

## “To the Next Level”: Castration in *Hostel II*

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The following seeks to apply Freud’s theory of castration to the castration scene in Eli Roth’s *Hostel II*. Doing so, this article will explore Freudian interpretations of castration, the representation of castration in the film, and the meaning of castration in various historical contexts. Freudian theory posits castration as the ultimate loss, and this claim has, in turn, frequently, influenced the presuppositions of horror film criticism like that of Stephen Neale, Peter Hutchings, Robin Wood, and Barbara Creed.(1) Many scholars claim that horror films feature images of figurative castration, but others point out that these movies rarely depict literal castration. I will argue, however, that *Hostel II* provides an instance of literal castration full of figurative meanings. I will argue that preceding its literal castration scene, the film foregrounds the penis and relates main characters in relationship to it, but the film also stresses the difference between having a penis, in the Freudian sense, and having phallic authority, in a Lacanian sense. Eventually, the film’s female protagonist, Beth, exercises phallic authority by literally castrating the already figuratively castrated male antagonist, Stuart. Climaxing the film with this scene, *Hostel II* denigrates the penis, but this is not the same as denigrating male phallic authority. In many ways, this denigration of the penis actually constructs a higher form of non-penile phallic authority venerated throughout history. I will show how ancient eunuchs, medieval celibates, and Renaissance castrati enjoyed more power than uncastrated men. Similarly, men in the Digital Age may find more phallic authority, a Lacanian type of symbolic power, in the non-penile astral body than the penised body of Freudian psychoanalysis. Likewise, men in *Hostel II* seek authority not by drawing power from their penises but by casting their penises aside. Faced with the threat of castration, they choose to figuratively castrate themselves, reject the penis’ power, and search for male phallic authority through what I call a penis-less “castral body” that is uncastratable and, therefore, invincible. With these claims, the following article will argue that *Hostel II* reflects the extent to which castration may not signify ultimate loss as much as ultimate gain.

### **Castration Anxiety**

Sigmund Freud’s theory of castration anxiety has left an indelible mark upon psychoanalytic theory. He claims, “When a male child first turns his curiosity to the riddles of sexual life, he is dominated by his interest in his own genital” to such an extent that he finds it hard to “believe that it could be missing in other people whom he feels he resembles so much.”(2) According to Freud, at some point children learn that boys have penises and girls do not. He claims that young males assume “little girls too had a penis, but it was cut off and in its place was left a wound.”(3)

This thought fills male children with the fear that they may one day lose their penis, determining “the boy’s relations to women: horror of the mutilated creature or triumphant contempt for her.”(4) As the embodiment of this realization, women become a locus of fear, a castrated symbol that stirs up male castration anxieties. Conversely, Freud claimed that when girls learn that boys have a penis they lack, they experience penis envy. As such, the girl who catches a glimpse of a penis fears she has already lost hers, and “she develops, like a scar, a sense of inferiority.” (5) With castration anxiety or penis envy, Freud claims both boys and girls learn their sex in relationship to castration. As such, the penis becomes the locus of identity, the source of sexual differentiation that separates boys from girls, uncastrated from castrated.

Freud’s analysis of castration anxiety and differentiation has had a tremendous influence on the interpretation of horror films. In *Genre*, Stephen Neale claims monsters are the defining figures of the

horror genre, filling audiences with both pleasure and anxiety. What causes this ambivalent reaction? Neale claims that “the horror film—centrally concerned with the fact and the effects of difference—invariably involves itself in that problematic and invariably mobilises specific castration anxieties.”(6) The castration anxieties that allow children to learn the difference between boys and girls also permit horror film audiences to appreciate the difference between monsters and humans. In this sense, Neale claims the monster figure taps into the castration threat “to entertain it, to produce it in the coherence of a process, as a filling in, something which, given the specific articulation of the problematic of castration, involves an equally specific set of interrelated instances of fetishism.”(7) The monster’s difference conjures up castration anxieties that frighten audiences, but horror films do not press this fear too far.(8) Neale claims horror films overcome the dangers monsters embody by turning them into fetishistic spectacles: the monster that represents the lack also “functions to fill the lack with its own presence, thus coming to function as a fetish.”(9) Given the frequency with which horror films use the monster to both evoke and assuage castration threats, Neale claims that “the problematic of castration underpins the horror film.”(10)

This claim that castration anxiety is central to horror films, however, has its critics. For example, in *The Horror Film*, Peter Hutchings bristles at the argument that “the horror genre is primarily concerned with anxieties about castration.”(11) He points out, “One obvious problem with focusing on castration as horror’s key problematic, the issue with which it is supposed to engage, is that, in terms of its narratives, horror is a remarkably castration-free zone.”(12) While psychoanalytic scholars claim that castration is important to these movies, Hutchings insists that, “in literal terms, it is barely there at all.”(13) Critics who claim otherwise substitute their lack of “literal” castration with readings of “figurative” castration, reading gruesome acts like decapitations, eye-gougings, teeth-pullings, and dismemberments as forms of figurative castration. (14) Hutchings’ claims construct a dichotomy between literal and figurative castrations and side with the former, insisting that “castration *per se* is not a major feature of the horror genre.”(15) Critics who analyze figurative castration, he argues, validate “the oft-repeated criticism of psychoanalytical interpretations, namely that they read too much into the films in question, manufacturing significance rather than discovering it.”(16) According to Hutchings examinations of literal castration discover significance while examinations of figurative castration manufacture it, relying on psychoanalytic metaphors to insist upon something that “is barely there at all.” (17)

Despite Hutchings’ claims, the horror genre has provided instances in which castration is “literally there.” Among them: *Last House on the Left* (1972), *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978), *Night of the Demon* (1980), *Cannibal Ferox* (1981), and *Santa Sangre* (1989). In 2007, Eli Roth provided another; writing, directing, and producing *Hostel II*. The torturous blood bath pits Beth (Lauren German), an art student traveling Europe, against Stuart (Roger Bart), an American suburbanite who travels to Slovakia to torture her. When the tables turn and Beth has the upper hand, she grabs a pair of scissors, cuts off Stuart’s penis, and flings it to a pack of dogs. With this scene, *Hostel II* obviously provides an exception to Hutchings’ claims. No need to resort to figurative castration here; we can discover significance instead of manufacturing it. Unlike, Hutchings, however, I do not assume analysis divides so neatly between figurative castration and literal castration. The following article will seek to reconcile these two camps. While Hutchings criticized psychoanalytic scholars for using tenuous instances of figurative castration to make arguments about the meaning of literal castration to the horror genre, the following will do the opposite, using *Hostel II* as a way to understand what literal castration means figuratively.

