The Axes of *I Spit on Your Grave*: Gender, Class, and Racial Trouble in Meir Zarchi's 1978 Original and Steven R. Monroe's 2010 Remake

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Inception

This paper was originally written for Professor Andrew Burke's "Topics in Visual Cultures: Horror Film" class in the Department of English.

Judge Aaron Persky sentenced Stanford University student Brock Allen Turner to six months in prison after he was convicted of sexual assault. While he was sentenced to six months confinement in jail, he served only three months and was released on probation. The public reaction to this case varied widely. The survivor published a twelve-page letter in which she recounts the painful details of her experience before, during, and after the assault, and fervently condemns Turner, the legal process, and the judge's verdict. Turner's father also published an open letter to the public asking for sympathy; he felt his son was being severely punished for "twenty minutes of action" (Turner). Hundreds of open letters responding to both the survivor and Turner were written, and campaigns to have Judge Persky removed were launched (Janovic; Stark; Ruiz). Turner's case exemplifies a legal system rigged to benefit upper-middle class white heterosexual men: Brock received an extremely light sentence because the judge was concerned about what incarceration would do to a bright young athlete. Such considerations are conspicuously absent when African Americans and other racialized people are on trial. Turner's privileged reality is the personification of what stands in the way of a more just society—that

is, a society in which women are safe from sexual violence and the law is fairly enforced and applied for the benefit of all people, not just those of certain races, classes, and genders.

At a time when cases like Turner's are engendering robust debates about sexual assault and the problems with the American legal system, it may seem inappropriate, perhaps even offensive, to publish a paper on a sub-genre of horror that has garnered controversy from its inception, namely: rape-revenge. Yet just as public media provided a space for productive debate about campus rape and sexual assault, mobilizing people to call for justice and systematic change, creative media can clear a space for the depiction and questioning of cultural values and norms. Due to its intense and often critical focus on rape, rape revenge is especially well suited for interrogations of cultural understandings of sexual violence and affirmation or disavowal of gender, race, and class norms as they relate to sexual violence. Rape-revenge films feature rape, a period of stabilization and rehabilitation, and then revenge for the rape; because of this, they offer an opportunity to transform cultural understandings of sexual violence as spectators are encouraged to identify with the rape survivor and encouraged to disidentify with rapists. In what follows, I argue that *I Spit on Your Grave*, both Meir Zarchi's 1978 original and Steven Monroe's 2010 remake, engage elements of class, race, and gender in their depictions of rape, rape victims, and rapists, and in doing so complicate easy denunciations of the genre as one that exploits its subject. The films centre the experience of the rape victim and encourage spectators to identify with her—a feminist gesture—but they also portray rapists through classist and racist means, thus allowing racist, classist, and white feminist viewing pleasure to exist within the same film. Thus, *Spit* occupies a faux-feminist location, one that ignores intersections of race and class, and until it critically engages in sexual assault and politics of race and class, rape-revenge will not fully realize its potential as a productive intersectional feminist space. Before launching into this analysis, however, I place *Spit* in context, remarking its origins in 1970s

debates about violence and debauchery and providing a brief overview of its reception in 1978.

Genre and Reception

Spit was originally released under the title *Day of the Woman* in 1977, but it was released under its current title in 1978. *Spit* and most other rape-revenge films are categorized as "exploitation films." These films use lurid content, gratuitous violence, and overwrought sexualisation to titillate the viewer, features that tend to make them controversial. For example, of the original, Robert Ebert said it was "a vile bag of garbage … without a shred of artistic distinction" (Review of *I Spit on Your Grave* [1980]), and of the remake he said, "it works even better as vicarious cruelty against women" (Review of *I Spit on Your Grave* [2010]). Robert Ebert and Gene Siskel named *Spit* the worst movie of 1980 ("Worst of 1980") and concluded that it was part of a misogynistic reaction to the women's movement, designed to force women "back to their place" ("Women in Danger"). In the *Video Movie Guide: 1998*, Marsha Porter and Mick Martin call the film "tasteless, irresponsible, and disturbing" and refer to a revenge scene in which a rapist is castrated as one of the "most appalling moments in cinematic history" (704). In 1989, two *Time* articles pointed to *Spit* (1978) as contributing to violent crime (Fulfs 264). It is important to note that exploitation films are often not categorized as such by their makers but by the public, making the label somewhat of a moralistic value judgement. Nakedness may compel some viewers to denounce these films as examples of excessive sexualisation, particularly if the bodies in question belong to women, while other viewers may interpret them as examples of verisimilitude. These differences of interpretation form the basis of the controversy surrounding *Spit*: some viewers and critics like Martin, Porter, Roberts, and Ebert view the violence and rape as gratuitous and sexualized and condemn the film accordingly as exploitative misogynistic garbage.

