

30 *Ibid.*, p. 250.

31 Also see John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990). Kasson suggests refinement of manners implied physical control of emotions; yet restraint of physical expression does not necessarily conflict with the pleasures in having those feelings.

32 This chart is indebted to a massive amount of research by many fine scholars.

I apologise to those I have failed to recognise in the following list: Denise Bielby and C. Lee Harrington, 'Reach Out and Touch Someone: Viewers, Agency, and Audiences in the Televisual Experience', in Jon Cruz and Justin Lewis (ed.), *Viewing, Reception, Listening: Audiences and Cultural Reception* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), pp. 81-100; John Champagne, '“Stop Reading Films!”: Film Studies, Close Analysis, and Gay Pornography', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 36, no. 4 (summer 1997), pp. 76-97; John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Methuen, 1987); Stephen Hinerman, '“I’ll Be Here With You”: Fans, Fantasy and the Figure of Elvis', in Lisa A. Lewis (ed.), *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 107-34; Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994); Helen Taylor, *Scarlett’s Women: ‘Gone With the Wind’ and Its Female Fans* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Jennifer C. Waits, 'United We Dish: The Construction of Reality in the Melrose Update Community', Popular Culture Association Conference, San Antonio, TX, March 1997; and the numerous papers from undergraduate and graduate students in the department of Radio-Television-Film at the University of Texas at Austin.

2 Genre and the Audience: Genre Classifications and Cultural Distinctions in the Mediation of *The Silence of the Lambs*

Mark Jancovich

In a recent article on *film noir*, James Naremore has commented on the difficulty of defining the term. This difficulty, he argues, arises because the definition 'has less to do with a group of artefacts than with a discourse – a loose evolving system of arguments and readings, helping to shape commercial strategies and aesthetic ideologies'.¹ Not only have understandings of *film noir* changed, but in the process specific films and film-makers have acquired different meanings in relation to the term. *The Lost Weekend*, once regarded as a central reference point in early discussions of *film noir*, has been completely excluded from later constructions of the field.

As Naremore argues, it is not so much the case that a group of texts simply exist in some relation to one another, however obscure that relation might be, but that 'the Name of the Genre ... functions in much the same way as the Name of the Author'.² He cites Michel Foucault's analysis of 'the author function' to substantiate the parallel between these systems of classification. For Foucault, the author function creates 'a relationship of homogeneity, filiation, authentication of some texts by use of others'.³ But this technique of classification does not simply identify some pre-existing essence. Instead, it produces what it purports to identify. It is the product of a desire and projection, of a need to believe that there is 'a point where contradictions are resolved, where incompatible elements are at last tied together or organised around a fundamental original contradiction'.⁴

As a result, and as Andrew Tudor has also argued, the pursuit of the 'Factor X' that defines a specific genre is both essentialist and ultimately futile. Naremore and Tudor both argue that genres are not defined by a feature that makes all films of a certain type fundamentally similar; rather, they are produced by the discourses through which films are understood. While Naremore considers how the meaning of the term *film noir* changes historically, Tudor defines the horror genre as 'what we collectively believe it to be', and sets out to study historical shifts in the patterns of those films understood to belong to the genre, and in the social concerns that have been expressed by and about them.⁵

Both types of work provide vital contributions to the study of genre and illustrate the point that genre definitions are not simply of academic interest, but have far greater currency and significance. Both also emphasise that genre definitions are produced more by the ways in which films are understood by those who produce, mediate and

consume them, than they are by the internal properties of the films themselves. The historical focus of these two critics tends to obscure one problem, however. Both authors presuppose the existence of a collective consensus – about the definition of particular genres within any given period. But such a collective consensus may not have actually existed. We need, therefore, to study not only how definitions of genre change over time, but also how they operate within the intense struggles between different taste formations that are present at a given historical moment.