### ***Hostel II***

Long before this literal castration scene, the penis figures prominently throughout *Hostel II*. Prior to introducing its protagonist, the film begins with a shot displaying nothing but a penis, a frame dedicated solely to the disembodied male member that visually represents its centrality from the beginning. From this image, the film reveals the three main characters narratively and visually in relationship to the penis. As the camera widens out, revealing an art class on the streets of Rome and the nude model to whom the penis belongs, it cuts to Whitney (Bijou Phillips) barely sketching as she gazes upon the penis lustfully. Lorna (Heather Matarazzo), in a daze, does not sketch at all, gazing upon the penis adoringly. Beth, however, focuses on drawing, beyond lust and adoration, as she sketches the penis dispassionately. With this sequence, the film introduces its trio of main characters in relationship to the penis. Here, as in Freud's analysis of castration anxiety, the penis becomes a symbol of sexual differentiation, separating the male model and the female artists sexually responding to him. The penis, however, also functions to differentiate the "sexual characters" of these three women.

First, this sequence establishes Whitney's relationship to the penis. Whitney mocks Lorna for never having seen a "cock" prior to the art class. Doing so, she uses the penis as a sign of sexual differentiation that even separates women. On one side stand Whitney and all the other women who have seen a "cock." Seeing real penises authorizes them to mock women who have not. Granted authority from this relationship to the penis, Whitney becomes a flat character defined by her pursuit of heterosexual intercourse. As the stereotypical nympho, she perpetually scans the crowd for men, a reaction to the penis that makes her susceptible to danger. Flirting with a man at the spas, she lets down her guard long enough for henchmen to kidnap her, and, in the end, Whitney is tortured and killed because she responds to the penis lustfully.

Second, the initial sketching sequence establishes Lorna's relationship to the penis. Having never seen a "cock," she is subject to Whitney's insults. This scene represents her as naïve and immature. She lacks not only the model's penis but also Whitney's experience with penises. Sexually deprived, she comes to embody the introspective woman who takes more pleasure in her journal than men, the sexually repressed female who gazes lovingly at penises she does not pursue. Established as the saint of the trio, her desires become asexual. The second someone spikes her drink, however, love leaps to the surface. She immediately falls for a man who kidnaps her, and, ultimately, Lorna is tortured and killed because she responds to the penis lovingly.(18)

Unlike Whitney, Beth is not filled with lust by the penis, and, unlike Lorna, she does not become enamored with it. In the initial drawing scene, she remains focused on coldly sketching the penis like any other artistic object. The film later echoes this detachment from the penis as she perpetually steers Whitney from acting upon her lust and Lorna from pursuing love interests. As she prevents them from chasing suspicious men, Beth seems more interested in the safety of her friends than heterosexual desires. These moments represent Beth as maternal and dispassionate, but on the way to Prague she breaks character and expresses genuine rage: In a train car filled with threatening men brandishing cigarettes, knives, and sexual aggression, the girls try to back away until they are physically accosted. Wrenching free, Beth and Whitney make their escape to safety until one of the men shouts after them, "I knew you were a tease, you fucking cunt!" With nostrils flaring, Beth barges back into the danger-filled room, shouting, "What the fuck did you call me?" The trio of armed men rise, but Beth does not flinch, glaring at them with clenched fists, ready for a fight until Whitney drags her away. Retreating, Beth apologizes, blaming her uncharacteristically irrational actions on being called a "cunt." "I hate that word," she explains. But this scene suggests more of Beth's relationship to the penis. The Italians display aggressive machismo. By calling the women "cunts," they also reduce women to orifices for sexually gratifying

penises. With the word “cunt,” men flaunt their uncastration, trying to remind Beth of her castration, but she refuses to venerate the penis or the men who have one and dares to fight back. In this scene and many others, Beth survives where the other women die, because she regards the penis dispassionately.(19)

The fourth relationship to the penis emerges in the figure of Stuart. While he does not appear in the sketching scene, he first enters sometime later sitting at a silent breakfast with his wife surrounded by books, a sun porch, and finger-paintings. He answers the phone to Todd (Richard Burgi), a friend and alpha-male, explaining that he has purchased Beth for Stuart to torture. As fantasies of torment whirl in Stuart’s mind, his wife exits wearing a power suit. As her authoritative heels click out of the house, he dares a frightened glance in her direction before expressing joy. Able to torture another woman but unsure how to escape his wife, Stuart stammers, “I’ll tell her I have to meet a client.” With this sequence, the film suggests that although he has a penis, Stuart does not enjoy the power traditionally granted to subjects with one. His wife wears the business attire, she makes the money, and she is the one with the power in the relationship. He is reduced to sneaking around the world behind his wife’s back, risking his finances, marriage, freedom, and safety to torture Beth. While Stuart may be literally uncastrated, he is also emasculated. In the end, he is compelled to torture and kill, because he seeks to figuratively reclaim his penis.

