 21st century new notions of the vilified woman who possesses supernatural powers have emerged in American horror and dark fantasy cinema. These notions of a fantastical film antagonist conceptualised as the Evil Woman are concerned with depictions of female power that oppose normality in American culture and patriarchal hegemony, by investigating the context of American socio-cultural and political attitudes, feminist psychoanalysis and female power as a threat to traditional American values.

In addition, this concept brings the factor of the 'voice' of the Evil Woman into the investigation and explores the development of contemporary female antagonistic characters who are bearers of independence, communicate female issues and criticise a flawed patriarchal system including capitalism, as well as contemporary notions of feminism. This voice delivers female-centred messages and is intended to reach a female audience rather than to please the male gaze.

This is the written defence of a practice-based study that aims to investigate creative alternatives to feminist-informed film criticism. The performative research methods used aim to interrogate the boundaries of theoretical feminist film criticism by tearing down the general invisibility of the researcher.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, my thanks go to all the participants who agreed to be a part of this project and film. None of this would have been possible without your help.

Thank you to my supervisors Richard Langley and James Walters for their support and advice and for making this experience enjoyable. When times seemed difficult, your kind encouragements were the reason I never gave up.

I would like to thank my parents Gudrun and Hans-Werner Zogall for their help and for being the best parents anyone could have.

Thank you to my partner Nina Jones for keeping me sane and for believing in me at times when I did not. You are the smartest, kindest person and by far my favourite person.

Thanks also to my friends Luis Freijo, Panagiota Axelithioti (Joulie), Hara Topa, George Tyros and Jemma Saunders. The coffee breaks, long discussions about important and unimportant matters and your intellectual support are experiences I will treasure for the rest of my life.

Thanks also to Megan Caine for proofreading the written component of this thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

NOTE: This doctoral thesis consists of two components: a documentary film and a written defence. There is a hierarchy of consumption intended by the researcher. The film takes the superior role in this doctorial inquiry; it needs to be seen as a stand-alone research piece and therefore should be examined before a reading of the written defence, as the defence's purpose is to complement the film.

This doctoral thesis uses the medium of film to investigate the wave of villainous feminine imagery that has emerged in recent years in mainly in the US American, but also in Canadian, supernatural horror and fantasy cinema landscape. The emergence has sparked popular cultural and scholarly interest in representational inquiries and has opened up multi-faceted discourses on the subject, allowing for a more female-centred focus. This female-centred interest offers complex viewpoints in representational research, of not only of female antagonistic characters in horror cinema but also of female artistic influence in the horror genre and contemporary female representations of power depicted as villainous in society. The thesis aims to capture and articulate this female-centredness in its two components: the film and the written defence. The film's focus is the examination of supernatural villainous female depictions in North American dark fantasy and horror cinema. This doctoral thesis was motivated by an observation I made several years ago in relation to the 2014 cinematic release of the fantasy film *Maleficent*. I noticed that *Maleficent* and its eponymous hero were the latest version of a trend that depicts female villains with supernatural power in a complex and even relatable way, a trend that started at the beginning of the 21st century. While Maleficent is the hero in this 2014 version of the Sleeping Beauty tale and cannot necessarily be defined also as the film's villain, the film triggered this doctoral investigation and its development of the Evil Woman concept. This concept focuses on the depiction of female main villains with supernatural powers as a representation of contemporary female issues and a vocal critic of patriarchal hegemony.

The audio-visual component, entitled *The Evil Woman in Cinematic Realms,* serves to investigate the depiction of supernatural female villainous characters - the Evil Woman - in mainly US American dark fantasy and horror film, arguing that with the beginning of the 21st century a shift in the depiction of the fantastical female antagonist has occurred. The Evil Woman is a broad concept that explores complex depictions of main villains in contemporary English-speaking and mainly US American horror and fantasy films. There are indications of a similar representational shift regarding supernatural female villains in television shows, but it is more complicated to define who the main villains are across an entire television drama, as characters change and progress over time. In the HBO television drama *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019), for instance, Daenerys Targaryen (played by Emilia Clarke) starts out as the protagonist of her own narrative. At the beginning of the series she is married off against her will by her brother, who sees the marriage as being to his own advantage. As the series unfolds, her character progresses and becomes more powerful and independent; she stands for justice and female empowerment. However, Daenerys evolves slowly into a power-obsessed super villain in the show's final season.

Throughout this study a series of research questions are stated, the aim of which is to investigate the development from depictions of supernatural female antagonists in the 20th century to the 21st century. Firstly, the thesis investigates the question: how have we been seeing the female villain in film and how do we see her now? The nub of the Evil Woman concept is the contextualisation of the historical, cultural and political status of women in society, within US American society in particular. This then leads to the question: how are powerful women who dare to question the status quo treated in US American society? The aim of this study is to point out a connection between 'real' female issues and

the female struggle of the antagonist in the film narrative, and also to asks whether this is a factor that makes all these current re-imaginations of supernatural female antagonists relatable.

Although, this study's focus is the examination of 21st-century female villains, it also uses examples from the 20th century to point out differences and similarities. For instance, I use child vampire Claudia (Kirsten Dunst) in *Interview with the Vampire* (1994) and Nancy in *The Craft* (1996) as female villain representations in both my film and the study. These late-20th-century female villains are not necessarily the main villains of these films; however, these examples are in my view the first seeds of the Evil Woman trope as they articulate what the Evil Woman concept represents in the 21st century. A significant aspect of this investigation is the establishment and inclusion of the female *voice* that these representations and therefore the Evil Woman concept offer. This conceptualisation of the female supernatural villain is inspired by, but also differs from and complicates, other concepts of female cinematic representation. Carol Clover's 'Final Girl' concept discusses the female victim-hero in slasher, rape-revenge and occult horror films. According to Clover, members of this trope are the young, virginal, female protagonists who survive the murder sprees of the, usually male, serial killers. The Evil Woman concept steps away from textual readings that focus on the female protagonist as victim and centres its focus on the depiction of female main villains with supernatural power who are both victimiser and victim in one body. The concepts that have had the greatest impact on this investigation are Barbara Creed's (1993) work on the 'Monstrous Feminine' and Donato Totaro's (2014) study on 'women who kill'. Creed offers a fascinating examination of female monstrosity in cinema, albeit mostly concerning protagonists. Totaro offers readings of various kinds of female killers, humans as well as supernatural; however, his focus lies more on female protagonists and monstrous victims-turned-killers than on female main antagonists. The majority of the films discussed by Creed and Totaro demonstrate that the monstrous protagonist has agency and a voice with which to articulate her anger and the motivation for her actions. Female antagonists with

supernatural powers, on the other hand, have often been depicted as two-dimensional characters without any depth. I would like to think of the Evil Woman as an original concept and an addition to the concepts of other scholars such as Clover, Creed and Totaro. The term evil woman has been used by scholar Amy M. Davis (2006) in her work *Good Girls and Wicked Witches: Women in Disney's Feature Animation*, in which she examines the representation of women in Disney feature animation films. Davis uses the terms 'evil woman' and 'wicked woman' to describe antagonistic females, human and supernatural alike (p. 107). Her use of the term 'evil woman' is descriptive however, whereas Evil Woman in this study is a concept and is therefore used differently to the terms of other scholars.

The concept of the Evil Woman differs from other feminist-informed scholarly investigations. Feminist frameworks, in particular those using a psychoanalytical approach, focus mainly on the female body's 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (Mulvey, 1985, p. 309), a site of male sexual attraction and/or male anxiety. The voice of female villains as a potential organ of socio-cultural critique has been *overlooked*. These evil women have been denied the opportunity to voice their motivation to do harm. Characters such as the Evil Queen and other female villains with magical powers have been denied the chance to explain their anger. The Evil Woman's power lies in her magical ability, but more so in her message and her story. Versions of the Evil Woman in film draw 'upon mythical and historical constructions' (Arnold, 2013, p. 2) of femininity and womanhood, but are given a voice with which to share their side of the story. In this research I am interested in the message the female villain sends to an audience through her speech, but not only through her speech. The use of body language is of importance especially in the case study *Mama*, the as the main villain – the ghost of Edith Brennan - is unable to speak. It is also of interest to investigate whether the message of the villain conforms with the message of the film's narrative. 'Evil lurks in what we cannot see, and we cannot trust what we do see' (Pinedo, 1997, p. 74): who can the audience trust, the Evil Woman or the film's narrative

and message? Does Hollywood fuel and police this image and these narratives? Does this have an effect on a wider American cultural image? Women have always been objectified in the visual arts and their objectification has been the focus of scholarly work. Gendered sound and the female voice have been largely neglected in the past. It is the combination of the female image and the female voice in both a literal and a figurative context that forms the female-centredness that is of sufficiently significant deservingness to be explored through this audio-visual form of research.

The film uses multi-layered referencing of media material such as film clips, news footage, interviews, screenshots, literary quotations and performed dramatisations to present and interpret theoretical frameworks. This form of presentation and analysis serves the thesis well, as it explores a broad concept that will leave room for further, more detailed, exploration in the future.

The documentary film and the defence share certain structural similarities; however, their components differ stylistically because the film faces the creative challenges of interacting with audio-visual material. Also, as a practice-based approach it aims to be an alternative methodology where traditional (written) research methods find their limitations. While there are benefits in delivering this research in audio-visual form, there are also limitations to such an approach. This study provides a visual presentation of the complexity of supernatural female villains in American cinema and interprets them as an interdisciplinary concept that straddles the boundaries between fiction and reality. The examination of a broad landscape of female villainous depictions in a realistic, socio-cultural and historical context prevents both an in-depth close reading of film examples and a detailed historical discourse of American culture. The study of the Evil Woman concept establishes a broad conceptualisation of villain representations and references many films. However, to demonstrate how complex the Evil Woman concept is, I have selected three case studies that

introduces it as an analytical touchpoint. These case studies are *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012), *Mama* (2013) and *Let Me In* (2010). It is necessary to mention that all three films are directed by men. I have chosen these films because of their narrative: they all have a supernatural main villain who is depicted as a three-dimensional being. Films such as *Jennifer's Body* (2009) and *A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night* (2014), which are directed by women, fit into the broader concept to a certain degree, but not entirely. *A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night,* directed by Ana Lily Amirpour, depicts a female vampire, but although the film is an American production the spoken language of the film is Persian and it does not therefore fit with my focus on English-speaking films. *Jennifer's Body* (2009), directed by Karyn Kusama and written by Diablo Cody, features Megan Fox as teenager Jennifer being possessed by a demon that has an appetite for teenage boys. As this investigation and its case studies are concerned with female monsters that are the main villain and have supernatural powers right from the beginning, I have not included this film as a main case study, because Jennifer in *Jennifer's Body*, (just as Ginger in *Ginger Snaps* [2000]) is not supernatural from the start. More importantly, although both these films (*Jennifer's Body* and *Ginger Snaps*) explain how their antagonists become monstrous but not what actually makes them antagonistic, certain aspects of their depiction fit into the Evil Woman concept as a critical voice against patriarchal hegemony and these are referenced in the documentary. The Evil Woman concept as a critical voice against patriarchy aims to ask questions: What does it do to patriarchy if women recognise that it is acceptable to be flawed and, more importantly, if they show that patriarchy is responsible for the damage and pain to the Other? Is letting women speak safe for patriarchy?

There is a difference in the tone of the language used in the film and the written piece. Both components carry the researcher's voice; however, the film uses an emotionally guided tone and humour while the defence uses a neutral tone and follows academic restrictions and language.

Thematically, the defence is to be seen as both a filmmaker's and a researcher's statement. The written component offers justification for the artistic choices made as well as a scholarly informed reflection that is heavily influenced by the recent academic as well as popular interest in female horror film directors. This interest in female horror filmmakers shaped the approach of my audio-visual component. The audio-visual form of this doctoral thesis presented me with a variety of difficult questions from the very beginning, but the one with which I struggled most concerned the form itself. How would I not only present my findings in the film, but use the medium as a tool of research? The thesis takes film as a practice-based research approach to interrogate the boundaries of theoretical feminist film criticism by tearing down the general invisibility of the researcher. Scholarly and non-scholarly interest in the female-centredness of narratives in film texts has extended in recent years to an increased attention on both the industry side and the female creative input of horror film productions. This female-centred practice-based research method aims to make an original contribution to the field of performative research practices. It is its performative, active, visibility as a research approach that forms this scholarly inquiry also into an emotional, personal experience. A further aim of the study is to offer an original contribution to gendered horror and fantasy genre film theory, by studying a group of supernatural female villains as a broad concept that differs from concepts presented in previous scholarly works. The performative elements of my documentary aim to investigate the gaze and whether it is possible to control it. This doctoral thesis focuses on the female perspective in regards into the research of female villains, as do my documentary film production and the choice of research approaches. In my film I incorporate performative elements by performing as a fictional guide who leads the viewer through the film's chapters/topic changes. The fact that I am an audio-visual element of my film – I appear and can be heard – is a significant part of this study's exploration of gaze, which incorporates images and sound through a practice based approach. It is intended in this study to explore the gaze and especially the female gaze with the voice

as a contributing element of communication. This study concerns itself with the message that the female villain sends to an audience through her speech. However, I include body language into this examination as I believe that a woman's voice should not be separated from her body and that the body is an instrument of communication. The case studies *Snow White and the Huntsman*, *Mama* and *Let Me In* demonstrate how body language and the behaviour communicate the female villains' emotion. The documentary uses film clips from *Snow White and the Huntsman* that show Ravenna's vulnerability. In *Mama,* the female antagonist is a ghost, unable to speak, but her body gestures articulate her personality. *Let Me In* complicates readings of image and sound dimensions in the context of meaning. In this film, Abby's personal intentions differ from what she leads her new young friend Owen to believe.

This defence is structured in two main chapters followed by a conclusion. Chapter One defends the stylistic decisions made by me as a female filmmaker and as a researcher. The defence begins with the placement of the study's research method within existing forms of performative scholarly research, and particularly in the context of Bill Nichols' (2017) and Stella Bruzzi's (2006) theoretical work on the performative documentary mode and the importance for the researcher to 'perform' as a gothic feminine and other cinematic wicked-women-inspired embodiments. The chapter establishes how Will Brooker's performative research on David Bowie and Katarzyna Paszkiewicz's work on female horror film directors are the main inspirations behind the decision to treat this study as a 'research experience' that tries to answer questions on the subject of gaze control. My aim with the performances in my film is to investigate the question in Katarzyna Paszkiewicz's essay 'When the Woman Directs (a Horror Film)' and to extent it from 'what happens… when the woman directs?' (2018, p. 41) to 'what happens… when the woman directs and performs?', exploring the difficulties of controlling the gaze as a female filmmaker and performer. Performing in one's own film is an

opportunity that should be explored as a female researcher and filmmaker, and therefore it should be treated as a necessity in this scholarly endeavour. Performing as the 1950's TV host Vampira seems especially suitable here. Vampira is now a popular culture icon, but during her short period of fame she was both worshipped and criticised for her bold appearance and behaviour. Famous for being the host of the *Vampira Show* and for her B-movie appearances such as in Ed Wood's *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959), she was punished for being the person she wanted to portrait, an image that was the opposite of that of the 1950s housewife. She used her voice to express her opinions as well as to protect and defend herself. When her TV show career was drawn to a close, producers wanted to buy the rights to her character, but Vampira refused. Her choice to own her body and voice was accompanied by her downfall and early career end.

The study uses other characters' interpretations as well, such as that of Norma Bates, another woman whose voice has been controlled by men. Even though Norma Bates' character is not supernatural, as a dead character she is almost ghost-like and she possesses her son's body. Furthermore, her voice's transformation has been an inspiration for the evolution of female villains.

This study as a whole should be seen as a nexus between scholarly theories in various disciplines and researcher and filmmaker statements. Through performance as well as by embodying and articulating this research with my voice, I, the researcher, engage with the research subject, and also with the audience and with voice.

As previously mentioned, the case studies used to explore the Evil Woman concept - *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012), *Mama* (2013) and *Let Me In* (2010) - are all directed by men. I have chosen these films because of their narrative: they all depict a supernatural main villain who is depicted as

a three-dimensional being. These characters are of interest to this study because they inform the audience of their motivations, which makes them relatable, especially for the female spectator. Also a significant element of these representations is also their use of their voice and the fact that (in most cases) they *tell* the audience how they have been wronged. The examination of the Evil Woman differs from, and should be seen as a separate approach to, the exploration of the gaze in the practice-based approach that is greatly influenced by Katarzyna Paszkiewicz's question: 'what happens… when the woman directs?' (2018, p. 41). My investigation extends her question to 'what happens… when the woman directs and performs?', with the aim of exploring the difficulties of controlling the gaze as a female filmmaker and performer.

Chapter Two considers the film *The Evil Woman in Cinematic Realms* as an artistic and scholarly body of research and discusses its structure and content, and its engagement with factual and fictional media, by respecting and challenging existing intellectual discourses. The film is structured in two major parts. The first section of the film places women and female monstrosity in the male-centred realm and the second half establishes a shift that respects the female-centred narrative.

The examination of audio-visual work can be placed on a fact/fiction continuum, regarding its explanation of real issues and situations through fiction. The juxtaposition of factual and fictional material can provide the link between these two worlds, as they can share similar imagery.[1] This includes the misogynistic behaviour and patriarchal attitudes of American hegemony that can be found in fiction film and which are delivered through this to American society. Pre-existing interview material sourced from the internet, such as with Mary Harron, Charlize Theron, and the Soska Sisters,

[1] The intercutting between the bullying scene in *Carrie* (2013), where the protagonist's classmates throw tampons at her and shout 'Plug her up' and the non-fiction footage of a presidential rally for candidate Donald Trump, where participants shout 'Lock her up' ('her' is Hillary Clinton) is such an example.

differs visibly from the interviews filmed specifically for this documentary. The sourced interview footage not only varies in audio-visual quality but also shows the source channel or company name, which reveals its original, intended purpose. This footage, produced for a different purpose and in a different context, has been used in this documentary as referential, and should be seen in the category of historical document that supports the investigation of the shift in representation of female villains into more relatable characters, such as interviews with Angelina Jolie and Charlize Theron. These sourced interviews also aim as a support to investigate the treatment of women in society. In contrast, the quality of the interviews that are specially filmed for this documentary is consistently high. The interviewees presented in the film are scholarly experts in the fields of horror and gender studies, such as Kate Egan and Xavier Mendik; film industry members and film critics such as Linda Rodriguez; and members of horror fandom and horror film programming personnel such as Anna Bogutskaya. They are intended to be the connection to the 'real' and the 'contemporary', as well as they are a connection to the actual scholarly investigation. They also hold an important position in that their presence is specifically produced for this film. The interviewees engage with the study and they have been asked specific questions about female villainous representations and whether they have experienced a shift in these representations. These interviewees were also asked questions about particular film texts discussed in the documentary.

However, the requisite short length of this written defence limits the kind of detailed in-depth analysis of theoretical film conceptualisations in relation to sourced media material, self-produced film material and film text readings that a traditional doctoral thesis offers through its comprehensive exposition and explanation. It is the purpose of this defence to support the audio-visual component with the necessary academic theoretical underpinning. Additionally, it provides a space for the justification of the creative choices made in the film's production.

I would like to point out here that the quality of the audio-visual material in the film varies. High quality media footage was used whenever available, but this was not always possible, for example with YouTube and Vimeo.

CHAPTER ONE

PERFORMING AS MONSTROUS FEMININES: A RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

1.1 Introduction

The audio-visual form of this doctoral thesis presented me with difficult questions from the very beginning. The main dilemma I faced was being researcher and practitioner in one body, a split personality aiming for academic brilliance while at the same time expressing a creative side that enjoys artistic messiness. How would I not only present my findings in the film, but use the medium as a tool of research?

Practice-led[2] research is, according to Haseman, the favoured term to describe creative research practices. The difference between researchers favouring traditional research methodologies and those who prefer practice-led methods is, in Haseman's view, that 'practitioner researchers do not merely "think" their way through or out of a problem, but rather they "practice" to a resolution' (Haseman, 2007, p. 147). The use of film as a research medium presented then the question of form and conventions. Would I have to produce my documentary in accordance with any structural and stylistic conventions or definitions, such as Bill Nichols' modes for categorising documentary types? His definition of the 'reflexive mode' best describes my general visual and acoustical approaches and my creative choices, as they deliver 'the filmmaker's engagement with us [the viewer], speaking not only about the historical world but also about the problems and issues of presenting it' (Nichols, 2017, p. 125). With this mode I aim to make the viewer a critical examiner of my research and my approaches. This study is not solely an analysis of cinematic antagonistic representations of women in film. It

[2] Carol Gray defines practice-led research as 'firstly, research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are defined and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners in the visual arts' (Gray, 1996, p.3).

investigates the socio-cultural and political changes in North American society that have influenced a change in the view of women in society and therefore in cinematic representations of women, here the supernatural female antagonist. Fuelled by female anger against patriarchal hegemony, a new wave of female-centred issues have recently been under discussion, centred around sexual violence against women, restricting and discriminating the female body by law (e.g. abortion rights), sexism in Hollywood and the lack of female roles in front of and behind the camera, to name but a few. I see value in using cinematic and aesthetic codes of documentary film and the fictional film genre, here the horror and fantasy genres; the advantage of audio-visual research methods is that they offer a massive pool of creative choices in articulating the research findings, film textual readings in relationship with the real, and the experience of the researcher/filmmaker. This cross-disciplinary engagement is a crucial opportunity to be explored through performative research approaches.