In direct opposition to these dismissive platitudes is my view that the sub-genre offers an opportunity for profound social change in attitudes

toward rape. Others share my basic premise. Carol Clover, Julie Bindel, and John Irving Bloom, for example, are among those critics who see the violence and nakedness of *Spit* as an appropriate depiction of rape and, therefore, as a valuable—if necessarily flawed—contribution to the feminist anti-rape cause. Bindel argues that both versions of *Spit* surpass *The Accused*[1] in their depiction of a justice system that does nothing to protect women from sexual violence. Drive-in movie critic Joe Bob Briggs applauds the original 1978 *Spit* for its brutally realistic depiction of uneven power relations, which he sees as being in line with second-wave feminist beliefs that rape is about male violence and female oppression, and not sex. He writes:

> If you took Susan Brownmiller, Andrea Dworkin and Gloria Steinem, and asked them to come up with their worst-case version of the true nature of rape, it would probably look a lot like what happens to [the] Jennifer Hill[s] … No sexuality at all—just completely oppressive violence of man against woman.

Feminist film critic and scholar Carol Clover points out that the film's values are no more "'shockingly misplaced' than those of a great deal of critically acceptable mainstream film and video fare" and that the film appreciates "the way in which its brutal simplicity exposes a mainspring of popular culture" (116). The controversy surrounding the original film and the momentum gained after the release of the 2010 remake, which led to two sequels, only adds to the richness of the *Spit* films as cultural objects for analyzing the politics of rape representation in popular culture. In examining the race and class intersections present in the films' depictions of rape, I complicate these reductive dismissals as tasteless, concluding that their class, sex, and race codes tell a much larger story about dispossession and marginalization in the United States.

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[1] *The Accused* is a 1988 film in which perpetrators of a gang rape are brought to justice by the testimony of a male witness who did nothing to intervene in the rape itself. In *The Accused*, a man obtains justice for the woman and a man is a credible witness when a woman is not.

The Axes of Spit*: How City-Country Codes Complicate Gender Politics*

My own analysis builds on Carol Clover's, developed throughout Chapter Three in her 1992 book *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*. She characterizes the 1978 *Spit* as a hybrid horror film that combines rape-revenge with the city-country sub-genre (115). The city-country sub-genre, which includes franchises such as *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977 and 2006) and the parodic *Tucker and Dale vs. Evil* (2011), feature city people who visit the country and are attacked by the people who live there (124–125). It is helpful to see the city-country sub-genre as having two axes: an overt class axis and a racial axis that underpins the class axis. Seen in this way, it becomes readily apparent how the rape revenge sub-genre adds more tangles to the existing intersectional snarl through its incorporation of the codes associated with the city-country sub-genre. Clover argues that rape revenge films feature a focalized sexual confrontation between members from different gendered groups: a masculine person or group rapes a feminine or feminized person, and after a period of rehabilitation, the raped individual seeks revenge, often in the form of torture and murder (114, 129).[2] City-country codes, however, complicate this gendered confrontation.