### **Phallic Authority**

The opening sequences of *Hostel II* establish main characters in relationship to the penis but do not reveal these characters in relationship to phallic authority. In Freud, the penis becomes the source of authority in patriarchal society, filling women with penis envy and a sense of inferiority. In “The Meaning of the Phallus,” however, Jacques Lacan claims the source of authority is not the penis but the phallus. This phallus is not a sexual organ but a signifier in the symbolic order that makes language, culture, and social interaction possible. (20) The relation of the subject to this symbol of authority is, Lacan claims, “set up regardless of that anatomical difference between the sexes.”(21) While feminist theorists like Luce Irigaray have accused him of carrying the same phallocentrism as Freud, others like Judith Butler insist that in Lacanian theory, one can have phallic authority without having a penis.(22) In “The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary,” she claims, “The phallus symbolizes the penis; and insofar as it symbolizes the penis, retains the penis as that which it symbolizes; it is not the penis.” (23) According to Deborah Luepnitz, “Lacan would always speak of the phallus not as a thing [like a penis] but as a position through which different objects circulate.”(24) Following claims that the phallus is different than the penis, Robin Wood claims that phallic authority in horror films defies anatomy. In “Brian De Palma: The Politics of Castration,” he claims penis-less women can become “usurpers of the phallus” through four avenues: positions of authority, the voice, the look, and, most relevant to our purposes here, money.(25)

In *Hostel II*, a film where people pay to torture and murder others without consequence, wealth becomes a signifier of phallic authority one can own irregardless of whether or not one owns a penis. Regarding the case of Stuart and Beth, the phallus of wealth becomes more authoritative than the penis as the film suggests that their genital configurations have little to do with their phallic authority. In Wood’s reading of horror films, “possession of money equals possession of the phallus.”(26) This seems to be the case in *Hostel II* when Whitney reveals to Lorna that Beth’s mother died when she was twelve and left her everything, enough to “keep her dad on an allowance.” Castrated, Beth would be doomed to subjugation, but the fortune she inherits from her mother reverses this destiny.(27) Able to keep her control not only her own money but her dad’s, this castrated woman can dominate her uncastrated father. Through money, this penis-less woman can even control the man whose penis produced her. Conversely, while patriarchal

society grants uncastrated men phallic authority, Stuart defies the norm. He lives the life of an “emasculated” man, submitting to his wife’s power. She has the money in the relationship, and he works for her. In this way, money becomes the phallus by which she controls Stuart. Instead of dominating his home as the owner of a penis, he is dominated by his wife, the woman who actually owns the house. To help recapture his masculinity, Todd pays for him to fly around the world for everything from brothels in Thailand to the torture chambers of Slovakia. Here, one can both lose and regain power not through the penis but the phallic authority that money provides.

Eventually, Stuart and Beth, two characters who defy anatomical relationships to phallic authority, clash. Inside the torture chamber, Stuart finds Beth semi-nude, shivering, and hooded. Slinking into the room, he scans the power tools awaiting him and sighs. He surveys a syringe and contemplates using it before removing Beth’s cloak and identifying himself. He insists, amidst sweat and tears, that he will not kill Beth and that Todd pressured him into coming, but he cannot torture her. Unable to execute his cruel plans, he begins to plot their escape as he holds Beth in his arms, and she whimpers, “They think you’re going to kill me, but you’re not some monster.” Looking into her horrified eyes, Stuart, the good suburban husband and father can only agree, repeating the cliché slogan “I’m not ‘that guy’”...before punching Beth to the ground.

Beth awakens to Stuart tying her with chains. “Don’t you have a family?” she pleads. “Don’t you have a wife?” Stuart responds, “My wife? My wife? I’m not allowed to kill my wife.” One of the Elite Hunting Group representatives interrupts to reveal that Todd could not finish torturing Whitney, and, therefore, has been killed. Stuart shrugs off his friend’s death and swiftly agrees to pay extra to finish Whitney off, hacking her to death with a machete. Returning to Beth, bloody and thrilled, he barks, “Notice anything different about me. I bet you fucking do. Fucking bitch.” His macho language quickly deteriorates into a series of statements addressed to Beth but directed at his wife. “Fucking respect me now. I don’t fucking work for you!” he yells. “I don’t work all fucking day for you to humiliate me. To tell me I’m shit. Never fuck me.” The logic of Stuart’s rant suggests a relationship between torture and sex: because he could not use his penis on his wife, Stuart used his phallic machete on Whitney. Deprived of penile stimulation, he prepares for the non-penile stimulation of torturing Beth.

Seeing this coming, Beth evades torture by tempting Stuart with genital gratification. Flattering his emasculated ego, she references the previous night when they crossed paths at the festival: “I was hoping you would kiss me. I wanted you to kiss me. I thought about you all night.” The sexual advances seem to work as Stuart commands her to get on the floor. Here, Stuart’s desire to torture turns into his desire to rape. Hovering over her, Stuart says she better be scared, and Beth claims, “I am. I like it.” At the point of penetration, however, Beth fights Stuart off and when the dust settles, Beth holds a swarm of gun-wielding guards at bay with pistol pointed at them and a pair of scissors gripping Stuart’s penis, a fact revealed in close-up. To end the stand-off, Sasha, the Elite Hunting Group’s leader, tells his guards to shoot both Beth and Stuart. She stops him short, however, by declaring that she wants to buy her way out. The proposition captures Sasha’s attention, but he quickly dismisses it, assuming the phallic authority of family riches belongs to Beth’s father as he mocks, “You going to call your parents for money.” To the surprise of all the henchmen in the room, she sneers, “No, motherfucker. It’s my money...I have accounts in Switzerland, Luxembourg, and the Isle of Man.”

Sasha agrees to the payment but insists Beth cannot leave without killing Stuart. Upon hearing these conditions, Beth reconsiders. Frozen with Stuart’s penis still in her grasp, second thoughts flash across her face; that is until Stuart taunts her, “They’re still gonna kill you, you fucking stupid cunt.” Suddenly,

a far off stare fill Beth's eyes, the same stare from the train, the same stare from when the Italian mob of men assaulted her. "What did you say to me?" she seethes. Defiant, beneath the subtle sound of rising strings and the zooming camera's enclosing frame, Stuart straightens up and yells, "You're a stupid fucking cu—!" But before he can finish the misogynistic insult, Beth clamps the scissors, castrating him. The threatening guards, even Sasha, every man gathered there shrinks against the actions of the young castratrice. Having faced the victimizing male, this woman usurps the phallic authority to fight back and kill her victimizer. (28) In a spray of spurting blood, Beth wrenches Stuart's penis and testicles from his convulsing body before taking them in her hand and marching out of the room. "Let him bleed to death," she says before flinging his genitals to the dogs. In this sense, Beth, using Wood's phrase, usurps the phallus. She literally castrates Stuart but can only do so because her wealth provides her the phallic authority to do so.