1.2 Performative Research – Seeing is Believing

Brad Haseman states that there are three types of research: qualitative research, quantitative research and performative research[3] (Haseman, 2006; 2007). He assertss that 'performative research stands as an alternative to the qualitative and quantitative paradigms by insisting on different approaches to designing, conducting and reporting research' (Haseman, 2006, p. 98). Furthermore, he states that '[p]ractice-led research is intrinsically experiential and comes to the fore when the researcher creates new artistic forms' (ibid. p.100). However, 'performative' and 'performativity' are terms used loosely in scholarly works. Defining performativity is challenging and depends on the scholarly discipline in which it is discussed. Documentary film scholars, such as Bill Nichols and Stella Bruzzi, define

[3] Haseman sees the necessity to differentiate between creative research methodologies and qualitative and quantitative research and asks: 'But what should we call such a research paradigm – one which asserts that the dance, the novel, the design and so on is an outcome of research? One possible way forward is by J.L. Austin's (1962) notion of performativity. For Austin, performative speech acts are utterances that accomplish, by their very enunciation, an action that generates effects. His influential and founding example of the performative: ("I take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife") enacts what it names (Austin 1962: 121). The name performs itself and in the course of that performing becomes the thing done' (Haseman, 2007, p. 150).

performativity in the context of documentary film modes and have published notable work on this subject. In *Introduction to Documentary*, Nichols defines how this mode 'sets out to demonstrate how embodied knowledge provides entry into an understanding of the more general processes at work in society' (Nichols, 2017, p. 149) and in *New Documentary,* Stella Bruzzi argues that the performative documentary is 'a negotiation between filmmaker and reality and, at heart, a performance' (Bruzzi, 2006, p. 186). Performance is a crucial element of my documentary. *The Evil Woman in Cinematic Realms* finds common ground on which to engage with factual and fictional images regarding female antagonistic representation and feminine identification in the supernatural horror genre, as well as being an artistic examination of gendered horror and fantasy genre production itself. The use of a variety of cinematic codes and sound effects embraces Bruzzi's definition of the documentary as a 'performative act' and a 'perpetual negotiation between the real event and its representation' (Bruzzi, 2006, p. 11, p. 13). Bruzzi describes two kinds of the performative documentary: 'films that feature performative subjects and which visually are heavily stylised and those that are inherently performative and feature the intrusive presence of the filmmaker' (Bruzzi, 2006, p. 187). All of these definitions helped to shape this performative research approach, but they also take 'performative' literally, as in performance and acting. If this research approach were to be placed within filmic categories, it would be best defined as an essay film with investigative intentions. According to Mark Cousins and Kevin Macdonald, the essay film is a form of the documentary film, that 'express[es] strong personal opinions and points of view [of the filmmaker]' (Cousins and Macdonald, 2006, p. 211) much like a written essay does. This study is an academic inquiry as much as it is an artistic piece that not only is informed by its theoretical frameworks, film texts and socio-cultural developments, but is also motivated by my personal interpretation of these and my own experiences as a female researcher, a female filmmaker and a woman in general: 'Like any form of communication, whether spoken, written, painted or photographed, documentary filmmaking

involves the communicator in making choices. It's therefore unavoidably subjective, no matter how balanced, neutral, fair or accurate the presentation seeks to be' (Bernard, 2016, p. 5). The advantage that the audio-visual form of research and its presentation has compared with traditional research is that the 'visual is part of a poetic process of expression and interpretation which "encourages the use of metaphor and the empathetic communication of knowledge and experience that cannot be expressed using words alone"' (Pink quoted in Spencer, 2011, p. 16). This filmic approach investigates cultural influences in the critical viewing process. The act of seeing has an impact on how we as members of society perceive the world we live in and '[t]he way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe' (Berger, 1972, p. 8). Socio-cultural constructions and ideas in the context of gender are the focus of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) and her earlier works on gender performativity. She sees gender and gendered acts as a construct of cultural beliefs and states that even 'gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanctions and taboo' (Butler, 1988, p. 520) and that performing is a 'mode of belief' (ibid.). In contemporary audio-visual culture, 'seeing is believing' has become a crucial and excessive part of everyday life due to social networks, and 'it should not be surprising that shared values, beliefs and perceptions should be so powerfully persuasive, overriding individual perceptions and rationality' (Spencer, 2011, p. 12). The gendered socio-cultural aspect of *seeing* is vital in terms of identification and the re-imagining of existing female monstrous archetypes. Spencer writes further that '[s]eeing is not a biological progress but a socially and culturally learnt one' (2011, pp. 12-13). This socio-cultural learning process contributes greatly to defining the concept of the Other.

Brigid Cherry writes in *Horror* that 'Othering is related to identity, both in term of self and of society' (2009, p. 107). The Other is the opposed party of the cultural/social/ethical group one identifies with. Robin Wood defines the film monster as an expression of the Other in American – Western - culture.

In his essay 'An Introduction to the American Horror Film', Wood discusses the increasing impact of Marxist and Freudian ideas in film criticism. Marxism sees its purpose in exposing the flaws of dominant ideals such as patriarchy and capitalism. Groups and individuals that oppose the patriarchal system and its institutions are therefore part of the Other, the Repressed. To summarise Wood, he categorises parties included in the concept of the Other as: other people; woman; the proletariat; other cultures; ethnic groups within the culture; alternative ideologies or political systems; deviations from ideological sexual norm; and children (Wood, 1979, pp. 9-10). Wood argues that normality is at risk in the horror film through the monster that embodies these categories and that woman is, in a male-dominated culture, a repressed Other:

> In a male-dominated culture, where power, money, law, social institutions are controlled by past, present and future patriarchs, woman as the Other assumes particular significance. The dominant images of women in our culture are entirely male-created and male-controlled. Woman's autonomy and independence are denied… (ibid.)

However, the repressed Other does not stay silent for long. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels mention in *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* (*The Communist Manifesto)*, first published in 1848, that bourgeois capitalism provokes its own downfall by creating a dependency on the working class. A similar irony is visible in the relationship between patriarchy and women. The repression of women by a male-dominated society results in a female hunger for liberation and a wave of women ready to voice their anger.

The focus of this academic investigation is an engagement with the historical treatment of antagonised women, such as witches and mythical female creatures (giving both historic and current examples), as well as with the contemporary public treatment of women in powerful positions. This includes

women in political positions as well as in the film industry. These ongoing discussions around the treatment of women in power in the film industry and especially in the genre world are a major point of engagement and influence for this study. A significant component of this research is the inclusion of the female voice in both the factual and the fictional world. The emergence of the third and fourth waves of feminism has been the result of an increasing urge felt by women to *voice* this still existing gendered power imbalance. In her work on women's voices in the classic Hollywood era, Amy Lawrence (1991) has established that *looking* and *seeing* have had a superior position in film criticism and gendered film analysis, in particular compared with the study of sound and voice. The focus on the female body and its constant state of 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (Mulvey, 1985, p. 309) holds a significant and favoured position of intellectual inquiry in academic film criticism. Women have always been objectified in the visual arts and their objectification has been the focus of scholarly work. Gendered sound and the female voice have been neglected in the past. It is the combination of the female image and the female voice in both a literal and a figurative context that forms the female-centredness that is of sufficiently deservingness to be explored through this audio-visual form of research. The contemporary appeal of discussions surrounding female-centred narratives and female-influenced horror production in American cinema in both academia and the popular press has significantly influenced the creative choices of this audio-visual doctoral thesis, and its exploration of supernatural female antagonists through a 'visible' female researcher/female filmmaker.

1.3 Performing as Monstrous Feminines

The collaboration between appearance and words is important in the context of female antagonistic voices in horror and fantasy film. This documentary delivers a creative approach and point of view to present its argument and guide the viewer through the film. However, I do not appear as my own persona but rather disguise myself as various forms of iconic villainous female horror concepts.

Feminist film theorist Barbara Creed mentions that '[t]he female monster, or monstrous feminine, wears many faces' (Creed, 1993, p. 1). Inspiration for a fictional guide was found in scholar Will Brooker's documentary *Being Bowie* (2016), an investigative film in which the researcher puts himself in the position of his research subject. In 2013, the death of Lou Reed, one of his music idols, motivated Brooker to pay tribute to David Bowie, another of his idols, with a book (while Bowie was still alive). The amount of existing literature on Bowie inspired Brooker to find 'a new approach, a way of entry into this vast amount of material about a complex performer who had been working professionally for 50 years' (Brooker, 2016). Brooker decided that the best way for him to understand Bowie was to absorb his culture and live it. Brooker altered his appearance to look more like Bowie and tried to replicate the experience of his research subject as best he could. The result of this new approach was the documentary film *Being Bowie,* a documentation of Brooker's journey, an assemblage of different media types, forms and styles, which later created the frame for Brooker's book *Forever Stardust: David Bowie Across the Universe* (2017) and for establishing Bowie as a 'mosaic figure' (Brooker, 2016). While I find Brooker's method of experiencing Bowie's life in a compressed amount of time problematic, as it does not deliver the cultural accuracy of those times, I nonetheless find the creative methods that led him to seeing Bowie as a 'mosaic figure' appealing as a new angle from which to approach the artist's persona. A comparable approach uses Isabella Rossellini in *Green Porno* (2008). This web series informs viewers about the sexual behaviour of different animals through Rossellini disguising herself as the animal that is being introduced and presenting staged factuality. Practice-based approaches with the researcher as 'performer', such as Brooker's, provide a direct and personal engagement with the research and offer new possibilities. This approach lets the researcher take 'visible' responsibility for their work compared with more traditional methods in which the researcher is at a safe distance and 'hidden'. My disguise as female horror imageries lends a voice to these female representations. This disguise also functions as a link

to the many faces and experiences that women share. I argue in this study that contemporary versions of the Evil Woman in American supernatural horror and fantasy film are given a voice - literally and metaphorically – with which to share their side of the story. It is intended that performing as a fictional presenter figuratively lends a voice too. In order to create an ironic, humorous tone, and an appropriate environment for addressing the research findings regarding angry, vengeful female antagonists, a combination of horror and fantasy film aesthetics and a camp-like host are deliberately chosen, a dark and dangerous gothic female host inspired mainly by Vampira[4] but also by other female monstrous characters belonging to the fantastic genres.[5]

Fictional horror show presenters such as the Crypt Keeper (*Tales from the Crypt*, 1989-1996) engage with their audience and form a connection with them by breaking the fourth wall; however, it was first and foremost the scream with which Vampira greets her audience (*The Vampira Show*, 1954) that formed my research persona. Vampira's scream is the opposite of the victim's scream that is commonly associated with the horror genre: 'Vampira made her scream an effusion of pleasure and threat' (Poole, 2014, p. 22). The Evil Woman as a fictional presenter aims to give this documentary a similar attitude and tone to Vampira's show. Although Vampira's powerful scare-scream was the first element to have an impact on my research-persona creation, it is Vampira's fate as well that represents my research on villainous and vilified women on screen. W. Scott Poole's book *Vampira: Goddess of Darkness* (2014) examines Vampira in the cultural and political context of her times. Maila Nurmi, a bondage model, achieved fame in 1954 as the iconic, gothic femme fatale Vampira and the first horror host on US American television. She embodied uncontrollable sexual

[4] There are rumours that Vampira was the model for the 1959 Disney animation feature *Sleeping Beauty* (Greene, 2014; Cotter, 2017, p. 154). However, to my knowledge there is no evidence that supports Cotter's and Greene's statements.

[5] Norma Bates is not a supernatural character, but her presence is almost ghost-like and I read Norman's personality disorder and his becoming his mother as a form of bodily possession associated with supernatural body possession horror films.

empowerment and challenged the image of the perfect 1950s housewife. Vampira was a rebel and she associated herself with James Dean, who was famous for his rebellious attitude against the normativity of the 1950s. According to Sheri Holman 'Vampira became the touchpoint of postwar male desire and anxiety' (2014, p. xvii). However, it was male anxiety that led to the end of *The Vampira Show* only a year later. As previously mentioned, Vampira used not only her body to attract attention but also her voice. According to Robert Michael Cotter, Vampira was 'blacklisted' (2017, p. 155) by the network ABC after refusing to sign over the rights to her character. Cotter further states that '[t]here has always been the question of whether she was officially blacklisted or if it was an unwritten "gentlemen's agreement"' (ibid.). Christine Rogers points out the double standard women face in society and argues that '[u]nder patriarchy women are constructed as nurturers, compliant wives and mothers, the moral touchstones of society, and women who disrupt these gender expectations… pay dearly for their rebellion' (2012, p. 103). Vampira is a woman who paid a high price for refusing to be controlled and *owned* by patriarchy. Poole writes that Vampira subverted the image of the 1950s housewife, 'turning her into a rebellious monster' (2014, p. 22), and he quotes Nurmi as saying: 'There was so much repression … and people needed to identify with something explosive, something outlandish and truthful' (ibid. p. 18).

My aim with these performances is to investigate Katarzyna Paszkiewicz's question 'what happens… when the woman directs?' (2018, p. 41) from her essay 'When the Woman Directs (a Horror Film)' and extend it to 'what happens when the woman directs and performs?', exploring the difficulties of controlling the gaze as a female filmmaker and performer. My choice to adopt and shape a research persona had the aim of drawing upon the lack of authorship and creative control that female filmmakers face. Through performance I actively take part in the discussion and take control of my academic and creative choices. My research persona aims to embody academic and popular

discourses and visualise the theoretical frameworks behind them, allowing my authorial voice to be heard. The dramatised elements are set in a dark cellar/dungeon-like environment. In my first appearance I am disguised as a campy gothic feminine (see Figures 1 and 2). This objective of this interpretation of a Vampira-like character is set to interrogate the works on theories of gender performance, femininity and feminine identity of scholars such as Vera Dika, Carol Clover and Judith Butler in the context of the female embodiment of power.

Figure 1

Figure 2

In her essay 'The Stalker Film, 1978-81' Dika argues that in the realm of the stalker film power and violence are always gendered masculine and are applicable to both the position of the killer and the self-defending victim. She states that '[a]lthough the killer may be represented as either male or female in the stalker film, the dominant and controlling vision can best be described as "masculine"' (1987, p. 90). Christine Rogers explains that '[t]here are multiple narratives around men and violence, many of them heroic. Male violence can be said to be normalised; an acknowledgment and arguably acceptable response to stress' (2012, p. 103). A similar stance to that of Dika is taken by Carol Clover in *Men, Women and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1993), an examination of the 'Final Girl' trope in the horror genre.[6] For Clover the female victim-hero is defined by her ability to defend herself with weapons, her intelligence and an overall activeness associated with the masculine and what Isabel Cristina Pinedo describes as a 'male in drag' (1997, p. 82). Pinedo applies Judith

[6] Clover primarily concerns herself with the horror subgenres of the slasher, rape-revenge film and possession films.

Butler's theory on the 'gender trouble' that happens when biological sex, gender identity and culturally expected gender performance are not aligned (ibid., pp. 81-84). However, Pinedo takes issue with the assumption that in a patriarchal culture strength, aggression, intelligence and power are assigned to be masculine and that even if someone is biologically a woman having these attributes turns her into a masculinisation of herself. Pinedo argues that such readings of gendered power would mean that 'feminine agency [wa]s an oxymoron' (ibid., p. 82).

I share Pinedo's concern about the neglect of the feminine status in film, especially in horror film as this is one of very few genres inn which women find a space. The symbolic masculinisation of the female body ignores the many possible ways in which women can express their own version of being a woman. Pinedo's critique on Clover's and Dika's readings influenced the presentation of my performative elements. The acts of disguise in this film celebrate and interrogate depictions and ideas of femininity and womanhood in genre film.

My documentary explores a number of concepts of monstrous women in horror and fantasy film. The gothic feminine inspired by Vampira expresses Freud's castration anxiety and the conceptualisation of the femme castratrice, which is a popular trope in the discourse of feminine monstrosity and a significant point of interest in Barbara Creed's exploration of the 'monstrous feminine'. The performative elements play with Creed's theory of woman as the castrator as well as Freud's theory of woman as being castrated. The castration scene in the cellar is juxtaposed with menstruation-suggesting sequences from films such as *Let Me In* (2010)*, Ginger Snaps* (2000)*, Carrie* (1976) and *Carrie* (2013). It then fades into a juxtaposition of the shower scene in *Carrie* (2013) with clips of chants against opponent Hillary Clinton from a 2016 Trump rally. The intention with this mix of fact

and fiction elements is to showcase similarities of the female experience but also to demonstrate that female fear and the fear of women are based on patriarchal attitudes.

Motherhood is a popular area of discourse in horror film criticism, especially regarding the modern horror film. In recent years the scholarly work of Sarah Arnold (2013) and Erin Harrington (2018) has re-evaluated existing work on the maternal as well as examining and re-evaluating cinematic images of it. In the last two decades, on-screen versions of horrific motherhood and maternal characters have experienced characteristic refinements. My performance as maternal representation is influenced by these new evaluations of motherhood and maternal images in horror as well as by the re-imagination of maternal characters' narrative. The performance draws specifically on the evolution of the monstrous mother in *Psycho* (1960). Mrs Bates is an iconic figure in the space of simplistic depictions of horror mothers; however, the television series *Bates Motel* (2013-2017) transformed her from an abstract idea of male mother complex into a relatable, complex, struggling, single mother (see Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 3

Figure 4

The horror genre has been accused of misogyny and of objectifying the female body, a trait that has linked it to pornography. On the one hand, the performance element of self-dissection interprets scholarly work on the horror and pornographic genres that interrogates them as genres dehumanising the female body by presenting it in parts - the genital and torso areas in particular – rather than as a whole-body image (McRory, 2010; Walter, 2011; Williams, 1991; Smith, 2013). On the other hand, the performance interprets the issue of the unattainable beauty standards that women try to achieve in (Western) culture through horrific harming and self-harming acts (see Figures 5 and 6).

Figure 5

Figure 6

The mirror sequences are a way to interact with myself and address the audience directly, to break the fourth wall and destroy the safe distance between me, my research subject and the audience (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Women's images have been exploited for the pleasure of the male gaze while the female voice has been silenced since before the rise of Christianity. The film and its performative elements aim to address this discrimination in a creative form that intends to remove the distance between researcher and research subject.

The Evil Woman in Cinematic Realms begins its performative sections with my performative persona stating a version of 'They call me a monster, but they don't know me'. This statements stands as a leitmotif throughout the film's discussions. The film ends with an interpretation of the bride in *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) and adds the question: 'Do you know me now?' This ending aims to showcase how silent or *silenced* monstrous women have been transformed into embodiments and represent the articulation of the female experience that includes the fight for body rights, for an end to violence against women, and for power, and independence and justice.

1.4 Safety

This documentary film engages with film clips, interviews sourced from media platforms, and interviews specially shot for it, the latter being with scholarly experts in the fields of horror and gender studies, such as Kate Egan and Xavier Mendik; film industry members and film critics such as Linda Rodriguez; and members of horror fandom and horror film programming personnel such as Anna Bogutskaya. As a filmmaker with experience in documentary film production I have always been aware of how important it is to treat and present participants with respect and to assure them of a safe experience. The ethical treatment of participants in documentary film has been extensively discussed. Documentary scholars, as well as works published by practitioners, devote considerable attention to ethical questions: 'How do we treat the people we film, and what do we owe them as well as our audience?' (Nichols, 2017, p.31). Concerns regarding ethical issues and safety are almost always

aimed only towards the participants. Although this is without a doubt an important matter, do we treat ourselves as audio-visual researchers with the same respect and ethical caution? How safe am I as an audio-visual researcher who explores and investigates these questions, and even criticises existing scholarly approaches through the use of non-traditional methods? Barry Hampe sees an increasing problem of the manipulation of reality and the truth. He states that '[i]n the twenty-first century we can no longer trust that "seeing is believing" or "the camera never lies"' (2007, p. 132) and asks: 'What happens to the credibility of the documentary film when what is shown isn't what it seems to be?' (ibid.). What happens to my credibility as an audio-visual researcher when I disguise myself as a Vampira-like monstrous feminine or a femme castratrice, or dissect myself in order to introduce the objectification and exploration of the female body in film? Is the audio-visual researcher in a safe space? Traditionally, written feminist film criticism has had the advantage of pointing out from a safe distance the lack of the female gaze and of female involvement in production; however, with this performative research I aim to take this safe distance away to examine whether a female-centred creative approach contributes in a new form to feminist film criticism. One of the most important challenges of this method will be whether I am able to control the gaze. The male gaze has been criticised by many feminist film scholars and this is the purpose of this study, but it will also focus on the establishment of a female gaze.

There is a difference between the intention of the filmmaker and the perception of the audience: the intended message of the film can differ from how it is received. In her influential essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', Laura Mulvey (1985) references Alfred Hitchcock's work to point out a gender power imbalance in his films, stating that the female characters are controlled by the male gaze. In *Alfred Hitchcock* (2014), Nicholas Haeffner criticises Mulvey's view that the director objectifies women on screen for considering only the male audience and the male gaze. Hitchcock

himself claims in an interview with François Truffault in *Hitchcock/Truffaut* (2017) that his films are made with women as the main target audience and he criticises his fellow filmmaker colleagues for ignoring such an important audience group, asserting that it is women who chose the movie when they go to the cinema with their partner (p. 226). Will this research and my persona be read by the audience as a male- or female-controlled? Despite the vastness of uncertainty that creative practice brings, *The Evil Woman in Cinematic Realms* is both a creative, feminist-informed inquiry into depictions of the supernatural female villain and an exploration and interrogation of performative practices with the intention of contributing to alternative feminist film scholarship.

Laura Mulvey paved the way for many other feminist critics. Psychoanalysis has long been a common and established way of carrying out textual reading in film theory, especially in the horror genre. Sue Short (2006) points to Hollywood's supply of countless male-centred stories for a male-dominated audience. She summarises Mulvey's view that female audiences from the classic Hollywood cinema era up until the mid-1970s were forced to identify either with weak female characters, or with male characters, which put them in a position of transvestism (Short, 2006, p. 5). Mulvey's stance on the dominant (and heterosexual) gaze of the male character and the male spectator has been questioned and complicated by scholars such as Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment in *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture* (1988). Gamman and Marshment take issue with Mulvey's universal concept of the gaze as leaving no room for alternative gazes. Gamman and Marshment propose other gaze variations in their critique and ask: who owns the gaze when the protagonist is a woman? Similar flaws in Mulvey's position are observed by Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin in *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies* (2009), when they state that male characters are as much controlled and objectified by the gaze as women are. Despite the flaws detected in Mulvey's concept, her ground-breaking essay became a

stepping stone for further and deeper investigations into the concept of the gaze, as the contributions in *Situating the Feminist Gaze and Spectatorship in Postwar Cinema* (Block, 2010) show. This collection of essays re-visits existing feminist film theories and offers film readings from new perspectives.

According to Marina Levina and Diem-My T. Bui, monster narratives 'offer a space where society can safely represent and address anxieties of its time' (2013, p. 1). However, contemporary female-centred monster narratives complicate this safe distance, which affects the position and creation of my performances and raises questions. What does it do to patriarchy if women recognise that it is acceptable to be flawed and more importantly, if they show that patriarchy is responsible for damage and pain to the Other? Is letting women speak safe for patriarchy?

Both the *voicing* of female experience and the limited depiction of 'recognisable' female characters in cinematic realms are of concern in plentiful discourses surrounding film form and film narrative. At the 2017 Cannes Film Festival actress Jessica Chastain offered her view on the lack of women in the film industry and of relatable female characters in film. The horror genre is one that has been publicly associated with masculinity and the controlling male gaze, with male producers and directors having the creative and economic monopolies and the women who appear in these films being depicted as screaming, weak victims who are, more often than not, naked. Even horror film producer Jason Blum has contributed to this public discussion. In an interview with Polygon in October 2018 (Patches, 2018) he states that there is a significant general lack of female directors and that even fewer are interested in making horror films. Although his statement faced criticism, it does points to larger perceptible issues in the film industry. John Berger identifies this issue in *Way of Seeing* and sums up the concept of gender depiction in visual arts simply with '[m]en act and women appear' (Berger,

1972, p. 47). While it is evident that female horror film directors, as with female directors in general, are the minority in the film and television industry, this research puts forward a series of questions regarding Chastain's claim (The Guardian, 2017) that female storytellers are necessary to produce identifiable female characters. Are female storytellers able to control the gaze? This links back to Paszkiewicz's question: 'what happens when… the woman directs' (2018, p. 42) a horror film? The horror genre is a respectable genre for directors to start their career in and a notable number of female directors such as Katherine Bigelow, Mary Lambert and the Soska Sisters owe their success to it. Nevertheless, women such as Amy Holden Jones (*Slumber Party Massacre,* 1982), Mary Harron (*American Psycho,* 2000) and Karyn Kusama (*Jennifer's Body,* 2009) received no critical recognition or audience approval for their films when they were first released. What makes their films worth mentioning is that they have a feminist or cultural critical message. *Slumber Party Massacre* was intended to be a satirical feminist take on the slasher genre, which is associated with the male gaze. However, the feminist commentary, according to Jones herself, was removed due to the influence of Roger Corman, who instead included stereotypical elements of the slasher genre (Murray, 2016). A similar fate was experienced by Mary Harron when *American Psycho* was released. This is now considered a cult film, but at the time its excessive violence and stereotypical depiction of women led to the director being labelled as misogynist (Paszkiewicz, 2018, pp. 43-44). A case that illustrates the different perspectives of artistic intention, marketing strategies and audience perception in the context of cultural relevance is *Jennifer's Body* (2009). At the time of its release the film was considered a commercial flop that was not feminist enough, despite 20th Century Fox's decision to include the all-female writer/director team of Diablo Cody and Karyn Kusama in their marketing. The feminist component of the film's content was questioned by film critics, while years later Cody and Kusama held the male-centred poster and the trailer marketing liable for the failure to attract female viewers (Peitzman, 2018; Sharf, 2018). A decade after its release, the film is finding new relevance, especially

in the relationship between the #MeToo movement and Jennifer's sacrifice scene, brought into context with the sexual assault allegations in Christine Blasey Ford's testimony against Brett Kavanaugh (Grady, 2018). The feminist re-evaluation of these female-centred films and Paszkiewicz's question are significant influences on this audio-visual thesis, which has included performance elements in order to investigate female cinematic representations in the context of audience identification and socio-cultural politics. This inquiry concerns itself with two questions: What is at stake for the female horror filmmaker? What is at stake for the female horror filmmaker in a feminist context?

