

The New Femme Fatale in *Jennifer's Body*

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Abstract

This paper offers an analysis of Jennifer Check from Diablo Cody's film *Jennifer's Body* (2009). It argues that the character of Jennifer advances the concept of the *femme fatale* by exploring the ways in which she both adheres to and challenges the trope, ranging from her outward appearance, her duplicity and her relationships with other female characters. This is contextualised through an overview of the longer history of the *femme fatale*, touching on biblical figures such as Eve (Adam's wife), Lilith (the first wife of Adam who turned into a demon-mother) and Salome (daughter of Herod II who asked for the head of John the Baptist), and later characters such as Catherine Tramell from *Basic Instinct* (1992) to analyse the evolution of the trope in relation to different cultural moments. Additionally, the discussion emphasises the importance of the female re-appropriation of the figure, and differentiates it from the *femme castrice*. Finally, the paper establishes the new *femme fatale*, led by Jennifer Check, as a by-product of objectification and abuse that turns her into both victim and monster with a vendetta against those that made her.

Keywords: Jennifer's Body, evolution of the femme fatale, women in horror, queer femme fatale, femme fatale as a feminist figure

Who is the *femme fatale* fatal to? If audiences and critics agree on one thing, it is that she is incredibly alluring, regardless of the actress playing her. As described by Janey Place, the *femme fatale* plays 'the evil seductress who tempts man and brings about his destruction' (cited in Bronfen, 2004: 113). However, with time, the role of this figure has evolved, as the femme fatale herself now reflects on the cultural moment when she is created, and attitudes towards female empowerment and sexuality have changed.

The focus of this paper will be on Jennifer from *Jennifer's Body*, a 2009 film directed by Karyn Kusama, starring Megan Fox as Jennifer and Amanda Seyfried as 'Needy'. By analysing the film, this paper will explore how Jennifer alternatively adheres to and challenges the concept, and reveal how the *femme fatale* is terrifying because of what she says about the society that turned her into a monster. Furthermore, it will argue that the character today offers an alternative to the *femme fatales* of previous eras, and breeds retribution, exploring notions of sorority and trauma in a subversion of the post-feminist spin of the figure, and advancing the trope to answer the demands of a generation of audiences raised on feminism.

The *femme fatale* has a long history. Overall, she could be described as lascivious, lovely, lying and lethal. However, equally crucial is her relationship with men, exemplified by the way definitions of the character focus exclusively on the effect she has on the men that cross her path. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.; 'femme fatale' entry) puts it concisely: 'a seductive woman who lures men into dangerous or compromising situations'. Thus, this complex character is often reduced to little more than a plot element – an obstacle the male protagonist will either overcome or succumb to.

The figure was popularised in the 1940s and 1950s with the rise of Hollywood's *film noir* era, a dark, pessimistic genre full of murders, lies and punishments that was a symptom of post-World War II America (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2005; 'film noir' entry). These films featured a beautiful woman who got the male protagonist into all sorts of trouble – our *femme fatale* – who was then punished with death or incarceration for her transgressions (consequently, showcasing how the figure represented contemporary male anxieties about increasing female independence). However, the *femme fatale* is not limited to this era, and examples include biblical characters such as Lilith, Adam's first wife who supposedly turned into a demon-mother, and modern ones like Catherine Tramell from *Basic Instinct* (1992).

The tales of these fallen characters served as cautionary tales for women – rich in sub-text – and to discourage them from exercising independence; they did not want to end up ostracised or dead, did they? An example of this is the biblical tale of Eve, who doomed (wo)mankind by taking a bite

from the forbidden fruit, justifying the oppression of women for years to come. Moreover, Eve's initiative to bite the apple can be seen as an attempt to obtain knowledge that is not accessible, which is reminiscent of the struggle to become emancipated, a key point of the representation of female experience.

