



The Woman, the Witch, and the Dancer

A comparative study of the representation of women in *Suspiria* (1977) and *Suspiria* (2018)

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Abstract

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This bachelor's thesis investigates how the representation of women differs between Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) and Luca Guadagnino's 2018 remake of the film by investigating the protagonist Suzy. Audience reception with focus on the female characters is taken into account in order to relate the films and their reception to the different historical climates of feminism. It is concluded that the remake tries to update the original's misogynist portrayal of women while not completely succeeding in all regards. Most of the reviews from the original's release do not discuss the representation of women, while almost all of the remake's reviews do. As feminism has grown substantially in the 41 years between the releases, it is evident through the films and receptions that film has grown and adapted alongside it.

Keywords: Horror, *Suspiria*, Dario Argento, Luca Guadagnino, feminism

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1. Introduction

When Dario Argento's giallo film *Suspiria* was released in Italy in 1977 it received mixed reviews by critics but was a commercial success nationally and in America.¹ The film was criticized for its thin plot and overly graphic gore, while the striking scenography and cinematography was often praised.² John Stark from the *San Francisco Examiner* wrote: “‘Suspiria’ is mostly gore, with little plot or intrigue.”³ Writing among similar lines Janet Maslin from *The New York Times* added that the “distorted camera angles and crazy lighting turn out to be much more memorable than the carnage.”⁴ An article in the *Colorado Springs Gazette* praised the film stating that “for lovers of cinematic suspense and shock, ‘Suspiria’ may prove the most harrowing shocker ever filmed.”⁵ 41 years after its release, Oscar-nominated director Luca Guadagnino created a remake of the now declared Italian cult film.⁶ What is interesting is that Guadagnino's *Suspiria* (2018) scraps nearly everything that made the original film popular. The bright color palette, modeled after Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), in the original film's setting of Freiburg, is exchanged for desaturated bleak images of wartorn post World War II Berlin.⁷ The basic outline of the film is the same, an American girl moves to Germany to study at a famous dance academy which turns out to be run by a coven of witches, but nearly everything within the confines of the broad story is changed. The changes from the original film to the remake are so vast that Guadagnino prefers calling the film a “cover” rather than a remake.⁸ Why did the film need a remake? Perhaps just to cash in on the popularity of the original film, but the extensive amount of changes from the original speaks to something different.

¹ Solomon, Aubrey, *Twentieth Century Fox: A Corporate and Financial History*, Lanham, Maryland, Scarecrow Press, 1989, p. 233.

² Maslin, Janet, “‘Suspiria,’ a Specialty Movie, Drips With Gore”, *The New York Times*, 13 August 1977.

³ Stark, John “Ballet school ought to be disbarred”, *San Francisco Examiner*, 11 August 1977, p. 31.

⁴ Maslin.

⁵ “‘Suspiria’ horror sensation”, *Colorado Springs Gazette*, 27 August 1977, p. 78.

⁶ Weiner, Robert G, Brottman, Mikita & Cline, John, *Cinema Inferno: Celluloid Explosions from the Cultural Margins*, Scarecrow Press, 2010, p. 64.

⁷ McDonagh, Maitland, *Broken Mirrors, Broken Minds: The Dark Dreams of Dario Argento*, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 2010, p. 138.

⁸ Nordine, Micahel, “Luca Guadagnino on ‘Suspiria,’ His ‘Zone of Darkness,’ and That ‘Call Me by Your Name’ Sequel — Venice”, *IndieWire*, 2018-09-11.

<https://www.indiewire.com/2018/09/luca-guadagnino-suspiria-interview-venice-film-festival-1201999848/> (accessed 2023-01-25).

Both films are directed by men but feature an almost exclusively female cast. However, they seem to take extensively different approaches to their representation of women. Giallo in general has been labeled “exploitation cinema”, characterized by elements of misogyny, sex and extreme violence.⁹ In this sense, Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) seems to be no exception at first glance. Most scholarly works on the film agree that it is misogynistic and follows patriarchal derogatory tropes of women in film.¹⁰ Dario Argento told an interviewer: “I like women, especially beautiful ones. If they have a good face and figure, I would much prefer to watch them being murdered than an ugly girl or man.”¹¹ Luca Guadagnino's *Suspiria* (2018) however, has evoked much more different interpretations on the portrayal of the female characters and femininity. According to the director himself: “[W]e really wanted to be very immersed in the femininity of this movie. This is a movie about the world of females.”¹² One reason the film received such a widely different remake could be that the original's representation of women needed to be updated.

Looking at these two films' representation of women provides a particularly compelling investigation. A popular female-centric horror film released at a time when feminism was rising, compared with its widely different remake in modern times. The so-called “second wave” of feminism and the American women's rights movement had just arisen prior to the release of the original *Suspiria* in the 60s and 70s.¹³ Feminism within film studies was also just beginning to emerge.¹⁴ Laura Mulvey's foundational feminist essay on “the male gaze” was released only two years prior to *Suspiria*, in 1975.¹⁵ In addition, it is a predominantly female film in a genre known for its problematic patriarchal view on women. The film follows female students at a matriarchal ballet school where even the killers turn out to be female, which is rare for the giallo genre. As

⁹ Sevastaskis, Michael, *Giallo Cinema and its Folktale Roots: A Critical Study of 10 Films*, North Carolina, McFarland, 2016, p. 2.

¹⁰ See for example: Mendik, Xavier, *Bodies of Desire and Bodies in Distress: The Golden Age of Italian Cult Cinema 1970-1985*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015; Reich, Jacqueline, “The Mother of All Horror: Witches, Gender, and the Films of Dario Argento”, Jewell, Keala J. (ed.), *Monsters in the Italian Literary Imagination*, Michigan, Wayne State University Press, 2001, pp. 89-106.

¹¹ Schoell, William, *Stay out of the shower: the shocker film phenomenon*, Robinson, London, 1985, p. 56.

¹² Juzwiak, Rich, “Director Luca Guadagnino on Assaulting the Senses and Indicting Patriarchy in *Suspiria*”, *Jezebel*, 25 October 2018, <https://jezebel.com/director-luca-guadagnino-on-assaulting-the-senses-and-i-1829994124> (accessed 2023-01-03).

¹³ Doughty, Ruth & Etherington-Wright, Christine, *Understanding film theory*, Second edition., Palgrave, London, 2018, p. 174.

¹⁴ Corrigan, Timothy, White, Patricia & Mazaj, Meta (red.), *Critical visions in film theory: classic and contemporary readings*, Bedford/St. Martin's, Boston, 2011, p. 706.

¹⁵ Doughty, p. 179.

the original was released when feminist movements were still in many ways in its beginnings, how is the film created in modern times when feminist discourse has grown significantly?

1.1. Purpose and Thesis Questions

This paper intends to investigate the main character Suzy (Susie in the remake) Bannion in a comparative study of *Suspiria* (1977) and its 2018 remake in order to see how the films' representations of women differ. How do the films articulate the character of Suzy; how do they create a woman? I will also be looking at how the films' representations of women were received by critics and fans. In the 41 years between the original film and its remake, feminism has not just substantially grown in film studies but in the world as a whole. The majority of feminist writings on film, and particularly horror films, have been published after the release of *Suspiria* (1977). Through comparing the films' different representations, as well as how they were received, I wish to see how the state of the world, particularly feminism, can find expressions in film and reception. While a comparative study of the main character is not the only entry point into an investigation on the films' portrayal of women, it serves as a good one. Suzy is one of many female characters but she is the protagonist and arguably the most important one. She is also one of the characters that has changed and developed the most between the films. The fact that she is the only character whose name has changed in the remake, albeit only in its spelling, points to her being a developed character.

- How does the representation of women differ in Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) and Luca Guadagnino's 2018 remake with focus on the character of Suzy (or Susie)?
- How have audiences perceived the representation of women in the separate films?
- What can the different representations as well as receptions tell us about the historical climate of feminism?

1.2. Method and Theory

In order to answer the thesis questions I intend to investigate Suzy in the respective films in relation to how she is portrayed as a woman. This will be directly investigated as well as elaborated through the films' themes of ballet and witchcraft which both have a historical

connection to womanhood. I will also be looking at how the film's representations of women were received through critic reviews from the release of the films, as well as fan posts. The analysis will be anchored in Suzy with some leeway to look at surrounding aspects to see how she functions within the larger scope of the film. Psychoanalytic theories will be used in order to not just analyse the elements which the film directly presents but also their unconscious psychological implications. Gary Needham writes: “The *giallo* is a paradigm case in defence of psychoanalysis. It solicits psychoanalytic interpretation and stages every oedipal scenario literally and spectacularly.”¹⁶ More specifically, feminist psychoanalytic writings will be the primary theoretical foundation of this paper. These theories have been chosen because they allow for a deeper look into the structures and psychology behind the films and their representation of women. The texts that will be used focus on different aspects of cinema that relate to women on the screen.