1.5 Aesthetics and Structure

My stylistic choices for this film imitate the world of the supernatural horror/fantasy genre, which on the one hand is known for its excessively misogynistic treatment of women, and on the other hand subverts such depictions and celebrates female empowerment, as in the 'contemporary teen horror [which] "deliberately engages with and celebrates the genre's long-term investment in subjectively expressing and empathizing with marginalized female experience"' (Craig and Fradley quoted in Fradley, 2013, p. 210). The use of horror genre-inspired imagery and sound has the intention of articulating gendered film genre analysis as a visceral experience. The idea that the viewing pleasures of genres, horror included, are connected to bodily affect has been explored[7] and, as Cherry states, it is the aim of the horror genre to stimulate 'emotional and physiological responses' (Cherry, 2009, p. 52) in its viewers. Linda Williams expands on the existing relationship between genre and affect by defining the concept of 'body genres' (Williams, 1991, p. 3). She identifies melodrama, pornography and horror as genres that produce (when done successfully) bodily reactions in the viewer. The viewer may feel arousal when watching pornography, emotional when moved by the on-screen characters in

[7] See Neale, 1980; Giles, 2004; Hill, 2005; Harnich, 2010; Reyes, 2016.

a melodrama, and fright and/or disgust while watching horror. Drawing upon Williams' work and that of others on the affect of genre film and on audience identification with on-screen bodies, *The Evil Woman in Cinematic Realms* is intended to motivate visceral responses in the viewer through juxtaposing female experiences and desires within film material with audio-visual records of both historical and contemporary events to establish a familiarity, as such experiences may be familiar to female audiences. An example of this is the juxtaposition of fictional male monsters with Rose McGowan's statement: 'He is a monster. He looks like a monster and he is a monster. Some people get the faces they deserve' (ABC News, 2018). This quote expresses how Hollywood actress Rose McGowan sees Hollywood producer and sex offender Harvey Weinstein after a storm of rape allegations against him in 2017. For McGowan and many others, Weinstein is a real-life monster and the merging of factual and fictional elements aims to evoke a physical response of discomfort in the viewer. This documentary intercuts fictional film footage with factual footage such as new clips, political interviews and events to present the argument that imageries of the female socio-cultural experience and female depictions in the fantasy and horror genres are closely related, that there appears to be a paper-thin line between reality and fiction that slowly fades away. The footage used showcases past and present cultural, economic and political attitudes towards women in American society, raising questions such as: Are contemporary horror films and films depicting female empowerment *actually* celebrating female empowerment? Where are we as a post-modern society when we can still compare misogynist fictional horror scenarios with the reality of some women's life experience? The juxtaposition of fact and fiction footage is used to respect the 'body genres'' ability to motivate an emotional, bodily response in the viewer, whether it be anger, disappointment, surprise or otherwise. As mentioned, this is a gendered research perspective on cinematic depictions of female antagonists in horror and fantasy genre film and the placement of woman in the socio-cultural space is crucial for the female-centred identification. The aim is to provoke an emotional

response of familiarity in the viewer (the female viewers especially) while also reflecting, inspiring and evoking a gendered research experience for the researcher. Furthermore, the film's narrative is heavily influenced by the incorporation of short music video elements, which aim to create moments of drama in certain sections of the film. The use of music-video-style elements are inspired by female driven gothic film texts such as *The Craft* and *Ginger Snaps* which are according to Estella Tincknell influenced by the MTV culture (2010, p. 256) and 'they challenge a number of generic and conceptual boundaries' (p. 245). This 'idea-collage', as a critical approach, highlights an assemblage of thoughts that link and juxtapose the similarities and discrepancies in the factual and fictional relationship between image, sound and theory. The collage includes areas of monster film theory and gender theory related to horror and fantasy film. It amalgamates socio-cultural events and political fears with genre narratives and female-centred issues, as well as linking to developments within the film industry. The 'idea-collage' challenges the traditional, linear form of storytelling. This approach is chosen to execute Christopher Vogler's understanding of the gender distinction in story constructions:

> Men's journeys may be in some sense more linear, proceeding from one outward goal to the next, while women's journeys may spin or spiral inward and outward. The spiral may be a more accurate analogue for the woman's journey than a straight line or a simple circle. Another possible model might be a series of concentric rings, with the woman making a journey inward towards the center and then expanding out again. The masculine need to go out and overcome obstacles, to achieve, conquer, and possess, may be replaced in the woman's journey by the drives to preserve the family and the species, make a home, grapple with emotions, come to accord, or cultivate beauty. (Vogler, 1998, p. 9)

However, the order of the case studies and the performative elements are inspired by Erik Knudsen's 'transcendental' documentary mode. The 'return to where it started' (2012, p. 133) is a structural form that Knudsen describes as 'transcendental' (ibid.). Nonetheless, there are developments in the

examination of contemporary supernatural female villains and the way in which they articulate their motivations, the suggested meanings of which are engaged with in a close analysis during the film. It is important for this thesis to go back to its beginning as Knudsen suggests 'in the transcendental narrative the key turning point brings us back to the state we were first made familiar with and it is experiencing this first state with new eyes that should most powerfully reveal the theme of narrative' (ibid., p. 134).

Within audio-visual academia, performative approaches have faced scepticism: 'Consequently, while I would certainly not discourage audiovisual scholarship that approaches experimental and "performative" modes of inquiry and communication, this is not where I think the greatest potential of audiovisual film criticism lies' (Lavik, 2012, p. 6). I am aware of the risks such methods carry; however, especially in the fields of gender identity and female representations in film, I see great value in this creative approach and the new research paths it opens up compared with traditional research methods: 'Creativity involves taking risks, and it has been argued that it is in refusing to take those risks where failure lies' (Kara, 2015, p. 23).

1.6 Defining the Evil Woman as a Rejection of Phallic Authority

According to Nel Noddings '[h]uman beings love to fictionalize evil - to terrorize each other with stories of defilement, horror excruciating pain, and divine retribution' (1989, p. 1). Robin Wood defines the horror genre as 'collective nightmares' (Wood, 1979, p. 13), that include films about supernatural monsters as embodiments of nightmares and fear. Dark fantasy and supernatural horror are genres in which supernatural creatures, such as witches, vampires, ghosts and werewolves, flourish and, as film monsters, represent notions of fear. The two genres cover similar themes, making it difficult to label a film with these shared traits as either a supernatural horror film or a dark fantasy

film. They also have common roots in fairy tales (Clover, 1993; Sipos, 2010; Twitchell, 1985; Warner, 2016) and '[f]emales dominate fairytale evil' (Warner, 2016, p. 25).

Stereotypical assumptions made by popular film critics and film scholars alike insist that 'women have been depicted in horror films as monstrous, weak, mentally unstable and victims of male violence' (Lazard, 2009, p. 132). What differentiates the depictions of wicked women in fairy tales from the monstrous women in horror films is – or used to be – their motivation. The fairy-tale antagonists 'actively seek to control not only their lives but also their circumstances' (Davis, 2012, p. 107) and 'their activity is forced upon them by their own jealousy and unhappiness' (ibid. 108). Traditional stereotypical female paradigms of film monsters are presented to the audience as villains, but do not provide an explanation of why these women are evil.[8] The lack of background information makes it difficult to empathise with these females and supports old paradigms of women as embodiments of death and horror. This lack of character development has an impact on how we as an audience see the characters. Nonetheless, female monsters in films such as *Dracula's Daughter* (1936), *Cat People* (1942), *Carrie* (1976) and *The Exorcist* (1973) depict a sympathetic character who is also the protagonist in these films and the audience is, therefore, supposed to identify with them. Clover writes that the women's movement's 'main donation to horror, I think, is the image of an angry woman – a woman so angry that she can be imagined as a credible perpetrator (I stress "credible") of the kind of violence on which, in the low-mythic universe, the status of full protagonist rests' (Clover, 1993, p. 17).

[8] The definitions of evil and its notions have passed through various transformations across history. The origin of the word can be traced back to the Old English *yfel,* which is related to the German *übel* and the Dutch *euvel* (lexico.com).

While the monstrous protagonist has agency and a voice with which to articulate her anger and the motivation for her actions, female antagonists with supernatural powers have often been depicted on both the screen and the page as two-dimensional characters with no depth. These evil women have been denied the opportunity to voice their motivation to do harm. Therefore there is little reason for the spectator to empathise with characters such as the bride in *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), the three brides of Count Dracula in *Dracula* (1931), the Wicked Witch in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), the Grand High Witch in *The Witches* (1990), Marsha Quist in *The Howling* (1981), Regine Dandrige in *Fright Night Part 2* (1988), and almost every female villain in the Disney animation films, including the Evil Queen in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). These monstrous feminines are portrayed as a threat to the protagonist, but also to the - usually male-dominated - system and the status quo. All of these female villains must be defeated in the end to secure the status quo of a patriarchal concept. Female characters of the fantasy genre who question the status quo and express critiques of the lack of their own agency, such as Claudia in *Interview with the Vampire* (1994), are rare and dangerous.

According to Donato Totaro's article 'When Women Kill: Recent North American Horror Films', roles for women in European horror have become more attractive and complex since the 1960s, with female antagonists being more common than in the North American equivalent. Only recently, according to Totaro, 'the female as antagonist and potential killer has caught up to its older European counterpart' (Totaro, 2014). Since the beginning of the 21st century, the representation of women-who-kill, especially in the horror and fantasy genre, has become increasingly popular. Over the last decade, online discussions and journalists have called for more female antagonistic roles and have

demanded that it is time for 'Hollywood to embrace the female super villain' (Martinetti, 2015)[9] [10]. In spite of this, female antagonists are rare even today and, according to Martha M. Lauzen (2016) only 18 per cent of antagonists in the top 100 grossing films of 2015 in the USA were portrayed by women,[11] despite the craving for a female villain made in Hollywood. Nevertheless, female villains with supernatural powers show developments in their depiction. As Donato Totaro notes, female antagonists in Hollywood are a:

> rare breed… [but] something wicked has happened in the last decade plus in the landscape of North American Horror:… Female killers as monsters (zombies, vampires, werewolves, etc.) have remained a fairly constant presence in horror films over decades, but the difference now is that women are killers in a more realistic context as well, as serial killers and psychopaths. (Totaro, 2014)

While Totaro sees the 'realistic context' of female killers in the form of human and non- supernatural narratives, I argue that a shift towards a 'realistic context' has also occurred in the narratives of supernatural female film villains. Furthermore, recent versions of evil women are presented as fully developed characters with hopes and desires, which helps the audience to connect with them even though we might not agree with the actions they take to fulfil their dreams. We accept their actions because, they are still the 'bad guys'. David Howard and Edward Mabley seek to define complex but non-sympathetic central characters, but their illustration matches with the portrayal of the new evil woman paradigm as well:

[9] See also Wohl, 2013; Doyle, 2015.
[10] Examples of films that do not include a supernatural villain include *Fatal Attraction* (1987), *Batman Returns* (1992), *Wild Things* (1998) and *American Mary* (2012), but they do match the characteristics of women-who-kill. The female super villain or the anti-hero trope has encouraged more exposure in recent years in TV shows such as *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019), *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016), *Once upon a Time* (2011-2018) and *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-present).
[11] See 'It's a Man's (Celluloid) World: Portrayals of Female Characters in the Top 100 Films of 2015'.

> In each of these [films], we still manage to care about a character who is far from admirable, far from enviable, yet with whom we still manage to share some small amount of empathy. We see the human heart suffering inside the character whose actions, desires, and possibly whose whole life we find distasteful. (Howard and Mabley, 1993, p. 21)

These new variations of North American female film villains are complex characters, much like the complex femmes fatales of film noirs. Janey Place defines the femme fatale as '[t]he dark lady, the spider woman, the evil seductress' (1998, p. 47) who is both temptress and destructor of men. Place states further that various depictions of the femme fatale who causes the demise of men are 'among the oldest themes of art, literature, mythology and religion in western culture. She is as old as Eve, and as current as today's movies' (ibid.). Therefore, she is a timeless, ever-existing male fetish. Helen Hanson and Catherine O'Rawe acknowledge the complexity of the femme fatale and 'her powerfully attractive visual appearance' (2010, p. 2). Furthermore, the character of the femme fatale is surrounded by mystery and an unknowingness about her character and it is this mysteriousness that sparks the 'desire to uncover her hidden essence' (ibid.). In contrast, the Evil Woman is not a mystery. She has a backstory that often informs the audience about her motivation and her efforts to harm the protagonist. This makes her more complex and perhaps more threatening to patriarchy than the mysterious femme fatale, who Mary Ann Doane defines as a 'symptom of male fears about feminism' (Doane, 1991, pp. 2-3).

I argue that the Evil Woman concept is too complex for it to be reduced to man's fear of feminism. The Evil Woman is not a feminist character *per se*. In my study, I propose that the female antagonist is a critic of patriarchy and contemporary conceptualisations of feminism(s). Such conceptualisations have been critically observed by social commentators and critics such as Anti Zeisler and Jessa

Crispin. Crispin examines notions of third and fourth wave feminism and sees them as banal 'Universal Feminism', ineffective and non-threatening. According to Crispin, feminism has lost its teeth and exists within the status quo: patriarchy. Crispin's ideal concept of feminism is of its sociological nature to create change in both society and the system for the greater good:

> Radical change is scary. It's terrifying, actually. And the feminism I support is a full-on revolution. Where women are not simply *allowed* to participate in the world as it already exists - an inherently corrupt world, designed by a patriarchy to subjugate and control and destroy all challengers - but are actively able to re-shape it. Where women do not simply knock on doors of churches, of governments, of capitalist marketplaces and politely ask for admittance, but create their own religious systems, governments, and economies. My feminism is not one of incremental change, revealed in the end to be The Same As Ever, But More So. It is a cleansing fire. (Crispin, 2017, p. XI, emphasis in original)

However, contemporary female antagonists in film cannot be defined as toothless and voiceless. Crispin argues further that '[p]eople don't like change, and so feminism must be as close to the status quo – with minor modifications – in order to recruit large numbers' (2017, p XI). Many female protagonists in these films, as Chapter Two will demonstrate, support a harmless feminism that is close to the traditional social order. Feminism has stopped being revolutionary. Feminism is no longer a threat to patriarchy (ibid.). The Evil Woman paradigm forces change inn order to improve her own situation, ignoring the greater good. This defines the contemporary female villain, the Evil Woman, as a risk for phallic authority as well, as it demonstrates the ineffectiveness of feminist concepts that are intertwined with capitalist values. Furthermore, these characters offer a sense of personal motivation that fuels their criticism and they present a flawed patriarchal system - including contemporary notions of feminism - that has harmed them. The Evil Woman is a presenter of 'real'

female issues: ‘If a woman cannot be aggressive and still be a woman, then female agency is a pipe dream’ (Pinedo, 1997, p. 83).

According to Terry Eagleton ‘the word “evil” is generally a way of bringing arguments to an end’ (Eagleton, 2010, p. 8). Evil characters such as the Evil Queen and other female villains with magical powers have been denied the chance to explain their anger. Their power lies in their magical ability, but more so in their message and their story. Laura Mulvey states that the ‘[v]oice exists on a cusp between resonance and significance. On one hand, a voice contributes a material texture to the general soundtrack of a film; on the other hand it conveys a specific message though language, in speech’ (2003, p. 15). In this research, I am interested in the message the female villain sends to an audience through her speech, as well as her body language, and whether this message of the villain conforms with the message of the film’s narrative. Especially in a film such as *Mama* – which is discussed in more detail later as a case study – attention needs to be to the antagonist’s gestures, because female antagonist is a ghost, unable to speak. However, her loving and caring gestures towards her children, as well as her violent actions in the face of threats, articulate her personality. Another film in which close attention to the body language and the action of the female antagonist is significant is *Let Me In*, its girl vampire Abby, which will also be discussed in more detail later. In this film, Abby’s personal intentions differ from what she leads her new young friend Owen to believe: ‘Evil lurks in what we cannot see, and we cannot trust what we do see’ (Pinedo, 1997, p. 74). Who can the audience trust, the Evil Woman or the film’s narrative and message?

Versions of the Evil Woman in film draw ‘upon mythical and historical constructions’ (Arnold, 2013, p. 2) of femininity and womanhood, but they are given a voice with which to share their side of the story. The concept of the Evil Woman in horror and dark fantasy interacts with a wider range of film and cultural theories. It is influenced by feminist-informed psychoanalytical approaches, but it goes

beyond psychoanalytical readings of film texts. The psychoanalytical approach in film theory has been criticised in recent years (Freeland, 2000; Schneider, 2004; Price, 1996), with good reason. The issue with the scholarly works published by Mulvey, Williams, Clover, and Creed, to name just a few, is that they assume the horror audience is predominantly male - the hypothetical male spectator. Since then, scholars such as Brigid Cherry, Rhona Berenstein, Richard Nowell and Isabel Cristina Pinedo have undertaken important research on the female horror audience and its pleasures of viewing.

This complex paradigm of the Evil Woman is still a villain and a threat, but she is empathetic. This makes her a serious new threat to patriarchy, which comes in many guises that offer identification and viewing pleasure for the female spectator. In *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012) and *Drag Me to Hell* (2009) the Evil Woman portrays the curse of ageing and is a victim of ideals of beauty. In *The Craft* (1996) and *Dark Shadows* (2012) she has the desire to improve her social status. She is a caring matriarch and provider in films such as *Mama* (2012), *Seed of Chucky*, (2004) and *Doctor Sleep* (2019), and a child-like seductress in *Let Me In* (2010). Compared with previous readings of female monsters and their sexuality, the paradigm of the Evil Woman is 'not overtly sexual, at least not initially, because they are too old, or more often too young' (Monnet, 2015, p. 152).

The Evil Woman is a villain and a threat, but 'motivated by a desire to disrupt the facile assumption that the genre does not speak to women but only about them' (Pinedo, 1997, p. 70). Furthermore, she articulates Sady Doyle's statement of society's vilification of the Other - here the woman - because 'as we still look for supernatural evil instead of human abusers, we still insist on seeing demonic influence where there are only girls in pain' (Doyle, 2019, p. 25).

CHAPTER TWO

THE EVIL WOMAN IN CINEMATIC REALMS – A RESEARCH STATEMENT

2.1 Introduction

My interest in an academic investigation of supernatural female villains was stimulated after watching an interview with actress Angelina Jolie to promote the fantasy film *Maleficent* (2014), a film that puts *Sleeping Beauty*'s villain at the centre of its narrative. In the interview, Jolie was asked what makes her character (Maleficent) relatable for today's audience, and Jolie replied, 'Wicked is always relatable. She is troubled. I think we all relate to troubled, I certainly do. We have all been hurt'.[12] This statement turns out to be characteristic of a variety of supernatural female villains in 21st-century mainstream American cinema, and while Jolie suggests that a general audience will relate to her character, thereby providing reassurance that no potential audiences will not be excluded, it is clear that *Maleficent's* narrative is heavily female-centred. The film addresses several issues that women *still* face in today's male-dominated society.

Maleficent is an American live-action fantasy film and a new interpretation of Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). It tells the story from the villain's (Maleficent's) perspective and portrays her not as the antagonist, but as the 'victim-hero',[13] a misunderstood fairy.[14] The film's narrative focusses on female bonding and on Maleficent's choice to fight back, her refusal to be neither villain nor victim. Maleficent's revenge is personal and is focused on the man she trusted and who betrayed her. Her childhood friend, Stefan, cuts off her wings so that he can become king. The taking of Maleficent's

[12] See ScreenSlam interview on YouTube: Maleficent: Angelina Jolie 'Maleficent' Official Movie Interview.
[13] This term, which Carol Clover uses in her book *Men, Women and Chainsaws,* which describes the (usually young) female protagonist as the sole survivor of a serial killer in the American slasher film.
[14] Maleficent as a fairy demonstrates that fairies can be part of the good and evil paradigm. Marina Warner writes: 'Few people believe in fairies, now, but they featured powerfully in the belief system of the past, and not always benignly' (2016, p. 1).

wings can be interpreted as a metaphor for rape, which turns the film into a rape-revenge film in disguise. As Sarah Projansky argues, 'rape is central to cinema itself' (2001, p. 20), and it is a topic that is significantly explored in horror and thriller genres (Clover, 1993; Read, 2000). Jacinda Read (2000) describes the transformation of the heroine in her examination of the rape-revenge cycle as a journey from victim to avenger. This is also shown in Maleficent who, as the victim of a male abuser, and takes revenge by putting a curse on his daughter, showing her monstrous and villainous side by harming an innocent infant.

The rape element in this fairy tale interpretation relates closely to the 1634 book version of the same fairy tale: *Sun, Moon, and Talia* by Giambattiasta Basile. Talia (Sleeping Beauty), after falling into a long, deep sleep catches the attention of a king. The king leaves her pregnant with twins while she is still unconcious. Marina Warner states that this element of the narrative has been left out or replaced in later versions (2016, p. 133). This demonstrates that fairy tales and myths have always reflected the culture of their time and, in most cases when written by men, have advertised and protected male standpoints. Fairy tales and 'myths embody and convey the most sacred truth a society can first produce and then protect. Myths are memories. Above all else, they are memories of what must never be forgotten, for without them there could be no lasting culture, and without culture there could be little meaning in life' (Twitchell, 1985, p. 84). *Maleficent* revives, re-imagines and contributes to contemporary memories and although it is directed by a man its screenwriter is Linda Woolverton.[15] The text follows the growing relationship between Maleficent and Aurora, and in the end it is Maleficent's kiss that awakens Aurora, not the prince's. *Maleficent* rejects the traditional patriarchal values presented in Basile's version, the Brothers Grimm fairy tale and Disney's *Sleeping Beauty.* The film introduces a new meaning of 'true love's kiss' that shows the protective love a woman has

[15] Linda Woolverton is also the screenwriter of Disney's feature animation *Beauty and the Beast* (1991).

for a child and the supportive bond between women. The film does not end with Aurora marrying the prince, but with her being crownned queen and the reunion of her realm with Maleficent's fairy world. Despite having a rape-revenge component, *Maleficent* contains themes that female audiences may prefer in films of dark fantasy and supernatural horror, including high production values, a strong female lead and subtle violence (Short, 2006, p. 3). A high proportion of the film's viewers were women, and it presented a working formula for female dark fantasy and horror audiences.