### **"To the next level."**

In his analysis of *Dressed To Kill*, Robin Wood relies upon Freud's castration theories, claiming that "men hate and fear [women] because as castrated they perpetually reactive childhood fears of literal castration, and because they may at any point reject their status as castrated and attempt to appropriate the symbolic phallus." (29) In this system where those who have penises have phallic authority, attempts by women to "possess the phallus is simultaneously perceived as a threat to castrate the male." (30) With this in mind, *Dressed To Kill's* villain, Dr. Elliot kills women in order to make peace with his desires to become a woman but "can view his femininity only in terms of castration." (31) Because he refuses to act upon his desire to cut off his penis, Dr. Elliot cuts women who sexually arouse it. Here, men who disavow their femininity kill women to prove their masculinity, and those who disavow their figurative castration figuratively castrate women. This leads Wood to conclude, "If the struggle for women's liberation is to be won, men must learn to relinquish [phallic authority] not in the name of liberal condescension and fair play but as an act that liberates them, too: in psychoanalytical terminology, they must learn to accept castration." (32)

At face value, the castration scene in *Hostel II* seems to do just that. Stuart can only view his wife's phallic authority as castrating. Refusing his "feminine" role, he tortures and kills women to prove his masculinity, and disavowing his figurative castration, he figuratively castrates women. In the end, Stuart is literally castrated by one of those women: the torturer is tortured, the murderer is murdered, the castrator is castrated, the villain is punished, and the heroine is saved. Because Stuart cannot accept his wife's phallic authority, he must lose his penis, and as he bleeds to death, the film suggests that those who cannot accept figurative castration face literal castration. According to Wood's logic, by doing so, the film relinquishes a false sense of penile entitlement and ushers in victory for women's liberation. By representing the horrors of literal castration, *Hostel II* invites male audiences to reflect upon the much less horrific and, as Wood claims, even liberating virtues of figurative castration.

Embracing male castration and female phallic authority proved a common theme in many 2007 horror films related to *Hostel II*. That year, the film's executive producer, Quentin Tarantino, also produced, wrote, and directed *Death Proof*, a film that turns the slasher film on its head, ending with the male serial killer of women hunted down and killed by a band of women. Robert Rodriguez's *Planet Terror* features Tarantino as Rapist #1 who attempts to sexually assault the film's female protagonist before his genitals melt. In *Hostel II*, even director, writer, producer, Eli Roth, figures himself into the iconography of castration: as Beth stumbles into Sasha's chamber of decapitations, a replica of Roth's severed head stands among the others.(33) With these examples, 2007 saw horror films that reversed the castration anxieties evoked in traditional horror cinema. Rather than using castration threats to frighten then

assuage audiences, restoring the penile phallic authority, these films reveled in castrations, parodying masculinity by assaulting the penis. Even male producers, directors, and writers of these films parody themselves with castration, creating spectacles around the demise of their own penises. With this, it would seem that these films answer Wood's calls, taking powerful steps towards accepting castration. But does this debasement of the male member help usher in the women's liberation Wood claims it does? In many obvious ways yes, but in many subtle ways that I will now explore, this denigration of the penis actually preserves the phallic authority of men by taking it to what *Hostel II* calls "the next level."

To further explore the veneration of male phallic authority through the degradation of the penis, one must first take a detour through the history of castration. In *Castration: An Abbreviated History of Western Manhood*, Gary Taylor claims Freud's castration theory does not refer to castration at all. While the father of psychoanalysis refers to penectomy, the severing of the penis, castration has historically meant orchiectomy or orchidectomy, the severing of the testicles. While Freudian focus on a historically rare form of castration has dominated scholarship from psychoanalysis to horror film analysis, Taylor claims, "Freud's theories about castration anxiety and the penis envy of castrated females can hardly be an accurate description of 'patriarchy,' because they misrepresent almost the entire history of castration and almost the entire history of patriarchy." (34) In "twentieth-century psychoanalysis, castration means loss, unequivocal loss, the epitome of loss," but in ancient societies castrated men had much to gain.(35) During a time when testicles were the source of male sexual identity, procreation the meaning of sex, and orchiectomy the purpose of castration, eunuchs occupied high places in society. According to Taylor, eunuchs who had their testicles removed could not reproduce, and, therefore, kings trusted them to guard royal harems. Because of this privileged position, eunuchs blurred the lines between man and woman, but also a division "even more fundamental for all ancient societies, the division between slave and free" as a "slave king." (36) In this context, castration did not signify loss but the only way slaves could gain freedom and power.

Beyond ancient times, the Medieval Era also viewed castration in positive terms. In "Sexual Mutilation and Castration Anxiety," Jacqueline Murray claims, "Castration and fear of castration, occupied a central place in theological, legal, and popular discourses precisely because it was a real issue for medieval men."(37) Christian men especially grappled with Matthew 19:12, the Biblical passage in which Jesus faces the multitudes and declares, "For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it." Considering this verse in his *Confessions*, St. Augustine claims, "If I might have more carefully listened to these words and, thus been made a eunuch for the kingdom of heaven's sake, I might have more happily awaited Thy embraces." (38) Many other Christian men would reflect on their ability to make themselves eunuchs for the God. Regardless of whether or not these faithful underwent orchiectomies, "castration continued to be presented as a positive metaphor for chastity and the individual's control over his disobedient genitals."(39) In this context, men exalted castration as a sign of spiritual power and loathed the genitals as "dangerous and irrational organs." (40) According to Murray, "rich medieval discourses on nocturnal emissions, spontaneous erections, and impotence" suggested the extent to which men felt genitals made them weak. (41) "Consequently," she claims, the penis, "the locus and symbol of men's patriarchal power was also the site of their spiritual weakness and physical vulnerability." (42) Making themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven, men also made themselves kings over women on earth. No longer were they subject to the sexual power women held over them; no longer would weak "men, dominated by lust, bec[o]me like horses or mules." (43) Freed from their genitals, they were freed from sexual desires and made invincible, because, as Murray claims, "a castrated

man was saved from lust and could resist women and sexual temptation.” (44) In the name of Christianity, chastity, and self-control, many medieval men willingly deprived themselves of their genitals, manhood, and humanity to pursue a life of power they could enjoy as a eunuch which they could not enjoy with a penis.

