

8. Suzanne Ferriss. "Fashioning Femininity in the Makeover Flick," in *Chick Flicks: Contemporary Women at the Movies*, eds. Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young (New York: Routledge, 2008), 41.
9. Ibid.
10. Elizabeth A. Ford and Deborah C. Mitchell. *The Makeover in Movies* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2004), 76.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Can't Buy Me Love*. Directed by Steve Rash. 1987. Burbank, CA: Touchstone, 2002. DVD.
- Cullen, Jim. *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Ferriss, Suzanne. "Fashioning Femininity in the Makeover Flick." In *Chick Flicks: Contemporary Women at the Movies*, edited by Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young, 41–58. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Ford, Elizabeth A. and Deborah C. Mitchell. *The Makeover in Movies*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2004.
- Gramsci, Antonio, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Translated and edited by Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, New York: International Publishers, 1971.
- She's All That*. Directed by Robert Iscove. 1999. Montreal, Quebec: Alliance, 2010. DVD.
- The DUFF*. Directed by Ari Sandel. 2015. Santa Monica, CA: CBS Films, 2015. DVD.
- The New Guy*. Directed by Ed Decter. 2002. Culver City, CA: Revolution Studios, 2002. DVD.

CHAPTER 13

The Geek as Rake: Roving Masculinity in Contemporary Film

K. Brenna Wardell

Summing up 2007 on the website of the entertainment magazine *Entertainment Weekly*, staff writer Adam B. Vary describes it as "the year of the geek." Citing diverse figures and media enterprises—from Shia LaBeouf in the film adaptation of the cult TV series *Transformers* (Bay, 2007), to massive crowds at Comic-Con, to the Emmy win of Tina Fey for her comedy *30 Rock* (2006–2013)—the moment had come, Vary argues, when "the geeks inherited the earth."

Vary illustrates his point through a discussion of actor Michael Cera, famous as self-conscious teen George-Michael Bluth in TV's *Arrested Development* (various, 2003–2006), who had made a successful move to the silver screen in the summer's comedy hit *Superbad* (Mottola, 2007). If the geeks had inherited the earth, Cera, claims Vary, "was their king." Vary cites the geekiness of Cera's characters, describing Bluth, for example, as "awkward," and "one you could definitely believe would have trouble talking to the female of the species." Yet he also notes the fan adulation connected to Cera, arguing, "Anyone who saw female fans

K.B. Wardell (✉)
Department of English, University of North Alabama,
Florence, AL, USA

© The Author(s) 2018
K.E. Lane (ed.), *Age of the Geek*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65744-8_13

repeatedly throwing themselves at Cera during last July's Comic-Con understands he's been well on his way to becoming a sex symbol for some time now."

The conjunction of "sex symbol" and geek seems surprising—after all, one of the hallmarks of the geek is a definite social and sexual awkwardness that inhibits, even precludes, such a combination. In fictional media iterations, from Harold Lamb in the film *The Freshman* (Newmeyer, 1925), to high-school students Sam, Neil, and Bill in *Freaks and Geeks* (Apatow, 1999–2000), and scientists Sheldon, Raj, Howard, and Leonard on TV's *The Big Bang Theory* (various, 2007–now), the geek has commonly been constructed as an underdog, even outcast, figure with little or no social or sexual power. But in a media moment, 2007 or now, in which real-life geeks (i.e., Mark Zuckerberg or Bill Gates) or fictional geeks successfully compel the attention—and dollars—of vast numbers of consumers, the geek is a figure of significant socioeconomic power and cultural prestige.

This essay examines the transformation of the geek in contemporary American film, a reshaping facilitated by geek media producers such as Tina Fey, Greg Mottola, and Judd Apatow; specifically, it explores the manner in which the geek has been combined with the figure of the rake—the seductive, exotic libertine. Through a close reading of four films from two genres—comedy and science fiction—I examine the nature and implications of this fusion, tracing both differences between the two and similarities that make this union less unexpected than it would initially appear. These films are, in order, the comedy *Superbad* (2007), directed by Mottola and produced by Apatow; the science fiction *Star Trek* (2009) and *Star Trek: Into Darkness* (2013), directed by J.J. Abrams and based on Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek* texts; and the comedy/science fiction/fantasy *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* (2010), directed by Edgar Wright and originating in the graphic novels of co-screenwriter Bryan Lee O'Malley.