However, per Stevie Simkin, this act was viewed by the Church as proof that woman was 'the weaker one' (2014: 25), since Eve succumbed to temptation, showcasing how the punitive connotations ascribed to her were applied to the whole sex. These beliefs are still prevalent today in the Christian Church where women are not allowed to reach the same status as men, as per the Church's catechism, '*only a baptised man* validly receives sacred ordination' (First Nation Church, 2018; original emphasis). Consequently, one can observe how Eve was taken to represent the entirety of the female sex and her sin extrapolated accordingly and, in the exploitation of the *femme fatale*, that exposes how the figure can be employed with misogynistic intentions.

Additionally, readings of Genesis take the eating of the fruit as a metaphor signifying sexual intercourse between Adam and Eve (Veenker, 1999). Hence, Eve's role as a *femme fatale* is accentuated, since she brings about mankind's sexual awareness, for which she is punished with the pain of childbirth (and her children punished for the original sin). This is relevant since it poses woman as the instigator for sexual acts, justifying the man's sexual desires as a response to the woman's advances.

Likewise, the *femme fatale* also functions as 'a figure of the male fantasy', as put by Elisabeth Bronfen; she embodies 'both a fascination for the sexually aggressive woman, as well as anxieties about feminine domination' (2004: 106). This showcases the reason for the *femme fatale*'s popularity, and how she has been objectified and utilised per the patriarchal agenda, without any agency of her own. Explorations of the sexual appeal of the *femme fatale* have been conducted extensively, often in the form of religious or mythical paintings, which relied on the excuse of the retelling to gorge in the female nude in compromised situations. This is the case for Henri Regnault's *Salome* (1870), which underwent different identity changes before it became a religious piece, although the subject remained the same (Sully, 2010: 48-49). The product was always going to be a sensual, loosely clothed woman, but the religious allusion

justified it. In other words, the *femme fatale* was a loophole for men to see a woman in the nude, and obtain their [voyeuristic](#) pleasure, without the danger of being accused of indecency; this simultaneously kept female sexuality in check since all these women were sinners, damned for their actions. Although it dates to the salons of the nineteenth century, *Salome's* case remains relevant today as it is reminiscent of the attitudes towards 'leaked nudes'^[1] or 'revenge porn',^[2] where the reactions to both phenomena is all too familiar to the hypocrisy explored above. Therefore, one can observe how the *femme fatale* served (and serves) to justify the objectification of women, because of their perversity, linking their sexuality to sin and posing men as their prey.

On the other hand, and with the passing of time, *femme fatales* have been updated through a process of reimagining them as misunderstood feminist characters. A salient example is Lilith, the biblical first woman and wife of Adam. Lilith refused to submit to Adam, and fled Eden to become the mother of demons. As a result, she was punished by God, and she roams Earth killing new-born babies and mothers in revenge for her own murdered children (Gaines, 2020). A character that made people so uncomfortable that they doubly vilified her by sometimes attributing the fall of man to her, and claiming that she was the serpent, as is the case with Michelangelo's 'The Fall and Expulsion from Garden of Eden' (1509–10) and the poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti with his poem 'Eden Bower' (1869; Gaines, 2020).

However, with the rise of second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, the focus shifted to Lilith's fight for independence and the relationship she could have had with Eve, thus counteracting the damage caused by the representation of Lilith as a baby eater and mother killer, and reinforcing the importance of sorority as a means of strength. An example of this reimagining is Judith Plaskow's short story, 'The Coming of Lilith' (1972), depicting this bond between the two first women, joining them against Adam, and conveniently omitting Lilith's murderous facet. This, although apparently biased, simultaneously questions the intention behind those tales, proposing Lilith as the victim of a society where women are powerless and silenced. This way, one can see how *femme fatales* are humanised in this reimagining process, encouraged by the socio-political context that focuses on their victim qualities over their imposed monstrous ones.

The changes in the figure's characterisation varied, and the 1980s and 1990s saw the birth of the spider woman, a personification of male anxieties surrounding female sexuality; a reflection of [post-feminism](#), which Samantha Lindop describes as a man-made 'retaliation against feminism' (2018: 2). This version of the *femme fatale* is reactive, and tries to convince women that feminism is unnecessary. Subtler than the fallen women punished for their crimes, this reincarnation embodies the attributes of an empowered woman: she is socially and economically independent, successful and beautiful. Here is where the post-feminist *fatale* begins to work her tricks. As Lindop observes, these women present the notion that they are the ones who 'choose to portray themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their liberated interests to do so' (2018: 50; original emphasis). This problematises the character, and leaves the more attentive audiences feeling uneasy with this superficially powerful women, as they are simultaneously everything feminism wants and everything it stands against.