Differences in taste are never neutral. The varying definitions of any given genre used by different social groups do not imply a pluralistic ideal of variety and heterogeneity. Ien Ang has observed that it is not the *fact* of differences but 'the meanings of differences that matter', and that these meanings 'can only be grasped ... by looking at their contexts, social and cultural bases, and impacts'.⁶ Issues of cultural authority and power are normally inextricably bound up with the conflict between different taste formations. Pierre Bourdieu has argued that virtually all forms of cultural practice and symbolic exchange, including taste preferences in dress, art or entertainment, give expression to prevailing systems of social and economic domination, and perform a social function by legitimating social differences:

taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar.⁷

Through such distinctions, and through the discursive positioning of cultural objects in classificatory hierarchies such as genre definitions, the classifier classifies himself or herself. Like other taste distinctions, definitions of genre are seldom free from evaluative prescriptions: both consumers and critics use systems of classification to articulate their preferences, exemplifying Bourdieu's argument that 'tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance ("sick-making") of the tastes of others'.⁸ When people with an antipathy towards horror films claim that the defining feature of the genre is visceral – 'blood and guts' – they also make a series of other implicit claims: that horror is sick, threatening and moronic in its appeal; and that they distinguish themselves from the people who watch horror films, who are by implication as moronic, sick and potentially threatening as the films they consume. Those making the claim represent themselves by contrast as reasonable, healthy and in a position to define what needs, in Andrew Ross's phrase, to be 'governed and policed as illegitimate or inadequate or even deviant'.⁹

Such conflicts over the definition of a genre occur among both its consumers and its detractors. There are at least three levels at which struggles over the cultural authority inherent in distinctions between genres take place among audiences. One cultural position identifies genre with popular film, and aligns itself with an art cinema which is either seen as 'free' from genre or else as subverting the genres of 'mainstream commercial cinema'. A second position does not reject genre *per se*, but instead constructs hierarchies of genre, by which *film noir*, for example, is likely to be seen as a more 'legitimate' genre than horror, or the western as more important than 'feminine' genres such as the romantic comedy. Even consumers of genres with low-cultural status will often find themselves in competition with one another. As Bourdieu has contended: 'Explicit

aesthetic choices are in fact often constituted in opposition to the choices of the groups closest in social space, with whom competition is most direct and immediate'.¹⁰ It is perhaps not surprising that those who seek to distance themselves from the consumers of a particular genre may have a very different sense of the genre from those who were either its untroubled, casual viewers or its enthusiastic fans. There can, however, be violent disagreements among the consumers of a specific genre over their respective constructions of the field, and this constitutes the third level at which struggles over genre definitions take place.

It is common for some horror fans to make a bid for greater legitimacy by distancing themselves from the denigrated image of the gory horror movie and its fans, and to privilege films, such as *The Innocents* (1963) and *The Haunting* (1963), that are said to work through 'atmosphere' and 'suggestion'.¹¹ In contrast, other horror fans, as represented by such publications as *Fangoria* and *Gorezone*, specifically privilege films of gory 'excess', and present the emphasis on 'atmosphere' and 'suggestion' as a 'cop out', an essentially feminised preference for the predictable, safe and untroubling.

In these debates, notions of authenticity often become central, with each group defining themselves as superior to other fans who are constructed as a mindless, conformist horde associated either with mass, middlebrow culture or with a lowbrow, illegitimate form. By the same process, each group distinguishes between the 'real' and 'authentic' examples of a genre and its 'inauthentic' appropriation. On occasions, this distinction becomes a matter of exclusion from the category. Within horror fandom, there are major disagreements over the status of films such as *Alien* and *Aliens*. For some horror fans, these films are included within the horror canon as works of immense importance, while others exclude them altogether, dismissing them as representing all the impoverishments of the science fiction film. Other groups distinguish vampire literature and films as separate from the general category of horror.¹²

Genres cannot, therefore, simply be defined by the expectations of 'the audience', because the audience is not a coherent body with a consistent set of expectations. Different sections of the audience can have violently opposed expectations. Not only can the generic status of an individual film change over time, it can also be the object of intense struggles at a particular moment. A film which, for some, may seem obviously to belong to one genre may, for others, clearly belong to another genre altogether.