These films are of interest for the manner in which they transform the figure of the geek by mixing in aspects of the rake: another figure often typed as male. Sexually successful and, usually, socially powerful, the rake is a confident, even aggressive, figure—very different from the typing of geek figures as shy, passive, and lacking power in multiple ways. Describing the rake in *The Restoration Rake-Hero*, scholar Harold Weber argues that the figure is unique: "the first character type in the history of English literature to derive his definition primarily from his eroticism."¹

Fictional characters such as Don Juan, as well as real-life individuals, including Restoration writer and wit John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, and eighteenth-century writer Giacomo Casanova, exemplify this eroticism.² Driven by bodily appetites and continually on the prowl to satisfy these urges, the rake is an ever-wanting, mobile figure—possessor of a desirous gaze; however, the rake is also subject to the gaze: a spectacular object for other characters and for viewers of visual texts featuring rake characters.

The figure's roots stretch back centuries to seventeenth-century literature, particularly theatre, as Laura J. Rosenthal notes in "Masculinity in Restoration Drama" from *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, and the work of writers such as the English playwrights William Wycherley and Aphra Behn, whose plays *The Country Wife* (1675) and *The Rover* (1677) feature the aptly named rake protagonists Harry Horner and Willmore.³ In film, rake characters have been a familiar presence since the first film narratives, with certain stars associated with the figure's erotic, sometimes exotic, allure—exemplified by Rudolph Valentino, famous as the tango-dancing Julio in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (Ingram, 1921) and the powerful Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan in *The Sheik* (Melford, 1921). Notably, rake figures and the actors who play them often become desired objects for characters and viewers, augmenting the spectacular nature of the texts in which they appear.

Elements of the rake and geek figures have mingled in film before, but usually in the separate bodies of contrasting pairs of males who, to various degrees, take on the characteristics of one figure or the other. Examples in the comedy genre include Bing Crosby and Bob Hope in the *Road to...* series, beginning with *Road to Singapore* (Schertzing, 1940), with the suave Crosby as the rake figure who normally gets the girl and the insecure Hope as the geek figure; or Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis, rake and geek respectively, in their nightclub, radio, and film collaborations—the last commencing with *My Friend Irma* (Marshall, 1949).⁴ In science fiction, the dichotomy of the rakish starship captain James T. Kirk and the highly rational, almost emotionless, Vulcan science officer Spock in the *Star Trek* TV series and films is exemplary of this tendency.

While this separation remains, there has been a move to combine these seemingly disparate male types in single characters. This shift is not unique to the contemporary moment: early examples include Dustin Hoffman's Benjamin Braddock in *The Graduate* (Nichols, 1967); Woody

Allen's characters, such as Isaac Davis in *Manhattan* (Allen, 1979); and even Harrison Ford's tweedy archeology professor/adventurer Indiana Jones in Steven Spielberg and George Lucas's long-running film series (1981–2008). Taking these in turn, Braddock is awkward, naïve, and physically unimpressive, and yet he romances both a mother and daughter; Davis is brainy, slight, and obsessive, as well as romantically successful with multiple stunning women; and Jones is both an easily flustered academic and a skilled explorer who is catnip to the films' leading ladies. Still, this change is particularly apparent in media from the late 1990s to the contemporary moment, media often created by Generation X filmmakers such as Apatow, Fey, and Abrams.

These media producers command a great deal of power within the industry, a power that grants them the ability to shape not only characters and texts featuring geek characters, but culture itself.⁵ Many of these filmmakers are self-professed geeks who create characters not far from their own past or current personas as struggling outsiders.⁶ By creating fictional characters who (at least by the texts' conclusions) combine aspects of the rake's power and prominence with the geek's intelligence and outsider charm, these producers create media texts that offer a kind of wish fulfillment for themselves and viewers, but a wish fulfillment that may elide these texts' more troubling aspects, particularly regarding representations of gender and sexuality.