The male empowerment through castration found in the Medieval Era occurs during the Italian Renaissance as well. In *The Manly Masquerade: Masculinity, Paternity, and Castration in the Italian Renaissance*, Valeria Finucci claims, “Through the years there has been a persistent politicization of the grief that should have defined the psyche of men who were proscribed from the congregation of ‘regular’ men because of a cut.”(45) While this assumption stems from Freud’s theories of figurative castration, it does not reflect the historical realities of literal castration. She cites numerous examples in which “castrati laughed when people pitied their condition, given the obvious narcissistic and economic advantages enjoyed by the most successful among them.” (46) Freud and his followers may imagine castration as a lack, but the castrati lived lives in many ways fuller than uncastrated men. They achieved wealth as performers, prestige as singers in the church, and escapades with women seeking to have intercourse with men who could not impregnate them. With such a lifestyle, these castrated men usually had more financial, political, and even sexual power than other men.

Given these historical perceptions of castration as the key to power, many horror film scholars reconceptualize the castration anxieties supposedly central to the genre. In *Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Barbara Creed argues that horror films challenge traditional psychoanalytic interpretations of castration. She claims that Freud stresses women’s physical castration while Lacan emphasizes their castration in a symbolic sense.(47) The theories of both psychoanalysts claim women terrify because they are castrated, but Creed claims that such arguments overlook the extent to which women terrify because they might also castrate. She claims, “Freud takes refuge in his theory of woman’s castration” rather “than consider man’s dread of the imaginary castrating woman.”(48) In horror films, she argues, the *femme castratrice* is even more horrifying, because while “the castrated female monster is inevitably punished for her transgressions, the castrating woman—usually a sympathetic figure—is rarely punished.” (49) These films justify *femme castratrices* who seek revenge for being raped. For example, in *I Spit on Your Grave*, Jennifer (Camille Keaton) exacts her vengeance against Johnny (Eron Tabor), one of four men who raped her. After recovering from her wounds, she lures him back to her cabin with the promise of another sexual encounter, and in a bubble bath, she manually stimulates his penis before cutting it off. While gruesome, the scene does not elicit sympathy for the castrated man, because his spurts of blood and whimpers of agony fail to undo the images of him brutally raping Jennifer earlier in the film. In this way, the film’s narrative allies audiences with Jennifer as she castrates Johnny. Freud claimed women evoke male castration anxieties, but Creed claims that, in this cinematic moment, “it is the mutilated male form that evokes castration anxiety while the heroine is represented as the avenging castrator, the central protagonist with whom the spectator is encouraged to identify.”(50) In these filmic instances, Creed points out, “the castrated male body, not the female body, represents lack and absence.”(51)

Male audiences, however, may not identify with the *femme castratrice* as much as the male she castrates. Creed acknowledges, like Neale, that horror films rely upon the psychological structures of Freudian castration anxieties, but they do so in particular ways, by “playing on the spectator’s fascination with the relationship between sex and death—particularly for the male.” (52) Even in the scene from *I Spit on Your Grave*, male audiences may identify with Jennifer as she castrates Johnny, but, Creed claims, they can only do so after she ignites male sexual desire by telling him she enjoyed the rape. The knife hand

risers but only after the hand job in a sequence that, as Creed claims, offers “the spectator the promise of an erotic pleasure associated with a desire for death and non-differentiation.”(53) Combining sex and castration, Jennifer “arouses a fear of castration and death while simultaneously playing on a masochistic desire for death, pleasure and oblivion.” (54) The film eroticizes castration, leading Creed to claim that “the death scenes of the male victims offer a form of masochistic pleasure to the viewer because of the way they associate death with pleasure.” (55) Given narrative structures that not only justify castration but derive pleasure from it, Creed claims *I Spit on Your Grave* invites audiences to experience castration anxieties not as one of Freud’s primordial fears but as a primal “phantasy” on par with other fundamental sexual events like birth and seduction. (56)

### **Male Phantasy: Castration and Desire**

Constructing castration as a sexual phantasy, such films may also construct castration as an avenue to a different kind of male desire. To see how this may be the case, one must first contrast Freud’s notion of castration threats with Lacan’s notion of symbolic castration. Freud claims that during the phallic stage, a boy localizes sexual pleasure in the penis and becomes “dominated by his interest in his own genitals.” (57) In this stage of genital self-stimulation, the penis becomes the primary source of both sexual pleasure and vulnerability as the boy learns “that the organ which is so dear to him will be taken away from him if he shows his interest in it too plainly.” (58) Fearing castration, the boy overcomes masturbatory desires. Freud makes similar claims about the prohibitive power of castration threats in his theorization of the Oedipus complex. In his case study of Little Hans, he claims the boy showed aggression towards his father and desire for his mother, a desire the boy eventually repressed because of the idea of being castrated by his father. (59) According to Freud, the Oedipus complex would remain one of the primary sexual attractions in boys if it were not “broken down by the castration complex.” (60) In “Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes,” he claims that this incestuous attraction to the mother is not merely repressed but “is literally smashed to pieces by the shock of threatened castration.”(61) In both the case of masturbation and the Oedipus complex, Freud claims that castration threats prohibit certain objects of sexual desire.