Films such as *Maleficent, Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012)*, Drag Me to Hell* (2009)*, The Witch* (2015)*, Mama* (2013)*, Seed of Chucky* (2004), *Dark Shadows* (2012), *The Craft* (1996) and *Ginger Snaps* (2000) are members of a group of North American films that complicate traditional assumptions of women in dark fantasy and supernatural horror genres. These are genres in which supernatural creatures thrive and, as monsters, represent notions of fear, with similar motifs and iconography shared both in literature and on screen: 'Dark Fantasy emphasizes the themes of horror, fear and impending death. Often times, the quest in Dark Fantasy is to survive horror and looming death' (Roberts, 2001, p. 31). Dark fantasy contains horror, and fear and death, just as the horror story does:

> Stories of horror, fear, the unknown, the supernatural, and death assuredly date back as far as does humanity. Sociologists and psychologists tell us that no single human issue – not even sex – dominates our conscious being more than that of morality and immorality. Dark Fantasy has been perpetuated in the folklore and mass media of the last two centuries. (Roberts, 2001, p. 31)

The two genres have similar themes, which also makes it difficult to label a film with these shared traits as either a supernatural horror film or a dark fantasy film.[16] Sue Short states that 'fairy tales frequently contain the stuff of nightmares' and that '[h]orror's kinship with fairy tales is demonstrated through several shared elements, including an emphasis on fear' (2006, p. viii). Brigid Cherry asserts that the horror genre 'should perhaps be more accurately thought of as an overlapping and evolving set of "conceptual categories" that are in a constant state of flux' (Cherry, 2009, p. 3). This is, in my view, also applicable to the film monster as a concept that embodies meaning. The monster and the meaning it represents is in a constant state of flux, because it evolves and changes over time. Wood defines the film monster as a threat to 'normality'[17] that changes its form 'from period to period' (1979, p. 14).

Even though Angelina Jolie stated in her interview that it is wickedness that is relatable for the audience, she also noted that the audience learns about her character's motivation: Maleficent has been hurt. *Maleficent*'s release occurred during the fourth wave of feminism. This wave is known to have a strong online presence and its main concern focuses on the fight for justice concerning sexual violence, calling out the perpetrators and achieving gender equality: 'Contemporary feminism is characterised by its diversity of purpose, and amid the cacophony of voices it is easy to overlook one of the main constants within the movement as it currently stands – its reliance on the internet' (Munro, 2013). This confirms 'that social revolution and sexual revolution are inseparably linked and necessary to each other' (Wood, 1979, p. 7). Munro states further that 'the internet has created a "call-out" culture, in which sexism or misogyny can be "called out" and challenged' (Munro, 2013).

[16] According to Steve Neale, 'it is sometimes very difficult to distinguish between horror and science fiction. Not only that, it can at times be difficult to distinguish between horror and the crime film, and science fiction, adventure and fantasy as well' (2000, p. 85).
[17] Wood uses the term 'normality' as: 'conformity to the dominant social norm' (1979, p. 14).

The #MeToo movement and the 2016 presidential campaign strategies of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump offer insightful imagery regarding the treatment of women in American society and its stance on female issues. American society is based on patriarchal hegemony and the traditional attitude that the passivity of women is an ideal that needs to be maintained and perceived as good and desired. Woman who are active, are independent and have their own viewpoint, are seen as evil in the dichotomy of 'Phallocentrism' (Cixous, 1976, p. 876): 'the historic "social issues" agenda of the Right has always incorporated strong anti-feminist values' (Gould, 1990, p. 137). This thesis interrogates traditional, influential Republican and right-wing personas such as Pat Robertson,[18] Fox News' Tucker Carlson, Ann Coulter, Jordan Peterson and President Donald Trump by juxtaposing their voices with horror film narratives. This comparison of imagery and statements aims to investigate the socio-cultural and political treatment that powerful woman experience when opposing traditional American values.

The textual readings of contemporary films in the thesis are concerned solely with depictions of female human monsters such as witches (Ravenna in *Snow White and the Huntsman*, Mrs Ganush in *Drag Me to Hell,* Nancy in *The Craft,* Rose the Hat in *Doctor Sleep,* Angelique in *Dark Shadows*), vampires (Abby in *Let Me In*), werewolves (Ginger in *Ginger Snaps),* women possessed by demons (Jennifer in *Jennifer's Body*) and used-to-be-human monsters, such as the ghost of Edith Brennan in *Mama* and killer doll Tiffany Ray in *Seed of Chucky*. Examples such as these portray evil women who have supernatural powers as the film's antagonist/villain and operate in the dark fantasy and supernatural horror realm.

[18] Pat Robertson founded the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) in 1960. The network and its content have become increasingly popular, with Pat Robertson as an influential Christian and conservative political voice. According to the network, Robertson's daily talk show *The 700 Club* is CBN's longest-airing programme and can reach 96 per cent of US American households (cbn.com).

This thesis investigates the question: how have we been seeing the female villain in film and how do we see her now? I argue that since the beginning of the 21st century new versions of female villains in North American supernatural horror film have emerged that are a response to contemporary female issues and challenge contemporary sexual politics. Furthermore, the thesis examines historical, cultural and political stances in North American society that have influenced a change in the view of women in society and therefore in cinematic representations of women. How are powerful women who dare to question the status quo treated inn American society? Is this what makes all these current re-imaginations of supernatural female antagonists relatable?

The first part of this film will present existing theoretical discussions around the monster in American cinema and examine male and female monsters in connection with voice and status in society. Here I will complicate existing feminist theoretical frameworks by arguing that woman as monster is castrated and with this figurative castration comes also a figurative castration or mutilation of her voice. It is the female voice and the acoustic organ that has been neglected, ignored or removed, in the case of Medusa by taking her whole head. The concept of the Evil Woman will be defined as a phenomenon comparable to Clover's Final Girl and Creed's Monstrous Feminine. The Evil Woman is an articulation of critique against the silencing and antagonising of powerful women in American culture and American cinema. The absence or lack of the female voice in the narrative - historically, culturally and politically – has influenced cinematic representations and approaches in film studies. Close readings of a group of films are made with the aim of confirming a gender imbalance in the articulation of meaning.

The second part of the film presents the main shift from male-centred to female-centred narratives. It investigates the non-fiction, the 'real', and considers female positions and women's ability to be

active policy makers from a film industry perspective. It examines the cultural and political attitudes of American society through recent political events such as the 2016 presidential campaign and the #MeToo movement. This chapter investigates emerging studies and institutions dedicated to visibly and vocally representing women in the film industry, along with realistic representations of women on screen. Does Hollywood fuel and police these images and these narratives? Does this have an effect on a wider American cultural image?

The last part of the documentary presents a group of films and three textual readings of film case studies that show how recent female antagonists have overcome the boundaries of patriarchal hegemony. These antagonists are analysed from the perspective of how their voice is used to reveal the feminine ideals of American society and its patriarchal attitudes towards women in power by juxtaposing the Evil Woman's meaning with that of the protagonist. The documentary considers the position of the female audience and the kind of viewing pleasure the Evil Woman provides to the female spectatorship. This chapter proposes that the villain comes to criticise a flawed phallocentric society as well as contemporary notions of 'powerless' feminism.

2.2 'Silence is a Woman's Glory'

The Evil Woman in Cinematic Realms concerns itself with the shift in perception of supernatural female characters in dark fantasy and horror film. These portrayals of female antagonists fall into a concept further discussed as the Evil Woman. Despite the fact that to this day the public perception of Hollywood's film industry is that it is sexist,[19] portrayals of female villains in American mainstream horror film have progressed over the last 20 years. According to Harrington, women have been given a 'privileged place', in this genre in particular, and she describes it as a locus of 'expression

[19] #MeToo and the #Time's Up movement revealed, and brought increased public attention to, the misogynist environment of Hollywood's industry.

and exploration that leverages the narrative and aesthetic horrors of the reproductive, the maternal, and the sexual to expose the underpinnings of the social, political and philosophical othering of women' (Harrington, 2018, p. 1). However, women have also always been depicted as a stereotypical image: as either the victim or, if they have supernatural powers, the monster (Lenne, 1979; Clover, 1993; Creed, 1993; Lazard, 2009). In *Framing Monsters: Fantasy Film and Social Alienation*, Joshua Bellin (2005) devotes a chapter to the examination of powerful female monsters who defy patriarchy. He draws upon Linda Williams' hypothesis of female identification with the film monster and analyses the combination of monster and femaleness in his chapter 'Dragon Ladies'. However, Bellin's focus is the female creature T-Rex in the film *Jurassic Park* (1993) and he categorises other female creatures, including the alien queen in *Aliens* (1986), 'the chromosomally male but reproductively female behemoth of *Godzilla* (1998) [, the] mother ship of *Independence Day* (1996)', Ursula (*The Little Mermaid*, 1989) and Santanico Pandemonium (*From Dusk Til Dawn*, 1996) as 'monstrous women' (2005, p. 107). I see issues with Bellin's broad definition of monstrous women. In my opinion, drawing a connection between female audiences' possible identification with female monstrous creatures such as the T-Rex is problematic, because this animal (giant lizard) lacks human characteristics. As Tudor states in his work on the categorisation of monsters as characters in horror film, the slime monster in *The Blob* (1958) and the alien creature in *Alien* (1979) are not characters as 'their motives remain opaque' and 'they are, rather, narrative functions given physical form' (1989, p. 115). According to Noel Carroll it is 'of human nature that we [as audiences] are emotionally moved by the personalities and situations of other people' (1990, p. 61).

The Evil Woman is highly influenced by Barbara Creed's important work on the 'Monstrous Feminine'. She challenges Freud's theory of the male castration complex, which claims that man fears castration because of woman's lack of a penis. Her lack is a constant reminder of threat. Creed argues that the 'Monstrous Feminine' is a threat to men and the social order because she is the

castrator. However, this thesis will complicate Creed's theory of the image of 'woman-as-castrator' (1993, p.7). To this day, scholarly attention lies on the female body and its research methods focus more on the image than on sound and what has been said. A fact that Jennifer O'Meara points out is 'how little research has been carried out on the female dialogue and voices in the past sixty years of cinema' (2016, p. 1121). Images of female creatures that are equally seductive and monstrous to the male gaze can be found in Greco-Roman mythology and earlier.

The image of Medusa is a prominent example of an image that has been used by patriarchal hegemony to vilify the woman who was harmed. Creed acknowledges the Medusa as a Monstrous Feminine, an image of male anxiety over female power; however, she omits any mention of Ovid's version of how Medusa became a monster. The part of this myth that is most well-known and is used for the purpose of keeping women in their place is the story of the hero Perseus, who took Medusa's head. How the Medusa became the snake-haired creature we know her as is less well known, as it involves disgraceful male behaviour and victim blaming. In Roman poet Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Medusa is portrayed as a Gorgon, the daughter of divine marine beings. Her exceptional beauty caught the attention of Poseidon who raped her in Athena's temple. Athena then turned Medusa into a snake-haired creature who could turn men into stone with her gaze, as a punishment for defiling her temple. In his manuscript 'Das Medusenhaupt'[20] (The Head of the Medusa), Sigmund Freud used the image of Medusa's head as a symbol for male castration anxiety. Medusa's serpent-hair, according to Freud, reminds men of the hairy genital region of the mother and is a reminder of the lack of the phallus (1941, p. 47). Both Freud's interpretation and the tale of Medusa's fate itself present a clear problem that still exists. Victimised women are demonised and controlled by the male gaze and their stories erased from the narrative, leaving only the male narrative at the centre. A similar case of the missing

[20] The manuscript has been dated to 1922.

voice of powerful and dangerous women is that of the mythical creatures the Sirens, which presents the voice as a serious threat to men. The Sirens are female creatures that are described differently depending on the source and the culture; however, one of their most famous 'appearances' (I stress this because they were not really seen) is in Homer's *The Odyssey.* In this poem Odysseus escapes the danger of these divines, by letting his men tie him to the boat's mast, when they are passing the Sirens' island. Odysseus hears the Sirens' seductive call but the text ascribes them very little narrative compared with the build-up and the theoretical threat they represent. They are denied an encounter with the hero. Narratives such as this, that deny a female voice, are common, and narratives such as that of Medusa demonstrate that women are punished for their voice and 'have to pay a very high price for being heard' (Beard, 2018, p. 8). Mary Beard states further that 'we need to recognise that [misogyny] is a bit more complicated and that there is a long back-story' (ibid.)

In this doctoral thesis I present close textual readings of individual films and groups of films with similar representations of demonised women with supernatural power. My textual analysis is supported by feminist-informed psychoanalytical film theory and socio-cultural and political approaches within the US context. My reason for not dismissing psychoanalysis as a method of reading the film text is that the image of the woman-as-castrated (Freud) and the woman-as-castrator (Creed) are not only to this day very present images within horror film but are also very present images and fears within traditional, conservative, patriarchal, American society. The value in using psychoanalytical ideas for textual readings is in uncovering patriarchal, even misogynist attitudes in American culture (historically and contemporaneously). It demonstrates how '[t]he battle for liberation, the battle against oppression (whether economic, legal, or ideological), gains enormous extra significance through the addition of the term "patriarchal", since patriarchy long *pre*cedes and far *exceeds* what we call capitalism' (Wood, 1979, p. 7, emphasis in original). According to Arnold 'psychoanalysis is a cultural myth of sorts, yet it shapes ideas, understandings and practices much in

the way that Christianity does' (2013, p. 3) and it 'nevertheless may still have much to say about particular works, subgenres and cycles within horror, if only because various psychoanalytic myths, images, and self-understandings have been continually and increasingly appropriated by the genre throughout the twentieth century' (Carroll, 1990, p. 168). The multi-faceted inclusion of historical, socio-cultural, political and industry factors seems appropriate and necessary for this doctoral inquiry, in order that it can examine the various influences that have possibly caused a shift in the representation of female supernatural antagonists in the last two decades.

This thesis has been informed by a number of works by film and cultural studies scholars such as Barbara Creed, W. Scott Poole, Marina Warner, Mary Beard, John Berger and Amy Lawrence. Its aim is to complicate and extend the research surrounding monstrous female identity in horror and dark fantasy genre and the previous (simplistic) arguments that female monsters are a threat to patriarchy. Numerous scholarly works have mainly focused on the female body in these genres and have criticised its objectification by a male controlling gaze. However, by putting the female body at the centre of their research, these critical works themselves objectify the female form - as a research subject. As previously mentioned, very little work has been done on the voice of the supernatural female villain and the *voicing* of the female issues they represent in the film text. Amy Lawrence's book *Echo and Narcissus: Women's Voices in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1991) and Kaja Silverman's work *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (1988) examine the female voice and acts of speaking in classical Hollywood film. Both conclude that the female voice in the classical era of American cinema is constructed and controlled by the patriarchal order and that women who speak are identified as a problem. In recent years several quantitative studies have published notable findings on the cinematic representation of women as speaking characters but these findings offer only a simplistic and reduced demonstration of the vocal gender imbalance in film. Woman can only be respected as a whole form if body, voice and message are

considered as a unit. The quality of what the female voice, as part of her body, produces is of significance.

Being a woman comes with certain societal expectations. Western, and more specifically North American, culture has created a simplistic but utopic idea of woman and this 'shows how much we depend on our understanding of what constitutes masculinity and femininity to make sense of the world we live in' (Hoffert, 2003, p. 2). Right-wing televangelist Pat Robertson advocates the concept of headship and describes the head of the ideal American family as being Jesus Christ, followed by the husband. This traditional concept of family values describes exactly the position of, and what is expected of, the woman is in American society, as she assumes an inferior role to a man (a husband). The family here is not an idea based on equality; it is, in fact, a system based on mastery, which Helene Cixous calls 'parental-conjugal-phallocentrism' (Cixous, 1976, p. 876), an understanding that 'will be passed on to children' (Hoffert, 2003 p. 2). Sylvia D. Hoffert presents America's evolution of gender politics in her insightful and extensive book, *A History of Gender in America: Essays, Documents, and Articles.* She presents gender differences and their effects at the various historical, cultural, political, and economical levels, from the arrival of the Colonists in the 17th century up until the 1970s. She states:

> Before about 1970, American history was written primarily by white men who set out chronicling the public political, economic, social, intellectual, and religious activities of other men. It was a celebration of American men's effort to develop and preserve democratic institutions, promote the progress of capitalism, institute a tradition of religious tolerance, and encourage geographic expansion. American history was also characterized by the assumption that white men were the norm and the measure of what humans could accomplish. (Hoffert, 2003, p.5)

The inferiority of women as society's preferred ideal is rooted in Christian traditions but can be traced back as far as classical times. Mariana Warner examines the relationship between fairy tales and their historical context in *From the Beast to the Blonde*, by pointing out prejudice against the woman in society. She states that the 'Christian tradition held the virtue of silence' (Warner, 1995, p. 29) and observes further that the ideal of the silent woman can be found in Aristotle's *Politics*, which states that 'silence is a woman's glory' (Aristotle, 2000, p. 52; Warner, 1999, p. 29) and that speaking was considered a sin.[21] The virtue of silence applies only to women.

John Berger's examination of the female position in European art displays the passive, impotent and silent position of women in Western culture. He states that 'the social presence of a woman is different in kind from that of a man. A man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies' (1972, p. 45). In contrast he argues that 'to be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men' (ibid. p. 46). In cinema this depiction is supported and promoted by the mainstream dream machinery of Hollywood: 'offering systematised variants on its modes of meaning and pleasure, genres participate constantly in an ongoing process of construction of sexual identity' (Neale, 1980, p. 56). The fantasy and horror genres both disobey and comply with traditional gender performativity and sexuality in the form of the film monster. Notions of monstrous representations in their various forms have been of interest to many scholars. W. Scott Poole states that a monster does 'not mean one thing but a thousand' (Poole, 2011, p. xiv) and analyses the monster as a 'historical problem' (2011 p. 3), while Judith Halberstam describes how '[m]onsters are meaning machines' (Halberstam, 1995, p. 21) and analyses in *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* monstrous images in 19th-century British novels and 20th-century American horror films. Halberstam describes the monster as a bearer of otherness that

[21] 'Mulier taceat in ecclesia' (Nietzsche, 1998, p. 125), meaning 'woman should be silent in church', is a Christian principle that Nietzsche mentiones in his influential work *Beyond Good and Evil*.

'can represent gender, race, nationality, class, and sexuality in one body' (Halberstam, 1995, pp. 21-22). Her historical examination of monster images in gothic literature and American horror film is interesting and her analogy of skin as a form of monstrous depiction and identification is fascinating; however, her comparison of British gothic literature of the 19th-century with 20th-century American horror film is difficult, due to the different cultural states of these countries and perhaps the different media involved as well. Halberstam mentions that the monster's body presents gender and sexuality, and she points out the power a female monster has in these narratives. However, her studies of female monstrosity often link back to the male-centred narrative, which I argue weakens the female monster's agency.

A public assumption that exists to this day is that women are not part of the horror film audience and that women play either the victim or the monster in North American horror cinema. Feminist film critics, especially during the second wave of feminism, influenced the perceptions of popular horror films and claimed horror to be a misogynist genre, using psychoanalysis to justify their positions. Inspired by Mulvey, Linda Williams criticises the dominant male gaze in her article 'When the woman looks' and concentrates on the male monster in classic horror as the object of identification for female audiences. Williams points out that the dominant gaze of both male spectatorship and the male protagonist degrades the female on screen to an object of desire and punishment. Williams states that 'women are given so little to identify with on the screen' (Williams, 2015, p. 17). Their only object of identification is the victim or the monster and in both cases the woman on screen and the female spectator are punished for looking, as they either witnesses the defeat of the monster or sees the woman on screen becoming a victim.

2.3 Woman as Victim

Film director Mary Harron states that 'as a woman, physically, you feel always under threat you know. If you're in a room full of men you are less physically powerful. But fear, I think, is why a lot of women do like horror, because fear is part of your life' (AMC TV UK, 2018). According to the findings of the US Department of Justice, women are six times more likely to become the victim of a sexually motivated crime, such as rape, in the United States than men[22] and in almost all cases the perpetrator is a man. In the history of North American culture, women's rights - sexual, political and economical - have been governed by men.

However, right-wing affiliated voices, such as Fox News presenter Tucker Carlson and clinical psychologist Jordan Peterson, have denied the victimisation of women in a phallocentric society:

> It's easy to mistake masculine competence for the tyranny that hypothetically drives the patriarchy. It's part of an ideological world view that sees the entire history of mankind as the oppression of women by men, which is a dreadful way of looking at the world. Fundamentally, human history is a co-operative enterprise, and men and women have lifted themselves out of the mire over millennia in their co-operative endeavor. And to describe that as centuries of the oppression of women by men is an absolutely reprehensible, ideological re-write of history. (Fox News, 2018)

In horror cinema the iconography of the victim is most commonly portrayed in female form and this has been discussed at length by film scholars and critics alike. In 'Monster and Victim: Women in the Horror Film', Gérard Lenne compares the female horror victim to the fairy-tale princess: 'no matter what happens, [she] never participates directly in the action. She is the object of desire' (1979,

[22] See Snyder, 2000, p.4, available at: https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/saycrle.pdf

p. 32) and needs saving. This type of victim is a popular image of the classical Hollywood era, such as Kay Lawrence in *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954) and Ann Darrow in *King Kong* (1933). The horror subgenre that is most popular for being publicly labelled misogynistic, the slasher film, provides its audience with two kinds of victims: The one that gets murdered by the (usually) masked killer and the girl that survives. Carol Clover coined the phrase 'Final Girl' (1993, p. 35), to describe the latter type, the usually young female protagonist as the sole survivor of a serial killer's rampage. Clover quotes *Carrie* director Brian De Palma to explain the necessity of the victim being female: '"Women in peril work better in suspense genre…. you fear more for her than you would for a husky man"' (Clover, 1993, p. 53). Feminist film scholars and popular film critics have attacked the genre for its torment of female characters and have identified it as a sexist male behavioural response to the women's liberation movement of the 1970s. Carol Clover has examined the slasher genre and the Final Girl/killer relationship. According to Clover the surviving heroine is an active and therefore a masculinised female. This definition is a variation on Mulvey's. This Freudian psychoanalytic approach however, denies the female hero of any agency.

The female hero can be female only when she screams: the most iconic acoustic feature associated with not only the slasher, but the female horror victim in general, is her scream: 'the female scream connotes vulnerability and futility' (Christensen, 2019, p. 275). One of the most popular screams in the history of American horror cinema is that of Janet Leigh in the shower scene in *Psycho* right before her character is stabbed to death by Norman Bates.

2.4 Man as Monster

American cinema has a long history of producing iconic monstrous figures that haunt the silver screen and bring fear and nightmares to its audience. According to Paul Wells, 'every monster is the promise

of death and demise' (2000, p. 10). The notions of monstrous representations in their various forms have been of interest to many scholars. Historian W. Scott Poole states in *Monsters in America: Our Historical Obsession with the Hideous and the Haunting* that 'the monster [is a] historical problem' (Poole, 2011, p. 3) and he analyses America's history and culture from the perspective of their being tied to monsters (Skal, 1993; Tudor, 1989; Bellin, 2003; Phillips, 2005).

However, '[t]he great monsters are all male' claims Gérard Lenne (1979, p. 38). From the fish-man in *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954), the mummy in *The Mummy* (1932) and Dr Jack Griffin in *The Invisible Man* (1933) to Norman Bates, Freddy Krueger, Michael Myers and Chucky, Lenne's claim seems to be accurate. Despite the aforementioned cultural attitudes predominantly blaming and punishing mostly women, the majority of monsters in North American film are male. They are, according to Aviva Briefel's definition, motivated by masochistic episodes and 'initiate their sadistic rampages with acts of self-mutilation' (2005, p. 16). Briefel allows her male monsters more psychological depth and motivation. John Belton devotes a chapter of his work on American culture and film to the horror genre, and brings in the aspect of audience identification with the film monster: 'monsters often emerge as more human or more sympathetic than so-called normal characters. The abnormality of the monster often endows it with a tragic dimension, as in the case of Frankenstein or the Wolf-Man, encouraging audience identification with it' (Belton, 2012, p. 274). Belton's examples of monsters in classic horror films such as *Dracula* (1931), *King Kong* (1933), *Wolf-Man* (1941) and *Frankenstein* (1931) are objects of identification, but as they are all male they are also mainly objects of male identification. While scholars such as Poole, Bellin, Tudor and Phillips favour looking at the male monster through a cultural-historical lens, Harry Benshoff uses queer readings to study male monsters in horror film.