While the effects of this fusion are diverse, and will be explored in greater detail later, I will gesture to these before moving to close readings of the films. For one, this can work, as noted, as a projection of desire: a chance for geek figures to have their day, if only in the fantasy world on-screen. In addition, this infusion can also form a strategic move to normalize the geek figure for mainstream audiences. In their presentation and reception, geek characters are often crafted as variously non-normative: socially for a lack of interpersonal skills, sexually for a failure or even refusal to pursue sexual intimacy, and physically due to a body that is in some way unconventional—bespectacled, untoned, too skinny, too fat, or shading toward androgyny. The mixing in of elements of the rake figure—confident, attractive, and sexual—may seem to offer a way to bring the geek persona and body closer to a perceived on-screen norm of gender and sexuality: in the case of these films' male geek/rake protagonists, specifically toward mainstream ideas of masculinity and heterosexuality.

Yet, infusing geek characters with elements of the rake figure also adds the complications of the latter's transgressive desires and behaviors. For one, as a figure associated with the erotic and exotic, the rake is often othered in texts, at least to a degree. Additional issues in terms of rakishness and male characters may include social misconduct, misogynistic attitudes, competitive relationships with other men, and a complex sexuality that in its excesses can be read as both heterosexual and homoerotic, hypersexual and a site of lack. Despite his active, even aggressive, behavior, the rake is also tied to passivity and the body (these last often aligned with femininity and women)—largely through the gaze. In "Gay and Lesbian Criticism," scholar Anneke Smelik notes, "The immanent feminization of male spectacle then brings about two possible dangers for the performing male: functioning as an object of desire he can easily become the object of ridicule, and within a heterosexist culture accusations of homosexuality can be launched against him."⁷ Together, these factors make the use of the rake to "normalize" the geek figure a complex, potentially contradictory, development with significant sociopolitical implications.

The move to fuse geek with rake gains an added dimension in the genres in which these hybrid figures often appear: comedy and science fiction, genres often considered particularly aligned with geek viewers.⁸ Thus, media producers who identify as geeks may gravitate toward these genres and shape their direction. While these genres seem quite different, they are, like the geek and rake figures, more similar than they appear: a similarity largely grounded in the genres' focus, in content and form, on the excessive and spectacular. Both comedy and science fiction texts tend to feature narrative arcs and character bodies that transgress social, sexual, and technological boundaries, opening up, if only briefly, other possibilities for these bodies, their worlds, and for viewers of these texts.

For example, comedies often emphasize reversals of the status quo, creating a space of anarchy and carnival: even if most feature a return to norms by their finales. As Mikhail Bakhtin argues in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, "Carnival brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid."⁹ Discussing comedy's boundary-crossing capacity in *The Unruly Woman*, scholar Kathleen Karlyn notes, "All narrative forms contain the potential to represent transformation and change, but it is the genres of laughter that most fully employ the motifs of liminality."¹⁰ As a speculative genre, science fiction similarly

explores the unconventional and alternate, often through the presence and action of extraordinary bodies. The tendency in both genres is to ultimately contain these bodies and their disruptions; however, through much of the length of comedy or science fiction texts these bodies provide a compelling source of narrative drama and visual interest: whether disobeying the bounds of propriety, the rules of gravity, or, in the case of alien or cyborg bodies, challenging what it means to be human and alive.

The teen comedy *Superbad* plays out the move to both unleash and contain, spectacularize and normalize the comic body in the personas of its main characters: the pudgy, foul-mouthed Seth and the shy, slim Evan, who have been friends since childhood, and their gangly, glasses-wearing friend Fogell—known through much of the film by the name on his fake ID: McLovin. The film takes place during the last few weeks of the boys' senior year in high school as they seek to gain some sexual experience before they depart for separate colleges. To win the favor of the girls they desire, Seth and Evan go on a quest to buy the girls alcohol. Their repeated failures to obtain it, their pursuit by two immature cops, their eventual pairings with their desired love objects, and their realization of the depth of their feelings for each other occupy most of the film's narrative.

While Seth and Evan are initially constructed as variously non-normative in their social and sexual awkwardness, by the film's conclusion they are primarily portrayed as regular guys who just happen to win the attention of very pretty and socially successful girls. This transformation is due, in part, to the manner in which the script mingles aspects of the geek with the rake figure, allowing the boys a power and prominence, albeit largely illusory, that allows them to achieve the social and sexual relationships they desire.