The overt class axis of the city-country sub-genre pits city folk against country folk, practically guaranteeing that spectators will identify with

[2] I use broad characterizations like these purposefully. The individual who is raped is not always a woman, but is always feminized. Clover reads *Deliverance* (1972) through this lens. In films like *Irreversible* (2002) and *The Last House on the Left* (1972), men related to the raped woman avenge the attack. Moreover, as Carol Clover argues, in horror, as in life, gender proceeds from performance rather than sex, but gender performance in horror is often not straightforward. For example, high numbers of horror movie killers perform their sexuality and, indirectly, their gender though weapons and violence (57).

the former and distance themselves from the latter. City folk in these films are typically represented as hygienic, well-mannered, law-abiding, wealthy citizens, while country folk are represented as dirty, poorly socialized, deviant and, above all, poor brutes (125–126). Clover points out that class indicators are often located in personal grooming, commenting that "[i]f city men are clean shaven … country men sport stubble. Likewise teeth; the country is a world beyond dentistry" (125). These characterizations of the country align spectators with the city folk, so much so that Clover describes the city folk as "people like us" and country folk as "people not like us" (124). This suturing of spectators to city folk has troubling implications: spectators are discouraged from implicating themselves in rape through enjoyment of the film's rape sequence and encouraged to suture themselves to the rape survivor.

Attesting to the complexities of the city-country sub-genre on which the rape revenge garners much of its materials, this binary opposition begins to fall apart as it becomes clear that the city folk are responsible for the poverty in the country, often in the form of land or resource depletion by large corporations. This oppression is merely a privatized version of the same colonial project that robbed Indigenous peoples of their lands and lifestyles (134). Although outwardly concerned with white individuals engaged in gender and class conflict, the story that the city-country reiterates film after film is one that makes available an allegorical reading: the city folk who arrive in the country are akin to settlers. The violence that ensues when the country folk attack the city folk can then be understood as a response to a perceived invasion: the brash city folk enter the country, armed with a sense of superiority, show off their affluence. Their very presence is an affront to the country folk's poverty and relative powerlessness in the face of urban capitalism. Race is just as important as class as a register of (dis)identification in this scenario. I suggest, as Clover does, that the race sub-axis of the city-country genre represents a rebranding of the American Western in an era when the Western has largely fallen out of favour for its overt racism. In both the Western and the rape-revenge

film, settlers in the former and city folk in the latter are complicit with the denigration of the country and its folk (134–137). The difference between these genres lies in the extent to which Indigenous peoples are visible: Westerns depict their death and dispossession explicitly, while one must read the death and dispossession of Indigenous peoples into the rape-revenge film, which rarely features Indigenous-coded characters yet maps attributes normally associated with such characters onto the country folk themselves (136). It is an easy transition; the stereotypes associated with Indigenous peoples, the rudimentary English, the dirty bodies and clothes, the primitivism, are superimposed onto the redneck, whose presence now comes to stand in for Indigenous people (136). Clover points out that "the great success of the redneck in [their capacity to stand in for the Indigenous people of Westerns] suggests that anxieties no longer expressible in ethnic or racial terms have become projected onto a safe target—safe because it is (nominally) white and infinitely displaceable onto someone from the deeper South" (135). The superimposition of caricatured Indigenous attributes onto country folk makes it doubly difficult for spectators to identify with them. On the surface, the encouraged disidentification with the same folk who rape and pillage the city folk in turn seems like a good thing: it would be difficult, if not impossible, to find anything redeeming in a genre that encourages spectators to identify with rapists. At the same time, however, the slick transposition of the Western's "redskin" and the horror's "redneck" is highly problematic because it codes racial others as rapists and encourages spectators to take pleasure in the annihilation of thinly coded Indigenous figures. These figures also confirm racist fears of the racialized man as sexually violent and in need of annihilation lest city women have to endure such brutal attacks. Hybrid rape-revenge/country-city films like *Spit* can be read as colluding with the Western's racist depictions of North American Indigeneity. In this reading, their alignment of the spectator with the rape victim is as a *white* feminist gesture, not an intersectional feminist gesture that recognizes that progress without the inclusion of all races is not progress at all. Thus, while rape-revenge films offer a potentially productive space for progress regarding sexual assault, its

productivity will never be realized until the classist and racist elements are stripped away.