In Lacanian thought, however, “symbolic castration” is an inevitable part of subjectivity that actually produces desire. He claims that the subject’s existence is unthinkable without the Symbolic, the linguistic realm that provides the word “I” to make one’s existence conceivable. The “Other” is a locus of meaning that makes language possible, but the subject eventually comes to imagine that this “Other demands his castration.”(62) Whereas the Freudian father threatens to castrate the boy who does not relinquish desire for his mother, the Lacanian Other admits subjects into the Symbolic order by separating them from their unbridled “jouissance” and imposing, instead, the permissible “Law of desire.”(63) By cutting away its limitless pleasure for more lawful forms, the self of the Symbolic order suffers a perpetual lack (manque), perpetually trying to recover the jouissance it has lost by pursuing objet petit a that inevitably fail to satisfy and spawn more insatiable desires.(64) Here, “symbolic castration” prohibits the subject’s jouissance but also produces the endless pursuit of desires that will never satisfy.

With symbolic castration, however, this chain of desires need not be sexual. Freudian theories of castration pose a threat against the literal penis, which assumes penectomy is the ultimate loss because penile sexual gratification is the ultimate goal. Symbolic castration, on the other hand, poses a threat not against the physical body, but the subject’s self-mastery. Symbolically castrated, the subject surrenders control of its jouissance, and entering the Symbolic world of language, the subject loses control of its ability to articulate its desire. Feminist theorist Jane Gallop suggests this much when she claims “castration for Lacan is not only sexual; more important, it is also linguistic: we are inevitably bereft of

any masterful understanding of language, and can only signify ourselves in a symbolic system that we do not command, that, rather, commands us.”(65) She further claims that “everyone’s inevitable ‘castration’ in language” means that no one can attain a “masterful grasp” of the language they inhabit.(66) If symbolic castration primarily threatens self-mastery, one must acknowledge the extent to which *jouissance* may connote much more than unbridled gratification of the penis; one must acknowledge the *jouissance* of self-mastery that might not be sexual and, for the male subject, might actually be at odds with penile gratification. The subject’s symbolic castration creates intersubjective networks, encouraging the individual to seek others that may fulfill its desires. With this interdependency, the Symbolic that allows the subject to articulate itself also makes self-mastery impossible. In the case of penile sexuality, the subject becomes dependent upon the others who can sexually gratify its penis. To fully disavow its lack, the subject seeks not a series of others that might finally satisfy its penile desires but the recovery of *jouissance* in which the subject lacks nothing and needs none other.

This seems especially so in the Digital Age where billions of dollars and innumerable minutes are spent on pornography that promises to fulfill the subject’s *jouissance* of self-gratification without the complications of desire that make one dependent upon others. In cyberspace, one can download the body of another for self-gratification without submitting the body of the self to the other. But the *jouissance* of self-gratification seen in the Digital Age is not solely based upon a masturbatory existence in which men gratify their own penises, a new phallogocentric technology that resonates with old Freudian theories of literal castration and Lacanian conceptualizations of symbolic castration. In fact, penile self-gratification may be another desire at odds with the *jouissance* of self-mastery. This may especially be the case in the Digital Age where literal castration may feed the sexual phantasy that one does not have to just police desire in a Freudian sense or submit to it in a Lacanian one, but can transcend it altogether. According to Lacanian theorist Slavoj Žižek, cyberspace allows users to transgress their bodies, to possess “another—ethereal, virtual, weightless—*body*, a body which does not confine us to the inert materiality and finitude, an angelic *spectral body*, a body which can be artificially recreated and manipulated.”(67) In this context of the spectral body, the physical body, even the penis, uncastrated body, becomes a hindrance, and, Žižek claims, the “penis, organ of urination *and* procreativity,” becomes less a sign of phallic power than a sign of powerless “self exposure,” an organ with which “our innermost self is directly externalized” and made “disgusting.” (68) Maxine Sheets-Johnstone makes a similar argument when she claims that the penis “gains unassailable stature and power” only if it “is protected, hidden from sight.” (69) “As an object perpetually protected from public view and popular scientific investigation,” she claims, “it is conceived not as the swag of flesh it normally is in all the humdrum acts and routines of everyday life but as a Phallus, an organ of unconditioned power.” (70) To keep its penis shrouded in mystery, the subject keeps it hidden from public view, but to keep its symbolic castration disavowed, the subject must also keep its penis hidden from private view. Freudian castration is a threat to make the penis absent, and the penis signifies fullness, the absence of castration. In Lacanian theory, however, the presence of the penis signifies one’s lack: as the source of uncontrollable erection, nocturnal emissions, and irrepressible passions, it becomes proof that the subject has been symbolically castrated, is subject to the Law of desire, is sexually attracted to and sexually dependent upon others. It is not enough to hide the penis from others so they cannot castrate it; the subject must also hide its penis from itself if it wishes to disavow the fact that it has already been symbolically castrated.

The subject can seek to evade both literal castration and symbolic castration through what Žižek calls the “astral body,” that supersensible being that comprises the individual, survives it after death, and allows the subject to exist without a body.(71) The penis, once the route to phallic authority, may now be an obstacle to it, a tie to be severed if one wishes to leave the disgustingly vulnerable body for the astral

body that enjoys self-mastery. With on-line buying and selling, meeting others, learning, encountering the digital world without the risks of the material one, this astral body experiences the ultimate in phallic authority: physical invincibility. This astral existence is available to men and women as everyone can hide their sex online, but for women already coded as castrated this disembodiment proves not as liberating as for men that are coded as castrate-able.(72) If the penis is a sign of weakness, a “swag of flesh” that can never live up to the power of the Phallus, then the male who relies upon the lie of the penis can leave the penis permanently hidden and shrouded in mystery by adopting the astral body. Phallic authority may no longer belong to penised bodies or penis-less bodies but the disembodied, and the subject made vulnerable by the penis, may seek self-mastery, the disavowal of symbolic castration, through literal castration. In the Digital Age, literal castration may no longer embody the ultimate loss but the ultimate gain, escaping the penised body that is vulnerable to castration and receiving the castrated body, uncastrateable and invulnerable. Contrary to Freud and Lacan notions of castration, the literally castrated subject may lack nothing and enjoy fullness, ceasing sexual desires, eliminating the final threat psychoanalysis can levy against it, and achieving the ultimate in phallic authority: self-mastery, castrating itself before others can, which makes castration threats and anxieties disappear. Rejecting the penis, the subject forsakes the penile desires that make one subject to others, the Law of Desire that proves one has been symbolic castrated by the Other, is disavowed. With such phantasies, the castrated body becomes astral or what I will call the “castral body.”