A case in point is Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs*, which critics such as Jonathan Lake Crane and Carol Clover identify unequivocally as a horror film.¹³ For years, I have done so quite happily as well, but I have gradually come to realise that most of my present-day students find this classification bemusing. While I remember *The Silence of the Lambs* as the first horror film to sweep the major awards at the Oscars, for most of my students the film's status as an Oscar winner defines it as a 'quality drama' – a grouping frequently preferred by people who claim not to like 'genre films'. While this seemed puzzling to me at first, research on the film's promotion established that, even on its initial release, the distributors of *The Silence of the Lambs* had tried to negotiate a special status for the film as distinct from the 'ordinary horror film', capable of appealing to those who identified themselves as far removed from 'the horror fan'. The final part of this essay examines this strategy by analysing the cover story of the March 1991 US edition of *Premiere* magazine, 'A Kind of Redemption' by Fred Schubers.¹⁴

Before examining this article, however, it is necessary to engage with some of the insights provided by historical reception studies, an approach to the study of film that has placed particular emphasis on the study of subsidiary publications such as reviews, interviews and feature articles. Theoretical accounts of historical reception studies acknowledge that there is no 'immanent meaning in a text' and that 'receptions need to be related to specific historical conditions as *events*'.¹⁵ Janet Staiger, whose book, *Interpreting Films*, provides the most sustained conceptual elaboration of historical reception studies, is critical of types of film studies which assume that meaning is an inherent quality existing in the forms of the text. Staiger insists that meaning is produced by audiences on the basis of the knowledge and discourses they bring to the film, and that each interpretation is therefore an event, an act of meaning production. Reception studies must, therefore, reinsert the film into the system of social relations that sustains it, and analyse not only the material conditions of its production, but also what Bourdieu terms 'the symbolic production of the work, i.e. the production of the value of the work or, which amounts to the same thing, of belief in the value of the work' – a symbolic production undertaken by, among others, the agencies of publicity, criticism and the academy.¹⁶

According to Barbara Klinger, however, historical reception studies has exhibited a tendency

to concentrate on single practices within the original moments of reception. Thus, much of this research ... has not systematically explored the fuller range of effects that historical context might have on cinematic identity. Films clearly circulate beyond their encounter with any one institutional or social sphere. How can we conceive of the relationship between history and cinema to address this more extensive sense of circulation, to examine the issue of meaning in a *comprehensive*, that is, transhistorical, transcontextual manner?¹⁷

Klinger also emphasises the need to look not only at how the meanings of a film change over time, but also at the different meanings which a film can have within a specific time-period. Her work expands the horizons of historical reception studies, which has on occasion done little more than practise a historical version of reader-response theory, in which the task of the critic is to unearth the 'appropriate' competences necessary for the interpretation of films. While historical reception studies has been principally concerned to discover how audiences are 'expected' to fill in gaps within texts and what knowledge they are 'required' to bring with them to the interpretation of films, it has shown relatively little interest in the ways in which issues of taste produce not only different readings of a text within a given historical period, but conflicts between the proponents of these different readings.

Klinger's work suggests that it is also necessary to strive for a more complex and nuanced understanding of historical receptions, and the competing discourses which make them possible. In practice, historical reception studies has relied on the analysis of published materials such as reviews, on the grounds that other evidence is often unavailable, while acknowledging that the public status of these artefacts makes them suspect. In her article on *The Silence of the Lambs*, for example, Staiger refers to reviews as *traces* of the event, as ways of reconstructing reception events, while also using them

to identify the discourses that *produce* these events. Other critics have seen reviews as providing very different kinds of evidence: Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, for example, point to the agenda-setting function of reviews that may not tell 'audiences what to think so much as ... what to think *about*'.¹⁸ As part of the process of contextualisation by which interpretations are framed and incorporated in struggles between different taste formations, reviews cannot be read as giving automatic or unproblematic access to the ways in which audiences interpret films. Any review, or any other act of criticism, is in itself 'an affirmation of its own legitimacy', a claim by the reviewer of his or her entitlement to participate in the process by which cultural value is defined and distinguished, and thus to take part not only in a legitimate discourse about the film, but also in the production of its cultural value.¹⁹ Reviews cannot, then, simply be taken as *traces* of readings, nor as providing a straightforward access to the discourses that produce interpretations; rather, they give a sense of the very different ways in which people are supposed to 'talk' about films. The importance of distinguishing between the activity of consuming films and the activity of talking about them is clearly demonstrated in Ien Ang's work on *Dallas*. She found that many of those who wrote to her were fully aware of the ways in which their consumption of the show could be judged by others, and constantly positioned what they said about the show in relation to a public discourse on the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate taste, and to what Ang calls 'the ideology of mass culture'.²⁰