Close Analysis 1: Spit (1978)

The gendered confrontation of the rape-revenge genre and the two axes of the city-country sub-genre are at work in *Spit* (1978). The protagonist, Jennifer (played by Camille Keaton), is highly feminized in her gender presentation: her red dress and high heels, her long flowing hair and white breasts all work to establish her femininity. The four rapists, Johnny (Eron Tabor), Stanley (Anthony Nichols), Andy (Gunter Kleemann), and Matthew (Richard Pace), are also clearly gendered: Johnny wears coveralls and leers at women; Stanley likes anything Johnny likes and throws knives at the ground for fun; Andy likes the jeans, no-shirt-and-suspenders look; and Matthew takes pains to let women know that he does not like women's things. They all, like Jennifer, present their gender through their appearance and mannerisms, but their heteronormative, aggressive masculinity is established most through their misogynist repartee. While discussing Matthew's virginity, a status apparently in need of change, Johnny remarks that they should "fix him up with a broad." Instead of referring to her by name, the men refer to Jennifer as a "broad," making it clear that they see her not as an individual but as an object of sexual arousal and conquest. In a move that classes as well as genders Jennifer, Johnny informs Matthew "New York broads are all loaded," a characterization meant to explain how she could tip Matthew so generously. Stanley chimes in with the assertion that New York broads "fuck around a lot." As if to confirm the inherent promiscuity of city women, Andy claims that he plans to visit cities like New York and Hollywood for unlimited sexual gratification.

From the outset of the film, Jennifer embodies the wealthy city folk trope. In the opening sequences, she emerges out of a New York high-rise in a dress and high heels, her bags carried by a bellboy whom she tips. She travels to Connecticut in her own car, nonchalantly paying for

gas and offering yet another tip. When Jennifer arrives at the cabin she has rented for the summer in order to write her novel, she orders groceries on the phone. Matthew delivers her groceries, and Jennifer responds by dishing out the third tip of the movie. She sarcastically calls herself "an evil New Yorker" after Matthew claims that New York is an evil place. The term "evil," however, is used against her once the rape portion of the film begins. The only thing the men know about Jennifer prior to raping her is that she is from the city; it is not Jennifer the autonomous author they rape, but their caricaturized idea of the city woman.

The men also embody the opposite; their stereotypical rurality is expressed most poignantly through their professions, which require little education or skill: Johnny is a gas jockey, Andy and Stanley are unemployed, and Matthew delivers groceries. As if to emphasize their lack of sophistication, Matthew is also cognitively delayed. His character represents an offensive conceptualization of the country folk trope.[3] All of the men perfectly embody the extremes of the country trope, investing their rape of Jennifer with class significance.

Woven into *Spit* (1978) is the race axis. When Andy and Stanley capture Jennifer, they shriek and holler, even performing tired stereotypes like mouth-tapping hoots and bird calls. They lasso her canoe and tow her into the woods, performing the kidnapped daughter

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[3] Although offensive, rape revenge and country/city horror commonly uses characters with cognitive delays or disabilities in the role of the country folk. Clover writes "the ubiquity of degenerate specimens is the material expression of family wrongness [referring to inbreeding as the cause]" (125). While it serves to illustrate the inferiority of the country folk, this demonization of people with disabilities contributes to the tendency to view such people as dangerous and assists in social and cultural ostracization. Representation matters, and in this regard, the horror films discussed in this article are doing an abysmal job at complicating the common narratives about people with disabilities.

trope in which Indigenous "savages" steal and molest "pure" settler women. In allowing the rapists to connote stereotypes about Indigenous peoples, Zarchi allows room for spectators to dismiss the rapists as vulgar, low-class hillbillies and to view them instead as practically savages. *Spit* marries the Western's "Indian" and the redneck, engendering a hyper-masculine figure so detestable that few, if any, spectators, would be inclined to identify. In this way the rape-revenge film discourages spectator identification with rapists and encourages identification with the victim, but also conveniently erases any implication of white, rich rapists like Brock Turner because the spectators have been so thoroughly discouraged from identifying with the rapists in terms of class *and race.*