There are many ways in which this plays out in film, and one example is Catherine Tramell from *Basic Instinct* (played by Sharon Stone), who enthralls a policeman for the benefit of her serial killing. She exemplifies the post-feminist goal of making women think that objectifying themselves is their idea, termed 'subjectification' by Rosalind Gill (cited in Lindop, 2018: 50). Lindop comments on Tramell's character:

Femmes fatales such as Catherine knowingly use subjectification as a [...] tactic, enabling them to get what they want. This complicated the idea that woman [sic] are unwitting victims of a discourse that reconfigures misogyny and anti-feminism as empowerment and freedom.

(Lindop, 2018: 50)

This underlines the reason why this strand of *fatales* is so detrimental, because their 'tactics' seemingly yield results, and engraves this idea in girls' minds that if they attempt to fit into this male fantasy, they will obtain power. It is not that they are unaware of how anti-feminist this behaviour is, but rather that they take advantage of it regardless because they find these methods more effective, which puts into question the necessity of feminism.

This concept is supported in *Basic Instinct* by the portrayal of a victorious Catherine who single-handedly defeats the police department, and murders unscathed, securing her lust interest in the process. However, Catherine's character functions more like a plot element than a character. No explanation is given for her motivations, and most of the time that she is on-screen, she is naked or subjected to voyeuristic activities. She works as a male fantasy, an artificially crafted woman with an underlying, subconscious, post-feminist agenda. However, that fantasy of power ends after the camera turns off, as can be observed in the controversy surrounding Sharon Stone and the infamous interrogation scene, which is not too clear whether it was consensual or not (Sanguino, 2019).^[3] Hence, one can observe how even the actresses playing *femme fatales* are not safe from the objectification/subjectification of the figure, regardless of the superficial power they exude.

Other manifestations of the trope can be found in the emergence of the *femme castrice*. A relative of the *femme fatale*, it is a character who enacts revenge on her rapists in a violent manner that deals with masochistic male paranoia on the implications of feminism (Lindop, 2018: 114). However, unlike the man-made *castrice*, recent years have also seen a female re-appropriation of the *femme fatale*, where she comes into her own character in films that touch the complex, intimate and painful facets of the female experience. This is the case for *Jennifer's Body*; a film written by, directed by and starring women.

Jennifer's Body is a great example of the evolution, and redemption, of the *femme fatal* which demonstrates the potential for the figure when it is in the right hands. The story takes place in a town near Minnesota, in the US, where Needy and Jennifer go to high school. The two are childhood friends, despite their differences, crystallised in their positions within the high-school hierarchy: Jennifer forms part of the upper echelon, as a cheerleader, while Needy is resigned to her role as a 'band nerd'. One day, Jennifer is sacrificed in a satanic ritual by a band called 'Low Shoulder' who believe they will get fame in exchange for the death of a virgin. However, Jennifer lied to them about her virginity, so she survives the ritual and turns into an all-powerful demon that needs to feed on human flesh to survive. After several of her schoolmates go missing, and she finds Jennifer covered in blood in her kitchen, Needy begins to suspect Jennifer of being behind the murders. Finally, Needy kills her, after Jennifer kills Chip

(Needy's boyfriend), and Needy is then sent to a mental asylum. There, she discovers she has inherited some of Jennifer's powers from her bite during the fight and escapes the institution to murder the band members who destroyed her life.

This paper will now examine how Jennifer's character is in constant conversation with the figure of the *femme fatale*. It will look at her physical and sexual attributes, as well as her manipulative tendencies, and how she challenges the typical portrayals via highlighting her victim quality and focusing on female relationships. It proposes the *femme fatale* as a figure of retribution, stemming from a history of abuse that is inherited from woman to woman.