Articles and reviews can most usefully be understood as one of the ways in which people learn to position themselves within hierarchies of taste. As Klinger contends, reviews

signify cultural hierarchies of aesthetic value reigning at particular times. As a primary public tastemaker, the critic operates to make, in Pierre Bourdieu's parlance, 'distinctions'. Among other things, the critic distinguishes legitimate from illegitimate art and proper from improper modes of aesthetic appropriation.²¹

Although Klinger is principally discussing the construction of hierarchies of legitimate taste, a similar argument can be made about the role of popular publications in constructing cultural hierarchies and proper modes of aesthetic appropriation in matters of popular taste. In both cases, reviews and feature articles set agendas for audiences by drawing attention to what is taken to be interesting or noteworthy about a film. They also reflect the differing attitudes of different sections of the media to varying taste formations. In the process, they focus their attention on different features and employ wildly different notions of cinematic value.

In her analysis of the reviews of Douglas Sirk's films during the 1950s, Klinger identifies three different and opposed taste formations in operation. The first, which she identifies as 'the liberal sources', routinely ignored mainstream Hollywood product in favour of an avant-garde aesthetic. The second shared tastes similar to those addressed by Universal's sales campaigns for Sirk's movies, while the third was associated with a broadly realist aesthetic related to the upper end of the middlebrow and the lower end of legitimate culture:

Appearing mainly in East Coast and otherwise urban periodicals and newspapers, these

reviews offered negative evaluations of Sirk's melodramas, in part influenced by a dominant canon of the time that endorsed realism in dramas. This general critical context supervised value judgements for drama, including the adult melodrama, that genre to which Sirk's films belonged at the time.²²

As Klinger demonstrates, reviews are products of specific taste formations, and also function specifically as gate-keepers or guardians of specific taste formations, mediating between texts and audiences and specifying particular ways of appropriating or consuming texts. As such, they are part of a complex process involving a series of media which we must recognise as neither monolithic nor monological. As both Klinger and Charlotte Brunson have shown, the different taste formations which underpin different publications will lead those publications to discuss films, and to address their own readers, in very different ways.²³ There are deep struggles not only *between* many of the media but also *within* specific media. Newspaper and magazine reviewing, for example, embraces very different taste formations with very different agendas: one would hardly expect *Fangoria* or *Gorezone* to share the same terms of reference as, say, *The New Republic* or *Sight and Sound*; indeed, *Fangoria* and *Gorezone* share different taste formations from one another. Examining a range of publications addressing a variety of readerships will reveal very different interests and preoccupations in any given film, and even clarify the contexts within which these publications are themselves meaningful as texts.

Staiger's discussion of *The Silence of the Lambs* clearly demonstrates an interest in discursive struggles over meaning, but her analysis concentrates on reviews of the film in publications addressing a middle-class, educated intelligentsia: the *Village Voice*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *New Republic*, *New Yorker*, *Rolling Stone*, *Vanguard* and *The Nation*. Within this audience, which corresponds to the first of Klinger's three taste formations, debates about the meaning of *The Silence of the Lambs* had, by the film's fifth week of the release

solidified into a set of propositions: 1) that whether or not Jonathan Demme had intended to create a homophobic film, the character of the serial murderer had attributes associated with stereotypes of gay men; 2) that in a time of paranoia over AIDS and increased violence directed towards gays in the United States, even suggesting connections between homosexuals and a serial murderer was irresponsible; but 3) that the character of Clarice Starling played by Jodie Foster was a positive image of a woman working in a patriarchal society and, thus, empowering for women viewers.²⁴