Numerous scholars favour analysing queer issues in the male monster ,and especially in a film such as *Interview with the Vampire* (1994) (Benshoff, 1997; Dyer *et al.*, 1993; Silver and Ursini, 2011). However, academic, film blogger and filmmaker Linda Rodriguez suggests that femininity has been represented by the male monstrous body, and in *Interview with the Vampire* she finds female issues such as motherhood in the form of vampire Louis. The film, set in 1990s San Francisco, is an adaptation of Anne Rice's vampire novel and stars Brad Pitt, Tom Cruise and Antonio Banderas. A reporter, played by Christian Slater, interviews Louis (played by Pitt), who shares his experience of life as a vampire and the relationships he has with companion Lestat and their adopted vampire daughter Claudia. Claudia (Kirsten Dunst) is an important part of the couple's, and especially Louis', life. He is her maker and some scholars, such as Silver and Ursini, read her making as an act of child molestation (2011, p. 262). However, I see the child molestation aspect as problematic in the context of a homosexual relationship. For this reason I follow Linda Rodriguez's reading and her view of the maternal and the child-parents-relationship. The film itself shows no indication of any sexual interest that the two adult men could have for Claudia, only parental motivation. In the film, Lestat states: 'She is our daughter'. Louis has a warm, paternal relationship with to Claudia compared with Lestat, who sees her more as his protégé. Louis is the kind, caring, nurturing half of the parental duo, attributes that are often ascribed to mothers in Western society. He lets Claudia sleep in his coffin, gives her kisses and buys her nice clothes. That fact that Anne Rice lost her own daughter before writing her vampire novel and that the novel was about that experience (Jacques, 2014) makes the loving parent-daughter relationship more plausible. Even though Claudia has a wonderful relationship with her 'father' Louis, she is a dangerous, unpredictable killer and an excellent, fearsome, female monster.

2.5 Woman as Monster/Villain

2.5.1 Underrepresented

In 1935, Universal Pictures released *The Bride of Frankenstein,* directed by James Whale. The film starts with Mary Shelley, her husband and Lord Byron passing the time by telling each other scary stories on a stormy night. Mary Shelley recounts a story about Henry Frankenstein and his experience of creating a bride for his monster. While the film gives the impression that the tale will be about the bride – that is, after all, the title of the film - it actually focuses on the dynamic between the male characters. The female monster, the bride, appears only at the end of the film, brought to life for a few moments and then destroyed at the hands of the doctor. The bride has only a visual appearance. She screams when she looks at her mate, but she is not able to speak and therefore she is denied any opportunity to be an active part of the narrative. She has the potential to be a monster or even an Evil Woman; however, she is - as with so many other female examples - silenced and thus denied the chance to be a narrator or to form any female agency. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, this denial or reduction of the female voice by male creators has already been demonstrated in the examples of the Medusa and of the Sirens in Homer's *The Odyssey.* Lillian Eileen Doherty states in her examination of the Sirens that their song is cut short. This makes sense, as the female narration takes the power away from the male hero and even from the male narrator (Doherty, 1995, p. 81).

Gérard Lenne claims that except for the female vampire, which is a male sexual fantasy, female monsters are rare and even when they are represented they assume a minor role in the film's narrative. Lenne acknowledges new developments with films such as *The Exorcist* (1973) but fails to mention classic Hollywood films such as *Dracula's Daughter* (1936) and *Cat People* (1942). Lenne's position indicates that female film monsters share the same iconic status as their male counterparts. Rhona Berenstein draws parallels between the horror genre, gender iconography and advertising. Monstrous

and evil characters in the horror genre such as Freddy Kruger, Norman Bates, Michael Myers and Jason Voorhees have become iconic figures and a universe of franchises exist around them. To this day it seems that there are more male than female horror film icons in this category (the only female slasher serial killer icon with a franchise is Angela Baker – *Sleepaway Camp* [1983] – and she is transgender). Even though it was Pamela Voorhees who killed people in the Slasher classic *Friday, the 13th* (1980), it was her son Jason who became the famous horror icon.

As previously mentioned, one of the most influential feminist examinations of gender representations in horror film is Barbara Creed's book *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis.* In her psychoanalytical readings of films such as *Alien* (1979), *Carrie* (1976), *The Hunger* (1983) and *The Brood* (1979) she argues that female representations in horror films are manifestations of male sexual anxieties and concludes that these films exploit the male fear of the woman as castrator. Creed's psychoanalytical methodology has been strongly criticised by scholars such as Cynthia Freeland, who states that psychoanalytic readings are 'too reductive' (Freeland, 2000, p. 4). Additionally, Creed's assumption of a dominantly male audience is only theoretical and she includes no female audiences experience or evidence of audience study in her research. Most feminist theorists who use psychoanalytical methods have criticised the depiction of women on screen as being inferior and passive and that 'women are given so little to identify with on the screen' (Williams, 2015 p. 17) compared with their male counterparts. According to Linda Williams, the female spectator's only object of identification is the victim or the monster and in both cases the woman on screen and the female spectator are punished for looking, for witnessing either the defeat of the monster or the woman on screen being victimised. Williams' position is problematic because, according to her, female spectators cannot enjoy horror films and they can identify only with the male film monster: 'she sees a monster that offers a distorted reflection of her own image' (2015, p. 24).

Williams mentions the screen vamp of the silent cinema era as an example of a dangerous and powerful woman, but only to point out that this is due to her 'dubious moral status' (ibid. p. 19) and that her deservingness of punishment turns her into a 'mere parody of the male look' (ibid.). Furthermore, she argues that the 'old woman' simply functions to horrify the audience and does not serve as a 'spectacle-object' (Williams, 1991, p. 3). A reductive reading like Williams' neglects any agency that an ageing female character might have and denies any possible identification that the female audience experiences. In the past, scholarly feminist film criticism using a psychoanalytical approach tended to leave out the possibility of both female identification with female monstrosity and female audience pleasure in the horror genres. Linda Williams' hypothesis, as mentioned earlier, does not allow for any possibility of pleasure for the female viewer either. However, her observation does not correspond with the experience of actress Theda Bara. The screen vamp of the silent film offers another interpretation of the vamp in films. *A Fool There Was* (1915) follows the story of a doctor who falls for the advances of 'the vampire' played by Theda Bara, a woman who seduces wealthy men and destroys their lives. Depictions of dangerous seductresses such as Bara's offer pleasure to the female spectator, contradicting William's image of the 1930s screen vamp. Bara states in an interview about her femme fatale character's effect on her female audience:

> Women are my greatest fans because they see in my vampire the impersonal vengeance of all their unavenged wrongs… they have lacked either the courage or will power to redress their grievances. Even downtrodden wives write me to this effect. And they give me the greatest compliment: 'I know I should sympathize with the wife, but I do not.' I am in effect a feministe. (May, 1980, p. 106)

The female film monster is sustained in Williams' aforementioned hypothesis of the female spectator's identification with the film monster, but it combines femininity with the monstrous, which

omits the ‘distorted reflection’. Despite mentioning the screen vamp or the femme fatale of film noir, Williams fails to mention female film monsters of the classic horror genre such as Marya in *Dracula’s Daughter* (1936) and Irena in *Cat People* (1941). Iconic female film monsters in American horror and fantasy film since the 1930s are, with a few exceptions, still rare. These films present their film monster as a sympathetic character with desires and with the articulation of the female issues they face. Their internal struggle makes them relatable and also defines what society sees as monstrous.

Both Marya and Irena can be read as film text examples of women who are repressed and who are captives in a male-dominated society, and the ‘conception of female sexuality as threatening to the male in terms of its representation of the castrated female’s weak and helpless state is called into question by the affinity between woman and monster’ (Hollinger, 1989, p. 39). These characters have abilities and power that go beyond those of the male protagonists and therefore there can be no positive outcome for them. If one were to investigate depictions of iconic female film monsters, one would find that they are a rarity in American cinema and that the motivation of the females departs from that of the male:

> Female killers are few and their reason for killing significantly different from men’s. With the possible exception of the murderous mother in *Friday the Thirteenth I*, they show no gender confusion. Or is their motive overtly psychosexual; their anger drives in most cases not from childhood experience but from specific moments in their adult lives in which they have been abandoned or cheated on by men. (Clover, 1993, p. 29)

Aviva Briefel suggests that it is the monster’s pain that gives the audience reason to identify with the monstrous. She divides this pain into two modes: ‘masochism and menstruation’ (2005, p. 16). The mode of masochism is reserved for the male monster who first causes himself pain. When he no longer feels this, his ‘ability to resist pain turns into a desire to harm others’ (ibid.). It is the self-

reflexive, masochistic position of the audience that offers cause to identify with the male monster. In comparison, Briefel states that female monsters:

> do not inflict pain on themselves before taking their sadistic rampages. On the contrary, they tend to commit acts of violence out of revenge for earlier abuse by parents, partners, rapists, and other offenders. (Briefel, 2005, p. 16)

However, Briefel gives a very narrow frame of female monster depictions. Her focus mainly comprises monstrous characters that are the film's protagonist, such as Carrie White in *Carrie*, Ginger in *Ginger Snaps* and Regan in *The Exorcist*, and claims that it is menstruation, the bleeding female body, that is the site of horror and the monstrous. Briefel's modes depict the monster (male or female) as a simplistic embodiment of human suffering. While she allows the male monster some psychological depth and inner struggle, female monsters cause harm as a reaction to previous violence towards them.

Investigations into villainous female film monsters that are empathetic and complex and prompt identification with the audience are even rarer. Peter Hutchings differentiates between the monster and the villain, by suggesting that the film villain in genres other than the fantastic is seen as a threat and a danger to the protagonist and their worlds but is rarely depicted, or seen, as monstrous. The film monster in horror and fantasy film however is, as Hutchings notes, 'impure' and 'unnatural' (2004, pp. 34-35). Erin Harrington states that Creed shifted attention from woman as victim to the '*under-theorised* female monster' (2018, p. 3). Again, more common is the depiction of two-dimensional images with no depth and no explanation of their 'evilness', as in characters such as the three brides of Count Dracula in *Dracula* (1931), the Wicked Witch in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), the Grand High Witch in *The Witches* (1990), Marsha Quist in *The Howling* (1981), Regine Dandrige in

Fright Night Part 2 (1988), the Sanderson Sisters in *Hocus Pocus* (1993) and Santanico Pandemonium in *From Dusk Till Dawn* (1996).

What the female monster represents at its core is the male-dominated society in crisis. Jane Ussher states that 'towards the end of the nineteenth century women were beginning to question and challenge openly the narrow role prescribed for them' (1989, p. 3). Karen Hollinger writes about the female monster and interprets Susan Lurie's argument that woman's power lies in her sexual difference:

> Applying [Lurie's]… theory to the monster film suggests that an interpretation with greater explanatory power that those of Neale and Mulvey in assessing the socio-historical implementations of the monster as woman in patriarchal society involves a recognition that the underlying fear that informs these texts and that lies behind that fear of castration is the threat of the potency of non-phallic sexuality. (Hollinger, 1989, pp. 39-40)

2.5.2 Objects of Anxiety and Erotic Desire - Pornography and Horror

Numerous scholars and critics see a connection between the horrific and the pornographic, both thematically and in terms of their visual presentation. Susan Sontag examines, in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, the visual presentation of violence and suffering: 'It seems that the appetite for pictures showing bodies in pain is as keen, almost, as the desire for ones that show bodies naked' (Sontag, 2003, p. 36) Furthermore she states that '[a]ll images that display the violation of an attractive body are, to a certain degree, pornographic' (ibid. p. 85).

Sontag's statement that violence and horror are linked relates to the works of numerous scholars as who discuss the bodily affect and the relationship of pleasure between sexual desire and fear

(McRory, 2010; Williams, 1991; Doyle, 2019; Poole, 2014; Creed, 1993; Lenne, 1979). I have mentioned Linda Williams' definition of the three 'body genres' that evoke a bodily sensation in the spectator. She states that these genres, which are pornography, horror and melodrama, have the ability to affect the viewer physically. She links horror and pornography as two 'systems of excess' (1991, p.3). The excess of violence and gore, as well as pornographic images and acts on screen, results in bodily reactions in the audience. However, horror and pornography share similar narratives, as James Twitchell argues: 'As with much pornography, contemporary formulaic horror sequences are so rife with misogyny, incest, rape, and aggressive antisocial behaviour that we are almost frightened to take it seriously' (Twitchell, 1985, p. 4). As discussed previously, horror and pornography share tropes of presenting a dehumanised version of the human body for the purpose of male pleasure. As Jessa Crispin states '[i]n order to take advantage of someone, in order to think of them as a resource to be exploited, it helps to dehumanize them' (Crispin, 2017, p. 57).

The doll, especially the sex doll, embodies both the concept of female bodily exploitation and dehumanisation to the extreme and the '[p]atriarchal perspectives [that] have associated femaleness with bodiliness in a manner that conceives the female body as fulfilling a function: being "for sex"' (Jones, 2013). The female doll as a (heterosexual) fetish object is a surrogate for a number of different notions:

> idol, form, knowing, seeing, a material object of devotion, endowed with a force; a little girl, virgin, virginity itself; a semblance, a substitute, a stand-in, mimetic; yet also a precious object. (Smith, 2013, p. 9)

A film that explores the idea of women as dehumanised objects that are there to serve men is the 1975 adaptation of Ira Levin's book *Stepford Wives.* The film follows Joanna Eberhard, a photographer from New York settling in with her family in a small town called Stepford. While struggling with the

town's slow and quiet lifestyle, Joanna makes friends with other like-minded women who have also recently moved there. After a short while, she notices that her friends start to change and become depictions of the ideal American housewife: quiet, eager to serve their husbands, not speaking their mind. Joanna discovers that the men of Stepford are responsible for turning their wives into living dolls. The end of the film shows all the wives of Stepford shopping in a grocery store. This scene, in particular, reveals the very real attitude of a patriarchal America towards its women.

The doll is lifeless and thereby the dominated party - patriarchy dominates matriarchy. Lifeless bodies can be found in cinematic depictions of sleeping fairy-tale princesses such as Sleeping Beauty and Snow White, who are often seen as role models for young girls. Lifeless, artificial role models, such as the Barbie doll, support utopic patriarchal beauty standards that condition children early in life to the idea of gender roles, gender appearance and female sexuality. Feminist writer Natasha Walter states that '[t]his image of female sexuality has become more than ever defined by the terms of the sex industry' (Walter, 2011, p. 3), which is accurate in the case of the Barbie doll, as she is based on a German sexual cartoon character.[23]

Nevertheless, according to Walter it has been a misconception that women do not find pleasure in watching pornography and Linda Williams also acknowledges shifts in female audience interests, suggesting that female horror and porn audiences experience viewing pleasure. This indicates a re-evaluation of feminist film criticism that includes female interests and an acknowledgment of female spectatorship that does not feel punished for looking.[24] The shift towards female control and female-

[23] See also the interview section with M.G. Lord in the Netflix series *The Toys That Made Us,* Episode: Barbie (2017).
[24] Linda Williams argues in her essay 'When the woman looks' that in the horror film the gaze of the female spectator as well as that of the female on-screen characters is punished for looking and this punishment prevents the female audience from experiencing any viewing enjoyment.

centred narratives that step away from female objectification can be found in the re-imagination of *Stepford Wives* (2004).

Frank Oz's remake of *Stepford Wives* in the 2000s tells a similar story to the original, with a fresh, updated take on women's position in Western/American society. It is still the story of Joanna Eberhard, but in Oz's version she is a strong, successful businesswoman, with a job that outranks her husband's. After a gun shooting during a TV programme launch Joanna loses her job as a producer. In order to make a new start, her husband (played by Matthew Broderick) reveals that they are moving to Stepford with the children. Just as in the 1970s version, Joanna has a difficult time adjusting to the small-town lifestyle after New York but she finds friends in Bobby (Bette Midler) and Roger (Roger Bart). After a while Joanna learns that the husbands of Stepford turn their wives into robots that portray the ideal of a 1950s housewife. However, this new version does not share the same dark ending as its predecessor. Together with her husband, Joanna exposes the secret of Stepford and turns the wives back into their strong, independent selves. The ending of the remake is inspired by the ending of the 1975 adaptation: we see the husbands shopping for groceries instead of the women; however, as they are complaining to each other, we learn that they are still themselves and not robots.

Stephen Neale argues that 'it could well be maintained that it is women's sexuality, that which renders them desirable – but also threatening – to men, which constitutes the real problem that the horror cinema exists to explore, and which constitutes also and ultimately that which is really monstrous' (1980, p. 61). This assumption exists about many female monster images. The female vampire, and the lesbian vampire in particular, embodies male sexual desire and anxiety about female sexuality (Weiss, 1992; Creed, 1993; Lenne, 1979).

The Evil Woman in Cinematic Realms links the imagery of the doll as a toy predominantly aimed at girls with the doll as a male sexual fetish and the female vampire as an image of male desire. In this section of the film I aim to combine these elements and present the young vampire Claudia in *Interview with the Vampire* as a subversion of these images, as she is 'bristling with feminist significance but… scarcely articulates her complaint' (Auerbach, 1995, p. 154). Her fierceness and desires are undermined by her child-like appearance: 'she is a visual icon of arrested development' (ibid.). Claudia represents the female experience under patriarchy as she is 'worshiped and controlled by two fatherly Lovers' (ibid.). However, with her doll-like appearance, 'vampirism is no release from patriarchy, but a perpetuation of it until the end of time' (ibid.) Nevertheless, Claudia protests against the restrictions placed on her and asks questions that imply that her 'fathers' have subjected her to unfairness and inequality, an articulation that reflects the female experience of gender restrictions and cultural gender expectations.

2.6 A Siren Call (to Women)

My film forces a thematic breaking point with the introduction of the Jessica Chastain's speech at a Cannes Film Festival press conference in 2017. Chastain offered her view on the lack of women in the film industry and the lack of relatable female characters in film. As a festival juror for the first time, she voiced her concern about female representation on screen:

> The one thing I really took away from this experience is how the world views women from the female characters that I saw represented and it was quite disturbing to me to be honest… I do hope that when we include more female storytellers we will have more of the women that I recognise in my day-to-day life. Ones that are proactive, have their own agencies, don't just react to the men around them, they have their own point of view. (The Guardian, 2017)

Chastain's concern reflects the ongoing conflict that female storytellers face in presenting female issues in the disguise of fiction. In the 17th century, male storytellers such as Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm did not tell their own stories. Their tales are a collection of stories told by women, such as nurses and grandmothers. This is the origin of the term 'old wives' tales'. Female writers often 'adopted the conversation of the fairy tale to depict the virtues, the suffering – and the hopes – of their sex' (Warner, 2016, p. 47). These tales often carried a feminist voice and dealt with the inequality faced in marriage, as it was socially acceptable for men, but not women, to have affairs. The female storytellers, who disguised their radical female-centred views in fairy tales, criticised their inferior position in education, in economic terms and in society in general. Had these women been exposed they would have faced punishment in the form of prison, house arrest or exile (ibid.). Chastain's statement about the lack of female storytellers is part of the long history of silencing the female voice that criticises society and urges liberation.

The punishment of the authorial female voice has continued into horror cinema. The horror genre often presents an opportunity for film directors early in their career. Numerous filmmakers who are now famous, such as Steven Spielberg, George A. Romero, Sam Raimi and Peter Jackson, began their profession in horror. Several female filmmakers such as Kathryn Bigelow, Mary Lambert and the Soska Sisters saw this genre as a stepping stone and directed horror films. Nowadays film collectives such as Women in Horror Month and The Final Girls recognise, support and celebrate the work of female horror filmmakers. However, scholarly assumptions such as Clover's argue that the female pleasure of horror, whether as a consumer or as a producer, is a rarity. She states that '…for while it may be that the audience for slasher films is mainly male, this does not mean that there are not also many female viewers who actively like such films, and of course there are also women, however few, who script, direct, and produce them' (Clover, 1993, p. 54).

In spite of the fact that the horror and fantasy genres are a home to numerous female directors,[25] and Clover's stance is becoming more outdated, these directors' presence is often nor recognised. Even in the 21st century the genre is still commonly associated with masculinity, and controlling male gaze and male directors. This public assumption was expressed by horror film producer Jason Blum in an interview with Polygon in October 2018, when he stated: 'There are not a lot of female directors period, and even less who are inclined to do horror' (Patches, 2018). His statement caused public disagreement and he later apologised, but in hindsight his comment pointed to a bigger issue. The lack of female representation on screen and the lack of female creative decision makers behind the camera suggest issues of great complexity. However, the public failure to recognise female directors is a fate these directors share with the female horror audience.

2.7 Female Genre Audience

One main topic of discussion between scholars and non-scholars is the assumption of a mainly male horror and fantasy film audience. Works on horror by scholars such as Carol Clover, Barbara Creed, Linda Williams and Peter Hutchings 'concern themselves with a theoretical male spectator' (Cherry, 1999, p. 1) and suggest that men make up the majority of audiences. These assumptions of a majority-male horror film spectatorship are criticised by scholars such as Brigid Cherry, who focuses on the behaviour and tastes of female horror spectatorships, and Cynthia Freeland, who has criticised previous scholars' statements 'that the horror genre is antiwoman' (Freeland, 2000, p. 3). Kier-la Janisse , founder of the Miskatonic Institute of Horror Studies, argues in *Eli Roth's History of Horror* (2018) that women have consumed horror continuously since the gothic novel. She states further that 'in the 80s it seems like no women liked it, but I think it was actually just that women were sort of

[25] See Totaro, 2014; Paszkiewicz, 2018.

afraid to like it because they felt like it was a betrayal of feminism in some way' (AMC TV UK, 2018), a stance that Rhona Berenstein shares.[26] Tying this in with the negative backlash women horror directors such as Amy Holden Jones, Mary Harron and Karyn Kusama have received because of their work, raises questions of whether these negative responses were an emotional reaction related to the prevalent contemporary attitude of feminism's aversion to the genre.