From the start of the film, Jennifer meets the requirements for the *femme fatale* – she is lascivious, lovely, lying, and (soon to be) lethal. At the bar, the pair go to watch indie rock band 'Low Shoulder', and Jennifer, who is underage, manages to get drinks by playing 'hello-titty' with the bartender (*Jennifer's Body*, 2009: 13:09–13:14), manipulating him through a self-objectification, reminiscent of the post-feminist *femme fatale* previously examined. Additionally, in this scene, the use of the light-hearted pun, problematised by its childish connotations, exemplifies how normalised this behaviour is in a society where young girls learn to sexualise themselves (seemingly) to their favour. These qualities are heightened after Jennifer is sacrificed and comes back to life as a literal man-eater. Suddenly, her presentation as a sexual being is more overt; for example, she preys on unsuspecting high-school boys by luring them in with her sex appeal, personifying the *femme fatale* in her combination of the sex and death drives that prove equally lethal and alluring. This concept is explored in Simkin, who emphasises the contradiction of this figure that excites both 'feelings of desire in the heterosexual male' and 'fear' (Simkin, 2014: 7) – something that is exemplified by the fact that these boys ignore the obvious warning signs because of the promise of sex with Jennifer. This additionally highlights the characteristic *femme fatale* strategy that takes advantage of the fact that men do not see her as a threat because of her femininity, and uses that to her benefit.

Moreover, drawing on the sexually charged representation of Jennifer, she further adheres to the trope by the queerness of her character. She kisses Needy in a long, private scene; a scene shot close-up, focusing on their

lips, highlighting the reciprocity of their feelings (*Jennifer's Body*, 2009: 1:00:17-1:01:01). Furthermore, Jennifer also makes references to their childhood, talking about previous slumber parties, 'We can play boyfriend girlfriend like we used to' (1:10:00), adding a new layer of depth to their relationship. Additionally, Jennifer later even says, 'I go both ways' when Needy exclaims, 'I thought you only murdered boys!' (1:30:442-1:30:46), a play on words that (again) link her sexuality and the people she kills, highlighting her **Eros** and **Thanatos** duality (Simkin, 2014: 7). This representation of bisexuality is recurrent within the figure of the *femme fatale* – especially in the later ones, such as *Basic Instinct's* Catherine Tramell – but is something that also occurs in older texts such as Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (2019). Apart from the problematic fetishising of lesbian relationships, this queer-trope is controversial because it associates queer women with killers, psychopaths and manipulators, highlighting the imposed deviance on queer figures. Additionally, as per Lindop, 'the fatale's bisexuality serves to intensify her discursive danger' (Lindop, 2018: 46). Furthering the correlation between these seemingly sexually liberated women and the male anxieties about female sexuality. Especially a lesbian sexuality that would both render men irrelevant, and threaten their claim on women, further destabilising the 'conventional gendered order' (Lindop, 2018: 68).

Additionally, Jennifer's queerness enhances the threat of the *femme fatale's* death drive due to the association of homosexuality with sterility that informs the representation of serial killers as queer in popular media. This is explored by Lee Edelman, who presents the building blocks of society as reliant on a future never to be witnessed by those creating it, a future symbolised by the figure of the 'Child', a future that can only happen through heterosexual reproduction, 'since queerness, for contemporary culture at large [...] is understood as bringing children and childhood to an end' (Edelman, 2004: 19). Thus, the very existence of people outside of heteronormativity poses a threat to society's survival, which is reflected in a queer, blood-thirsty Jennifer.

Lastly, this bisexuality, with heavy connotations of treachery, potentiates the *femme fatale's* duplicity. This hidden nature is another way in which Jennifer adheres to the traditional trope, as she conceals her powers and plays into the role set up for her. This is explored at various times in the film; the first instance of it being when Jennifer lies about her virginity to

the lead singer of 'Low Shoulder'. She thinks that is what he wants to hear and so morphs herself to match his expectations and desire. On this note, it is also interesting to think about how it was precisely the fact that Jennifer lied about being a virgin (thus concealing the true nature of her sexuality) that saved her from dying in the ritual. This implies that this adaptability, or acting, allows women to have some semblance of power in the patriarchy, as they decide what they are and what they are not. Conversely, there is a chance that Jennifer would have been spared if she had not lied, as her abusers would have looked for a more fitting victim for their sacrifice. In turn, this showcases how the threat of sexual predation goes beyond the victim's behaviour, as the predators retain their objective regardless of the girl, which poses this abuse as unavoidable.