The rapists, then, are poor redneck men who are othered, not just because of their low vulgarity but because of their 'savagery,' a trait that signals their status as substitute for the Western's "Indian." Since racialized others are often coded as hypersexual (Clover 136), it comes as no surprise that they attempt to reassert their dominance over the city oppressor through sexual violence. Clover points out that "resentment comes up in the attention paid to Jennifer's nice car and clothes and her generous tip" (129). Her wealth serves as motivation, but as Clover notes, the gang rape "first and foremost [has] to do with male sport and male pecking order" (122), which are displaced onto Matthew's virginal status. Matthew's status becomes the premise for raping Jennifer and the means through which the other men justify their own violence. After all, they are killing two birds with one stone; they are only helping a friend lose his virginity and putting a city girl in her place. This compulsion for dominance and masculinity is the fuel for extreme sexual violence, but the rapists cannot acknowledge this when faced with Jennifer's revenge. Each rapist attempts to pacify Jennifer by proclaiming their innocence and blaming others in the group. Even though all participate in her rape, none feel culpable. The rapists, perhaps like the spectator who might refuse to examine the possibility of toxic expressions of masculinity in the real world, do not comprehend the severity of Jennifer's rage or why she holds individuals accountable,

not races, classes, or genders. However apt it is to link dominance and masculinity as *Spit* does, it does not engage critically with the politics of race and class at play in how masculinity is presented. If intersectional feminists are to claim rape-revenge films as productive spaces in which to address rape, then race and class must also be addressed.

Close Analysis 2: Spit (2010)

In Monroe's 2010 version, the race, class, and gender dynamics are quite different as society now accepts classism more readily than racism. Gestures to race are more muted then those in the 1978 version, but the rapists' class is established with more vigour. *Spit* (2010) depicts rapists who embody stereotypical southern "white trash" and function as representatives of the most maligned group of white people in the Western world. Monroe also leaves out the hooting that recalls the Western's Indians in the woods. Given this, *Spit* (2010) constitutes a portrayal of rednecks that has been completely removed from the realm of ethnic and racial anxieties and is at an extreme end of the "infinitely displaceable" capacity of the redneck to be "from the deeper South" (135).

If Monroe is indeed exploiting this racial sub-axis of city-country horror, the rapists' scorned rurality seems to remark how willing we, as spectators, are to accept highly insulting and stereotypical portrayals of others and otherness when they are marked by class affiliation but reluctant to accept such portrayals when they are coloured by racial stereotypes. All the hate and anxiety once focused on the American Indian or the African American is still present but now focused on a white and therefore "safe" target. While a hyper-pronounced rurality stretches the limits of white trashiness, pushing the viewer to accept a caricature of humanity, it also caters to a white liberal brand of antiracism. *Spit* (1978) allowed for a release of racist pleasure by destroying the coded Indians who rape a white woman. However, *Spit* (2010) also allows for a release of racist pleasure but cloaks it in classist

pleasure by erasing the Indian coding and displacing it onto a white redneck. Until these racist and classist pleasures are removed from the rape-revenge genre, it remains rather unproductive.

In the absence of any overt racialized coding like hooting in the woods, Monroe's depiction of the rapists magnifies their vulgar, low-class rurality. The rapists' accents are more stereotypically pronounced, and their grammar is considerably worse. Johnny (Jeff Branson) even asks "What for you do that with?" when asking Jennifer (Sarah Butler) how she phoned the police. The rapists also sport more signifiers of southern American rurality, wearing camouflage and bearing the Confederate flag. Another expression of the rapists' class is their choice of leisure. The men go fishing, although not ordinary fishing like that depicted in the 1978 film, but rather, a brutish caricature of fishing: instead of a rod and bait, Andy (Rodney Eastman) kills a fish with a baseball bat. A new character, Sheriff Storch (Andrew Howard), introduces another rural activity: hunting squirrels and quail. Not only do these activities establish the men's rurality, but they also establish a senselessly violent rurality where things are killed for sport. That a baseball bat is used to fillet a fish only heightens the men's perversion of American pastimes and, by association, American masculinity. These men are so far removed from rosy ideals of learned and morally sound Americans that they do not even register as fully human for the city folk spectator. The level of disidentification available to the spectator is far too high for *Spit* (2010) to be seen as particularly productive for intersectional feminist causes. Without self-implication being available to spectators of all classes and races, rape-revenge will continue to fester in a marginal white-feminist status.