1.2.1. Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis is a collection of psychological theories and therapeutic methods established by neurologist Sigmund Freud in the early 1890s.¹⁷ Psychoanalytic theory is an approach to understanding the human psyche through the dynamics of personality development and personality organization.¹⁸ One foundational aspect to psychoanalytic theory is the idea of the unconscious mind: a part of the mind which a person is not consciously aware of, that for example hides repressed memories and thoughts.¹⁹ Psychoanalysis has had a major influence on film studies and has been used to develop many theories of film.²⁰ Using psychoanalytic theories can help in understanding what different aspects and elements of film present subconsciously. Particularly, many feminist scholars have applied psychoanalysis to film as a means of investigating how women are represented in the cinema.²¹ This paper will focus on feminist psychoanalytic writings about women on the screen in general, and specifically horror films.

¹⁶ Needham, Gary, “Playing with Genre: An Introduction to the Italian *giallo*”, Mendik, Xavier & Mathijs, Ernest (eds.), *The Cult Film Reader*, McGraw-Hill, 2007, <https://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/needham11.php> (accessed 2023-01-29).

¹⁷ Mitchell, Juliet, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: A Radical Reassessment of Freudian Psychoanalysis*. London, Penguin Books, 2000, p. 341.

¹⁸ Thornton, Stephen P., “Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)”, *Internet Encyclopedia of Psychology*, 2022, <https://iep.utm.edu/freud/#H3> (accessed 2022-11-28).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Doughty, p. 156.

²¹ Ibid., p. 179.

1.2.2. The Male Gaze

One of the most influential early feminist writings on film that is still often cited today is Laura Mulvey's essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* published in 1975. Even though Mulvey's essay primarily focuses on classic Hollywood cinema, which definitely neither Argento's nor Guadagnino's *Suspiria* is, it is still an important foundational feminist text to keep in mind. How both the original *Suspiria* and its remake relates to Mulvey's concept of the male gaze is something that will be investigated in order to see how Suzy is portrayed by the films' form. Mulvey's theory has been criticized, debated and updated by Mulvey herself and many other scholars since the release of her essay on the male gaze. This will also be taken into account when looking at the gaze in both *Suspiria*.

In the article, she uses psychoanalytic theories from Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan in order to discover how film produces pleasure. She argues that “the fascination of film is reinforced by pre-existing patterns of fascination already at work within the individual subject and the social formations that have moulded him.”²² Classic Hollywood cinema has unwittingly been structured to visually satisfy unconscious patriarchal desires in the viewing subject, argues Mulvey.²³ She proceeds to discuss Freud's ideas on scopophilia, that is, the pleasure of looking. One aspect of scopophilia involves looking at others as objects of pleasure, while the other aspect involves identification with the person on the screen.²⁴ Because the symbolic order attributes presence and subjectivity to man, Mulvey argues that women on the screen have become erotic objects for the male spectator while also being objectified by the subjective gaze of other male characters within the film, which the male spectator identifies with.²⁵ This is what Mulvey famously calls “the male gaze”.

1.2.3. The Final Girl

Giallo is often quoted as the precursor to the American slasher film to which it shares many common characteristics.²⁶ When investigating the role of gender in the slasher film there is one book that is of particular influence: Carol J. Clover's *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in*

²² Mulvey, Laura, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, *Visual and other pleasures*, 2nd ed., Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2009, p. 14.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 17-18.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 20.

²⁶ Kerswell, Justin A., *The Slasher Movie Book*, Chicago Review Press, 2012, p. 46-49.

the Modern Horror Film.²⁷ In the book, she introduces the now famous concept of “the Final Girl”. The intention of the book is to investigate gender roles in horror films and the possibility that male spectators are prepared to identify with female characters in horror.²⁸

When writing about the killer in slasher film she focuses primarily on male killers only mentioning in passing that female killers are rare.²⁹ Male killers are mostly driven by psychosexual motives, gender confusion and childhood traumas.³⁰ For various different reasons, the male killer usually specifically targets females.³¹ Even though men can also die, female deaths are prolonged and more graphic.³² The Final Girl is the one who survives. She encounters the maimed bodies of her friends and realizes, much earlier than any other victim, her own impending doom. We see her hide, run, scream and get wounded. “She is abject terror personified.”³³ As she progresses through the film she becomes more and more masculine until she finally murders the monster in a symbolic castration.³⁴ Suzy in the original *Suspiria* (1977) is a good example of a classic Final Girl, while Susie in the remake challenges many of the classical connections to the Final Girl. Looking at how these two films follow this trope will showcase how the representation of women has changed and been updated in the remake. The preoccupation with violence toward women is present in both *Suspiria*, but the killers turn out to be female. This spin on the classic Final Girl trope will also be investigated further.

1.2.4. The Monstrous-Feminine

Barbara Creed released her book *The Monstrous-Feminine : Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* in 1993 where she argued that far too many scholarly works on horror films had focused purely on the woman as a victim and not as the female monster itself.³⁵ Creed writes that “when woman is represented as monstrous it is almost always in relation to her mothering and reproductive functions.”³⁶ She proceeds to bring up Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection as a way of identifying

²⁷ Clover, Carol J., *Men, women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1992.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³⁵ Creed, Barbara, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Routledge, London, 1993.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

the monstrous-feminine in the horror film.³⁷ Kristeva defines the abject as that which is “opposed to I”.³⁸ It is everything we disregard in order to form our conception of self, our ego. Abjection is the horror experienced when one is confronted by one's corporeal reality, that is, the materiality of the self which exposes the illusory nature of the egos we have constructed. Objects that invoke abjection are for example bodily wastes and corpses.³⁹

Kristeva argues that different societies throughout the ages have sought to contain abjection by suppressing it through prohibition and Law, as well as purifying the abject through for example religious ritual.⁴⁰ Due to the gradual disintegration of organized religion it is art and culture that has taken over the role of purifying the abject.⁴¹ Creed argues that although Kristeva mainly focuses on literature, the purification of the abject is also the main ideological function of the horror film.⁴² “The horror film attempts to bring about a confrontation with the abject (the corpse, bodily wastes, the monstrous-feminine) in order, finally, to eject the abject and re-draw the boundaries between the human and non-human”, Creed writes.⁴³

The horror film is particularly interested in the maternal figure as abject, since she and all she signifies threatens the stability of the symbolic order.⁴⁴ Additionally, Creed brings up Freud's theory of castration anxiety, which is man's fear of woman because she gives the impression of being castrated. Returning to the origins of the theory and the mythos of the “vagina dentata”, Creed concludes that the male fear of the castrated woman has given birth to an even greater fear, the fear of woman as castrator.⁴⁵

Creed brings up five faces of the monstrous-feminine, among them the witch. Since both *Suspiria* deals with abject imagery and witches it is interesting to look at if, and in such case how, these films present the monstrous-feminine. The different representations of witches is of particular interest since Susie in the remake turns out to be a witch herself in the end.

³⁷ Creed, p. 8.

³⁸ Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of horror: an essay on abjection*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982, p. 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16-17.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴² Creed, p. 14.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

1.3. The Scope of Research

Since investigating the representation of women in *Suspiria* (1977) and its 2018 remake can be conducted in various different ways I have chosen to limit myself to looking at the main character of Suzy through feminist psychoanalytic theories. This is only one way to approach the matter at hand. Suzy is the protagonist of both films and the female with the most screen-time. She is arguably one of the most changed characters in the films which presents one way of looking at the difference in representation of women. Some leeway is allowed to look at how Suzy relates to the other characters and elements of the film in order to achieve a broader picture of how she functions within the film. Psychoanalytic theories have been largely used in feminist film studies and provide a way of looking at what the film tells us subconsciously about the elements it presents. The theories I have chosen as my primary theoretical foundations are all well known in film academia and still often quoted in scholarly writings. The reviews I will be using while looking at the films' reception are all from well-known newspapers, with a few exceptions of fan-sites for a broader perspective. There are other feminist psychoanalytic theories that could benefit my investigation, however, I have chosen a few foundational ones that I believe are evident in the films.

1.4. Previous Research

There exists a large amount of scholarly writings on Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977). Most feminist articles on the film which are of my interest focus on the representation of femininity as threatening and the female killers as embodiments of the castration threat.⁴⁶ One article that presents a different take on the film is Charlotte Gough's article on ballet. She argues that through the film's ballet setting it presents a reflection on female-centric identity anxieties.⁴⁷ This article will be of interest in presenting a different way of looking at the original film's otherwise deemed misogynist portrayal of women. Much fewer articles exist on Luca Gudagnino's *Suspiria* (2018) and even fewer comparing the two. Even if most articles on the remake mention the original in one way or another there are few articles that explicitly compare the two with each

⁴⁶ Mendik, Xavier, *Bodies of Desire and Bodies in Distress: The Golden Age of Italian Cult Cinema 1970-1985*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015.

⁴⁷ Gough, Charlotte, "The Ballerina Body-Horror: Spectatorship, Female Subjectivity and the Abject in Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977)." *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*, 2018, no. 17.

other. Luke Lewin Davies' article on witchcraft compares the original film with the remake in relation to Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection.⁴⁸ This is a compelling article for my thesis seeing as it investigates what implications the different representations of witchcraft have in relation to femininity and womanhood.