Discourses involving the viewing pleasures of female horror audiences are a growing field in academia, as well as in popular publications and the inclusion of online publications and active, 'vocal' genre fandom publications reflects the increasing visibility of the complex variations of evil women. This active vocal online presence and the connections, especially between female horror fan communities, show that female audiences claim the genre for themselves and prove assumptions that the horror genre is male dominated to be inaccurate. Since the publication in 2009 of *Entertainment Weekly*'s online article 'Chicks dig scary movies' by Christine Spines, other online articles have followed on similar topics regarding the 'trend' (Spines, 2009) that '[t]oday…, the genre's biggest constituency of die-hard fans are women' (ibid.). Spines' discovery is hardly a new development in the field of horror audience studies. Scholar Rhona Berenstein states that gothic horror films such as *Dracula* were especially marketed with a female audience in mind. She points out that the romantic component of the *Dracula* story was strongly advertised to attract female audiences (1996, p. 66). Nowell's research on the marketing strategies of women-in-danger films in the early 1980s suggests that women were acknowledged as a key demographic audience of horror and thriller and they were a targeted by film marketing for the horror and thriller genre. Furthermore, Nowell argues that:

> that print and audiovisual para-texts–posters, newspaper ads, publicity articles, lobby cards, trailers, and TV spots–were used to preempt accusations of misogyny based on supposedly

[26] See Berenstein, 1996, p. 4

> misogynistic intent, sexist content, lower-class male spectatorship, sadistic consumption, and exhibition in rundown urban areas that were associated with predatory males. In so doing, the majors aimed to differentiate their women-in-danger films from sensationally marketed independent releases so as to avoid commercially damaging controversy and to attract the lucrative adult female audience. (Nowell, 2013, p. 3)

A recent and by far one of the most in-depth female horror audience studies was presented by Brigid Cherry in 1999. She investigated the female horror film audience for her doctoral thesis and her findings show a preference for horror films with vampire, supernatural and witch content. Other recent studies have shown that female horror and fantasy film audiences are growing and have become a serious target group for productions. Film productions aim to please the female gaze with their film marketing strategies. For instance, the marketing concept for the supernatural horror film *Jennifer's Body* (2007) was created to attract both male and female audiences (Kwan, 2009). Diablo Cody, the film's screenwriter, explains how she and Karyn Kusama (director) wanted 'to subvert the classic horror model of women being terrorized' (ibid.). Furthermore, Cody explains that with *Jennifer's Body* she not only intended to tackle 'the male-dominated horror genre' (ibid.) but that for her 'the key reason for writing the movie was to bring to the screen a new way of expressing the intensity of female bonds' (ibid.). Despite mixed critical reviews at the time of release, the audience demographics for *Jennifer's Body* show balanced audience numbers, with 51 per cent female viewers and 70 per cent of them under the age of 25.[27]

[27] See DiOrio, 2009.

2.8 Female-Centred Fantastic Film Content

Brigid Cherry's study on the female horror spectator suggests that women have a preference for horror. She states that while the data collected does not speak for the whole of female spectatorship, it leads to the conclusion that women prefer certain aspects and subgenres of film over others. As previously mentioned, research indicates that films containing themes of dark fantasy and supernatural horror, with high production values, a strong female lead and subtle violence, are favoured by women (Cherry, 1999; Short, 2006, p. 3). Box office hit *The Conjuring* (2013) is listed among films with a high proportion of women in the audience - a 53 per cent female audience, of whom 59 per cent were under 25 years old.[28] - and it presented a working formula for female dark fantasy and horror audiences. *Maleficent* (2014), a female-driven story with Angelina Jolie as lead, was that summer's third-highest grossing movie and earned about US $240 million in ticket sales in the US and Canada (Hamedy, 2014).

The 1975 *Stepford Wives* depicts the male's desire to achieve mastery over women, while the 2004 remake depicts the female's desire to be her strong, independent self. Both film versions articulate the strong male anxiety about losing power over their own women and being overpowered by women in general. This male fear is a constant recurring theme in the horror film that has been inherited from earlier forms of storytelling. Nevertheless, '[w]hat makes horror "crucial enough to pass along" is, for critics since Freud, what has made ghost stories and fairy tales crucial enough to pass along: its engagement of repressed fears and desires and its reenactment of the residual conflict surrounding those feelings' (Clover, 1993, p. 11). Male anxiety about losing their mastery over women and the female's wish to overcome her repressed situation are in a perpetual discourse. Film director Karyn Kusama states that the horror film genre offers a unique space in which to explore this power

[28] See Cunningham, 2013

imbalance and give women the upper hand: 'And that's what remains profoundly meaningful to me about horror is it's one of the few genres that's had the guts to say "as a culture we are terrified of women and girls. We are terrified of the power they have"' (AMC TV UK, 2018).

The female-centred horror film offers its audience a heroine to sympathise with, but also to be terrified of. According to C. Jerry Kunter, the first North American female-centred horror film was *Dracula's Daughter* in 1936, followed by *Cat People* in 1942. Characteristic of this subgenre is a sympathetic female monster. In the 1960s and 1970s more female monsters and women killers came to the surface in many films, including *Marnie* (1964)*, Sisters* (1972), *Carrie* (1976). All of these films were directed by men. According to Donato Totaro, an increase in female antagonists and killers which he calls 'Women-Who-Kill', emerged at the beginning of the 21st century. He argues that female killers kill in a more realistic context, in the form of human serial killers and psychopaths. In my view a 'realistic context' applies also to the supernatural female villain, as she is depicted as more human and addresses 'real' female issues. Totaro suggests that this shift stems from the connection between female spectatorship and content creation within female-centric sub-genres in horror. He points out that the 'fact that there are so many more North American female-centered (and female-centric) horror films than ever before is an indication of at least two things: an increase in women horror spectators; and a reflection of gains made by women socially and in the film industry' (Totaro, 2014).[29] The growing influence of women in Western society suggests that in the horror and fantasy genre film studios no longer ignore women or, in Williams' words, punish them for looking, and new narratives of 'female-centered (and female-centric) horror films' (ibid.) show that women, in the film industry and as spectators, take more control over the gaze. In recent years, as mentioned, female-

[29] This confirms Rhona Berenstein's description of horror as a place where: 'human characters, male *and* female, behave monstrously and transgress the social rules and roles that usually confine them' (Berenstein, 1996, p. 5, emphasis in original). It seems that supernatural evil female archetypes are experiencing this humanisation.

centred issues in films have become of interest in scholarly discussions as well as in popular film criticism and even on an industry level. Even though Totaro's stance sounds optimistic, quantitative studies such as Dr Martha M. Lauzen's annual study 'It's a Man's (Celluloid) World' suggest scepticism.

This quantitative study is conducted by the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film. Its focus lies in the examination of on-screen representations of women in US films. In summary, Lauzen's annual findings indicate a gender imbalance in the representations of male and female characters. In 2013 – the first time the study added speaking roles as a category - only 30 per cent of all such roles were female, and this also included minor characters. In the top 100 grossing films of that year only 15 per cent of the protagonists were female (Lauzen, 2014, p. 1). In 2014, the year *Maleficent* was released, 30 per cent of all speaking roles were represented by women while only 11 per cent of characters with anti-social goals, including those with antagonistic or criminal motivation were women (Lauzen, 2015, p. 3). In 2015 the study added antagonists as a research category. This was the first and last time that antagonists were investigated in the study, and 18 per cent of them were women (Lauzen, 2016, p. 1). The horror genre has been included since 2017 and it has been shown to be one of the few genres in which female representation on screen is greater than that of males. In the category of female protagonists, 13 per cent of these were in the horror genre compared with seven per cent of male protagonists (Lauzen, 2018, p. 3). In 2018, also in the category of female protagonists, 19 per cent appeared in horror compared with a male representation of four per cent (Lauzen, 2019, p. 2) and in 2019, the figures were 26 per cent and 12 per cent respectively (Lauzen, 2020, p.2).

Lauzen's study is an annual reminder that women's voices are controlled and limited, as she points out in her findings on female speaking roles. A tool that has only recently become popular in the measurement of female representations and their voice is the Bechdel Test (BT).[30] The test is based on Alison Bechdel's comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For*, which first appeared in 1985. While '[fe]minist critics have long used the test to discuss popular culture, [it is its] appearance in a literary magazine like *The New Yorker* [that] marks its entrance into mainstream criticism' (Steiger, 2011, p. 104). The test, which can be categorised as a quantitative research tool, has been criticised by many scholars and film critics for being too reductive and being used inappropriately as a quantitative tool to measure qualitative content. For instance, the teen vampire romance *Twilight* (2008), which features a woman in a 'semi-abusive relationship' (Zeisler, 2016, p. 57) and whose whole existence is focused on her boyfriend, passed the test.[31] Zeisler explains further that 'the BT is not a judgement of quality or nuance' (p. 55). Scholars and critics fear that the simplicity of the test serves to 'actually legitimise low, one-dimensional standards for women's verbal and vocal representation' (O'Meara, 2016, p. 1121). The test does not specify the voices it represents. In-depth critical analysis is beyond the Bechdel Test's capability, and it leaves both voices and representations of ethnic diversity and queer identity behind, along with the ageing voice. Despite the test's limitations, Sweden has introduced it into its film rating system to provide an additional layer of transparency for audiences, and although the test has been 'elevated beyond the original intention' (Zeisler, 2016, p. 56.) it points to a broad issue of the underrepresented female voice in cinema.

Even though representations of women in horror have been stronger than in other genres and the 'realistic' representation of 'Women-Who-Kill' has been improving in female-centred horror, the

[30] The Oxford English Dictionary defines the Bechdel test as '[a] way of evaluating whether or not a film or other work of fiction portrays women in a way that is sexist or characterized by gender stereotyping. To pass the Bechdel test a work must feature at least two women, these women must talk to each other, and their conversation must concern something other than a man'.
[31] See: http://bechdeltest.com/view/501/twilight/

lack of a continuous focus on female antagonists on a qualitative level indicates that the female antagonist in horror and other genres is still overlooked and under-researched. This demonstrates the importance of this study, as it points out that the realistic female antagonist who holds power provides a critical voice that has been ignored and silenced.

2.9 Hollywood's Sirens and the Medusa of American Politics

This film has been greatly influenced by how America treats women in power, and hence this treatment has been made especially visible with regard to events from 2016 and 2017. In 2016, Hillary Clinton experienced that misogyny in American politics and culture is still a reality in the 21st century. However, powerful women can also be an influential voice in spreading an awareness of various injustices. In 2017, for instance, actress Alyssa Milano revived the solidarity movement for sexual abuse survivors through #MeToo and turned it into a viral phenomenon with millions of supporters worldwide.

The importance of film marketing and its strategies has become more complex since the emergence of the internet and social media platforms. One vital component is the star, as '[s]tars are one of the key selling points for a blockbuster' (Abbott, 2010, p. 31). In the advertising process, the story of a film is just as important as its cast, and recently the Evil Woman has more often been portrayed by famous Hollywood actresses, such as Charlize Theron (*Snow White and the Huntsman*), Meryl Streep (*Into the Woods*, 2014), Rachel Weisz and Mila Kunis[32] (*Oz, the Great and Powerful*, 2013) and Angelina Jolie (*Maleficent)*. This signifies that female Hollywood A-listers not only see horror and the fantastic as genres that start their careers, but that they also treat these genres and their characters

[32] In 2014, Mila Kunis became the new face for the Jim Beam bourbon. Choosing her shows the company's aim to attract younger customers, but also more female customers. The fashion and style magazine Marie Claire interviewed Kunis and advertised the bourbon to their customers (Gould, 2014).

respectfully (Anna Bogutskaya interview). Furthermore, in addition to attracting a high number of general audiences, these actresses are also likely to entice female audiences to see the films in cinemas. They have a social power that could be associated with the Sirens' call, but in these contemporary cases the intended recipients are women not men. Actresses such as Jolie, Chastain, Streep and Theron not only carry a social power and lend their voices to advocating for cultural change, they also carry substantial value for film productions and are able to use their status to put pressure on Hollywood businesses. Charlize Theron is an example of an actress who is fully aware of her value and has pushed for her popular recognition to be reflected financially. According to the popular press, in the aftermath of the Sony email hacker attack and the publication of confidential information, including the inequality in the pay of female stars, rumours in Hollywood circulated that Charlize Theron took this as motivation to demand $10 million to reprise her role as Ravenna in *Huntsman: Winter's War* (2016), the same amount as her screen partner Chris Hemsworth was being paid (Wiseman, 2015). Despite the social and economic ability that accompanies stardom, Hollywood stars are both dependent on and a product of American consumerism. In fact, they are a complex body of cultural policy representation:

> The star challenges analysis in the way it crosses disciplinary boundaries: a product of mass culture, but retaining theatrical concerns with acting, performance and art; an industrial marketing device, but a signifying element in films; a social sign, carrying cultural meanings and ideological values, which expresses the intimacies of individual personality, inviting desire and identification; an emblem of national celebrity, founded on the body, fashion and personal style; a product of capitalism and the ideology of individualism, yet a site of contest by marginalised groups; a figure consumed for his or her personal life, who competes for allegiance with statesmen and politicians. (Gledhill, 1991, p. xi)

Scholar Joshua Bellin states in his socio-cultural analysis of the female film monster that in the non-fiction society the female monster is the angry woman, known as a feminist who poses a threat and triggers conservative 'anxiety about changing traditional gender roles and traditional family constellations' (2005, p. 108). The Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s created a group of key cultural critics such as Andrea Dworkin who spoke up about the exclusion of women from powerful spaces. Dworkin argues that '[i]n most instances, women have been deprived of the opportunity even to formulate, let alone articulate or spread, values that contradict those of the male. The attempts that we make are both punished and ridiculed' (Dworkin, 1980, p. 257). Since then, feminists have been demonised and portrayed as 'hairy-legged, angry, man-hating … bogeymen' (Crispin, 2017, p. ix) by traditionalists.

Influential women do not always receive respectful treatment by and support from their culture, as the contemporary case of the 2016 American presidential election suggests. While Hollywood A-list actresses enjoy their position in the film industry and the influence they have in addressing social issues, and even have an impact on film production developments, '[i]n the arena of political power, women have been effectively silenced' (Dworkin, 1980, p. 257) or aggressively attacked, as in the case of Hillary Clinton.

The treatment of Hillary Clinton and the outcome of the presidential election – Clinton, an experienced and competent politician lost to an inexperienced, media-hungry Donald Trump – indicates that the conservative politicians involved in the campaign strategies against her were an embodiment of misogynist, right-wing propaganda. Criticism of the deceptive performance of conservatism has long been expressed by Robin Wood: 'The right-wing politicians, lacking all true moral sense under cover of a repressive and discredited traditional "morality," fulfil the function of

sustaining and fostering the perpetuation and growth of the government by the rich and for the rich which they hypocritically call “democracy”’ (Wood, 1998, p. 6).

Hollywood has an image of being a liberal institution, and numerous of its members even spoke out to oppose Donald Trump as a presidential candidate. However, the recent conviction of film producer Harvey Weinstein, as well as public allegations of sexual misconduct against Kevin Spacey and other famous male Hollywood personas, have exposed Hollywood as a hiding place for abusers and a safe haven for gender inequality.

Cinema can be a window on cultural issues. Is the Evil Woman, who now has a background story and visible motivation for harming the acknowledgment of female issues, and a celebration of female audiences and the female gaze? What meaning does the Evil Woman trope articulate in the context of film narrative and culture?

2.10 The Evil Woman’s Voice - Vocalising Female Issues

> The earliest stage of women’s history could be called ‘victimization history’. It exposed the degree to which women had been sexually, socially, politically and economically exploited and subjugated by men throughout the course of western civilization. But in identifying women as victims, it pictured women as passive and powerless, unwilling or unable to find a way to change the circumstances that they found themselves in’. (Hoffert, 2003, p. 7)

Women have had the urge and the willpower to change their situation from victim to hero over the course of history. Now more than ever, strong women come forward with their stories to support and

encourage others and let them know they are not alone. This sense of unity, having a voice coupled with anger inside, has motivated brave women to face up to injustice.

'She [Rose McGowan] has proved to be a sexual predator's worst nightmare because she has not just a public voice but a deeply admirable lack of fear and shame' (Freeman, 2018). Originally created in 2006 by activist Tarana Burke, the MeToo movement went viral in October 2017 after actress Alyssa Milano used the hashtag #MeToo in response to increasing sexual assault allegations against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. Since then McGowan has become one of the #MeToo movement's loudest voices. The irony is conspicuous: Harvey Weinstein has created his own worst enemy and monster. The movement and its supporters unsurprisingly share attributes of cinematic film monsters as they 'not only represent threats to the social order but can also offer new possibilities within and transformation of that order' (Hutchings, 2004, p. 37). It was McGowan and other 'angry' female voices that ultimately led to Weinstein's arrest on the 25th of May 2018. He was subsequently convicted of criminal sexual assault and rape on the 24th of February 2020. Freeman's quote above also captures the irony in the relationship between patriarchy and women. The repression of women by aggressive, dominating male attitudes results in a female hunger for liberation and a wave of angry women ready to fight. One particular image that has always been associated with the rejection of patriarchy is the image of the witch, who has been reclaimed as a feminist icon.

2.11 The Witch and Phallic Authority at Risk

The witch image as an anti-patriarchal depiction has been used by conservative extremists such as Pat Robertson to spread fear of the feminist movement among the public: 'The feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become

lesbians'[33] (Moi, 2006, p. 1736). The negative, satanic association of this image has always been connected with the stance against the existing Christian social order and the law of the father.

The belief in supernatural forces and mystical creatures such as demons, ghosts, werewolves and witches is as old as humankind, and while there is no written evidence that can determine the exact origin of these creatures, the discoveries of old artefacts such as gravestones, vases and amulets dates their presence back to early pagan times.[34] In the pagan period, powerful, magical beings such as the witch were seen as good as well as evil. They were protectors as well as punishers. However, over time society's beliefs changed and developed and, with the rise of Roman Catholicism, especially, these creatures were demonised: before science was able to decode the world's mysteries, society held supernatural forces accountable for the origins of misery and terror. It was suspected that supernatural creatures such as witches had a close relationship with the Devil, especially in Western society.[35] The existence of the Devil and supernatural creatures was part of society's reality, and women were particularly associated with him. Historian Carol Karlsen, in her book *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England*, examines the status of women in society, and misogyny and their connection with the witch trials of 17th-century New England (Karlsen, 1998, p. xiii). Although witches can be male, and there were men accused of and punished for witchcraft during the witch trials in North America (and Europe), the public association with the witch image and '[t]he story of witchcraft is primarily the story of women' (Karlsen, 1998, p. xii). Many of those 'witches' admitted during torture to actions that were not provable by prosecutors - such as using psychic abilities, talking to animals and having sexual intercourse with the Devil (Karlsen, 1998; Kieckhefer, 1998; Waite, 2003). Midwives especially (and other women who were gifted healers)

[33] See Pat Robertson quoted in The New York Times, 1992, 'Robertson Letter Attacks Feminists'.
[34] See. Zipes, 2012, p.57.
[35] See Jones, 2012, pp. 48-50.

were seen as witches due to the common belief that they possessed magical powers (Pearson, 2010; Creed, 1993). The majority of the accused were innocent, but there were also cases in which individuals admitted to being witches and having harmful intentions. This study, concerning itself as it does with female villains, would be incomplete without mentioning the few examples of witch trials that involved serious crimes, including child murder. According to historian Gary K. Waite, in his book *Heresy, Magic, and Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, there is evidence in records that proves the existence of underground sects in Italy whose members were described as 'demonic, cannibalistic-infanticide witches' (Waite, 2003, p. 36). In his essay 'Avenging the Blood of Children: Anxiety over Child Victims and the Origins of the European Witch Trials', Kieckhefer defines different types of child-harming witches: 'Witch-Vampires charged with killing children in their cradles' (1998, p. 94) and 'Witches charged simply with causing bodily harm and death to children by their bewitchment' (1998, p. 107). As historical records indicate, the 'woman-as-witch' is either a victim or a victimiser.

Historian Jo Pearson identified 'the nuances of rhetorics of violence surrounding the Witch' (Pearson, 2010, p. 142) and established six types: physical violence (including torture, rape and murder), psychological violence (including rape, inquisitorial procedure and investigations), patriarchal violence (restrictions by social, cultural and religious orders), violence of silence (the silencing and ignoring of the voice of the witch), invisible violence (magic and cursing) and mimetic violence (ibid.). The second wave of feminism in the 1970s reclaimed the witch as an icon for women's liberation and as a symbol for the victimhood of phallocentric violence. However, Pearson argues that '[r]adical feminists and feminist witches refuse to acknowledge the labels assigned to witches by their accusers' (2010, p. 153) and she supports her argument using Martha J. Reineke's statement that these women 'feel empowered to proclaim the innocence of the accused' (Reineke quoted in Pearson,

ibid.). Furthermore, Pearson argues that this reduces the power of the witch and turns her into a victimised body that is 'nothing but a site of torture and death' (Purkiss quoted in Pearson, ibid.).

Since the 1930s, American dark fantasy and horror films have portrayed good witches, such as Glinda in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), Jennifer in *I Married a Witch* (1941) and Eglantine Price in *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* (1971). However, many witches are also presented as agents of evil, and characters such as the Wicked Witch in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), the witch coven in *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), the Grand High Witch in *The Witches* (1990) and the Sanderson Sisters in *Hocus Pocus* (1993) perpetuate such images. These films depict the witch as the stereotypical creature that harms humankind, by bewitching them, poisoning them and eating their offspring as described in the *Malleus Maleficarum*[36] (1971). The witch is undoubtedly the most iconic monster figure associated with the female body in horror cinema. Barbara Creed defines the film witch 'as an old, ugly crone… capable of monstrous acts' (1993, p. 2). The stereotypical 'Horror Witch' holds an enduring position in horror cinema regardless of her distorted 'image of [her] real-life counterparts' (Sipos, 2010, p. 11) and she even uses the power she possesses to connect with common female problems, such as in *Carrie.* Carol Clover quotes Stephen King, who connects his experience with 'Women's Liberation' as an inspiration for his female teenage protagonist:

> If *The Stepford Wives* concerns itself with what men want from women, then *Carrie* is largely about how women find their own channels of power, and what men fear about women and women's sexuality…which is only to say that, writing the book in 1973 and only out of college three years, I was fully aware of what Women's Liberation implied for me and others of my

[36] *Malleus Maleficarum* was first published in 1486/1487. See https://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/0004/bsb00043229/images/index.html?seite=00001&l=en

> sex. The book is, in its more adult implications, an uneasy masculine shrinking from a future of female quality. (King quoted in Clover, 1993, p. 3)

Famous witch characters have evolved and have been re-interpreted, as the Evil Queen from the Grimm fairy tale *Snow White* demonstrates. In the Brothers Grimm story, she is nameless and only referred to as 'the Queen' or 'the Evil Queen'. Bruno Bettelheim states that fairy-tale characters have no names or only generic names so that everyone can relate to them (Bettelheim, 1991, p. 40). Terry Eagleton explains in his book *On Evil*, that 'the word "evil" is generally a way of bringing arguments to an end' (Eagleton, 2010, p.8). Based on Eagleton's statement, the Evil Queen is evil because she has to be. Recent versions of this character, however, do have a name. In the American TV show *Once Upon a Time* (2011-2018) she is Regina, the Major/Evil Queen, with a secret wish to have a family and a desire to get her own happy ending, despite being a villain. As one of the most iconic evil figures associated with the female body, the cinematic witch has also undergone these kinds of changes since the beginning of the 21st century: 'Alongside the appearance of the new Gothic, an apparently newly active femininity, physically assertive, and offering the female body as a site of resistance and control rather than sexual passivity has been an important feature of a range of major feature films in the early 2000s' (Tincknell, 2010, p. 249).

'The laugh is certainly the product of a social dynamic' (LaBelle, 2014, p. 119) and as Anna Bogutskaya points out it is the witch's laugh that shows power and superiority. LaBelle states further: 'From the superiority of one to another to laugh down at someone' (ibid.). The witch as an antagonist now has more to offer acoustically than just a powerful laugh. She *speaks to* their female audience as her narrative explors women's desire for agency and realistic representation of women's matters. The bad witch in cinema has often been depicted as the social outcast, a monster that enjoys tormenting

the protagonist. In the last two decades, this gendered icon of evil in American horror cinema has gone through significant transformations, which have alluded to her becoming more empathetic. Her struggles and desires are now well known to her female audience. The bad witch appears to her audience in the form of a teenager who is not accepted by her peers, such as in *The Craft*, or as a servant desperate to climb the social ladder. The motivation of this type of witch is based on real problems that an audience can identify with, and her use of witchcraft to help their situation showcases patriarchal fears of powerful woman: 'Witchcraft is not just a *form* of power for these girls, it's more or less the only power they have; magic is the voice of the marginalized responding to their oppression' (Doyle, 2019, p. 220, emphasis in original). The magic therefore makes her more dangerous to male attitudes and more powerful than ever.