Phantasies about this castral body underlie *Hostel II*, phantasies most articulated through Todd, Stuart’s friend, who represents the film’s fifth relationship to the penis. As he jogs through the Slovakian village with his friend, Todd asks, “You remember the first guy in high school who got laid?” He goes on to claim the sexually experienced boy “just had something about him” that set him above his peers. In Todd’s mind, the genital actions of this young man compelled others to instinctively revere him: the penis has the power to exercise phallic authority over women, conquering them sexually, and actions of the penis have the power to exercise phallic authority over men, demanding their respect. Todd then links men who have lost their virginity with men who have killed: they do not have to act tough or declare their deeds, but when in the presence of a killer, “You know that this guy’s got the balls to do what few others can.”(73) Todd inserts himself into that category of alpha-males, phantasizing about how he too has the “balls” to torture women, and he imagines that by the end of the day his physical genitals will grant him even further phallic authority over others. Back in their hotel, hours from their torture sessions, he raises a toast “to the next level.” Then, they enter a brothel seeking penile stimulation one last time before they go to the torture chamber in search of non-penile stimulation. Once Todd’s Elite Hunting pager sounds, however, he quickly hurls the woman off of his penis, stopping his sexual act incomplete, depriving himself of genital gratification before moving onto that next level of gratification: torture.(74) At this stage, the penis becomes irrelevant, a thing that generates less pleasure than circling a bound and gagged girl with a radial saw.

In Stuart’s final moments, he oscillates between exercising the penis and exercising phallic authority. Before he attempts to torture Beth, he tries to rape her. Aroused by her submission, he foregoes the stimulation he gets from torture and attempts genital stimulation. With these final acts, the film emphasizes Stuart’s penis moments before taking it away, but the film spends most of its time emphasizing non-penile gratification. With Todd’s rhetoric about the next level, the film suggests a source of male phallic authority derived from something other than the penis. As he talks about having the “balls” to do what few others do, the film suggests that balls are figurative, not an issue of genitalia as much as power. In the prostitute scene, Todd gets his penis stroked but leaps at the prospect of stroking his own ego. As his pager sounds, the film places the penis at odds with phallic authority; either sex or

torture, penile stimulation or extra-penile stimulation, the penis or the phallus.<sup>(75)</sup> Faced with these choices, Todd and Stuart choose the latter. Doing so, they accept castration without accepting female phallic authority. Todd's response to Stuart's figurative castration? Do not accept castration; reject the penis altogether. Following Wood, these men seem to accept castration: by storming out of the brothel, they forsake the penile stimulation women can provide. At the same time, however, they reject castration: by storming into the torture chamber, they pursue a phallic authority over women that does not require a penis. Contrary to Wood's claims, accepting castration does not necessarily deliver a victory for women's liberation as much as it takes male phallic authority "to the next level," a level that derives its power not from the uncastrated male body but from the uncastratable body. Given how *Hostel II* establishes the castral body as a male phantasy, one must wonder if literal castration is really horrific in this film. Does it overwhelm audiences with castration anxieties or indulge castral phantasies?

The same must be asked of the other horror films that feature castration. Do *Hostel II*, *Planet Terror*, *I Spit on Your Grave*, *Last House on the Left*, or *Teeth* parody male phallic authority by denigrating the penis, or do they mock only a certain kind of male phallic authority? These films castrate men who rape women, but do their scenes of castration punish men for sexually assaulting women or for relying too literally on the penis as the source of domination? These moments of castration pointedly criticize masculinity but only that type of masculinity based upon the anatomical penis. They evoke the castration anxieties only to push them over the edge with scenes of literal castration, and, doing so, these films seem to satirize men who find too much power in their penises. Doing so, however, does not necessarily venerate the female phallic authority that castrates these men. Could these castration scenes mock men who lose their penises for failing to know how to achieve self-mastery, recover jouissance, and disavow symbolic castration without the penis? Do these scenes of castration simply mock the outdated, anatomical body for suffering under penile sexual desires rather than pursuing non-penile ones? The ancient eunuch, the Medieval Christian, and the Renaissance castrato seem to have come full circle in the Digital Age. After a small hiatus during 20th century of Freudian discourse on castration anxiety, this era, like those before it, may find little anxiety in castration and may actually welcome it. After nearly a century of psychoanalysis insisting that penile lack signified the ultimate loss, castration may once again, like it had through much of history, be understood as the ultimate gain, dominating others *and* the self with a castral body that can cast aside the useless penis because it has attained the ultimate in phallic authority: self-mastery.