1.5. Background

1.5.1. Giallo

Although debates exist over whether *Suspria* (1977) can be called a giallo film or not, it is still often quoted as one as it shares many of the characteristics of the genre and is made by one of the most prominent giallo-directors Dario Argento. The giallo is a murder mystery genre that often includes elements of thriller, horror, slasher and crime fiction. Although it is debated whether giallo can be called a genre or not, for the sake of this thesis I will call it one.⁴⁹ Michael Mackenzie divides the genre into two categories: “M-gialli” which focuses on a male protagonist who witnesses a murder and tries to solve it, and “F-gialli” which focuses on a female protagonist involved in a plot often focusing on her sexuality and mental instability.⁵⁰ Gary Needhams argues that the giallo has a fascination with mentally ill women and the “pathologising of femininity”.⁵¹ The giallo often features a male killer who predominantly stalks and kills women. Many women are killed under sexual circumstances, such as during or directly after sexual intercourse. Because of the association between female sexuality and violence the genre has been accused of misogyny.⁵²

1.5.2. Historical Context

Dario Argento's *Suspria* was released in Italy during the second wave of feminism in 1977. The women's liberation movement, as it was called, lasted from the beginning of the 60s to the end of the 80s.⁵³ During this time period in Italy a law was passed to ensure gender equality within

⁴⁸ Davies, Luke Lewin, “Appropriating the abject: Witchcraft in Dario Argento and Daria Nicolodi’s *Suspria* (1977) and David Kajganich and Luca Guadagnino’s 2018 remake”, *New Cinemas*, 2021, vol. 18, no. 1 & 2.

⁴⁹ Needham.

⁵⁰ Mackenzie, Michael (2013) *Gender, genre and sociocultural change in the Giallo: 1970-1975*. PhD thesis, University of Glasgow.

⁵¹ Needham.

⁵² Koven, Mikel, *La Dolce Morte: Vernacular Cinema and the Italian Giallo Film*, Scarecrow Press, 2006, p. 66.

⁵³ Doughty, p. 174.

marriage in 1975, a law of equal rights in the workplace was passed in 1977, abortion was legalized in 1978 and Italy signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1980.⁵⁴ Different feminist groups wanted to raise awareness of the patriarchal ideology that oppresses women and encourage radical change.⁵⁵ Feminist film theory and inquiries into gender and sexuality in film arose particularly in the 70s alongside the second wave of feminism.⁵⁶ Claire Johnston and Laura Mulvey both published their foundational psychoanalytic feminist articles in the 70s.⁵⁷

When Luca Guadagnino's *Suspria* was released in 2018 the world had seen the second, third and fourth wave of feminism. The state of feminism today is most often called post-feminism, or neo-feminism.⁵⁸ When the original was released a lot of the essential feminist groundwork was still being laid that is now taken for granted in most Western countries. Most of the articles and books referenced to in this paper were released post Argento's original, with the exception of Mulvey's article that was only released two years prior. Although feminism has come a long way, post-feminism still deals with many issues that were brought up already in the first and second wave: "Issues such as unequal pay, violence, sexual abuse and the demands on body image".⁵⁹ According to an analysis by the European Union from 2014 on gender equality in Italy: "Italy is still far from reaching satisfactory results, in spite of relevant progress under the pressure of women's movement, civil society and European legislation."⁶⁰ Feminist issues are much more prominent in the media today and cinema depicts a much wider variety of women in today's society.⁶¹ The #MeToo-movement on social media arose in 2017, one year prior to Guadagnino's *Suspria*. The movement began to raise awareness of sexual harassment and

⁵⁴ Rosselli, Annalisa, European Parliament, *The Policy on Gender Equality in Italy*, 2014, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2014/493052/IPOL-FEMM_NT%282014%29493052_EN.pdf (accessed 2023-01-31); International Labour Organization, "National Labour Law Profile: Italy", *International Labour Organization*, 2023, https://www.ilo.org/ifpdial/information-resources/national-labour-law-profiles/WCMS_158903/lang--en/index.htm (accessed 2023-01-31); United Nations, "8. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women", *United Nations Treaty Collection*, 2023, https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&clang=_en (accessed 2023-01-31).

⁵⁵ Doughty, p. 174.

⁵⁶ Corrigan, p. 706.

⁵⁷ Doughty, p. 179.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁶⁰ Rosselli.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

assault following sexual-abuse allegations against film producer Harvey Weinstein. It gained a large following and many of the participants were from the film industry.⁶²

2. Analysis

The analysis will be divided into three parts: Suzy, the woman, Suzy, the witch, and Suzy, the dancer. I will also be looking at other characters and elements in the films to see how she functions within the film. In what follows, I will begin by looking at, and comparing, the characteristics of the protagonist Suzy (or Susie) in Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) and Luca Gudagnino's 2018 remake. I will then continue to investigate the films more closely through the films' formal style and by using popular feminist film theories such as “the male gaze” and “the Final Girl”. Following, I will look at the films' representation of witchcraft in order to see what implications it has that Susie turns out to be a witch in the remake. This will be related to Barbara Creed's theory of “the monstrous-feminine”. Charlotte Goughs article on ballet in the original will then be investigated to present a potential different reading of the films. Finally, I will look at how both films were received by critics and fans, particularly the representation of the female characters.

2.1. The Woman

2.1.1. The Characteristics of Suzy/Susie

Dario Argento stated in an interview that he modeled the style of *Suspiria* (1977) after Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937).⁶³ This is mostly evident in the film's fantastical settings and the bright red, green and blue lighting. However, another likeness can be drawn between the fairytale and the giallo: the naive and petite Suzy tormented by an evil old witch. The traditional fairytale lines between virgin and crone are clearly drawn. Like the red apple in *Snow White*, the witches in *Suspiria* feed Suzy food and red wine each night which causes her to doze off. Suzy is stereotypically feminine. The moment we are introduced to Suzy Bannion, she is wearing a white virginal dress and high heels. Throughout the film she is usually clothed in

⁶² Nationalencyklopedin, *me-too-rörelsen*, <https://www-ne-se.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/upplagsverk/encyklopedi/l%C3%A5ng/me-too-r%C3%B6relsen> (accessed 2023-02-01).

⁶³ McDonagh, p. 138.

light-coloured dresses or skirts with flounce or lace. She is graceful and frail. All in all, she is a prime example of a stereotypical ballerina. Nevertheless, she is also intelligent, self-reliant and stands up for herself. When the stern teachers insist that Suzy should move to the boarding school she protests and gets her will through. She shows her intelligence by listening to the directional sounds of the teachers footsteps and realize that they do not leave the school at night as they say, but instead go somewhere inside the school.

In Luca Guadagnino's *Suspiria* (2018) the similarities to *Snow White* are not evident. Susie is not portrayed as the classical pure and virginal ballerina. She is at once more ambiguous as she has run away from her home in America and hitchhiked to audition at the famous dance academy without any prior formal training or references. Unlike Suzy 1977 who has already been accepted to the academy when she arrives. If the original Suzy is self-reliant and confident, Susie in the remake takes it to another level. In her first lesson at the academy, the previous lead dancer quits and Susie confidently steps in to dance the protagonist at once when no one else dares. As for her status as pure and virginal, there is one scene which tells us that she is in fact a virgin. When instructor Madame Blanc asks Susie how it felt to dance, she replies: “It felt like, what I think it must feel like to fuck.” In the same sentence we are told that she is a virgin, we are also told that she is not classically virginal. The fact that Susie's name has changed in spelling indicates her various changes.

2.1.2. The Gaze

Let us now take a look at how the formal style of *Suspiria* (1977) presents Suzy. Other characters of the film will also be investigated to see how the film presents the characters differently. Suzy arrives in Germany one stormy night to enlist at a famous dance academy in Freiburg. As she walks through the dim corridor of the airport and looks at the pouring rain outside we hear the eerie foreboding synthesizer from the Goblins soundtrack. Already we understand the grave perils awaiting our main character. The opening sequence of *Suspiria* (1977) at once places our sympathies with Suzy as we fear for the inevitable dangers that lurk in the darkness without. As Suzy arrives at the school by taxi she encounters a distressed female student, Pat Hingle, who flees the building while mumbling something incoherent in the storm. After being denied entry, Suzy takes the taxi again to a hotel. On the way she watches through the window as Pat runs through the woods away from the school. So far we have seen everything from the viewpoint of

Suzy. However, for a moment we shift focus to Pat who has arrived at a friend's apartment. During this sequence the camera is more distant. We watch Pat through the window from afar and lurk behind her in the room. After a long ominous buildup she is violently killed through a series of close-up stabbings. During this sequence we are repeatedly placed in the point of view of the disembodied killer. Such scenes are a key characteristic of the giallo-genre. Isabel Cristina Pinedo argues that such scenes promote sexualised and fetishised violence toward women through the objectification of the female body via the male gaze.⁶⁴

Although Laura Mulvey's influential essay on the male gaze particularly focuses on classic Hollywood cinema, which *Suspiria* definitely is not, it is still an interesting aspect to look at. Drawing from Freudian theory, Mulvey argues that classic Hollywood cinema caters to man's erotic and narcissistic scopophilia, which means the pleasure of looking.⁶⁵ This voyeuristic form of looking involves transforming people into objects of pleasure and “subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze”.⁶⁶ Woman on the screen becomes an erotic object for the spectators.⁶⁷ In *Suspiria* (1977) the male gaze is ambiguous. The film does not take the opportunities to sexualize its female characters that many other gialli or horror films would. There is no focus on fragmenting images of female body parts, except during the murders. The only scene in which we see Suzy dance, the camera focuses solely on her face rather than her body. When Suzy and Sara bathe in the school's pool they are dressed in largely covering bathing suits and the camera mainly stays medium close-up on their faces. Of course, you could argue that the fact they even include a scene in the pool is sexualising. However, the neutral camera and wide shots of the eerily tranquil pool along with stressful music mainly seems to build an ominous atmosphere.