Yet another expression of the men's low class is their defensiveness about their own socioeconomic position and their aggression toward Jennifer *because* of her class. This is seen shortly after the rape portion of the film begins, when Johnny implies that Jennifer thinks she is "too good" to have a drink with them. "What are we to you?" he asks, "A bunch of dirt?" She drinks, but Johnny insists that he knows she "can

do better than that": "I'm sure when you're out there in the city with all your hoity toity city friends watching you can throw it back with the best of them, now can't you?" Akin to "little man syndrome" wherein men overcompensate for physical smallness with excessive aggression, bravado, or other facets of traditional masculinity, these men seem to have a "backcountry syndrome" that causes them to be highly defensive of their class. At times, this defensiveness eclipses the gender confrontation inherent in rape. Not only does this mute the gender confrontation inherent in rape—arguably a component of rape-revenge films that enables the genre to be deemed white feminist—but it also once again distances the spectator from any self-implication.

Another divergence from the original, and perhaps the most conspicuous, is the brutality of the rapes and the poetic justice of Jennifer's revenge. This poetic justice is in the details of Jennifer's post-rape treatment of the men. In the 1978 version, Jennifer, through seduction, convinces Johnny to drive into the wilderness with her. She pulls a gun on him and Johnny pleads for his life, blaming the others and Jennifer for his actions. Seeming to change her mind, Jennifer takes him back to her cabin, runs him a bath, and while stroking his penis, cuts it off and leaves him to bleed to death. Death by castration is undeniably violent, but not in the same league as the torture inflicted on Johnny in the 2010 *Spit* in which Jennifer ties him up, rips out teeth, forces him to fellate a gun, and castrates him.

The initial set-up remains the same: Jennifer briefly uses her body to lure Johnny as he approaches her from behind. Jennifer turns and clubs him with a crowbar. When he regains consciousness, Johnny discovers that he is naked and tied up like an unbroken horse: feet tied separately and the bit in his mouth tied to the rafters. It is fitting that Jennifer uses a horse theme for her revenge on Johnny. He calls her a show horse, demands to see her teeth like a slave buyer would do to a slave, and makes her whinny and prance. It is significant that Johnny treats Jennifer as a horse because it underlines their class identities: horses are tools of manual rural labour. Johnny, being a country man, could

have used horses. However, Jennifer is not just a horse, but a *show* horse; she is the city's useless perversion of what used to be the sole purview of country folk. Moreover, in characterizing Jennifer as a horse, he imbues her with all its associations. Just like a horse, Jennifer needs to be broken, ridden, and tossed away when she is no longer useful. Johnny's obsession with teeth is no accident either. As mentioned earlier, Clover points out that teeth have a special role in city-country horror as indicators of class. Jennifer's good teeth become an indicator of her city class and, cast in animal terms, Johnny can terrorize Jennifer about this class difference while reinforcing his identification with a low, rural class. So it is little wonder that when Jennifer exacts her revenge, she ties Johnny up like a horse. She demands to see his teeth, yanking on the bit in his mouth. She calls him an ornery stallion, then rips out three of Johnny's teeth, while repeating what he said to her when forcing her to fellate his gun: "No teeth show horse." She takes out a gun and forces him to do the same. Then she castrates him and puts his severed penis in his mouth, repeating "No teeth, show horse," literalizing his command to her during the rapes. In destroying Johnny's teeth, Jennifer re-classes him into a category in which she believes he belongs: the despicable toothless redneck. This class-based brutality attests to how class underpins *Spit* (2010), to such an extent that emphasis on sexual violence is reduced or obscured by class-based violence.

In the 1978 *Spit*, Jennifer kills Stanley with a boat propeller after terrorizing him in the lake, much like how he terrorizes her. However, in Monroe's 2010 version, Stanley (Daniel Franzese) is much more differentiated from the others than in the original: even before the rapes begin, Stanley films Jennifer while she is alone in her cabin. He documents every detail of their attacks, from what Roger Ebert calls their "rape foreplay" (Review of *I Spit on Your Grave* [2010]) to the rapes themselves. This aspect of the film is interesting; often the spectator looks at Jennifer through Stanley's camera. The spectator is doubly removed from the rape, but also made doubly aware that by watching the film they engage in behaviour similar to Stanley's**.** If this

knowledge itself is not enough to prompt a degree of criticism about the ethics of looking and spectatorship, then Jennifer's revenge returns the spectator to the implications of watching.