2.12 Case Studies

2.12.1 *Snow White and the Huntsman*

The depiction of the Evil Queen Ravenna embodied by Charlize Theron offers an intriguing and fresh interpretation of the Grimm fairy tale. The film touches on female anxiety about ageing and loss of power. When being interviewed[37] about her character, Charlize Theron expresses views about women in society that are similar to those of Naomi Wolf, who argues in her book *The Beauty Myth* that '[b]eauty is a currency system like the gold standard. Like any economy, it is determined by politics, and in the modern age in the West it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact' (1991, p. 12). Wolf sees the creation of beauty ideals associated with female youth as a significant component of a patriarchal strategy to prevent women from bonding: 'Aging in women is "unbeautiful" since women grow more powerful with time, and since the link between generations of women must always be newly broken: Older women fear young ones, young women fear old, and

[37] See rappler.com interview at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=crgsFRs0lOI&t=76s

the beauty myth truncates for all the female life span' (Wolf, 1991, p. 14). Ravenna envies Snow White's beauty and youth, and Snow White fears Ravenna for her power and murderous ruthlessness. Wolf's words describe the dynamic between Ravenna and Snow White, but also that between other cinematic examples such as Christine and Mrs Ganush in *Drag Me to Hell*, Annabel and Edith Brennan in *Mama*, and Edith and Lucille in *Crimson Peak* (2015). Even films such as *The Craft* and *Jennifer's Body* depict the necessity to destroy powerful female bonds. However, I propose that these films also depict the female protagonist as part of the status quo as they all appear closer to the expectation of male-created ideals, ideals the antagonist cannot achieve. Ravenna, aware of her actions and her role declares to Snow White: 'You cannot defeat me! I've lived too many lives. Ravaged entire kingdoms. I have been given powers that you could not even fathom! I will never stop. Never. I will give this wretched world the queen it deserves'. Although Ravenna is the antagonist and is defeated in the end, the audience is provided with information regarding her character that explains her actions and motivations. She is as much the victim as the villain and her actions as a vengeful act against patriarchy can be justified. She is the embodiment of the consequences of a flawed, male-dominanted society that has produced its own enemy. Owen Gleiberman of *Entertainment Weekly* states of Ravenna that she is a 'fascist of feminism' (2012), which is a radical statement; however this 'relatable' radicalism is what makes her dangerous and her vengeful behaviour reflects the desire of a female audience, the audience that silent film actress Theda Bara calls her 'greatest fans'.[38]

Ravenna's character is a nexus of sexual violence, utopic beauty ideals, female rivalry, female independence and patriarchal exclusion, as well as extensive film marketing strategies. Brigid Cherry points out that the internet is used as a 'marketing and publicity tool within the film industry' (Cherry,

[38] In the prequel/sequel *The Huntsman: Winter's War* (2016) Ravenna portrays a more stereotypical villain compared to her sister Freya (played by Emily Blunt).

2010, p. 69). In 2012, the production company, Universal used the internet as a tool to create a 'new mobile advertising campaign' (Kats, 2012). This marketing strategy involved adverts on social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest that allowed the user to book tickets to the film, rate the film and share their experience with friends on their mobile devices. With this strategy, Universal intended to 'build a deeper relationship with its user' (ibid.). To promote *Snow White and the Huntsman* and attract female audiences, Universal's marketing department launched a 24-hour non-stop programming campaign in collaboration with HSN (Home Shopping Network). On the 30th of May 2012 (a day before the official release) HSN aired exclusive behind-the-scenes footage and offered products 'created specially to evoke the film's themes of beauty and power' (Olson, 2012). The combination of these campaigns paid off well (with a 53 per cent female audience), although bosses at Universal 'had reservations over whether it could draw young men, who typically make up most of the action crowd' (Larkin, 2012). In the end the attraction was almost even between female and male audiences, but it also served the argument that '[a]dvertisers are not in the business of liberating women - only of liberating their money' (Gamman and Marshment, 1988, p. 3).

2.12.2 *Mama*

Erin Harrington states in her book *Women, Monstrosity and Horror Film: Gynaehorror* that '[m]others are always already monstrous' (Harrington, 2018, p. 17).

In modern Western society motherhood and the maternal is an idealised construct, and a 'stereotypical aspect of western female identity' (Porter, 2012, p. 11). This identity of womanhood is often reduced to discussions of the female body in film criticism. The horror genre uses these – patriarchal – ideals of the maternal to create images of anxiety, nightmares and abjection: 'If one actually looks horror often has a very, very long tradition of female aggression linked to it. Often linked to the female body

and often liked to motherhood' (Xavier Mendik interview in film). Mrs Bates in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* has always been a horror icon, a famous representation of horrible mothers without actually having been physically present in the film - she was represented by her son, Norman. It was not until the release of the A&E network TV show *Bates Motel* in 2013 that Norma Bates became an actual three-dimensional character, and was given a face and, more importantly, a voice.

There are other examples I could have chosen for the textual reading and as a detailed case study for the section of the Evil Woman in the context of motherhood. *Seed of Chucky* (2004) and *Doctor Sleep* (2019) illustrate diverse cases of the altered evil mother-archetypes. *Seed of Chucky*, an American supernatural horror-comedy, is the fifth instalment of the *Child's Play* franchise, in which Chucky, a murderous doll, comes to life and goes on a killing spree. In *Seed of Chucky* Tiffany breaks with the stereotypic paradigm of a monstrous mother who tortures her own offspring. Tiffany, a murderous killer doll herself, loves and nurtures her child. With the spirit of an Evil Woman too, Tiffany subverts traditional gender roles and is the dominant partner in the relationship with Chucky. Another very recent cinematic example of a supernatural female villain that represents motherhood is the character of Rose the Hat in *Doctor Sleep.* Rose is not a mother in a biological sense - she has no children but rather absorbs their energy and kills them - but she is the main provider for herself and the supernatural 'coven' of which she is leader. She takes great care of her members and tries to protect them. Although Tiffany and Rose the Hat show the great complexity of contemporary Evil Woman tropes, I decided to examine *Mama* in the textual reading. This film complicates and subverts existing theoretical work on motherhood and the maternal in the context of the horror film.

In her book *Cinematernity: Film, Motherhood and Genre*, about gender and various genres, Lucy Fisher asks 'how narratives and cultural forms imply a specific sexual politics' and draws parallels

between notions of motherhood and mothers, and genre, including horror (Fisher, 1996, p. 6). 'Horror films provide one very large, popular, ongoing, and accessible body of material for symbolizing evil' (Freeland, 2000, p. 2) and from classic horror cinema up until the 1990s, the role of maternal figures in horror and fantasy film was clearly defined as pure evil, as a simplistic depiction of monstrosity or as castrator and embodiment of fear and death. The terms, used by other scholars to categorise the classic maternal paradigm, are: good mother, bad mother, castrating mother, phallic mother, archaic mother and monstrous mother. Ann E. Kaplan (1983) focuses on the mother character of the classical Hollywood era in her article 'The Case of the Missing Mother'. She states that these mother paradigms are similar to those found in literature and mythology throughout Western culture. Kaplan defines two of these paradigms as the 'Good Mother' and the 'Bad Mother':

> 1. The Good Mother, who is all-nurturing and self-abnegating – the 'Angel in the House'. Totally invested in husband and children, she lives only through them and is marginal to the narrative.
> 2. The Bad Mother or Witch – the underside to the first myth. Sadistic, hurtful, and jealous, she refuses the self-abnegating role, demanding her own life. Because of her 'evil' behaviour, this Mother often takes control of the narrative, but she is punished for her violation of the desired patriarchal idea, the Good Mother. (Kaplan, 1983, p. 81)

Kaplan's paradigms coincide with the Jungian mother archetype and exist in abstract form both as goddesses and Mother Earth, and in religions such as Christianity's image of Mary, mother of Jesus, but also as non-abstract mother-types ('persönliche Mutter') such as mothers, step-mothers and god-mothers etc. (Jung, 2011, pp. 96-98). Carl Gustav Jung states that archetypes, including the mother archetype, are manifestation of the collective unconscious (ibid.) These structures of the human's unconscious mind are old images, manifested in religion, dreams, myths and fairy tales, and are

familiar to every person and culture. The mother archetypes can symbolise the good, but also the frightening and the dark, which means birth as well as death (ibid.).

The classic horror genre provides a variety of Bad Mother (Kaplan) and Monstrous Mother (Creed) paradigms in films such as *Psycho* (1960), *Carrie* (1976)*, Sleepaway Camp* (1983) and *The Brood* (1979) and also in a large body of scholarly interpretations. Lucy Fisher writes that this 'confirms feminist perceptions that motherhood in the cinema has been a site of "crisis" [and i]n many films, the mother is blamed for her transgression or for the ills she visits upon her offspring'. (Fisher, 1996, p. 30). Barbara Creed centres her approach on monstrous maternal figures such as the monstrous womb, the archaic mother and the castrating mother. She suggests that '[t]he monstrous mother is central to a number of horror texts. Her perversity is almost always grounded in possessive, dominant behaviour towards her offspring' (Creed, 1993, p. 139). The 'castrating mother'-type (mother-son relationships), as a contrast to Freud's theory of the mother as castrated, is illustrated in Creed's analysis of *Psycho* (1960). Even though Mrs Bates is not physically present in the film – only at the end when her mummified body is found in her house - Norman effectively becomes her whenever he commis murder. In those moments he is his own mother. Through Norman, the spectator learns that his mother was dominant, abusive and manipulative. The dominance of his mother prevents Norman from fully developing his own, independent identity. Her identity even absorbs Norman's completely when he is arrested for murder. The category of the 'castrating mother' also applies to Aunt Martha in *Sleepaway Camp*, who forces her nephew Peter Barker to live as Angela, his sister, who died in a boating accident together with their father John. When Aunt Martha is granted full custody of Peter, she decides to raise him as a girl, due to the fact that she already has a son, Ricky. By denying Peter his own identity, she also denies him his penis and therefore can be categorised as a 'castrating mother'-type. Controlling, dominant and abusive – even psychotic - is Mrs White, Carrie's mother in

Brian De Palma's horror classic *Carrie*. In this unhealthy mother-daughter relationship the mother is, again, the dominant party, hindering her offspring in the formation of her own identity. Even though Carrie cannot be castrated, her mother displays castrating characteristics by cutting Carrie off from any form of social life. *The Brood* directed by David Cronenberg presents Nola, a patient in a mental institution, as an image of abnormal reproduction. Nola has the ability to take her negative emotions such as anxiety, jealousy and anger and converts them into physical outgrowths of her own body. These outgrowths are living midget-like beings driven by Nola's rage and their only purpose and motivation is to hurt the source of Nola's anger. Creed describes the mother-image here as 'an abject creature not far removed from the animal world and one dominated totally by her feelings and reproductive functions' (Creed, 1993, p. 47). These classic maternal paradigms are presented as villains, but do not provide the audience with an explanation of why these women are bad, monstrous or evil. The lack of background information makes it difficult to empathise with these females and supports old, simplistic, stereotypical paradigms of women as embodiments of death and horror.

Sarah Arnold allows a more complex perspective in her book *Maternal Horror Film: Melodrama and Motherhood* and provides 'alternative ways of reading the maternal in horror' (Arnold, 2013, p. 36). She draws on Kaplan's definition of the Good Mother and the Bad Mother, but expands the Bad Mother definition by describing her as 'a multifaceted and contradictory construct' (ibid, p. 68). She also points out parallels of representations of motherhood in the melodrama and the horror film genres. She clarifies the differentiation between woman and mother and distances herself from works such as Creed's, combining the monstrous femininity with motherhood. This leaves room for a progressive perspective on women and motherhood and provides an opportunity for new paradigms to arise. Recent horror and fantasy films, such as *Dead Silence* (2007)*, The Woman in Black* (2012) and *Insidious: Chapter 2* (2013) continue to exploit the convention of a traditional monstrous

maternal figure with a destructive, harmful nature, but '[w]hile a certain misogyny appears to be pervasive, there are works that address the female spectator more progressively' (Fisher, 1996, p. 30). New variations have complicated previous assumptions and they consider the female gaze through dominant female characters. These maternal providers are three-dimensional, with personalities and troubled pasts, and are presented as characters in films such as *Mama*, *Seed of Chucky* and even *Doctor Sleep*. They are no longer simply the classic archetypal Monstrous Feminine, but have, since the turn of the 21st century, become more complex and have agency: 'the Bad Mother is not only a product of the patriarchal imaginary, or a representative of the nightmare unconscious, but also a transgressive figure who resists conformity and assimilation' (Arnold, 2013, p. 69). Maternal figures are no longer monstrous and their new appearance seems to be a very attractive twist for a wide audience. Recently, Hollywood has taken an interest in transforming villainous monsters into empathetic characters with needs and desires. Rhona Berenstein describes horror as a place where 'human characters, male *and* female, behave monstrously and transgress the social rules and roles that usually confine them' (Berenstein, 1996, p. 5, emphasis in original). It seems that supernatural evil maternal archetypes are experiencing exactly that transformation.

This section will analyse groups of film texts depicting fantastical antagonistic women as providers, such as in *Doctor Sleep*, *Seed of Chucky* and *Mama,* with *Mama* as the primary focus. *Mama's* antagonist depicts a female ghost, a horrific-looking entity, as a single mother and a functioning provider. The single mother trope embodies the American right-wing's fear of a 'Life without Father' which to Nicholas Davidson's mind is the 'greatest social catastrophe facing our country' (Davidson, 1990, p. 40).

Andres Muschietti's supernatural horror film *Mama* (2013) presents a caring mother as antagonist in the form of the female ghost of Edith Brennan. Not only is Edith Brennan the antagonist, her name – Mama – is the title of the film. The film's tagline clarifies the premise: 'A mother's love is forever'.[39] *Mama* is a film about motherhood. The ghost of Edith Brennan is both the supernatural antagonist and threat of the film and a loving, caring, maternal figure. Interestingly, as a ghost (a dead being between the living and the spirit world), Mama is the embodiment of Kristeva's definition of abject in mother/motherhood as well as in being dead. Steve Jones states of the undead that '[w]hen gendered female[,] [t]he undead fittingly symbolize the history of femininity under patriarchy' (Jones, 2013). This duality of Mama's character not only fits with the characteristics of the Jungian mother archetype as both good and evil but also combines aspects of Kaplan's Good Mother and Bad Mother.

Mama cannot speak. The dream sequences are Mama's attempts to communicate with Annabel and give her a voice with which to explain her troubled past and the source of her hauntedness. A key moment for Mama is her short transformation into a human-like ghost with a womanly voice in the final sequence of the film: as she holds her biological baby's remains in her arms and cries in grief, the audience witnesses the transformation from Mama into Edith Brennan. This depiction presents her still as abject – due to being dead – but also as a three-dimensional character, with desires and emotions.

2.12.3 *Let Me In*

'Fine, all power to the women and the girls as long as we don't confuse roles and the differences of gender' (Bill Bennett).[40]

[39] See https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2023587/?ref_=nv_sr_srsg_3
[40] See Tashman, B. (2011) *Bennett, Robertson Blame Feminism, Gay Culture For Ruining Men.*

I could have chosen more obvious film texts through which to analyse a villainous woman subverting gender roles, such as Angelique in *Dark Shadows*, Nancy in *The Craft* or even Ravenna in *Snow White and the Huntsman.* All of these characters offer a female villain who desires to climb the social ladder and reject the oppression of male standards. However, I decided to examine the character of Abby in the American vampire horror film *Let Me In* (2010). The reason behind this is that Abby is a character who embodies a diversity of subjects and is, as a villain, not easy to identify.

The quote at the start of this subsection reflects a deeply held Republican viewpoint that restricts women's freedom. The institution of marriage is an accepted form of repression of women in Western culture. Fox News stated that the institution of marriage is at stake when women earn more money than men. 'Study after study has shown that when men make less than women, women don't want to marry them. Maybe they should wanna marry them, but they don't' (Tucker Carlson, Fox News, 2019). The Women's Liberation Movement has fuelled the Republican right-wing fear of the potential superiority of women. *Let Me In* takes this fear and concern about the gender hierarchy and perverts all aspects of conservative and liberal fear.

Firstly, it needs to be established that, unlike in other interpretations, I intend to read the character of the young vampire Abby as the main antagonist. She is, for the protagonist Owen, even more dangerous than his bullies at school, because he trusts her as a friend and does not realise the threat she poses to him and his future. *Let Me In* is a 2010 American-British vampire horror film, directed by Matt Reeves. The film is an adaptation of the Swedish novel *Let the Right One In* (2004) and the Swedish film of the same name. To indicate Abby's belonging to the conceptualisation of Evil Woman, her development from castrated to castrated-castrator needs to be established by exploring

the discrepancies between the Swedish novel and the Swedish film within the American-British adaptation.

Both the novel *Let the Right One In* by Swedish writer John Ajvide Lindqvist and the Swedish film explore the friendship between Oscar and child vampire Eli. The dark tone of the novel matches the issues it deals with. Set in the suburbs of Stockholm in the 1980s, themes of divorce, alcoholism, castration, paedophilia and queer identity are addressed. The film version is also set in a suburb of 1980s Stockholm, and even though it remains close to its source material, some themes have been changed. As the friendship between the two children grows closer, it is revealed in the novel that Eli is, in fact, not a girl bur a castrated boy. This introduces queerness into the narrative, which is not uncommon in vampire tales, as in the literary works of J. Sheridan Le Fanu (*Carmilla*, 1872), Whitley Strieber (*The Hunger*, 1981) and Anne Rice (*Interview with the Vampire*, 1976). Interestingly, the Swedish film is not as clear about Eli's sex and gender identification. It is assumed by Oscar (and the audience) that Eli is a girl, an assumption that is supported by the production's decision to cast female actor Lina Leandersson. However, Leandersson states in *Eli Roth's History of Horror*[41] that the production shortened her eye lashes to make her appear less feminine. Eli's male identification and the castration are subjects that Roth ignores in his exploration of the film. The Swedish feature only hints in the direction of genital mutilation with a short shot of Eli's scarred genital area while Eli is taking a shower at Oscar's home. The American adaptation does not contain this scene. Director Matt Reeves defended this absence in an interview with Gizmodo, commenting that it did not take anything away from the narrative and the original message.[42] Reeves' comment can be contested by arguing that *Let Me In*'s narrative is as a consequence depicted as more conservative and the relationship between the two main characters displayed as a normative one. The American-British version follows

[41] See *Eli Roth's History of Horror,* Episode: Vampires
[42] See Woerner, M. (2010)

the ‘friendship’ between young Owen, played by Kodi Smit-McPhee, and vampire girl Abby, played by Chloë Grace Moretz.[43] Not only is Abby a less masculine name, but her appearance is more feminine compared with that of the androgynous-looking Eli. This, combined with the absence of the genitals shot, suggests that vampire Abby is biologically female in *Let Me In*.

For the reasons presented above, this examination treats the vampire Abby as biologically female and, as this is an examination of the voice of female villains, I want to establish again that Abby’s character is discussed in the context of the main antagonist. The peril she poses is greater for Owen and for other people in his (and her) life because it comes in the guise of an innocent child and friend. In fact, Abby is a seductress, just like Dracula and Lestat, who leeches on to her prey.

The honesty of Abby’s (and Eli’s) feelings towards Owen (and Oscar) have been questioned by other scholars[44] ‘[a]s with the Swedish predecessor, the depth and genuineness of the vampire girl’s feelings for Owen/Oscar are never confirmed’ (Silver and Ursini, 2011, p. 306). Is she in love with the protagonist, Owen the boy-next-door, or is her interest in him driven by her survival instinct? This doubt regarding her intentions can be dismissed by listening to what Abby says on her first encounter with Owen. She establishes the kind of relationship she will have, and maybe even the only kind she can have, with Owen: ‘We can never be friends’, Abby says with certainty. This is a crucial moment as it reveals her main motivation for getting close to Owen. Another moment that uncovers Abby’s ‘real’ motivation in becoming close to Owen is when Owen visits Abby in her apartment and finds strips of old photos of her and a young boy. The boy in the photos looks similar to her ‘father’, which implies that Abby is perhaps in need of a replacement for her ageing companion and helper[45] as he

[43] Moretz’s name was already well established in the film industry through films such as *The Amityville Horror* (2005) and *Kick-Ass* (2010).
[44] See Silver and Ursini, 2011; Gelder, 2012.
[45] The replacement of companions is reminiscent of Catherine Deneuve’s vampire figure in *The Hunger* (1983)

gets too old to provide her with 'food'. This awareness then also makes her intention to support and help Owen with his school bullies suspicious. Abby gives Owen the confidence to stand up to his bullies; she is the one who gives him the advice: 'You have to hit back. You have to hit back hard'. When Owen displays fear and uncertainty, she even suggests he use his knife. Her supportive approach contains a strong element of grooming. Abby is highly capable of manipulating the men in her life and using them to her advantages. When Owen admits that he could hear her 'father' shouting at her the other night, she lets him believe that her father figure has a temper while in fact it was she who had the outburst.

While the Swedish versions (book and film) are set around Stockholm, *Let Me In*'s narrative takes place in Los Alamos, New Mexico in 1983 - the Ronald Reagan era. The film reflects the country's conservative and Christian ideologies of the time, however, it also reflects the still existent belief in family values by neglecting any queerness and depicting Abby as a girl, turning her relationship with Owen into a traditional, heterosexual one. The hospital scene contains parts of Reagan's famous 'Evil Empire' speech. This speech, given in 1983 to the National Association of Evangelicals, focused on a comparison between the Soviet Union, as evil, and the devoutly Christian United States, as good and exemplary. Reagan's speech brought up domestic issues and criticised abortion rights and 'pro-choice' beliefs – not, however, part of *Let Me In* – and this conservative view of women inspired both the narrative and Abby as an antagonist.

The film text criticises and at the same time celebrates the ideals it represents. The right-wing's anxiety about female power is a constant in its politics, one that never went away after the rise of women's liberation in the 1960s and 1970s. Abby as an Evil Woman is a perversion of traditional American values and of the ongoing belief in and acceptance of these ideologies. Fox News presenter

Tucker Carlson suggests that women should marry men. Abby as a powerful and dangerous woman dominates the men in her life and uses them, and the narrative celebrates her strength and at the same time punishes it. On the one hand she is an Evil Woman who is still alive at the end of the film. She is not destroyed as in other monster-films and she goes on a train journey with Owen. On the other hand, she is not visible in the last shot on the train: she has to hide in a box. This reflects the patriarchal system's anxiety about female power and its need to control and restrain the powerful female body.

Abby's power comes from her ability to manipulate the men around her. She is not weak, but her child body limits her strength. She is a representation of Freud's male castration anxiety. A woman poses a threat, because she lacks the penis and envies it. While Abby is symbolically castrated, Eli was literally castrated. Simultaneously, Abby is a representation of Creed's castration anxiety theory. Creed reverses Freud's theory and suggests that the Monstrous Feminine poses a threat to the man because she is a castrator. Abby, in this case, is both.