Despite this, there is the problem of the prolonged graphic killings of young trembling females penetrated by phallic knives. Even if the rest of the film can be seen as not sexualising, the murders can definitely be seen as such. As Isabel Cristina Pinedo puts it, these sequences make frequent use of the male gaze to promote sexualised and fetishised violence toward women.⁶⁸ These scenes place the spectator in the point of view of the killer, encouraging the

⁶⁴ Pinedo, Isabel Cristina, *Recreational terror: women and the pleasures of horror film viewing*, State University of New York Press, Albany, New York, 1997.

⁶⁵ Mulvey, p. 19.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁶⁸ Pinedo.

identification with the murderer and the objectification and dehumanization of the female bodies shown in fragmenting closeups being stabbed and cut open. There are also certain instances in the film when we are placed at a distance from the characters, as if we are spying on them from afar. If we assume these shots are in the point of view of the killer, they also add to the identification with the murderer and the objectification of the female characters being watched. For Linda Williams, who built upon the male gaze theory, such scenes present the female body itself as monstrous, seeing as the only horror visible on the screen is the mutilated body of the female victim.⁶⁹ Sequences where the audience is situated as the disembodied killer is not just a typical characteristic of giallo, but the slasher film as well. In Carol J. Clover's influential book on gender issues in the slasher film she writes about the preoccupation of violence against women. According to Clover, the victims of the slasher are most commonly teenage girls.⁷⁰ Men can also die when they happen to be in the killer's way or when they try to stop him, but only women are killed because of their gender.⁷¹ Moreover, male deaths are often fast and either offscreen or seen from a distance.⁷² Clover writes: "The murders of women [...] are filmed at closer range, in more graphic detail, and at greater length."⁷³ This is mostly true for *Suspiria* (1977) as well. Although there is one prolonged scene of a blind man being watched from afar and later killed, he is barely allowed to respond in terror before he is attacked, and a lot of the violence is insinuated offscreen. The only other male death is quick and almost completely offscreen. Unlike the females who are stalked, then run for several minutes in terror before being repeatedly stabbed in various graphic close-ups. All of the female victims' bodies are also shown in detail after the murder. Nevertheless, there is one aspect which complicates *Suspiria* (1977): the fact that the killers turn out to be female. This means that the disembodied gaze we have identified with is in fact not male, but female. Most scholarly works on the film do not believe that this creates a more progressive meaning, instead they argue that the film presents femininity as threatening and the witches as patriarchal symbols for the castration threat.⁷⁴ This will be investigated further in the chapters on the witches.

⁶⁹ Williams, Linda, "When the Woman Looks", Grant, Barry Keith (ed.), *The Dread of Difference*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1996, p. 31.

⁷⁰ Clover, p. 33.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Mendik.

Another aspect to the male gaze and scopophilia is identification with the person on the screen as an “ideal ego” through a regression to “the mirror stage”.⁷⁵ Lacan's concept of the mirror stage is when a child recognizes him or herself for the first time in a mirror. The child then misperceives this reflection as being sovereign to him or herself since it seems to possess superior motor skills. This in turn creates the notion of an ideal ego. The experience of the ideal ego in the cinema is possible due to the specific viewing conditions which allow for a sort of regression to the mirror stage through the similarities of restriction of movement and vision.⁷⁶ The audience identifies with the controlling gaze of the male hero through his representation of the ideal ego.⁷⁷ However, in the case of *Suspiria* (1977), and the remake from 2018, there is no main male character to attach an ideal ego to. In fact, there are barely any male characters to identify with at all. Moreover, in the original *Suspiria*, most of the male characters which do exist are emasculated in one way or another. There are only four male characters that appear repeatedly in the film. The one with the most screen-time is blind, he can not produce a gaze at all, another is nonverbal and ridiculed for his abnormal physique, and the third is a small child. The fourth is the only one we might identify with as he is a seemingly regular student. However, his flirtations with Suzy are continuously ignored and he is described as being poor and on the teachers' leash. Jacqueline Reich writes: “[T]he majority of the witches’ murder victims are already ‘castrated’; they are either women or, like the blind piano player [...], gendered feminine”.⁷⁸ Unlike Mulvey's model for classic Hollywood cinema, there is no male character who produces a gaze to identify with. Instead, Suzy is given an active gaze throughout the film. As in the beginning of the film when the camera constantly shows us what she is looking at, or toward the end when she actively seeks out the witches on her own. Linda Williams writes that in horror films the female characters are sometimes given an active look. However, she argues that the woman's gaze exists only to be punished.⁷⁹ The woman is not just simply punished for the act of looking, but because the look represents a “potentially subversive recognition of the power and potency of a nonphallic sexuality.”⁸⁰ Suzy's gaze mostly serves as the audience's point of view throughout the film but it is sometimes “punished”. This is mostly evident toward the

⁷⁵ Mulvey, p. 18.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 19.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 20.

⁷⁸ Reich, Jacqueline, “The Mother of All Horror: Witches, Gender, and the Films of Dario Argento”, Jewell, Keala J. (ed.), *Monsters in the Italian Literary Imagination*, Michigan, Wayne State University Press, 2001.

⁷⁹ Williams, p. 17.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 24.

end of the film when she actively looks for the witches and her look unveils the mutilated dead body of her friend Sara and the monstrous body of the decayed head witch Helena Markos. When Suzy discovers Sara's corpse the camera slowly glides over her mutilated body showing every gruesome detail. Jacqueline Reich writes about this sequence: "She [Sara] was punished because, to paraphrase Williams, she "looks" (she was the first to attempt to discover the witches' lair). Her shift in the narrative from subject to object of the gaze justifies her punishment, and the camera relishes it."⁸¹

Unlike the original film, Luca Guadagnino's 2018 remake does feature a prominent male character, the psychoanalyst Doctor Josef Klemperer. However, he does not project a traditional objectifying gaze on the female characters and is furthermore portrayed by a female actress. One can speculate that the reason they chose a female actress was to not give so much time to a man in a film predominantly about women. The only other two male characters in the film are police investigators who are at once rendered incompetent and unsympathetic. Furthermore, they have very little screen-time. In the original film there are many male characters with very little screen-time scattered throughout, who have all been replaced by female characters in the remake. The new female teachers: Miss Marks, Pavla, Alberta, Miss Vendegast, Miss Mandel and Miss Millius, are all clear nods to the removed male characters: Mark, Pavlos, Albert, Professor Verdegast, Doctor Mandel and Professor Milius. The only characters producing active gazes throughout the film are females. For example, when the teachers look at the dancing students and Susie's active investigating gaze throughout the film. Unlike the original film, the remake features a great deal of dancing scenes. In these scenes, the camera jumps around the room in fragmenting close-ups of the female dancing bodies. In one such scene, the camera focuses on Susie's rear as she sensually grinds against the floor. Additionally, Susie is dressed more revealing throughout the film. In the final sequence we see her nude from behind and glimpse her bare breasts through a thin robe. Such sequences can be seen as making use of an objectifying and sexualising male gaze. The remake features certain instances when the camera is placed at a distance as if it is looking from afar at Susie, like the original *Suspiria* (1977). This could induce the effect of a male gaze but we soon realize that it is in fact the head instructor, Madame Blanc, who is looking at her. This could still encourage us to objectify Susie, but it is

⁸¹ Reich.

not through the eyes of a male, but a female. According to screenwriter David Kajganich: “We worked really hard to make sure that there wasn’t any shred of the male gaze in the picture.”⁸²

The murders in *Suspiria* (2018) are also radically different from the ones in the original. The women are never pierced by phallic objects and we are not placed as the disembodied killer. We also know at once that the killers are the female teachers unlike the original where we do not realize they are female until the very end. Hence, the remake does not promote fetishised and sexualised violence toward women in the same manner the original does. However, the murders are still prolonged, gruesome and shown in vivid detail. The women are killed by spells forcing their bodies to break on their own which also promotes Williams' argument that the female body becomes monstrous as it is the only horror showcased on screen.⁸³ The remake does not share the same characteristics of the giallo and slasher genres that the original does and has mostly been called a pure supernatural horror film. However, the film does have a preoccupation of violence toward women, like the slasher and giallo, but that could simply be because the film takes place in an all female environment. There are no men killed at all in the remake.