An early scene is instructive in establishing Seth and Evan's initial position as social and sexual outsiders, even as it points to their desire to obtain a rakish confidence and gain sexual experience. Becca, the girl in whom Evan is interested, asks him to a party thrown by one of the school's popular kids, a party to which he has explicitly not been invited. Evan pretends that he and his friends are too busy with their own pursuits, which he paints as highly socially and sexually sophisticated, to attend, narrating an idealized version of the boys' adventures while the film's images play out the very different reality.

This contrast between the aural and the visual stresses the gap between the boys' desired image of themselves and their actual individual

and communal lives. As Evan's voice assures Becca and the viewer of the boys' successes, what the viewer sees is the unruly bodies of unsophisticated boys who don't fit in at an adult party, can't get into a local club, are unable to hold their liquor, and who interact with female bodies only through the voyeurism of the *Vag-tastic Voyage*: an online porn website with which Seth is obsessed. While the boys desire to play the role of rake, this space between their desires and their achievement highlights their geekiness, even as Evan's narrative foregrounds an illusory transcendence of their perceived lack. Yet despite the ways in which the boys are initially portrayed as failed rakes, the film's narrative arc leads them toward just the social and sexual successes that this early scene denies them, so that, by the finale, Evan and Seth have united with the girls they desire and Fogell has achieved both his first sexual experience and the respect of his peers.

However, before the film moves to unite the boys with the girls, it acknowledges Seth and Evan's mutual affection, an affection both cemented and elided by their move to new—specifically heterosexual—relationships. As cops arrive to break up the party the boys have crashed, Seth rescues an unconscious Evan, carrying him away from danger in his arms. The boys go to Evan's house, bunk down in sleeping bags, and reveal their feelings to each other, using the word "love" numerous times. Seth hugs Evan as the camera hovers over them, capturing their sleeping-bag-encased forms close to each other. The culmination of the boys' rakish adventures seems to be not heterosexual union but a joy in the homosocial, one that allows space for a spectrum of desire that extends to the homoerotic.¹¹

However, the film then uses the playing out of the boys' rakish desires—their heterosexual partnering—to move them away from the homoerotic, even the homosocial. Despite the emotional intimacy of the night, the next day the boys don't speak of their declaration but instead go to the mall, where they encounter the girls and pair up with them. In the film's final moments the boys throw inquiring, even longing, glances at each other as they follow the girls and move apart, as if uneasy in their new roles as heterosexual males. The ending thus feels somewhat ironic: placing the boys just where they desired to be in the opening, even as, given all they have been through and expressed, this now seems bittersweet.

The film ultimately constructs both Evan and Seth as socially successful and heteronormative despite their initial positioning through the

presence of the trio's third member: Fogell. The contrast between Seth and Evan's more average, less extremely marked, bodies and that of the incredibly thin, gawky, and glasses-wearing Fogell works to diffuse the geekiness of Seth and Evan and move them closer to the status quo. This is despite the fact that it is Fogell who has the most overt sexual success when he achieves a brief genital contact with his crush, Nicola, only to be disturbed by the cops just as he cries, exultantly, "It's in." The othering of Fogell in the film through elements of *mise-en-scène*, particularly costuming and performance, as well as by Seth himself, who repeatedly refers to him as "Fagell," dismisses non-normative elements in Ethan and Seth and their pairing, even as it maintains a sense of gendered and sexual otherness within the diegesis (the world of the film).

As discussed, one of the notable elements of comedy is the manner in which it opens a fluid space for boundary crossing and focuses on bodies as spectacle; the second genre with which I engage—science fiction—possesses a similar liminality and showcases unusual, often marvelous and disruptive, bodies. This is certainly the case for the *Star Trek* franchise: originating in Roddenberry's TV series (1966–1969), with its futuristic settings, fantastic technology, and diverse characters, human and alien. Of these characters, the human Kirk, long-time captain of the *Enterprise*, and his Vulcan first officer and friend Spock are two of the most iconic, offering a distinctive pairing of rake and geek figures.