1. While Freud's conceptualization of the castration anxiety changed throughout his career, I will be focusing on those interpretations that focus on the castration threats against the anatomical penis in his theories of sexual differentiation in children. Freud's theories of psychological development in boys and girls hinge upon the penis. For example in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, especially in "The Transformations of Puberty," Freud suggests the penis is fundamental to the psychological growth of boys, and in "Castration Complex and Penis Envy," he claims the lack of a penis is central to the psychological growth of girls. Here, the anatomical penis is not to be confused with the phallus in Lacanian theory or even much of Freud's writing, that suggests a difference between the penis and the phallus, the anatomical and the symbolic.
2. Freud, Sigmund. "Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood." *The Freud Reader*. Ed. Peter Gay (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989): 443-480, 460.
3. Ibid. 460.
4. Freud, Sigmund. "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes." *The Freud Reader*. ed. Peter Gay. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989): 670-678, 674.
5. Ibid. 674.
6. Neale, Stephen. *Genre* (London: BFI, 1980), 43.
7. Ibid. 44.
8. Williams, Linda. "When the Woman Looks." *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*. Eds. Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, and Linda Williams. (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America): 83-99. Williams argues that women and monsters share a peculiar relationship in horror films. She argues, "The destruction of the monster that concludes so many horror films could...be interpreted as yet another way of disavowing and mastering the castration her body represents" (88-89). At the same time, however, "the woman's look at the monster offers at least a potentially subversive recognition of the power and potency of a non-phallic sexuality" (90).
9. Neale. 44.
10. Ibid. 44.
11. Hutchings, Peter. *The Horror Film* (Essex, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2004), 64.
12. Ibid. 65.
13. Ibid. 65.
14. Ibid. 65.
15. Ibid. 65.
16. Ibid. 65.
17. Ibid. 65.
18. It is important to note that Lorna is not killed by a man but by the only female torturer in the film, one who murders her in a bath of blood as in the mythical accounts of Elizabeth Bathory, "The Blood Countess."
19. It is significant that the film implies a lesbian attraction between Beth and Axelle (Vera Jordanova), a theme of repressed homosexuality that resonates with the character of Josh (Derek Richardson) in *Hostel*.
20. Lacan, Jacques. "The Meaning of the Phallus." *Feminine Sexuality*. eds. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose. Trans. Jacqueline Rose. London: Macmillan, 1982): 74-85, 79.
21. Ibid. 76.
22. Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke. Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 1985.
23. Butler, Judith. "The Lesbian Phallus and the morphological Imaginary." *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* (New York & London: Routledge, 1993): 57-92, 83.

24. Luepnitz, Deborah. "Beyond the Phallus: Lacan and Feminism." *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*. ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 221-237, 226.
25. Wood, Robin. *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan...and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, 2003), 122.
26. Ibid. 122.
27. The circumstances of Beth's inheritance suggest that her mother had more money than her father. The mother also cuts this father out of her will, skipping over him to leave everything to her daughter. Enjoying phallic authority over him in life, she also exercises that unusual relationship to the phallus in death.
28. In this way, Beth resembles what Clover calls "the Final Girl."
29. Wood, 123.
20. Ibid. 123.
31. Ibid. 130.
32. Ibid. 124.
33. In "The Uncanny," Freud claims severed heads are a psychological metaphor for castration (50). Mitchell Lichtenstein's *Teeth* (2007) evokes perhaps one of the most central of castration anxieties, fear of the vagina dentate.
34. Taylor, Gary. *Castration: An Abbreviated History of Western Manhood* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 60.
35. Ibid. 43.
36. Ibid. 148.
37. Murray, Jacqueline. "Sexual Mutilation and Castration Anxiety: A Medieval Perspective." *The Boswell Thesis: Essays on Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. Ed. Mathew Kuefler (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006, 254-272), 255.
38. Augustine. *Confessions*. Trans. Vernon J. Bourke. *Fathers of the Church*, 21 (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1953), 35.
39. Murray, 255.
40. Ibid. 264.
41. Ibid. 264.
42. Ibid. 264-265.
43. Ibid. 267.
44. Ibid. 267.
45. Finucci, Valeria. *The Manly Masquerade: Masculinity, Paternity, and Castration in the Italian Renaissance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 273.
46. Ibid. 273.
47. Creed, Barbara. *Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 110.
48. Ibid. 121.
49. Ibid. 122-123.
50. Ibid. 153.
51. Ibid. 153.
52. Ibid. 153.
53. Ibid. 130.
54. Ibid. 130.
55. Ibid. 130.
56. Ibid. 153.

57. Freud, "Leonardo," 460. Again, this refers to specific strands of Freudian theory in which the anatomical penis plays a primary role in the dissolution of the Oedipus complex through castration threats.
58. *Ibid.* 460.
59. Freud, Sigmund. *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*. trans. Alix Strachey. (London: The Hogarth Press, Ltd., 1936), 52.
60. *Ibid.* 52.
61. Freud, "Some Psychical," 677.
62. Lacan, Jacques. "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious." *Écrits: A Selection*. trans. Alan Sheridan. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc. 1977): 292-325, 321.
63. *Ibid.* 324.
64. In *The Plague of Fantasies*, Lacanian theorist Slavoj Žižek claims that as opposed to *jouissance*, "desire's *raison d'être*...is not to realize its goal, to find full satisfaction, but to reproduce itself as desire" (38-39).
65. Gallop, Jane. *Reading Lacan*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 20.
66. *Ibid.* 20.
67. Žižek, Slavoj. *On Belief* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 54.
68. *Ibid.* 59-60.
69. Sheets-Johnstone, Maxine. "Corporeal Archetypes and Power: Preliminary Clarifications and Considerations of Sex." *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader*. ed. Donn Welton. (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1998): 149-180. 173.
70. *Ibid.* 173.
71. Žižek, *On Belief*, 34.
72. Sheets-Johnstone claims, "Western cultural practice generally" assumes "a male's body is not anatomized nor is it ever made an object of study in the same ways as female bodies. The net result is that the penis is never made public, never put on the measuring line in the same way that female sexual body parts are put on the measuring line" (173). Digital existence may be another step in Western cultural practice to keep penises private and de-anatomize the male body.
73. This statement articulates a pre-Freudian sense of male power located in the testicles rather than the penis, but the following scene in the brothel juxtaposes the penis and instruments of torture, re-establishing a Freudian sense of male power located in the penis rather than the testicles.
74. In "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria ('Dora')," Freud claims that in cases of *coitus interruptus*, "the libido flows back again into its old channel and manifests itself once more in hysterical symptoms" (216). In "Case of Obsessional Neurosis ('Rat Man')," he claims *coitus interruptus* can be a tool by which men spoil the same sexual affairs they claim to want (349). These two passages suggest a subconscious desire in males to initiate penile stimulation only to stop short of ejaculation as a way to turn sexual desire back upon itself, shoring up those energies for non-sexual exploits.
75. For a similar argument, see Freeland's analysis of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* where she argues, "The notion of chain saw as phallic substitute is driven home (as if it needed to be) when the patriarch of the cannibalistic family tells Leatherface sternly, 'Sex or the saw, son, you have to choose!'" (251).