2.1.3. Suzy, The Final Girl

Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) can quite distinctly be connected to the slasher film trope “the Final Girl”, which Carol J. Clover identified. In slasher films, we often follow a group of young people who one by one are murdered by a serial killer. The Final Girl is the one who survives. She is undoubtedly the main character of the film and the only one to survive long enough to either kill the villain, or be rescued.⁸⁴ She is also often easily distinguished from the other female characters. She is either virginal or sexually inactive, unlike her friends. She is watchful and sees the signs of danger her friends ignore. Primarily, she is intelligent and resourceful.⁸⁵ These characteristics are all true for Suzy in *Suspiria* (1977). She is portrayed as classically virginal through her white feminine dresses. She continuously ignores the flirtatious moves by her fellow male student Mark. She is also intelligent, resourceful and watchful throughout the film. By

⁸² Crimmins, Deirdre, “Exclusive Interview: ‘SUSPIRIA’ (2018) Screenwriter David Kajganich Talks About the Male Gaze and Female bodies”, *Rue Morgue*, 2019-01-28, <https://rue-morgue.com/exclusive-interview-suspiria-2018-screenwriter-david-kajganich-talks-about-the-male-gaze-and-female-bodies/> (accessed 2023-01-29).

⁸³ Williams, p. 31.

⁸⁴ Clover, p. 35.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

constantly snapping up and remembering key details her friends miss she manages to complete the puzzle of the mysterious killings at the school.

“The Final Girl is boyish, in a word”, Clover writes.⁸⁶ She is not feminine in the ways that her friends are and in many cases it is even spelled out in her manly or unisex name: “Stevie, Marti, Terry”.⁸⁷ This is something that does not completely apply to Suzy. Firstly, her name is feminine. She dresses stereotypically “girly” unlike other Final Girls such as Ellen Ripley from *Alien* (1979) who dresses in a green flight suit, and moreover is always referred to as her more unfeminine last name Ripley. Suzy is also a ballet dancer which is feminine-coded, unlike Ripley's job as a warrant officer aboard a spaceship. Although, you could argue that Suzy is the most masculine among her fellow female students, since she is strong-willed, stands up for herself, confronts the witches and ultimately kills their leader.

In Guadagnino's *Suspiria* (2018) Susie is also allowed to be feminine. Although, she is not portrayed as virginal and pure. As previously stated, she is in fact a virgin but not classically virginal. She is always clothed in dark colors, mostly dark red which is much more sexualized than the virginal white dresses of the original Suzy. Susie is also allowed to express her sexuality more through for example her passionate dancing, and in her dreams when we see her masturbating. She is even more independent than the original Suzy. She manages to hitchhike from America to Germany and enter the prestigious school with no prior formal training and quickly climbs to dance the lead part. Neither Suzy nor Susie is portrayed as particularly masculine, except perhaps in their strong will and self reliance.

The hero of the film is the Final Girl. She is the one we feel for, whose horror we share.⁸⁸ Clover argues that if point of view equals identification then we are at first forced to identify with the killer as we are situated in his eyes as he watches from a distance and later strikes down his victims. However, as the film progresses, and as more characters die, the point of view shifts to that of the Final Girl. “If, during the film's course, we shifted our sympathies back and forth and dealt them out to other characters along the way, we belong in the end to the Final Girl; there is no alternative.”⁸⁹ This also applies to *Suspiria* (1977). Even if we are forced to identify with the killer as she stalks the other female victims and kills them, we are towards the end

⁸⁶ Clover, p. 40.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 44.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 45-46.

undoubtedly identified with Suzy. In the final 20 minutes of the film, Suzy is the only one left at the school and we solely follow her as she is given an active gaze to seek out the witches. Clover argues that the Final Girl is constructed as masculine through her difference from the other female characters and her use of an “active investigating gaze”.⁹⁰ As the film progresses the Final Girl becomes more and more masculine until she ultimately grabs the knife and “addresses the monster on his own terms.”⁹¹ Although Suzy is not portrayed as particularly masculine in the beginning of the film, you could argue that her masculinity increases as she gains courage, an active investigating gaze and ultimately kills the head-witch with a phallic object. Even though the Final Girl trope can be seen as progressively feminist in the sense that it forces the audience to identify with a female protagonist, the end result becomes that the only female who is allowed to survive does so because she embodies virginity and purity, and because she is masculinized.

But it is not just the Final Girl whose gender-identity is ambiguous. Clover writes that the killer's phallic purpose is undeniable as he thrusts his phallic weapons into young women, but his masculinity is questionable. “[H]e ranges from the virginal or sexually inert to the transvestite or transsexual”.⁹² Therefore, she writes that in the end “The Final Girl has not just manned herself; she specifically unmans an oppressor whose masculinity was in question to begin with.”⁹³ This is something that *Suspiria* (1977) puts a spin on, since the killers in the end turn out to be the female teachers. We never actually see the killer in action, so there is a possibility that the killer could be Pavlos, the handyman of the school who seems to do the witches' every bidding. In which case the film would be more in line with the Final Girl trope. However, it would not make that much of a difference since it was without a doubt the female witches who orchestrated the murders. Additionally, in the sequence where Sara is murdered we see a person with long black hair picking up a knife, which means that it is not Pavlos there and most likely one of the female witches. This does not necessarily mean that the film presents a more progressive version of the Final Girl. It could still be seen as Suzy killing the powerful wicked women and herself being allowed to live because of her purity, virginity and her masculinization.

This trope does not apply to the remake. Firstly, Susie is not the only one left to survive in the end. She is furthermore not portrayed as pure and virginal. She is allowed to be feminine,

⁹⁰ Clover, p. 48.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., p. 47.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 49.

and stays feminine throughout the film. The gaze belongs to the female characters in *Suspiria* (2018) already from the beginning. The only times we are situated as the disembodied gaze of an onlooker, it is the gaze of one of the female teachers. This is also not ambiguous as in the original film where we do not understand the disembodied killer is female until the very end. The end also presents a distinct difference from the Final Girl trope when Susie not only kills the witches but herself turns out to be a witch. This popular trope which the original film quite distinctly follows is clearly changed in the remake.

2.2. The Witch

Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) was the first in Argento's trilogy about the Three Mothers who are three ancient powerful witches determined to rule the world. The mothers are based on Thomas De Quincey's 1845 collection of essays *Suspiria de Profundis*.⁹⁴ De Quincey describes them as the three Sorrows: Mater Lachrymarum, Our Lady of Tears; Mater Tenebrarum, Our Lady of Darkness; and Mater Suspiriorum, Our Lady of Sighs.⁹⁵ In Argento's second installment of the trilogy, *Inferno* (1980), it is revealed that the directress of the dance academy Helena Markos is Mater Suspiriorum. In the remake however, Markos only claims to be her, until the end when it is revealed that Susie is the true Mater Suspiriorum. To examine what this says about Susie in the remake we must firstly investigate how the films present witches and witchcraft.

2.2.1. The Characteristics of the Witches

In Argento's *Suspiria* (1977), Suzy speaks to Professor Milius, an expert on witchcraft. He explains that witches are “malefic, negative and destructive”, “they can change the course of events and peoples lives, but only to do harm” and that “their goal is to accumulate great personal wealth, but that can only be achieved by injury to others.” The desire for personal wealth adds to the money-focused atmosphere of the school. When Suzy first arrives at the school her dormitory is not yet ready and she is to temporarily move in with a student, Olga, who at once insists that she pays 50 dollars a week in advance, and when Suzy asks to borrow shoes from another student she is told that she can buy them. A student, Mark, cannot afford to pay for

⁹⁴ McDonagh, Maitland, *Broken Mirrors, Broken Minds: The Dark Dreams of Dario Argento*, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 2010, p. 146.

⁹⁵ De Quincey, Thomas, *The posthumous works of Thomas De Quincey. Vol. 1, Suspiria de profundis : with other essays; critical, historical, biographical, philosophical, imaginative and humorous*, Heinemann, London, 1891.

room and board and is thus forced to do errands for the teachers. The dance academy was founded in 1895 by Helena Markos, “a powerful witch with a tremendous talent for doing evil”, Milius explains. The witches are stern towards their students and manipulate them to get their will through. They kill everyone who gets suspicious of them in a grotesquely violent manner. In essence, the witches are presented as an all-female death-coven whose goal is to acquire great power and wealth.

In Luca Guadagnino's remake the witches are much more caring of the students. Susie is allowed to audition for the academy without any training or references. When she is accepted one of the teachers explains that the school acts as a “Ruth Bré”-collective where they do not charge anything for room and board. Ruth Bré was the pen name of author Elisabeth Bonnes who was a German feminist, advocate for women's rights and a critic of patriarchy.⁹⁶ The instructor says: “In this company we fully understand the importance of a woman's financial autonomy.” The students also take care of each other without the promise of money. They look up to the teachers as mentors. One student, Sara, says proudly about Madame Blanc: “She's tough. She kept the company alive through the war. When the right just wanted women to shut off their minds and keep their uteruses open, there was Blanc.” There is at once a positive feminist focus on the empowered women of the academy rather than the outright greedy power-mad witches who can only cause death in the original film. However, they do still kill and harm students in unnecessarily painful ways. A big difference from the original is that we get to know the witches much more, they are a crucial part of the film. We find out that the coven is in fact divided in two separate camps, one who wants Helena Markos to rule while the other wants Madame Blanc as leader. Markos needs a new body in order to continue living and the plan is to sacrifice Susie. Madame Blanc and her followers disagree with the ritual. After the members of the coven hold a democratic election which Markos wins, one of Blancs followers who has been visibly against the killings of the students commits suicide. Blanc clearly cares most of all about art and dance, while Markos seems more greedy for wealth and power. When Blanc opposes the ritual of prolonging Markos life in order to save Susie in the last second, Markos proclaims: “This isn't vanity! This isn't art!”