To echo this, Jennifer attracts her victims by enticing them, laughing at their jokes and indiscriminately lying to them. She even does this with Needy's boyfriend Chip, whom she manipulates into thinking Needy cheated on him, and moulding her personality to his tastes (*Jennifer's Body*, 2009: 1:21:13–1:22:21). These are examples in which Jennifer, like the *femme fatales* before her, utilise their sexuality to lure in the unsuspecting male. Lindop dwells on this, equalling this tactic to a 'masquerade' where the *femme fatale* conceals her true nature to please the male gaze and 'subvert the law, along with the true nature of her disposition' (2018: 51). However, what could be taken for an efficient, empowering strategy, upon closer observation is revealed to be the only option left for women in a society that does not accept their sexuality as their own, and ensures that it is moulded to the male one. This reflection is impeded in post-feminist texts like *Basic Instinct* and the seemingly victorious *femme fatale*, happy with her existence, and implied and encouraged in *Jennifer's Body*, where Jennifer's victim status is highlighted.

This encouragement to question the necessity for these strategies is one of the ways in which *Jennifer's Body* challenges the trope of the *femme fatale*, but it is not the only strategy deployed to advance the figure. A key way in which this film differentiates itself is by its woman-centred plot – with two female leads, and a focus on the intricacies of female relationships and experience, touching on themes such as sexual abuse. There is no male hero to lead the action of the film, and although the *femme fatale* has villainous characteristics, the one to oppose her is

Needy. This is highly significant because it allows Jennifer to overcome the restrictions imposed on the figure as 'textually disruptive', or as 'the obstacle to the male quest' (Hanson, 2010: 216). She is a three-dimensional character and drives the action in the film rather than functioning as a plot device. Additionally, this text also challenges the traditional way the *femme fatale* trope is interacted with by grounding Jennifer's character and giving her motivations that make the audience see her as more than a 'stereotype of feminine evil' (Bronfen, 2004: 114). This can be seen in the film through the exploration of Jennifer's character that portrays her as more than a sexy monster.

At first, Jennifer is introduced as the stereotypical popular girl; she is mean and promiscuous, and does not incite sympathy. However, this is challenged when, after the audience has seen Jennifer disembowel several of her schoolmates, she reveals to Needy what 'Low Shoulder' did to her (1:02:03–1:09:10). This poignant scene, along with how Jennifer was lured into the van in a state of shock (18:17–18:50), and the fact that she asks, 'Are you guys rapists?' (1:02:19) has a strong impact on the audience, who realise the real-life implications of the scene, along with the fact that she was *forced* to become the monster she is. This scene, strongly reminiscent of sexual abuse, makes the audience sympathise with Jennifer, and even forget about the three people she has already eaten. This is achieved with the low angle, and point-of-view shot, showing the singer mid-stabbing, along with the close-ups on Jennifer's wailing face, chosen to provoke empathy in the audience by putting them in the victim's place. These techniques, characteristic of the horror genre, effectively allow the ritual to act as a stand-in for sexual abuse to discuss the effect this trauma can have on its victims.

However, it is worth noting that this film strays (or advances) the horror genre's tendency to gorge on the abused female body, using the cuts inflicted as an excuse to revel on the naked female form. Furthermore, the fact that this is only revealed after she is shown killing mercilessly showcases how the text intends to do more than impose the victim role on Jennifer, as so many horror films do (Chusna and Mahmudah, 2018: 11).

By proposing Jennifer as the product of male violence in a society where women's bodies are objectified, while simultaneously denying the viewer the chance to objectify and sexualise her brutalised body, and granting her

both power and a literal hunger for revenge, the text turns Jennifer into a complex character, with questionable goals that the audience finds itself empathising with, if they are not already rooting for her. In this way, *Jennifer's Body* challenges the apathetic, psycho *femme fatale* trope audiences are used to by presenting a young woman who has been hurt and is out for retribution, becoming, as Bronfen wanted to see, a *femme fatale* who 'has agency and is responsible for her decisions' (2004: 114), a character in her own right.