The struggle that Staiger analyses is, however, also bound up with a debate over the film's cultural and generic status, a debate that was given particular inflection in the different media outlets addressing different taste formations. Attempts to emphasise the status of Starling as a 'positive image' often relied on distinguishing the film from the generic category of 'the slasher movie', while attacks on the film's supposed homophobia usually sought to associate the film with the horror genre in a manner that both drew upon and reproduced assumptions about the genre's status as an example of popular cinema. In contrast to many other critics, Carol Clover does not present *The Silence of the Lambs* as either a radical reversal of the sexual politics of the slasher movie, or as proof of the horror film's inherently reactionary nature. For her:

When I see an Oscar-winning film like *The Accused* or the artful *Alien* and its blockbuster sequel *Aliens* or, more recently, *Sleeping with the Enemy* and *The Silence of the Lambs*, and even *Thelma and Louise*, I cannot help thinking of all the low-budget, often harsh and awkward but sometimes deeply energetic films that preceded them by a decade or more – films that said it all, and in flatter terms, and on a shoestring. If mainstream film detains us with niceties of plot, character, motivation, cinematography, pacing, acting, and the like, low or exploitation horror operates at the bottom line, and in so doing reminds us that every movie has a bottom line, no matter how covert or mystified or sublimated it may be.²⁵

It is therefore important to address the ways in which debates over the film's gender politics were bound up with issues of class taste and its legitimating functions, and it is this association which will be the focus of my analysis of Fred Schubers's article in *Premiere*.

When *The Silence of the Lambs* was released in the United States (on St Valentine's Day, 1991) sections of the press scrupulously avoided any direct association of the film with the horror genre. Many reviews established the film's association with horror, but then deflected or neutralised it. In place of generic classifications, reviewers deployed ambivalent adjectives: 'terrifying', 'brutally real', 'chilling', 'macabre', 'dark', and as having 'an atmosphere of Gothic gloom'.²⁶ Apart from this reference to the Gothic, the only generic identification I have been able to find in reviews and commentary published in mainstream, middle-class or quality publications describes the film as a 'suspenseful drama'.²⁷

The Silence of the Lambs was nevertheless associated with the horror genre in reviews which emphasised the 'ordeal' involved in watching the film in a manner that drew directly upon the traditional 'dare' of horror movie promotion. *Playboy*, for example, declared that: 'If you can handle it, *The Silence of the Lambs* is a paralysing suspense drama, the kind of movie to watch by peeking through your fingers ... Audiences are likely to sit tight ... and gasp with relief when it's over'.²⁸ *Premiere's* short review observed: 'If it's a choice between this and chocolates for Valentine's Day, the bonbons might be a better bet, but then again, *The Silence of the Lambs* promises to be so terrifying, you're bound to end up in your sweetheart's arms'.²⁹

The main strategy of many of the reviews is simultaneously to present the film as offering the pleasures associated with the horror movie – that it will be gripping, terrifying, shocking, etc. – while also legitimating the film through its distinction from the genre. This sense of distinction is constructed in two main ways: first, through claims about the film's aesthetic 'quality', and, second, through claims about its politics, which are generally defined in terms of feminism.

The first of these strategies can be seen in the article by Fred Schubers, published in *Premiere* in 1991, which tries to negotiate a position for the film by emphasising both the horrific nature of its material and the auteur status of its director, Jonathan Demme:

The zesty auteur of such recent light operas as *Something Wild* (which did have corrosive later stages) and *Married to the Mob* did not seem temperamentally ideal for novelist Thomas Harris's brutally real, often macabre version of a pair of serial killers who, respectively, skin and consume their victims.³⁰

The role of promotional materials in framing the film for reviewers before reviewers frame films for audiences is indicated by the striking similarity between this passage and one which appears in the *Playboy* review, which observes: 'Director Jonathan Demme, more often associated with lightweight fare (*Something Wild* and *Married to the Mob*), brings touches of dark humour as well as cinematic style to this adaptation ... of Thomas Harris's novel'.³¹ Both passages emphasise Demme's status as an auteur director who is to be taken seriously (so countering one problem) while also stressing that he is known for making light, likeable films (so countering another). On the other hand, they ignore Demme's background in 'exploitation' movies, such as the women-in-prison drama, *Caged Heat*, which he made for Roger Corman.