⁹⁶ Nationalencyklopedin, *Ruth Bré*, <http://www.ne.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/lång/ruth-bre> (accessed 2023-01-18).

2.2.2. Psychoanalytic Reading of the Witches

Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) has in hindsight received a large amount of scholarly criticism because of its portrayal of femininity as threatening and the witches as patriarchal symbols for the castration threat.⁹⁷ According to the Freudian theory of phallogentrism, due to woman's absence of a penis, she signifies lack. Woman's essential role in "the symbolic order", which is Lacan's concept of the unconscious ideological systems that compose society, is to signify "the castration threat", meaning the fear of both metaphorical and literal emasculation.⁹⁸ Jacqueline Reich writes about the witches in the original: "The witch functions as stand-in for the subversive potential of female sexuality and solidarity. She constitutes a threat to the entire hierarchical structure of gender subjectivity, and thus she must be mutilated and destroyed."⁹⁹ According to Barbara Creed's writing on "the monstrous-feminine", man's fear of woman as castrated has also developed another fear, the fear of woman as castrator.¹⁰⁰ Creed coined the term "the monstrous-feminine" because it implies much more than a reversal of the male monster. It is her femininity and sexuality itself that play an important role in the creation of her monstrosity.¹⁰¹ "All human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject", she writes.¹⁰² Creed's intention is to explain why, and how, the woman is presented as monstrous in most horror films. She quotes Linda Williams' *When the Woman Looks*, writing that woman's "power-in-difference" is essential to the representation of the monster.¹⁰³ Creed brings up Kristeva's theory on abjection, writing that the horror film perseveres with the historical notion of casting the mother figure as abject.¹⁰⁴ Kristeva argues that one of the earliest experiences of abjection is when a child attempts to break away from the mother who is reluctant to release it.¹⁰⁵ Creed writes that one of the most common monstrous roles in the horror film that belongs to woman is the witch.¹⁰⁶ Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) quite clearly perseveres the association between witches, abject and femininity. Helena Markos is depicted as a monstrous mother figure who can only do harm. The witches are

⁹⁷ Mendik.

⁹⁸ Mulvey, p. 14.

⁹⁹ Reich.

¹⁰⁰ Creed, p. 7.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁵ Kristeva, p. 14.

¹⁰⁶ Creed, p. 73.

presented as flat purely evil characters who are only capable of fulfilling their own desires of wealth and power at the cost of others. The voice-over at the beginning of *Inferno* (1980) tells us that Mater Suspiriorum and the Three Mothers are “wicked step-mothers, incapable of creating life”. Xavier Mendik argues that *Suspiria* clearly connects the abject to motherhood.¹⁰⁷ He writes that the witches are presented as destructive and dominant mother figures who try to infantilize the students of the school, particularly the men there. Madame Blanc's nephew Alfred, the blind pianist Daniel and the poor dancer Mark all become reliant on the witches who curtail their independence.¹⁰⁸ Mendik likens this with Kristeva's argument that as a child gains an own identity and independence the image of the mother changes from caregiver to a threatening figure who tries to restrict the child's independence.¹⁰⁹ Creed briefly mentions Argento's trilogy writing: “*Suspiria* and *Inferno* [...] reinforce the stereotypical image of the witch as a malevolent, destructive, monstrous figure whose constant aim is destruction of the symbolic order.”¹¹⁰ Luke Lewin Davies writes about abjection and witchcraft in both *Suspiria* and argues that Argento's film is completely in line with Creed's argument that the horror film has taken over the role of purifying the abject from religious ritual, and associating the abject with the female.¹¹¹ This is all the more problematic since the film also encourages the audience to enjoy watching it all unfold, in line with “Creed's suggestion that horror film underlines the thrilling aspect of encounters with the female abject.”¹¹²

Guadagnino's 2018 remake is more ambiguous in relation to the monstrous-feminine. The film does have scenes which definitely associate the abject with the feminine. Helena Markos is still the monstrous maternal figure who only desires wealth and power as in the original film. However, as previously mentioned there exists two factions. The other potential leader of the coven, Madame Blanc, and her followers, are more interested in art and politics. They care for each other and do not take any money from the students. The teachers do kill students in grotesque and horrifying ways, but it is all in an attempt to prolong Helena Markos life. Madame Blanc and her followers are obviously against this, shown strongest through one teacher who is seen crying as a student is put under a spell and later commits suicide when Markos wins the

¹⁰⁷ Mendik, Xavier, “Från monsternamma till ‘tredje könet’: Xavier Mendik om kvinnlig abjektion i Dario Argentos filmer”, *Filmhäftet*, 2002, vol. 39.no. 1, p. 39.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹¹⁰ Creed, p. 77.

¹¹¹ Davies, p. 49.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

election. For Luke Lewin Davies, the remake tries to redeem the witch while continuing the association with the abject.¹¹³ One example he brings up is when Susie says that dancing felt like what she thinks it must feel like to “fuck”, to which Madame Blanc replies: “You mean to fuck a man?” Susie retorts: “No, I... Was thinking of an animal.” Davies argues that the film retains the abject by “insisting that [Susie] remains a terrifying animal fucker”.¹¹⁴ This is only one interpretation of the scene. The film seems to try to only focus on questions of femininity and womanhood to the extent that the only prominent male character is played by a woman. If Susie's ecstasy while dancing would have been likened with “fucking a man” it would imply that the most pleasurable experience for a woman is to have sexual intercourse with a man. Instead, her comment on animals is more connected to the raw sexual energy of nature. Allowing her to express sexuality while not connecting it to a traditional heterosexuality. It also serves as a hint towards her later reveal as the true Mater Suspiriorum considering the historical connection between witches and sexual intercourse with animals.¹¹⁵ Perhaps there would not need to be a sexual aspect to the dance at all, but Susie is afterall “the Mother of Sighs”. The pleasurable sighs during sexual intercourse could be connected to the prominent sighs during the dance scenes. Creed writes that female sexuality has traditionally been connected to her monstrosity and the abject in horror films.¹¹⁶ Hence, nevertheless it can be seen as a problematic scene. However, it seems most of the abject in *Suspiria* (2018) is connected to the deeds done in Helena Markos favor, who is still portrayed as the monstrous mother figure of the original film.

In the end of the film Susie reveals herself to be the true Mater Suspiriorum and kills the wicked impostor Helena Markos and every witch who chose to side with her. Madame Blanc's followers are allowed to live. Susie asks the three students who have been tortured by the witches, Patricia, Olga and Sara, what they wish for and they all plead for death. She kills them instantly and ends their long suffering committed on Markos behalf. She pays a visit to Dr. Klemperer who has been tormented by the witches throughout the film and apologizes. She tells him the true story of what happened to his wife, which the witches previously lied about and manipulated, and then proceeds to remove his tormented memory of the torture he has endured. When Susie kills Helena Markos a new era of witches arises. She kills the old view of the

¹¹³ Davies, p. 52.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 53.

¹¹⁵ Bullough, Vern & Bullough, Bonnie, *Human Sexuality: An Encyclopedia*, 1994, Taylor & Francis. p. 61.

¹¹⁶ Creed, p. 5.

monstrous mother figure witch who only craves power and causes pain. A new feminist view of witches is formed through the kind, caring, merciful Susie and Madame Blanc who most of all care for sisterhood and the art of dance. Davies writes: “[T]he implication is that Suzy killing off the Markos faction signals a return to political engagement and female strength.”¹¹⁷ Despite this, the film does have certain elements which do connect Susie to the monstrous-feminine. In one scene where Susie and Sara sneak around the teachers office, Susie happens to stumble upon a few of the witches who have put two police officers under a spell. One of the policemen is naked from the waist down and a witch is holding a hook close to his penis while laughing. Susie looks on and muffles a laugh herself, moves on and does not tell Sara about it. This scene undoubtedly implies the fear of woman as castrator and promotes the stereotype of the liberated woman as destroyer of men. Toward the end of the film a group of the students dance naked on Markos ritual in a way of presenting the female body as abject as they dance drenched in blood or partially clad in clothes made from human hair. When Susie reveals herself to be Mater Suspiriorum during the ritual she summons death incarnate and opens up her chest in a vaginal-like opening that shows her abject heart. Davies writes: “[R]ather than turning its back on the association with the abject, Kajganich and Guadagnino’s remake attempts to ‘rescue’ the abject by suggesting that it is possible to have a relation to abjection while at the same time being a politically engaged and unifying force.”¹¹⁸ Even though the film presents a progressive update on the original film's representation of the witches it still clearly preserves the association between the abject and the feminine in many ways.

2.3. The Dancer

Another aspect to *Suspiria* (1977) and its remake which is connected to femininity is the ballet setting and the fact that Suzy is a ballerina. Although most scholarly writings on Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) have deemed it misogynist there are a few exceptions. One such text is Charlotte Gough's essay about the implications of the ballet setting of the film. Gough argues that scholarly works on *Suspiria* (1977) which focus on castration anxiety and the objectification of women through the male gaze are too preoccupied with male viewing.¹¹⁹ She writes: “[I]t is later revealed that the killers are in fact female; consequently, the deliberate (gendered) stylistics of

¹¹⁷ Davies, p. 51.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 52.