Jennifer ensnares Stanley in an animal spring trap that closes on his leg as he lunges toward her. When Stanley regains consciousness, Jennifer uses his camera to record his face as she repeats what he said to her upon breaking into her cabin: "Smile pretty for the camera." Monroe's camera zooms in for a full-face close up as Jennifer says "I know you like to watch; I'll give you quite a show." She is addressing Stanley, but through the proximity of the camera, she addresses the spectator as well. Jennifer condemns the voyeur, a point made clearer when she sets up the camera and flips the screen toward Stanley so he can watch his own torture. Jennifer puts fish hooks through Stanley's eyelids to hold them open, smears them with fish guts, and literally leaves him for the crows who arrive to relieve him of the tools of his trade: his eyes. The implication of those who watch is clear: if they took pleasure in watching Jennifer then they too deserve Stanley's fate as he is forced to watch his own death. Stanley and the implications of his death are firmly within feminist thought, especially in the advent of online misogyny and violence. Nevertheless, while the 2010 Stanley, his camera, and Jennifer's revenge firmly constitute a feminist gesture, the classism present in the film qualifies or even undermines the feminism of the film as a whole.

Perhaps the most violent and poetic of Jennifer's acts of rape revenge is her torture of Sheriff Storch. It is telling that the major addition to the 2010 version is a representative of the law, ineffective at protecting Jennifer and enacting any integrity. Moreover, the Sheriff has a pregnant wife and daughter. His life is full of women, and that does nothing to influence his treatment of Jennifer, suggesting that common rhetorical pleas for empathy by imagining that the crime was committed against a female loved one is wholly ineffective. Jennifer exploits the Sheriff's selective empathy when taking her revenge. She sends his wife a recording of the rape, poses as his daughter's new teacher and

uses her to lure the Sheriff away in order to ambush him. The Sheriff is an utterly damning portrayal of law enforcement and the larger justice system, a message consistent with what many survivors, activists, and advocates have been communicating for a long time (Hengehold 95; Giacopassi and Wilkinson 368).

Jennifer first encounters the Sheriff after escaping the other rapists in her cabin. As she flees through the woods, she runs into the Sheriff. Thinking she has found the safety of the law, she pleads for help and the two of them return to her cabin. Jennifer quickly discovers that he cannot be trusted, ironically by finding out that he does not trust her. This distrust of the victims of sexual violence is the basis of victim-blaming. The Sheriff questions her, then gropes her under the guise of patting her down for weapons. The other men return, clearly in league with one anther, and the gang rapes begin. When the Sheriff rapes Jennifer, he does so anally, professing to like it rough, calling himself an "ass man." To take revenge, Jennifer ties the Sheriff to a table leaned over, with his rifle in his anus. In the corner of the room is a figure in a burlap bag, and the Sheriff seems to think it is his daughter. Jennifer rapes him with the gun, reminding him that "I thought you were an ass man." She remarks that his daughter is so innocent and young, asking, "Can you imagine?" to which the Sheriff replies, "Imagine what?" Jennifer says, "Imagine if somebody had done something like this to her" as she thrusts the rifle into the Sheriff's anus: "Someone like Andy? Or Stanley? Or Johnny? Or more likely you?" The Sheriff begs for his life, reminding Jennifer that his daughter "is just a little girl." Jennifer replies "So was I." Jennifer clearly identifies the rape as something that destroyed anything child-like about her—happiness, trust, naivety, and a budding sense of independence. Those small words convey the effects of rape that those who victim blame would like to believe do not exist. Jennifer reveals the figure in the burlap; it is not the Sheriff's daughter but Matthew (Chad Lindberg). Jennifer ties a string from the trigger of the rifle embedded in the Sheriff's anus to Matthew's wrist. When Matthew regains consciousness and moves, the shot kills both the Sheriff and Matthew.