The Schubers article in *Premiere* also continued this project by presenting Demme's motivations for making *The Silence of the Lambs* as simultaneously aesthetic and political: 'If somebody had asked me if I would be interested in doing a movie about a young woman who goes after a man who mutilates and murders young women, I would have said absolutely not. But the people at Orion said, "We've got this script we're really excited about – just read it"'.³² Without any attempt at a transition, the article continues: 'Given the choice, says Demme, "I'd much rather see a strong story with a lead character as a woman than the lead as a man. Because the odds are stacked higher against the woman"'.³³ This again emphasises the 'horrific' nature of the materials while maintaining a sense that Demme was attracted to the quality of the script – its 'strong story' – and the presence of a female rather than a male lead, which is at the core of the film's supposedly feminist politics. While many discussions of the film suggested that the presence of a heroic female lead distinguished it from other horror movies, the slasher movie is usually characterised by the presence of a strong female hero, the figure whom Carol Clover identifies as the 'final girl'.³⁴ In plot terms, the presence of Clarice Starling as the heroic protagonist associates the film with the slasher genre, rather than distancing it.

Other distinctions between *The Silence of the Lambs* and the horror genre were constructed by invoking Demme's auteur status and emphasising his discreet handling of the film's violence. *The Time Out Film Guide* observed: 'Although Demme does reveal the results of the killer's violence, he for the most part refrains from showing the acts themselves; the film could never be accused of pandering to voyeuristic impulses' – a reference to the supposedly voyeuristic nature of the horror film in general, and the slasher movie in particular.³⁵ Once again, the message was clear: the film could offer the thrills of a horror movie without middle-class audiences either having to feel guilty or questioning their sense of their own distinction from that monstrous other, the troubling and disturbing figure of the slasher movie viewer.

The most overt and sustained way in which these distinctions were constructed, however, was through the star image of Jodie Foster. A particular construction of Foster's star image was used to legitimate the film as a whole and the character of Clarice Starling in particular. By presenting Foster in particular ways, Schubers's article endorses certain readings of Clarice as a character. This process also works reciprocally. Foster is presented as actively investing the character with meaning (strength) and in the process, her own star image and her credentials as an actor are re-established and given an explicitly political dimension. At one point, Schubers informs us that Demme had originally considered Michelle Pfeiffer for the part of Clarice; but that he had soon

changed his mind because 'feminist fellow-traveller Demme understood that [Foster's] commitment would give Starling the backbone the part requires'.³⁶

This notion of backbone, articulated through an emphasis on professional and political commitment, is central to the image of Foster constructed by the article. Her status as a serious actor is established through an account of her dedication to realism: 'In the service of authenticity, Foster spent several days simulating the life of a trainee



Jodie Foster as Clarice in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991)

at the FBI in *Quantico*.³⁷ Quite what 'several days' actually amounted to, and quite how 'authentic' it might have made Foster's performance, is not elaborated. Rather, the reader is supposed to relate this information to a concept of acting established through Method performance, demonstrated predominantly by male stars such as Robert De Niro and Dustin Hoffman, who seek to distinguish themselves from the supposed 'inauthenticity' of popular culture – an inauthenticity which is usually associated with feminisation – and to associate themselves with a masculine, legitimate culture.³⁸ In Foster's case, these notions of commitment and the suggestions of the work involved in constructing the star's performance are given a political dimension through the claim that the performance is itself an act of *political* labour. Some of the film's promotional material structures her performance as part of a broader struggle underpinning Foster's entire career, which arises from her personal and political commitment to feminism. As the *Premiere* contents page states, in *The Silence of the Lambs* Foster 'once again confronts the victimisation of women'.³⁹ This involves both a rereading of Foster's previous films, in order to present them as being a *commentary upon* victimisation, rather than simply (as could be argued) an *instance of* victimisation.

The suggestion that Starling is not just a victim but a heroic female character is used to establish the film's distinction from the popular. Schubers's article quotes Foster: 'What's great about this character is that her lot in life, as the hero, is to save the under-

dog, because she's lucky enough not to be the underdog anymore. I feel like there's never been a female hero who uses femininity as a warrior thing, and not like Rambo – Rambette – in underwear. This is not some male version of a female hero.⁴⁰ In saying this, Foster was trying to distinguish the film from a range of female action heroes, of whom the most famous is Ripley in the *Alien* films. Indeed, after the release of *Alien*, there were several references which associated Ripley with Rambo, most obviously in the word 'Fembo'.⁴¹ As a result, Foster as an actor was perhaps legitimated through an association with masculinity and realism, as opposed to the popular, the fantastic and the generic.