Given this dichotomy, one of the most striking elements of director J.J. Abrams's 2009 reboot is the manner in which these characters and their respective rake and geek aspects are reconstructed and, to a degree, mingled. By creating a complex time-travel story that reimagines the origins of the *Enterprise's* crew, Abrams and his collaborators both nod to the original and reform it. Their narrative concerns the efforts of the original Spock (Spock Prime) to prevent a star from going supernova; he is only partially successful, and the explosion destroys the planet Romulus. A black hole sucks Spock Prime and a Romulan vessel into the past, creating an alternative timeline. The actions of the enraged Romulans—destroying Spock's planet of Vulcan and causing the death of Kirk's father—reconfigure the lives of Kirk, Spock, and their colleagues, who must unite to stop the Romulans and their leader, Nero.

The film's reimagining of the Kirk and Spock characters does several things at once in relation to gender, sexuality, and representations of the geek and rake. For one, it offers a fresh vision of the characters, both as individuals and in their professional/personal relations; second,

it provides a new lens with which to examine the original characters themselves. In the case of Kirk, the original Kirk's (Kirk Prime's) overt rakishness, the near-excessive nature of his constant unions with both human and alien women, is transformed into a Kirk who retains elements of the rake, but who also assumes aspects of the geek.¹² The result is a new/old Kirk whose rakishness, given the film's reflexive mode, particularly in relation to the original text, is potentially ironic. Similarly, Spock, whose obsessive regulation quoting and discomfort with sociopersonal relations make him a near-definition of the geek, assumes elements of the rake figure. These changes transform the characters, even as a connection to the original characters and their world is maintained.¹³

For instance, Abrams's Kirk is, like Kirk Prime, rooted in his strong emotions, his physicality, and, particularly, his sexuality; however, the reboot adds to, even counters, this characterization by stressing, via dialogue and performance, his intellect and reason: moving him closer to the always-logical Spock. And while this Kirk is indeed rakish, he is often a failure at seduction, a lack the film and its sequel exploit for comedy. Kirk flirts with Lieutenant Nyota Uhura and sleeps with her roommate Gaila, a green-skinned Orion, but it is Spock, not Kirk, who forms an intimate relationship with Uhura. Not only is Kirk's sexual prowess somewhat lacking, but he initially has little power in Starfleet, the Federation's exploratory force; this removes the authority of the high-ranking Kirk Prime and contrasts with the personal and professional power of the reboot's Spock.

While Spock is variously represented as an outcast on his homeworld, where his half-human heritage means he is treated as less than Vulcan, and among humans, where he is seen as alien, this Spock is also a successful man who has significant standing and authority: a commander to Kirk's cadet. Abrams's Spock is certainly aligned with geek characteristics, yet he is not so fully rooted in logic and emotionally contained as Spock Prime. Instead, the narrative reveals that Spock has the capacity to be intensely passionate and emotional, even as he seeks to restrain and conceal this.¹⁴ That this Spock is involved in a very real way, repeatedly coded as human, with emotions of sexual desire (with Uhura), as well as anger and competition with other males (particularly Kirk and Nero), develops a character who may seem less alien/othered both to the other characters and the viewer. Most notably, this focus on Spock as a heterosexual figure removes, to an extent, the longstanding association of Kirk and Spock through the genre of slash fiction with homoerotic desire.¹⁵

The film thus moves Spock closer to specifically human sociocultural norms of masculinity and sexuality, even as it repeatedly demonstrates his extraordinary nature. This is most visible in Spock's hybrid human/Vulcan body and his abilities, such as the Vulcan neck pinch and mind meld. However, despite spectacular treatments of his body, by the film's conclusion Spock is presented as just another member of the *Enterprise* crew, a kind of double, with a difference, of Kirk.

Following *Star Trek's* critical and financial success, *Star Trek: Into Darkness* was released in 2013, earning respectable reviews and amassing even larger box-office numbers. The sequel shows Kirk and Spock much closer emotionally, although their relations with each other and their colleagues continue to evolve. As in the first film, the two men's characterization both recalls elements of the Prime characters and reimagines them, largely through mixing elements of the geek and rake figures. This is most obvious in an emotional death scene featuring the two that parallels, with a difference, a seminal scene in the Prime film *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (Nichols, 1982).