It is significant that the Sheriff's death, although orchestrated by Jennifer, is ultimately the result of the Sheriff's poor leadership of Matthew. Matthew, as in the original *Spit* (1978), is cognitively delayed and his rape of Jennifer is facilitated, encouraged, and applauded by the other rapists. Changing his virginal status is the entire pretence for the gang rape in the first place, but it is not of his will that these events unfold until he penetrates Jennifer. After the rapes, Jennifer confronts Matthew in the woods. He grovels before her, begging forgiveness, and professing that he did not want to participate.[4] Jennifer acknowledges this but ends the conversation by saying that none of that is good enough. His reluctance does not negate his crime. His reluctance, however, does earn him a few more hours of life and allows Jennifer to repay the Sheriff accordingly. It is through the Sheriff's "leadership" that Matthew raped Jennifer, so it is fitting that it is through his poor leadership, in the form of not being able to convince Matthew to remain still, that the Sheriff is killed and kills Matthew. *Spit* (2010) goes beyond simple blame and allows Jennifer a more thorough revenge that punishes the leader for the actions of the follower.

This eye for an eye justice or *lex talionis*[5] is exactly the kind of justice the city-country genre demands. The link between Jennifer's treatment of the rapists and the rapists' treatment of her could not be clearer in

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[4] Matthew is more than an easy way to acknowledge group dynamics; he could also be viewed as a sort of secondary victim. He is clearly traumatized by his own actions—he pukes directly after finishing and shakes in the woods, staring vacantly and jumping at any sound. He is accountable to Jennifer for his actions, but the line between victim and rapist is blurred by how the group of men taunt him into action, even pushing him on top of Jennifer. That Jennifer also punishes Matthew may seem harsh, but it implicates bystanders of sexual violence. Reluctance and intention means little when it does nothing to prevent sexual violence.

[5] *Lex talionis* refers to retaliation or punishment that corresponds with the degree or severity of the initial crime.

Spit (2010), nor could the link between torture and rape. Her treatment of the rapists addresses both their individual treatment of her and how their particular brand of masculinity can be exploited. Sheriff Storch is forced into the very position he professed to enjoy. Jennifer ensures that Johnny's mouth reflects his class. Stanley is forced to watch his own torture. Matthew was encouraged and harassed into raping Jennifer by the others, and so he dies by the failure of the Sheriff to convince Matthew not to move. By lethally returning their expressions of class and masculinity to them, Jennifer condemns not just the individuals but the behaviours they exhibited during the first half of the film.

Conclusion

Regardless of the brutality of the rapes or violence of Jennifer's revenge, it is unhelpful to engage in binary condemnations of either sexual violence, such as rape, or vengeful violence, such as torture and murder. Perhaps, as feminist scholar Susan Gubar states, *Spit* (1978) simply shows us what we need to know: "even independent women are vulnerable to sexual attack and how such abuse only breeds further violence" (731). While she finds no value in the film, her statement is true. Sexual violence can affect anyone and trauma tends to breed violence, but according to Western ideas of justice, each is responsible for one's own actions. Both the rapists and Jennifer are guilty of extreme violence, but the difference is that one group is supported by society and the law, while the other is systematically silenced and subjected to the will of the other and often forced to endure sexual violence without any viable recourse. In the case of the former, the rapists' actions are commonly dismissed, much like those supporting Brock Turner and his extremely short prison sentence. In a culture in which such injustice is allowed to persist, it is little wonder that there is such satisfaction in watching Jennifer take her revenge. This satisfaction, however, does not negate the fact that the film and other popular media that engage in depictions of such violence can, but often do not, explore this host of issues embroiled in sexual violence: that

both *Spit* films also allow, some may even say promote, racist and classist pleasure. In determining the ethics or helpfulness of the use of rape in popular media, one can easily ignore the race and class issues, looking instead at only the gender-based issues. Such an analysis is an exercise in an elitist brand of feminism that remains limited to middle and upper-class white realities. Examinations of *Spit* (1978 and 2010) allowed me to identify intersections of class, race, and gender in particularly stark terms; the rape-revenge and city-country hybridity of the films allow me to do so. This is not as easy with other media, and what remains to be analysed, then, is how other popular media use race, class, and gender in depictions of rape so that a roundly *intersectional* feminist critique of sexual violence can be sustained and disseminated. While merely a start, this offers a view of popular media that cares about addressing the depictions of racial, class, and gender difference.

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