The title of Schubers's article – 'A Kind of Redemption' – emphasises the idea of Foster's performance as an act of feminist struggle. It derives from Foster's comment that

I realise that I play certain characters to redeem them. I think in some ways what my makeup is, and my lot in life, is that I've used fiction to save women who otherwise would have been spat upon or passed off, not paid attention to. To reverse a certain negative history. That's why I've always played those people, to make them human. It has reverberations in my life, how I feel about my family and how I feel about the literature I studied and the things that I do.⁴²

Schubers draws attention to Foster's education: her 'Yale major was literature (with a concentration on African-American works), Toni Morrison her thesis subject'.⁴³ Suggesting that Foster 'seems to see her work in *Silence* as the actor's equivalent of a slim, pithy novel', the article constructs another link between the film and legitimate culture.⁴⁴

Foster's observations on redemption establish a series of connections between her own status as serious artist and the character of Clarice Starling. The idea of redemption is linked to the religious association of the film's title: *The Silence of the Lambs* refers to the slaughter of the innocents and to the figure of the saviour, identified with Starling. References to her 'make-up' or her 'lot in life', however, also draw attention to the fated or psychologically compulsive aspects of her character. Starling's psychological 'make-up' and her narrative 'lot in life' are directed towards saving the women who are compulsively dehumanised by killers such as Gumb.

Foster's comments also refer to her own life and particularly the way in which 'I feel about my family'. Schubers stresses that Foster's family lacked a father and revolved around a strong maternal figure, while Foster herself supported the family financially throughout her childhood. This discussion of her family background presents Foster as the strong daughter: the brilliant young actress whose talent, intelligence and hard work rendered a male bread-winner unnecessary, combining ideas of female strength and independence with the image of Foster as a serious artist. For example, the supposedly semi-autobiographical features of her directorial debut, *Little Man Tate*, serve to establish her not only as a serious actress, but also as an auteur director through the supposedly personal nature of the material as well as through the 'sensitivity' of its handling.

Schubers's article presents the film as having all the pleasures of a horror film without threatening the self-image of those audience members who distinguish themselves from 'the horror fan'. Most significantly, it seeks to detach the film from the horror

genre's associations with voyeurism, misogyny and formulaic simplicity. At the time of the film's initial release, the quality press, much of the promotional material, and even the film's own *mise-en-scène* all sought to evoke an association with the terms 'Gothic' and 'terror', rather than horror.⁴⁵ These terms engage a familiar set of distinctions by which 'the Gothic novel' and 'the tale of terror' are not constructed as the other to legitimate culture (as they have been in other contexts) but rather are associated with legitimate culture through a series of distinctions in which 'horror' is constructed as their own other.

The mediation of *The Silence of the Lambs* illustrates the ways in which genre distinctions operate not to designate or describe a fixed class of texts, but as terms that are constantly and inevitably in a process of contestation. Imbricated in that contest are questions of cultural value, privilege and the authority to determine cultural legitimacy through the act of genre definition. Rather than horror having a single meaning, different social groups construct it in different, competing ways as they seek to identify with or distance themselves from the term, and associate different texts with these constructions of horror. In such circumstances, the definition of genre becomes, like the definition of the literary canon, both the site and the stake of contention as these groups compete for the legitimacy of their definition in order to demonstrate the legitimacy of their claim to cultural authority. As Randal Johnson comments, Bourdieu's analysis suggests that 'such struggles in fact constitute the dynamic of change in the cultural field', for what is always at stake in such struggles is the cultural authority to promulgate legitimate definitions of classification and cultural hierarchies.⁴⁶ From such a critical perspective, the reductive project of trying to define whether *The Silence of the Lambs* is a horror film or something else is replaced by the much more interesting tasks of interrogating how such a definition is constructed and contested, and examining what forms of cultural authority are at stake in the process of generic definition.