However, Jennifer's story does not end with redemption; she is killed by a weeping Needy, who stabs her in the chest, in a scene where the audience gets a glimpse at the thorough subjectification Jennifer has undergone, as she says, 'My tit', and Needy replies, 'No, your heart' (*Jennifer's Body*, 2009: 1:37:17–1:37:24). This humorous dialogue (representative of the film's prevalent tongue-in-cheek tone throughout) highlights how Jennifer was a victim of sub/objectification until the end, as the first thing she worried about was her breasts – exemplifying the awareness and internalisation of the male gaze. The scene is highly relevant because it showcases how Jennifer's character is a deliberate portrayal of the internalisation of the male desire, one that can only be overcome and defeated by women. This is exactly what happens in *Jennifer's Body*, as Needy embodies the [final girl](#)^[4] and defeats her friend, realising that Jennifer must die because she has been fully corrupted. Needy sees past the post-feminist tactics and understands that Jennifer's power is a by-product of abuse that does more harm than good. This idea is initially introduced after Jennifer tells Needy what happened to her and explains in a light-hearted tone how, for some reason, she did not die, even though it should have killed her – to which Needy, crying, replies 'Maybe it did' (1:07:00), acknowledging how this experience has killed the girl she used to know. Needy's remark also highlights the detachment Jennifer shows when recounting her murder, which could hint at a coping mechanism – Jennifer becomes this monster to keep on living. It is in this way that this film advances the *femme fatale*, by presenting Jennifer as an example of the effects of a society that hypersexualises women, objectifying and exploiting them, and directly challenges the post-feminist examples by showing her as a victim, regardless of the power she acquired.

It is because of this that Lindop missed the point when she comments that 'in spite of the empowerment afforded to young women such as [...]

Jennifer [...] female sexuality is ultimately expressed only to show how monstrous it is' (2018: 109). *Jennifer's Body* is not about the horrors of female sexuality, but rather about how it has been horribly abused for the benefit of the male gaze, and how the women – who have been represented as monsters – are actually victims trying to survive the aftermath of their violation.

Jennifer's death, and Needy's revenge, is highly significant. That last haunting shot of Needy leaving the murder site and staring at the security camera, right at the audience, is both threatening and knowing. It works in two ways, acknowledging the audience as accomplices, and threatening those who might not agree with Needy's actions. It claims unapologetic authorship to the horrors inside the hotel room. This is emphasised in the film by the brief use of a point-of-view shot where one of the band members seems to be filming, and the video goes static, signalling the beginning of the attack. Here, the use of point of view puts the audience in the shoes of the soon-to-be-killed killers, augmenting the threat of this figure of retribution. This chilling image represents another way in which *Jennifer's Body* advances the trope of the *femme fatale*, as it deals with the inheritance of trauma and the importance of sorority, thus directly challenging the post-feminist rhetoric that attempts to persuade women that this unity is unnecessary (Lindop, 2018: 158). The film makes it clear to the audience that women are inextricably connected by seemingly exploring the post-feminist goal of making women think of one another as competition, when Jennifer and Needy fight over Chip, and later debunking it when Needy kills Jennifer and is heartbroken. Yes, the two had a complicated friendship, but what was important was that they both cared for each other and had a deep connection. This is evidenced in the film by the psychic link that unites the two, and by which Needy senses Jennifer murdering Colin (55:06–55:45), and Jennifer kissing someone and realising she is going to kill Chip (1:24:35). This bond is finally cemented in the text when Needy inherits Jennifer's demonic powers and decides to avenge her friend – even after Jennifer had killed her boyfriend and tries to kill her, demonstrating how she understands that Jennifer was a victim. To this extent, *Jennifer's Body* advances the figure of the *femme fatale* by showcasing the need for female solidarity, and the persistence of trauma that is inherited from woman to woman, and will keep passing down until the source of the harm is dismantled.