¹¹⁹ Gough, p. 51-52.

(traditionally male) violence [...] ultimately refute such a reading, and subvert gendered power relations.”¹²⁰ She argues that looking at the film's relationship with its ballet setting and ballerina protagonist presents “a radical articulation of *female*-centric identity anxieties.”¹²¹ Gough brings up Jade Boyd who writes that ballet creates an “unrealistic, and potentially harmful cultural perception of, and detachment from, the body”.¹²² This happens through perfectionist demands on the body which is to be worked into shape in order to appear inhumanly graceful and ethereal.¹²³ She brings up Douglas Rosenberg, who argues that dance in cinema presents an even more unattainable body through the filming and editing process that renders the dance “beyond human capabilities”.¹²⁴ Gough adds that this becomes even more problematic considering that “female selfhood has been historically tied to the body.”¹²⁵

Gough writes that the first moment Suzy encounters distress and signs of the supernatural is directly after she is for the first time “encouraged to submit to a ballerina image-ideal”.¹²⁶ After her first dance rehearsal she encounters a woman who temporarily blinds her with a metallic object, causing her to become pale and light-headed. When she returns to the rehearsal she is forced to continue dancing by her instructor even though she is visibly faint and asks if she can stop, ultimately resulting in her collapsing. The supernatural horrors and psychological distress of the film thus coincides with “her bodily detachment and dehumanization when she is ordered to perform as a dancer.”¹²⁷ Additionally, Suzy is always dressed completely in black while in the dancing studio, unlike the pure white, or light-coloured, dresses she usually wears. Gough writes: “[I]n her attempt to fulfill the ballerina ideal, she is presented, through the film’s fantastic elements, as unable to control, or even entirely separated from the body, a body that constitutes her professional, aspirational identity but that is simultaneously suppressed.”¹²⁸ The controlled and objectified body is also a part of the male gaze which the film makes use of. Gough argues that Laura Mulvey's model for the male gaze is destabilized when the killers turn

¹²⁰ Gough, p. 60.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 52.

¹²² Ibid., p. 54.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Rosenberg, Douglas, *Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 44.

¹²⁵ Gough, p. 56.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p 61.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p 62.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 57.

out to be female.¹²⁹ Gough argues that the murder sequences in the original *Suspiria* are “psychoanalytically representative of the ballerina’s fears, externally projected onto other victimised female bodies, and are indicative of culturally conditioned female ‘alienation’ from and distorted perception of the body”¹³⁰ This argument can be applied even clearer to the remake of *Suspiria* since several of the students are in fact murdered while performing a dance controlled by the teachers. A student, Olga, has had enough of the repressive environment of the ballet academy and decides to leave. The newly arrived Susie decides to take over the lead after Olga. As she vigorously dances with passion in front of a pleased head instructor the dance intercuts with Olga who has been captured on her way to leave the school and put under a spell. Olga has lost all control of her body and is forced to dance alongside Susie in a separate room. As her body struggles to keep up with Susie's dancing her body literally begins to crack and break gruesomely. This scene showcases Gough's argument that the dancer in film is “denied control of her own image and reduced to the body, while that body must also be used as a controlled instrument to meet the physical and aesthetic requirements of the dancing role and choreography, as well of the audience(s).”¹³¹

Gough provides a compelling argument that offers a potentially different reading of Argento's *Suspiria* (1977), which presents a reflection on female-centric identity anxieties rather than a purely misogynist portrayal of women. While these arguments also can be applied to Guadagnino's remake through the violent sequences of controlled dancing, it is more ambiguous considering Susie's relative freedom of expression in her dancing, as well as the fact that she progressively gains control over her body and masters the dance. The dance in the remake is also not traditional ballet, rather a more free and experimental form of dance.

2.4. The Reception

Very few of the reviews from the release of Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) mention its representation of women. Most articles either praise the film for its over-the-top violence and gore, or condemn it. Bob Keaton from *Fort Lauderdale News* wrote: “For the seekers of superficially devilish thrills, ‘Suspiria’ is just the thing.”¹³² John Stark from the *San Francisco*

¹²⁹ Gough, p. 60.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p 53.

¹³² Keaton, Bob, “Mysterious ‘Suspiria’ a Horror Fans Delight”, *Fort Lauderdale News*, 30 November 1977.

Examiner criticized the film for solely being a display of gore.¹³³ Janet Masil from *The New York Times* wrote that Dario Argento “as always, overdoes graphic gore.”¹³⁴ One exception who focuses on the representation of women is Gene Siskel from the *Chicago Tribune* who wrote: “‘Suspiria’, like so many hard-core violent films, tells of the mutilation of young women.”¹³⁵ He continues:

One of the more pernicious elements of hard-core violent films is that they typically feature utterly defenseless women. Miss Harper, who is a decent actress [...] is reduced to cowering in corners. She has been costumed to look much younger than her years to make her out to be a teen-ager. Presumably there are men in the audience who like to see young girls abused. Nice picture, huh?¹³⁶

Even if the film is predominantly about females, one critic, Bruce McCabe from *The Boston Globe*, manages to emphasize the few male characters of the film: “I particularly liked Daniel [...] and Pavlo[s]”.¹³⁷ Janet Maslin calls Suzy “[a] strange, pouty girl” and writes “the students’ compassion for one another leaves a lot to be desired.”¹³⁸

Reviews on Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) released in later years by fans almost always focus on the representation of women. Kelcie Mattson acknowledges the problematic phallic violence against women and the clear connections between Suzy and the Final Girl while still believing the film is empowering to women. She writes: “So we’re left with a film where women aren’t sexualized but are still mutilated, who are proactive but also killed, who are pure innocence and pure villainy, empowered but through a man’s limited vision of empowerment.”¹³⁹ Amanda Lang writes that even though the film has been considered misogynist she believes it is progressive for its time. She writes: “All of the murder victims are women because all of the primary roles are played by women. [...] Here, women control the action and are looked at as sources of real

¹³³ Stark, p. 31.

¹³⁴ Maslin.

¹³⁵ Siskel, Gene, “Fox covers its prints on its part in ‘Suspiria’”, *Chicago Tribune*, 8 August 1977, p. 7.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ McCabe, Bruce, “‘Suspiria’ is fitful”, *The Boston Globe*, 25 August 1977, p. 29.

¹³⁸ Maslin.

¹³⁹ Mattson, Kelcie, “Fairy Tales and Final Girls: The Female-Centric *Suspiria* (Women In Horror Series)”, *Medium*, 2016, <https://medium.com/@wewillbethestars/fairy-tales-and-final-girls-the-female-centric-suspiria-women-in-horror-series-63bc16ab1f7f> (accessed 2023-01-06).

power.”¹⁴⁰ She continues: “The character of Suzy is initially seen as hopelessly naive but grows to become a strong, capable person.”¹⁴¹ This is something that can be connected to the Final Girl trope and seen as her masculinization, but for Lang it is empowering for females. Adam Nayman writes: “The misogyny of the imagery is unmistakable, and yet *Suspiria* complicates audience reactions [...] by filling its narrative almost exclusively with female characters, with the male performers [...] reduced to the sidelines.”¹⁴² Although these articles claim that the film has a feminist potential they also admit to the problematic sides of the portrayal of women.

Luca Guadagnino's 2018 remake has been more divisive. It seems about half believe it is feminist while the other half believes it tries and fails to be feminist. Andrea Thompson from *the Chicago Reader* titled her review of the film: “The new *Suspiria* manages to be about women’s power without being feminist”.¹⁴³ While Ashviny Kaur from *The Massachusetts Daily Collegian* wrote: “Although some critics believe that this take on feminism falls flat, I don’t see it that way. I believe this movie is a true representation of feminism and motherhood”.¹⁴⁴ Almost every review focuses on the representation of women and if the film can be considered feminist or not. Michael O’Sullivan from *The Washington Posts* writes that the film has an undercurrent of misogyny and objectifies women through nudity, violence and the male gaze.¹⁴⁵ However, Sonia Rao from the same newspaper writes inconclusively that the film has a representation of feminism that is sure to be polarizing.¹⁴⁶ Kelsea Stahler from the women's magazine *Bustle*

¹⁴⁰ Lang, Amanda, “Throwback review: *Suspiria* and the magic of female rage”, *Alt Citizen*, 2018, <http://altcitizen.com/throwback-review-suspiria-and-the-magic-of-female-rage/> (accessed 2023-01-06).

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Nayman, Adam, “Reign in Blood: The Legacy of Dario Argentos ‘*Suspiria*’”, *The Ringer*, 2018-10-05, <https://www.theringer.com/movies/2018/10/5/17939894/suspiria-dario-argento-luca-guadagnino> (accessed 2023-01-31).

¹⁴³ Thompson, Andrea, “The new *Suspiria* manages to be about women’s power without being feminist”, *Chicago Reader*, 2018-10-30, <https://chicagoreader.com/blogs/the-new-suspiria-manages-to-be-about-womens-power-without-being-feminist/> (accessed 2023-01-06).