Notes

- 1 James Naremore, 'American Film Noir: The History of an Idea', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 49, no. 2 (winter 1995–6), p. 14. Naremore enlarges on his discussion in Chapter I of his book, *More than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 9–39.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid., p. 14.
- 5 See, for example, Andrew Tudor, 'Genre', in Barry K. Grant (ed.), *The Film Genre Reader* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), pp. 3–10; and Andrew Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1989).
- 6 Ien Ang, 'Wanted: Audiences. On the Politics of Empirical Audience Studies', in Ellen Seiter et al. (eds), *Remote Control: Television Audiences and Cultural Power* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 107.
- 7 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 6.
- 8 Ibid. p. 56.
- 9 Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 61.

- 10 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 60.
- 11 For a corroboration of this view, see Brigid Cherry, 'Refusing to Refuse to Look: Female Viewers of the Horror Film', in Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (eds), *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies* (London: BFI, 1999), pp. 190-205.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Jonathan Lake Crane, *Terror and Everyday Life: Singular Moments in the History of the Horror Film* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994); and Carol Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (London: BFI, 1992).
- 14 Fred Schubers, 'A Kind of Redemption', *Premiere*, US edition (March 1991), p. 52.
- 15 Janet Staiger, 'Taboo and Totem: Cultural Meanings of *The Silence of the Lambs*', in Jim Collins et al. (eds), *Film Theory Goes to the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 143.
- 16 Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed', in Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (Oxford: Polity Press, 1993), p. 37.
- 17 Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. xvii.
- 18 Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: Knopf, 1985), p. 90. This point is also discussed by Thomas Poe in Chapter 7 of this volume.
- 19 Bourdieu, 'The Field of Cultural Production', pp. 35-6.
- 20 See Ien Ang, *Watching 'Dallas': Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1985).
- 21 Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning*, p. 70.
- 22 Ibid., p. 71.
- 23 Charlotte Brunson, *Screen Tastes: Soap Opera to Satellite Dishes* (London: Routledge, 1997).
- 24 Staiger, 'Taboo and Totem', p. 142.
- 25 Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saws*, p. 20.
- 26 'Review', *Premiere* (February 1991), p. 12; Schubers, 'A Kind of Redemption', p. 52; 'Review', *Playboy* (April 1991), p. 24; 'Review', *Radio Times* (12-18 October 1996).
- 27 'Review', *Playboy* (April 1991), p. 24.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 'Review', *Premiere*, February 1991, p. 12. Compare this to the review of *Dr X* by James E. Mitchell in the *Los Angeles Examiner* in 1932: 'Take the girl friend and by the middle of the first reel she'll have both arms around your neck and holding on for dear life'. Cited in Rhona J. Berenstein, *Attack of the Leading Ladies: Gender, Sexuality, and Spectatorship in Classic Horror Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 60.
- 30 Schubers, 'A Kind of Redemption', p. 52.
- 31 'Review', *Playboy* (April 1991), p. 24.
- 32 Schubers, 'A Kind of Redemption', p. 52.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Amy Taubin, 'Killing Men', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 1: issue 1 (1991), pp. 14-18; Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saws*, esp. pp. 35-42.
- 35 *Time Out Film Guide* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), p. 666.
- 36 Schubers, 'A Kind of Redemption', p. 53.

- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1979) and *Heavenly Bodies* (London: BFI, 1987).
- 39 'Contents', *Premiere* (March 1991), p. 7.
- 40 Schubers, 'A Kind of Redemption', p. 52.
- 41 Harvey R. Greenberg, 'Fembo: *Aliens* Intention', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol. 15, no. 4, (winter 1988), pp. 165-71.
- 42 Ibid., p. 53.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Compare, for example, the 'Gothic' dungeon in which Clarice encounters Lector in Demme's film with Michael Mann's presentation of the modernist/postmodernist asylum in which Will Graham confronts Lecktor [sic] in *Manhunter*, a film based on *Red Dragon*, the Thomas Harris novel which immediately precedes *The Silence of the Lambs*.
- 46 Randal Johnson, 'Editor's Introduction' to Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, pp. 19-20.