Lastly, it is through this inheritance that the *femme fatale* turns into a figure of retribution. Jennifer is reborn in Needy, which challenges the traditional effect of the *femme fatal* and her aftermath. Bronfen explores how, even though in the course of each cinematic narrative, the *femme fatale* loses her power both on the diegetic level (she dies) and on the visual level (she falls into shadows, diminishes in size, has no voice-over of her own), the disturbing power she embodies remains through the end (Bronfen, 2004: 113).

Hence, one can see how the passing of the torch to Needy in *Jennifer's Body* represents an advance of this trope by making this 'disturbing power' indestructible, even after Jennifer's demise. Needy becomes a reincarnation of Jennifer's anger, and it is in the process of dealing with this monster that she can overcome her mousy façade and come into her own strength. This growth is shown in the film by the way Needy carries herself, and even in her appearance when, at the end of the film, she loses the glasses and lets down her hair, obtaining a more mature look that connotes her mental development. This can be interpreted as the positive effect of the *femme fatale*; she is a personification of abuse, breathing and impossible to ignore. She forces people to face the products of a society they are enabling, and, in the case of women like Needy, realise that they cannot allow it to continue any longer. In this way, it could be argued that *Jennifer's Body* also represents the *femme fatale* as necessary, despite its more problematic features, for a wider reaction against the exploitation and objectification of women.

In conclusion, *Jennifer's Body* advances the trope of the *femme fatale* by presenting Jennifer as both victim and monster and humanising her through her experiences and motivations. She is still identifiable as a *femme fatale*; however, in this case, rather than being out for blood just because she can, the *femme fatale* terrifies because she is man-made and turns her power against those that hurt her. Jennifer offers a look into the nature of trauma, and its inheritance, achieved in the text with Needy. At the same time, this allows the text to comment on the importance of sorority and the complicated nature of female relationships, a point a lot of *femme fatales* miss. Consequently, one can observe how this film advances the trope and makes it more relevant to the events today, which explains its current popularity and the initial failure this film had when it was released. The production team, presumably male-dominated,

marketed it to college males because of Megan Fox's feature (ET Live, 2019). Both the production team and the male teens saw Fox as nothing other than a 'sex bomb', completely obviating the plot and the sub-text, performing the objectification the film denounces and justifying the need for *femme fatales* like Jennifer who make the issue impossible to ignore. *Jennifer's Body* presents an updated version of the *femme fatale* in a reclaiming of a figure that was employed as 'a symptom of male anxiety' (Bronfen, 2004: 114) and giving her voice and agency. The need for *femme fatales* will hopefully diminish with time, but right now, Jennifer represents one of the best examples of the figure: a character who is fed up with the abuse that has been inflicted upon her and becomes fatal to those who created her.

Notes

[1] Photographic material where a person (usually a woman) is shown in the nude. These are sent privately, and when they are shared, they become 'leaked'. There have been a lot of famous instances in which the victims were actresses and models, which sparked interest among audiences who scrambled to get a look at these pictures.

[2] Similar to the above, this tends to be more sexually explicit material that, like the above, is shared without the permission of the persons involved.

[3] Allegedly, Stone was not aware of what the audience would see in the final version of the film. She did agree to the scene because it made sense for the character, but she said that she would have appreciated it if Paul Verhoeven (the director) had showed her the scene as millions of people would later see it at the movie theatre. When she saw the final version, she slapped Verhoeven and asked him to get rid of the scene. He refused (Sanguino, 2019).

[4] A figure in the horror genre, particularly slasher films, the 'final girl' is the female character that escapes and defeats the killer after all her friends perish.

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Glossary

Trope: a recurring theme or motif (in literature or art).

Femme castrice: a female figure who enacts violent revenge on her rapists.

Post-feminism: a reaction to the feminist movements of the 1970s that argued that feminism had become unnecessary.

Voyeuristic: relating to voyeurism, the practice of obtaining sexual gratification by looking at sexual acts (mainly secretively).

Eros: the ancient Greek god of physical love and sexual desire, it stands in for the libido.

Thanatos: an ancient Greek personification of death, also functions as the death instinct (expressed in violent aggression).

Final girl: trope in horror films, it refers to the girl who survives the killer in a slasher film.

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