CONCLUSION

The audio-visual thesis that this written component accompanies has established the emergence of a complex female villain - whether in re-imaginations of existing characters from fairy tales and myths or as original characters - in the supernatural horror genre of US American cinema over the last two decades. Throughout the thesis – in both the documentary film and the written component – it has been demonstrated that new variations of female antagonists with supernatural powers have experienced a representational shift. These elevated representations offer more and complex meanings to their audience than examples of female monstrous antagonists pre-1990. Contemporary films that depict a female villain with magical powers portray their antagonist as a representation of female issues that are grounded in society. Film villains such as Ravenna, Mrs Ghanush, the ghost of Edith Brennan, Abby and Angelique are dangerous, because they have supernatural powers. However, they are also dangerous because they articulate - either openly or more subtly – a critique of patriarchy and expose it as a system that is hostile to women and to any group that is not part of it. The villains in these films pose a greater threat than the female protagonist as the protagonists are too close to pleasing and supporting the status quo, which is demonstrated in the film textual readings of *Mama* and *Snow White and the Huntsman*, but also extends to films such as *Doctor Sleep*, *Drag Me to Hell* and *Jennifer's Body.* This development in the US American fantasy genre is of great importance, as these examples of female representation offer a sense of reality and furthermore, a voice of criticism in the face of patriarchal hegemony. Angelina Jolie explains in a promotional interview for her film *Maleficent* how the audience relates to Maleficent and even to the cursing of baby Aurora at her christening. Jolie states that the audience 'get[s] to know who [Maleficent] was as a child and how she became evil. And I think strangely, you will approach this christening scene

differently. When you know what you know about her by the time you get to the christening – if we've done it right – you may dare I say be on her side'.[46]

The Evil Woman is a feminist-informed genre concept that goes beyond the intellectual inquiries of the female body and representations of the woman-as-castrator and is a threat to patriarchal hegemony. Projections of the Evil Woman in US American genre cinema have gained personal, socio-cultural and political agency by informing the spectator of her motivation through a backstory. This backstory is grounded in 'real' issues women have faced and are still face in a male-dominated system. The acknowledgment of the antagonistic 'voice' not only equips these characters with more meaning but renders the filmic narrative as a whole more meaningful. This is important, because as an audience we understand the motivation of the character and rationalise her behaviour. This also opens up more complex analytical viewpoints and possibilities for reading the character and the narrative as a whole. Narratives with an Evil Woman challenge and celebrate traditional viewpoints and depictions.

The silencing of women has been integrated into US American culture, its influence stemming from cultures as far back as the emergence of Christianity and even Greco-Roman times. Patriarchal ideologies, valuing the nuclear family and the advertisement of traditional gender roles, still operate today and are a constant of conservative, right-wing politics, with Donald Trump, Pat Robertson, Tucker Carlson and Ann Coulter – to name only a few – as their famous supporters. The Evil Woman is a concept that challenges the assumptions of film representations, traditional American values and patriarchal attitudes, and motivates the spectator to raise questions such as: who is more evil in this

[46] See ScreenSlam interview at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qaMb2lG-YB0&t=66s

narrative and who is the actual villain? Is evil in the eye of the beholder? Films such as *Dark Shadows*, *Snow White and the Huntsman, Mama*, *Drag Me to Hell*, *Seed of Chucky* and *Let Me In* do not give clear answers. Returning to the question I posed in the Introduction - 'Who can the audience trust, the Evil Woman or the film's narrative and message? - this cannot be answered straightforwardly either. The films provide the audience with a reason to empathise with the Evil Woman but whether we can trust her or the message is a more complicated issue. Another important element of the Evil Woman paradigm is that these film villains do not see their supernatural powers as a burden or a curse, unlike their predecessors Irena in *Cat People* (1942) and Marya in *Dracula's Daughter* (1936) who want to live a 'normal' life. This is where contemporary characters and the narratives themselves are more meaningful than in pre-1960s, and even pre-1990s films with a supernatural female villain. The Evil Woman celebrates, rather than condemns her power and her strength.

This thesis has also demonstrated how Hollywood's mainstream cinema is an ideal outlet through which to present liberal ideas to a wide audience, as it can change and celebrate cultural and political attitudes. The re-imagination of powerful female villains still punishes them as in traditional genre film and reveals how US American mainstream genre cinema is a paradox machinery that creates narratives to both celebrate and criticise the traditional US American values. These cinematic representations and the filmic narratives they exist in seem to give the illusion of a supportive, liberal viewpoint regarding gender equality and respect for women with power. Taking the fate of these antagonists into account, it is debatable how much has in fact changed. In juxtaposing the appearance, motivation and the agency of protagonist and antagonist in these films, it is the protagonist who triumphs over the antagonist and thereby restores patriarchy, and hence conservative ideology. This is addressed by Janey Place: 'Our popular culture functions as myth for our society: it both expresses and reproduces the ideologies necessary to the existence of the social structure. Mythology is

remarkably responsive to changing needs in society: in sex roles for example – when it was necessary for women to work in factories during World War II and then necessary to channel them back into the home after the war' (1998, p. 47). Studies in this regard, such as Martha Lauzen's 'It's a Man's (Celluloid) World' and those of the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, support the argument that '[t]he Hollywood film industry offers further confirmation of the feminist fallacy in the area of increased visibility of female characters per se' (Ferguson, 1990, p. 219).

Even though we see powerful and relatable flawed female characters on screen, there is still the component of punishment in the end, as in film texts such as *Dark Shadows*, *Drag Me to Hell*, *Snow White and the Huntsman*, *Doctor Sleep*, *Jennifer's Body*, *Ginger Snaps*, and even *Mama* and *Let Me In*. This punishment of powerful women is deeply established in (Western) patriarchal culture and is still a constant in US society, as the treatment of powerful women such as Hillary Clinton during the 2016 presidential election campaign demonstrates.

Even though complex depictions of female villains in contemporary narratives in horror and genre cinema both celebrate and police these characters, there are still important changes that have occurred. Most important is the increasing interest of high-profile female actors such as Charlize Theron, Megan Fox, Mila Kunis, Meryl Steep and Eva Green in portraying such characters and attracting a large number of audiences into the cinema, which then exposes these audiences to female-centred narratives.

The Evil Woman functions, just as Clover's Final Girl and Creed's Monstrous Feminine, as a concept through which we can analyse antagonised cinematic representations as a whole - the body and the voice of a woman - and it distinguishes the position and issues of women in the American culture.

The Evil Woman can be applied as a conceptual cross-point of approaches. For too long the psychoanalytical approach has been seen as separate from the socio-cultural, historical and political approach of film textual analysis. An important aim of this thesis is to establish that the exploration of the representation of women in cinema and in cultural ideologies is closely intertwined with psychoanalysis. This is an issue that has a long history and we are now examining myths and early fairy tales to point out their worrying misogynist messages. We re-interpret and re-imagine the fate of characters such as the one of Medusa, the Sirens and female fairy-tale villains including witches, vampires, werewolves and spirits and connect them with 'real' female issues that women face in society, such as age discrimination, sexual violence and body-shaming to name only a few. However, it must be mentioned that, due to its limited size, this thesis has not been able to explore in more detail textual readings of, and the roots and influence of, European myths, and the differences in contemporary European cinematic examples of supernatural female villains. This would have extended the frame of this research too far.

The audio-visual nature of this thesis presented me with the opportunity to break down the boundaries of traditional research methods and establish a close and personal relationship with my research topic and film as a research tool. As I mentioned in the subsection 'Safety', there is a concern about how we treat ourselves as researcher/practitioner/performer in an ethical context. Concerns regarding ethical issues and safety are almost always aimed only towards our participants/interviewees. An issue that arose during my film preparations was whether we 'treat ourselves as audio-visual researchers with the same respect and ethical caution' and the question that followed me through the whole thesis process was: is my film a safe space in which I, as an audio-visual researcher, can investigate my topic? Looking back at the early planning phases of my film and my decision to become an active participant who was seen and heard, I have come to the realisation detailed below.

Firstly, I need to admit that the creative choice to *act* as a Monstrous Feminine in this thesis extended my academic and psychological expectations. Performing as a character that was highly inspired by someone as sexually provocative and intriguing as Vampira became a particular challenge. I did not anticipate the psychological impact this would have on both me and the project. As stated in the Introduction and in the chapter 'Performing as Monstrous Feminines: A Research Experience', I was aware of certain risks that would come with such an approach. Will Brooker's own experience and the psychological tolls he suffered while performing as David Bowie offered informative insights into the possible seriousness of such a method. My naivety, however, prevented me from thinking through and questioning this approach carefully, because my approach to the performance differs from Brooker's. Will Brooker spent a long time 'being Bowie' and his research became more intense over time. He altered his own appearance by dyeing his hair and wearing clothes similar to those David Bowie wore at specific points in his life. Brooker lived and breathed Bowie for a whole year, sometimes to the point at which the lines blurred and it was unclear – even for Brooker himself - when Brooker was Brooker and when he was Bowie. This became evident in his film *Being Bowie*: when addressed as Will Brooker by an off-camera interviewer, he responded with, 'If this is my name' (Brooker, 2016). I rejected Brooker's 'method-acting' approach and made the conscious decision not to alter my appearance in a way that it would last for the duration of my study. The main reason for this was to protect myself mental health from additional pressure, but I also did not want to lose my identity. It was my intention to playfully interpret the characters I was influenced by. It was never my intention to *be* them. An interpretation inspired by characters such as Vampira would provide the necessary distance from which to examine my topic and my methodology more critically. Furthermore, Brooker and his research received attention from the press. Engagement with the public and the accompanying pressure was not a concern I had, because it was never my intention to attract

the attention of the press or the wider public beyond the conference circuit. My main worry was that my approach might not produce work of academic and intellectual value and that it would not be up to the standards of a doctoral thesis. Throughout my study and the film's pre-production phase, I thought carefully about the factor of voice and about how to place my own voice in both the film and the study, because the female voice has such as strong position in my research. However, while preparing for the performative elements in the documentary film I noticed how I became more critical of myself, my looks especially. In the end, my delivery of my carefully planned and scripted voice-over and my concern about my noticeable accent where not an issue in practice; in fact, the voice-over sections offered a safe space where, I felt more comfortable because my mind and attention were not occupied with concerns over my appearance at a time when my main focus of preparation was shifting more towards this. As previously mentioned, performing as a fictional guide that is inspired by someone as sexually provocative as Vampira turned out to be a more difficult task than I had previously assumed. In my personal life I do not wear provocative or figure-hugging clothes. I feel most comfortable in gender-neutral clothing and wear make-up only on special occasions. However, I felt it was necessary for my performance to alter my appearance to get at least visually close to my inspirations. I bought the wigs, dresses, make-up and false nails that were necessary to alter my look and fit the part. Quickly, the performative elements that were originally planned to function as comic relief and to bring some light-heartedness to the thesis increased my own seriousness and the psychological pressure on me. In the end I did not get lost in the portrayal of the characters or lose myself in Vampira; rather, I lost myself in the theoretical framework. Researching demonised women of power in fiction and non-fiction affected my mood significantly. I noticed increased anger and anxiety about what was expected from me as a doctoral researcher, a female filmmaker and a woman, in addition to about the unfair and unequal position that women still have in our culture and globally. In my mind I embodied Butler's theory of gender performativity. I felt the pressure to perform the

patriarchal idea of femininity and embody dangerous female sexuality. John Berger's investigation of the female body in European paintings and his statement that a woman's body is constantly judged by others as well as by herself became a significant component of my performative approach and my research experience. The closer the filming of my performance parts came, the more I intensified my 'preparations' and exercised more to look fitter, healthier and thinner. Suddenly, Pat Robertson's statement 'you need to make yourself as attractive as possible'[47] seemed very accurate and real, and looking as good and attractive as possible seemed imperative to my performative research experience. This focus on my appearance consumed more time than questioning the study's academic value did at certain points in this intellectual and creative endeavour. In the end I am able to see a connection between the relationship I have with my film and monster film narratives themselves. I realise now that I have become victim and victimiser in the same body. I have created this 'monster' myself. It was my idea to be a visible part of my film and it was my idea to perform as fictional characters with Vampira as the main influence. I did this to myself and have no one else to blame for my choices.

Performing as Vampira as a research experience turned out to be different from what I had originally expected. Part of this research and of my performances was aimed at investigating Katarzyna Paszkiewicz's question, 'what happens… when the woman directs?' (2018, p. 41) from her essay 'When the Woman Directs (a Horror Film)' and extending it to 'what happens when the woman directs and performs?', exploring the difficulties of controlling the gaze as a female filmmaker and performer. As mentioned earlier in this study, written feminist film criticism traditionally has the advantage of pointing out from a safe distance the lack of the female gaze, of female involvement in production and so on; however, with this performative research my aim has been to take this safe

[47] See Robertson's statement at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38Nm3uQ6Guo

distance away in order to examine whether this female-centred creative approach contributes in a new form to feminist film criticism. One of the greatest challenges of this method was whether I would be able to control the gaze. In Chapter One, I point out the difference between the intention of the filmmaker and the perception of the audience: the film's intended message can differ from how it is received. Laura Mulvey references Alfred Hitchcock's work to point out a gender power imbalance in his films, stating that the female characters are controlled by the male gaze. However, Hitchcock himself explains in an interview with François Truffaut that his films are made with women as the main target audience. He asserts that they are to him an important audience group, since women chose the movie when they go to the cinema with their partner. However, when deciding to perform as a fictional persona - a presenter - I expected some scepticism from other academics about the academic importance of this approach. I questioned my choices and asked myself: what will happen to my credibility as an audio-visual researcher when I disguise myself as a Vampira-like monstrous feminine or a femme castratrice, or dissect myself to introduce the objectification and exploration of the female body in film? How will the audience receive my film and my performance? Am I in the end able to control the gaze? Vampira was punished for being the person she wanted to portray, which was an image that was the opposite of that of the 1950s housewife. For her refusal to play by the rules of patriarchy she paid a high price: the end of her career. My concern was – and still is – that my performative research approach and my performative elements in particular would not be well received by peers and that I would be punished for choosing 'non-traditional' research methods to investigate my topics. To my relief, the feedback I have received at conferences and from other peer researchers has been mainly positive. My original assumption (and this may have been due to my own prejudice) was that my approach would be questioned and criticised by other female researchers. This was a concern that was fuelled by the experiences of female horror filmmakers who used the horror genre to criticise and mock the genre's misogynist conventions and whose work was attacked

by feminist critics who misread its messages. Interestingly, while male peers noticed only the 'dressing up' element of my thesis, female peer researchers noticed and appreciated the theoretical frameworks, of Butler, Berger and Creed and so on, that I was engaging with. However, through my research and my findings I have also become aware that reading and analysing the gaze is dependent on many factors. The filmmaker, such as Hitchcock, Harron and Kusama, may have their intention to please a certain audience but how these films are received in the end depends on the personal experience of the spectator and also on the time in which the film is being read. For instance, the film *Jennifer's Body* did not receive critical recognition or audience approval when it was released and its feminist intention and content were questioned by film critics. A decade after its release the film finds new relevance, especially in the relationship between the #MeToo movement and Jennifer's sacrifice scene, brought into context with the sexual assault allegations in Christine Blasey Ford's testimony against Brett Kavanaugh (Grady, 2018). The changing attitudes of society allow a feminist re-evaluation of these films. Whether I have been able to control the gaze in my film or not will depend on the personal experience of my audience as well as the cultural time and circumstances in which it is being examined. As previously mentioned, I have had mainly positive experiences at conferences, but only time will tell whether this will change.

The experience I take away from this performative research endeavour is of great value. Being a visible part of my thesis made me aware of the intellectual potential of practice-as-research methods and the increasing possibilities they bring for further opportunities of exploration.

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FILMOGRAPHY

Films

Film Title	Year	Director	Studio / Company
A Fool There Was	1915	Frank Powell	Fox Film Corporation
Alien	1979	Ridley Scott	20th Century Fox
Aliens	1986	James Cameron	20th Century Fox
All Cheerleaders Die	2013	Lucky McKee	Modernciné
American Mary	2012	Jen and Sylvia Soska	American Mary Production / Evolution Pictures
Black Sunday	1960	Mario Bava	Galatea Film / Jolly Film
Bram Stoker's Dracula	1992	Francis Ford Coppola	American Zoetrope / Osiris Films
Bride of Chucky	1998	Ronny Yu	David Kirschner Productions
Carrie	1976	Brian De Palma	Red Bank Films
Carrie	2013	Kimberly Peirce	Metro-Goldwyn Mayer Pictures / Screen Gems / Misher Films
Cat People	1942	Jacques Tourneur	RKO Radio Pictures
Constantine	2005	Francis Lawrence	Warner Bros. Pictures
Creature from the Black Lagoon	1954	Jack Arnold	Universal Pictures
Crimson Peak	2015	Guillermo del Toro	Legendary Pictures / Double Dare You Productions
Dark Shadows	2012	Tim Burton	Village Roadshow Pictures / Infinitum Nihil / GK Films / The Zanuck Company
Dead Silence	2007	James Wan	Twisted Pictures / Universal Pictures
Dracula	1931	Tod Browning	Universal Pictures

Dracula 2000	2000	Patrick Lussier	Dimension Films / Neo Art & Logic
Dracula's Daughter	1936	Lambert Hillyer	Universal Pictures
Drag Me to Hell	2009	Sam Raimi	Ghost House Pictures
Evil Dead	1981	Sam Raimi	Renaissance Pictures
Evil Dead 2	1987	Sam Raimi	Renaissance Pictures
Fatal Attraction	1987	Adrian Lyne	Jaffe/Lansing Productions
Frankenstein	1931	James Whale	Universal Pictures
Fright Night	1985	Tom Holland	Vistar Films
Fright Night 2	1988	Tommy Lee Wallace	New Century/Vista TriStar Pictures
Fright Night 2: New Blood	2013	Eduardo Rodriguez	20th Century Fox Gaeta/Rosenzweig Films
Friday the 13th	1980	Sean S. Cunningham	Georgetown Productions Inc.
From Dusk Till Dawn	1996	Robert Rodriguez	Dimension Films / A Band Apart / Los Hooligans Productions / Miramax
Ginger Snaps	2000	John Fawcett	Motion International
Godzilla	1998	Roland Emmerich	Centropolis Entertainment / Fried Film / Independent Pictures
Halloween	1978	John Carpenter	Compass International Pictures / Falcon International Production
Hocus Pocus	1993	Kenny Ortega	Walt Disney Pictures
Insidious: Chapter 2	2013	James Wan	Blumhouse Productions
Interview with the Vampire	1994	Neil Jordan	The Geffen Film Company
Into the Woods	2014	Rob Marshall	Walt Disney Pictures
Jennifer's Body	2009	Karyn Kusama	Fox Atomic

			Dune Entertainment
Kick-Ass	2010	Matthew Vaughn	Marv Films / Plan B Entertainment
King Kong	1933	Merian C. Cooper	Radio Pictures
The Lost Boys	1987	Joel Schumacher	Warner Bros. Pictures
Let Me In	2010	Matt Reeves	EFTI / Hammer Films / Exclusive Media Group
Let the Right One In	2008	Tomas Alfredson	EFTI / Filmpool Nord / Seriges Television
Maleficent	2014	Robert Stromberg	Walt Disney Pictures / Roth Films
Mama	2013	Andy Muschietti	Toma 78 / De Milo Productions
Mandy	2018	Panos Cosmatos	SpectreVision / Umedia / XYZ Films
Marnie	1964	Alfred Hitchcock	George Stanley Productions
Nightmare on Elm Street	1984	Wes Craven	Media Home Entertainment / Smart Egg Pictures
Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors	1987	Chuck Russell	Heron Communications / Smart Egg Pictures
Ouija	2014	Stiles White	Platinum Dunes / Blumhouse Productions / Hasbro Studios
Oz The Great and Powerful	2013	Sam Raimi	Walt Disney Pictures / Roth Films
Psycho	1960	Alfred Hitchcock	Shamley Productions
Seed of Chucky	2004	Don Mancini	La Sienega Productions / David Kirschner Productions
Shutter	2008	Masayuki Ochiai	Regency Enterprise / New Regency / Vertigo Entertainment
Sisters	1972	Brian De Palma	American International Pictures
Sleepaway Camp	1983	Robert Hiltzik	American Eagle Films

Sleeping Beauty	1959	Clyde Geronimi	Walt Disney Productions
Sleepy Hollow	1999	Tim Burton	Mandalay Pictures / Scott Rubin Productions / American Zoetrope / Tim Burton Productions
Snow White and the Huntsman	2012	Rupert Sanders	Roth Films
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs	1937	David Hand	Walt Disney Productions
Teeth	2007	Mitchell Lichtenstein	Roadside Attractions
The Amityville Horror	2005	Andrew Douglas	Dimension Films / Platinum Dunes / Radar Pictures / Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
The Blob	1958	Irvin Yeaworth	Fairview Productions / Tonylyn Productions
The Bride of Frankenstein	1935	James Whale	Universal Pictures
The Brood	1979	David Cronenberg	Canadian Film Development Corporation
The Craft	1996	Andrew Fleming	Columbia Pictures
The Conjuring	2013	James Wan	New Line Cinema / The Safran Company / Evergreen Media Group
The Exorcist	1973	William Friedkin	Hoya Productions
The Howling	1981	Joe Dante	International Film Investors / Wescom Pictures
The Hunger	1983	Tony Scott	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
The Huntsman: Winter's War	2016	Cedric Nicolas-Troyan	Roth Films / Perfect World Pictures
The Little Mermaid	1989	Ron Clements and John Musker	Walt Disney Pictures / Walt Disney Feature Animation / Silver Screen Partners IV
The Others	2001	Alejandro Amenábar	Las Producciones del Escorpión, SL / Sociedad General de Cine, S.A.

The Ring	2002	Gore Verbinski	MacDonald/Parkes Productions / BenderSpink, Inc.
The Ring Two	2005	Hideo Nakata	Parkes/MacDonald Productions
The Stepford Wives	1975	Bryan Forbes	Palomar Pictures
The Stepford Wives	2004	Frank Oz	Paramount Pictures / DreamWorks Pictures / DeLine Pictures
The VVitch	2015	Robert Eggers	Parts and Labor / RT Features / Rooks Nest Entertainment
The Witches	1990	Nicolas Roeg	Jim Henson Productions / Lorimar Film Entertainment
The Witches of Eastwick	1987	George Miller	Guber-Peters Company / Kennedy Miller
The Wizard of Oz	1939	Victor Fleming	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
The Wolfman	1941	George Waggner	Universal Pictures
The Woman in Black	2012	James Watkins	Alliance Films / Hammer Films / UK Film Council
Trick R Treat	2007	Michael Dougherty	Legendary Pictures / Bad Hat Harry Productions

Documentary Films

Film Title	Year	Director	Studio / Company
Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film	2006	J. Albert Bell, Rachel Belofsky and Michael Derek Bohusz	Starz Entertainment / THINKFilm
Nightmares in Red, White and Blue	2009	Andrew Monument	Lux Digital Pictures
The American Nightmare	2000	Adam Simon	Minerva Pictures

Television

Show Title	Year	Director / Creator	Producer / Channel
American Horror Story: Coven	2013-2014	Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk	20th Century Fox Television

Bates Motel	2013-2017	Carlton Cuse, Kerry Ehrin, Anthony Cipriano	American Genre / Universal Television
Eli Roth's History of Horror	2018	Kurt Sayenga	Asylum Entertainment / Marwar Junction Productions
Green Porno	2008	Jody Shapiro, Isabella Rossellini	Rick Gilbert, Jody Shapiro, Isabella Rossellini
Once Upon a Time	2011-2018	Edward Horowitz and Adam Kitsis	ABC Studios
Penny Dreadful	2014-2016	John Logan	Desert Wolf Productions / Neal Street Productions / Showtime Networks
Sex and the City	1998-2004	Darren Star	Darren Star Productions / HBO Entertainment
Tales from the Crypt	1989-1996	William Gaines, Steven Dodd	Tales from the Crypt Holdings / HBO
The Vampira Show	1954-1955	Hunt Stromberg, Jr.	Hunt Stromberg, Jr.
Ways of Seeing	1972	John Berger	Mike Dibb / BBC Two