



Y NACIÓ EL ASESINO EN SERIE: A BOOK REVIEW

ERIKA TIBURCIO MORENO
UNIVERSIDAD CARLOS III DE MADRID

Y nació el asesino en serie considers an essential question: can US history be studied through the lens of its monsters? The serial killer is one of the most infamous monsters, featuring prominently in countless horror movies and true crime shows. The serial killer's modern shape in the United States stemmed from the internal questioning of the national ideology such as the innocence and the exceptionalism that occurred in the late 1950s.

Serial killers like Ed Gein, Ted Bundy, and John Wayne Gacy captivated the media and FBI officers alike due to their gruesome methods of killing, the number of victims and their inability of stopping and living with other peacefully. Although the term "serial killer" was coined at the end of the 1970s by Robert Ressler, horror cinema complicated the serial killer image by offering a wide range of killers who possessed the attributes of this kind of murderer. *Psycho* (1960) replaced the evil outsider with seemingly ordinary people who effectively hid their dark and perverted sides. The characters in these films were constructed as powerful antagonists who were sadistic, unstoppable, depraved, and remorseless—they could not stop killing and, as a result, society could only defeat this enemy through death or arrest. From the 1960s to the 1980s not only did the United States face various crises but a new scientific culture also spread through the country. The growing influence of psychological and psychiatric explanations of human behavior shifted the nation's perceptions of criminals. This shift resulted in the birth of criminology and behavioral science in the 1970s, which aimed to profile psychopaths, serial perpetrators, and rapists.

As notions of human behaviour shifted, the entertainment industry began to depict these evolving attitudes. Talk shows and true crime fiction mixed scientific facts with popular stereotypes to turn serial killers into great, mythological "others" who seemed to represent the dark underbelly of society. This material provided heightened entertainment value while mixing fantasy with reality.



However, it is crucial to note that a monster, in whatever form it may take, is a powerful antagonist that threatens normalcy. Due to this power, the hierarchical order in normal society is compromised via this monstrosity. The serial killers most monstrous form was generally depicted as a White urban man who could hide in plain sight while seducing and manipulating their victims. Other types of serial killers differed from this model as it is described the rural version in horror cinema between the 1960s and the 1980s, who was portrayed as neither intelligent nor physically normal.

And the Serial Killer was Born aims to offer a cultural history of the United States from the 1960s to the 1980s, whose internal crisis (questioning of the American values and confrontation between the conservative and the countercultural sides) pervaded all spheres, included the fiction. The first chapter offers a brief account of the historical context in the period of study. The second part of this chapter explains the horror genre and the specific facets that characterize the American horror genre. Chapter 3 explains how serial killers are understood and how the portrayal of serial killers differs between the social discourse surrounding these killers and the ways they are constructed in film. In particular, the chapter demonstrates how reality and horror fiction intermingled to produce a type of sexually repressed white man. This type, the chapter suggests, is based on discourse rooted in exceptionalism, Puritanism, and capitalism. The chapter reiterates that the serial killer's social transgression was based on his remorselessness, which allowed him to be a killing machine. In the 1980s, slasher movies elevated him to an urban legend: a mythical monster with supernatural abilities.

The analysis brought forth by this chapter is twofold. First, the research identifies patterns in normalcy and monstrosity in 120 movies released from the 1960s to the 1980s. Second, ten case studies provide an in-depth study of the prominent trends that shaped the modern serial killer. While *Psycho* and *Dressed to Kill* (1980) focused on a mentally ill, sexually repressed man who killed sexually attractive women, *Deranged* (1974) and *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (1986) were based on real criminals and confronted rural and the urban discourses of serial killing. *The Boston Strangler* (1968) explored the ideas of *Psycho* but went a step further, concealing the madness of the film from the audience. Meanwhile, the features of *Halloween* (1978) and *The Slumber Party Massacre* (1982) were crucial to understanding the slasher subgenre and the debate around this subgenre. Unlike many horror films that feature a single villain, *The Last House on the Left* (1972) and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) highlight class inequalities as the explanation of deviation. Finally, the last chapter of *Y nació el asesino en serie* is devoted to *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and closes this text by discussing the post-modern shift of this monster.

In sum, this essay covers the cultural changes that took place in the United States, whose crisis pervaded all aspects of life. Horror became the perfect genre to explore anxieties and uncertainties surrounding the "innocent" land of the free.



BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

Tiburcio Moreno, Erika. 2019. *Y nació el asesino en serie. El origen cultural del monstruo en el cine de terror estadounidense*. Madrid: Los Libros de la Catarata.

SUGGESTED CITATION: Tiburcio Moreno, Erika. 2021. "Y nació el asesino en serie: A Book Review." *PopMeC Research Blog*. Published March 17.