¹⁴⁴ Kaur, Ashviny, “‘*Suspiria*’ is a dark, twisted tale of femininity, motherhood and witchcraft”, *The Massachusetts Daily Collegian*, 2022-03-08, <https://dailycollegian.com/2022/03/suspiria-is-a-dark-twisted-tale-of-femininity-motherhood-and-witchcraft/> (accessed 2022-01-06).

¹⁴⁵ O’Sullivan, Michael, “‘*Suspiria*’ is a beautiful mess and stars Tilda Swinton in three roles and don’t ask us what it means”, *The Washington Post*, 2018-10-31, https://www.washingtonpost.com/goingoutguide/movies/suspiria-is-a-beautiful-mess-and-stars-tilda-swinton-in-three-roles-and-dont-ask-us-what-it-means/2018/10/31/2b34dd7c-d7cf-11e8-83a2-d1c3da28d6b6_story.html (accessed 2023-01-31).

¹⁴⁶ Rao, Sonia, “What exactly is ‘*Suspiria*’ trying to say about witches and feminism? We break it down for you.”, *The Washington Post*, 2018-11-02, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/arts-entertainment/2018/11/02/very-witchy-suspiria-is-supposed-be-radically-feminist-movie-how-so/> (accessed 2023-01-06).

writes that Guadagnino's *Suspiria* does not say anything in particular about feminism and this is precisely why it is so good. She writes:

[S]tories like this have been made about men for decades, it's actually a pretty big deal that, alongside the stories of feminist triumphs and unyielding heroines, women can now also see themselves in something as murky, grey, and undefined as the world of *Suspiria*, too.¹⁴⁷

There also exists a large amount of fan posts surrounding Guadagnino's *Suspiria*, its portrayal of women and status as feminist. Sociologist Brian Brutlag titles his blogpost: "The Feminism of 'Suspiria' terrifies the Patriarchy"¹⁴⁸ Stacie Ponder writes that the film is deeply feminist and that the images from Susie's nightmares are inspired by different feminist artists.¹⁴⁹ There are also several posts that argue the film is queer, particularly through the relationship between Susie and Madame Blanc which is seen as romantic and sexual.¹⁵⁰ In an interview on a fan podcast both Luca Guadagnino and David Kajganich admit to the film being queer.¹⁵¹

3. Summary, Discussion and Conclusions

Suzy in Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) has proven to be a stereotypical Final Girl, except for the fact that she is allowed to be feminine. She and the other female characters are given active gazes throughout the film but several times their look is punished by what it unveils. Even though the film does not sexualize its female characters for the most part, the murder sequences do promote sexualized and fetishized violence toward women via the male gaze. One big

¹⁴⁷ Stahler, Kelsea, "'Suspiria' Has No Feminist Moral & That's Exactly Why It Matters", *Bustle*, 2018-10-29, <https://www.bustle.com/p/suspiria-has-no-feminist-moral-thats-exactly-why-it-matters-13019228> (accessed 2023-01-31).

¹⁴⁸ Brutlag, Brian, "The Feminism of 'Suspiria' terrifies the Patriarchy", *The Sociologist's Dojo: Self Defense for the Absurdity of our Social World*, 2018-12-10, <https://thesociologistsdojo.blogspot.com/2018/12/the-feminism-of-suspiria-terrifies.html> (accessed 2023-01-31).

¹⁴⁹ Ponder, Stacie, "SUSPIRIA Day 25: appropriate vs appropriation", *Final Girl*, 2019-10-25, <http://www.finalgirl.rocks/2019/10/suspiria-day-25-appropriate-vs.html> (accessed 2023-02-01).

¹⁵⁰ See for example: Fortier, Zoe, "Women and Queerness in Horror: *Suspiria* (2018)", *Phenixx Gaming*, 2020-09-23, <https://phenixxgaming.com/2020/09/23/women-and-queerness-in-horror-suspiria-2018/> (accessed 2023-02-01); Ponder, Stacie, "SUSPIRIA Day 31: we're at the end", *Final Girl*, 2019-10-31, <http://www.finalgirl.rocks/2019/10/suspiria-day-31-were-at-end.html> (accessed 2023-02-01).

¹⁵¹ Ponder, Stacie & Hudson, Anthony, "Episode 82 - SUSPIRIA with Luca Guadagnino and David Kajganich", *Gaylords of Darkness* [podcast], <https://gaylords-of-darkness.pinecast.co/episode/561ad4692b3c4f15/episode-82-suspiria-with-luca-guadagnino-and-david-kajganich> (accessed 2023-02-01).

difference the film presents from other giallo films is that the killers turn out to be female. Charlotte Gough has shown us that this fact has the potential to present a different narrative that surrounds ballet and female-centric identity anxieties. However, most scholars instead argue that the witches are patriarchal symbols for the castration threat and promote the view of powerful women as destroyers of men and the symbolic order. Through the monstrous-feminine we can see that the film clearly preserves the association between femininity, motherhood and the abject.

Luca Guadagnino's *Suspiria* (2018) presents a different view of Susie who is no longer the pure and virginal Final Girl of the original. The gaze at once belongs to the female characters, however, certain sequences can be seen as making use of a sexualizing and objectifying male gaze. The murders are no longer in the point of view of the killer and we know at once that the killers are female. Despite this, the murder sequences still showcase brutal graphic violence toward women's bodies. The film quite clearly still preserves the association between the female and the abject but tries to do so in a more progressive manner. Most of the abject and horrendous acts committed in the film are on behalf of Helena Markos who is still portrayed as the wicked mother figure of the original. When Susie in the end turns out to be Mother Suspiriorum herself and kills Markos it feels as if a new era of witches arises. The old view of the witch as a terrible mother figure who only craves wealth and power at the cost of others is killed. The new view of witch seems to function more as a feminist icon, reclaiming an old derogatory stereotype and turning it into something new. Susie and her followers are powerful but kind, fair, politically engaged and feminist. That is not to say that the film's portrayal of women is entirely unproblematic.

In the original *Suspiria* there exists several male characters who have been replaced by females in the remake. Many of the male characters in the original seem to function as experts who “mansplain” something to the female characters. For example, Doctor Mandel is Saras therapist who explains the origins of the academy and the witches, and Professor Milius is an expert on witches who explains witchcraft. In the remake there is only prominent male character, Doctor Klemperer, who is Patricia's therapist and he also attempts to help the female characters by explaining things for them, only he is wrong. He claims that Patricia's thoughts about the witches are merely delusions. A witch tells him: “Why should I pity you? [...] When women tell you the truth, you don't pity them. You tell them they are delusional!”¹⁵²

¹⁵² Own translation from German.

When Agento's *Suspiria* was released, feminist film theory was still in its beginnings and the second wave of feminism was in its prime. 41 years later when Guadagnino released his remake a lot has changed, although we still have a ways to go. The original's focus on a strong female protagonist in an almost all female environment can be seen as progressive for its time. However, the portrayal of women is still undeniably problematic. As we can see from the reviews, very few people were concerned with the representation of women at the release of the original. It is mostly in hindsight through scholarly articles and fan posts in later years that the film's portrayal of women has been criticized. Certain fans believe it does present an empowering view of women through Suzy, although they still recognize the problematic sides. Luca Guadagnino and David Kajganic have undoubtedly consciously tried to create a more feminist empowering view of the witches than in the original. This is evident through its various references to feminist artists and the contrast between the Markos- and Blanc-factions. Susie is allowed to be sexual and feminine throughout the film, and by showing that she is Mater Suspiriorum she also shows that she has not been frail and manipulated but instead has always been the most powerful witch of all. The connections to the abject are still there, however, that could be because the film still follows historical views of witchcraft, as well as the original film, but tries to update and change these views. Almost every review of Guadagnino's *Suspiria* recognizes its feminist attempts with varying thoughts if it succeeds or not. Almost every fan-post argues that it is in fact feminist and some even that it is queer.

As I asked in the beginning of this paper: Why did the film need a remake? It is evident that as feminism has arisen in the world, film has also changed and adapted alongside it. Guadagnino's *Suspiria* is clearly aware of derogatory tropes of women in cinema and tries to deliberately change them. Even though this is just one film produced in modern times, we can see from the reviews and fan-posts that they almost all focus on feminism. If the original would have been released today it probably would have been heavily criticized. Almost no one wrote about the film's misogyny at the release, while in hindsight it has arguably been the most discussed aspect. Almost every review on the original released in modern times writes about the representation of the female characters. People are much more aware of feminism today and much more critical toward how women are represented in the media. Even if Guadagnino's remake is radically different from the original, and more feminist as I have argued, it still receives a lot of criticism because it does not manage to go all the way. This in contrast with the

original whose portrayal of women is undeniably problematic yet still barely received any critique on that subject when released, shows how the feminist historical context is evident in culture and film.

In order to see more how feminism through history finds expression in the medium of film, you would have to look at several films from one specific time period and several from another to be able to draw more general conclusions. In this case you could look at several more horror films from the 70s and compare them with horror films from modern times as well as their receptions. A broader study would provide a more generally applicable conclusion. Even though this case showcases a large increase in feminist thoughts in film and audiences, it is a film which specifically asks for such a reading. It would be compelling to see how issues of female representation are evident in films where femininity is more on the sidelines.

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