The film starts in media res in a sequence that foregrounds Kirk and Spock's developing friendship, as well as the entire crew's camaraderie. An effort to stop an exploding volcano on an alien planet endangers Spock; Kirk rescues him, violating the Prime Directive. Their friendship is strained when Spock reports Kirk's transgression and the latter loses his command. A terrorist bombing and an attack on a Federation meeting reunite the men, and they are sent on a mission by Admiral Marcus to kill the attacks' mastermind: John Harrison, soon revealed as the genetically enhanced superman Khan Noonien Singh, used by the duplicitous Marcus to create weapons. In the ensuing conflict, the *Enterprise* is nearly destroyed, first by Marcus and then by Khan, saved only by Spock's stratagems and Kirk's sacrifice of his life to restore the ship's power. Spock pursues Khan and nearly kills him, but McCoy and Uhura stop him so that they can use Khan's blood to revive Kirk. The film concludes as the *Enterprise* departs for a 5-year mission.

Darkness builds on much of the first film's treatment of Kirk and Spock, further normalizing their characters and bodies even as they are still depicted as variously othered. Kirk continues to be associated with sexual appetite, as when he wakes up between twin female Caitians (humanoid aliens with long tails); however, these appetites are largely unsatisfied, his failures continuing the somewhat ironic, knowing presentation of the character. For example, when Kirk flirts with

Dr. Carol Marcus, she is not persuaded, presenting him with a backward compliment about his intelligence while referencing the problem of his "reputation."¹⁶ To perhaps an even greater extent than its antecedent, *Darkness* downplays Kirk's power and showcases his emotional and physical vulnerability. Overpowered and outmaneuvered by Khan, and afraid, as he notes in his death scene, of his mortality, this Kirk must rely on the efforts of his crew and Khan's blood to save him.

While Kirk's rakishness is downplayed and his smarts and vulnerability foregrounded, Spock continues to be presented as less of an outsider figure and geek. Instead, *Darkness* transforms Spock into something closer to the traditional male action hero, pursuing both public and private goals in his battles with Khan and sometimes thorny romance with Uhura. This transformation is most overt in the film's finale, in which a vengeful Spock hunts Khan, displaying none of his typical emotional reserve or focus on intellect over brawn. Instead, Spock is represented with the action hero's customary attributes, displaying confidence, strength, and aggression. Yet, if these aspects of the finale and the film as a whole foreground Spock's move away from an association with the cerebral and passive, often associated with the geek, and center on his partnership with Uhura, eliding the homoerotic associations of his relationship with Kirk, the film's emotional high point—Kirk's death—complicates this.

This scene, with its display of the men's bond, is Abrams's most overt homage to the Prime texts, referencing, albeit with a role reversal, the scene in *Khan* in which Kirk bids farewell to a dying Spock. The homage is largely constructed via several striking parallels. For one, there is the dialogue: in *Wrath* Spock notes of his sacrifice that "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few," while in *Darkness* the men acknowledge one another by using each other's tactics as a sign of their respect and demonstration of their mingling. Kirk notes of Spock's treatment of Khan, "You used what he wanted against him. That's a nice move," and Spock answers, "It is what you would have done." Kirk replies, "And this ... this is what you would have done. It was only logical." Visual elements are another link, including a composition stressing both closeness and separation—with one man dying inside a decontamination chamber while the other remains on the other side, and the choice of a hand gesture, the Vulcan salute, used as an attempt to connect through the glass. Kirk Prime's enraged scream of "Khan!" in *Wrath* following Spock's death is echoed by Spock's cry in *Darkness* at

Kirk's death. The men's separation is short-lived, but the resulting grief profound, so much so that, in *Darkness*, Spock loses all control—crying as Kirk dies, screaming when he is dead, and then nearly killing Khan.

The subsequent scene of Kirk's awakening from his temporary death, attended by McCoy and Spock, not only marks the characters' reunion after the climactic action of the *Enterprise's* near-destruction and Khan's defeat, but also a moment of subtle intimacy between Spock and Kirk, as Spock calls Kirk "Jim": a sign that the last formality has been erased. If the near-touch between the men in the death scene spoke to an emotional bond, Spock's use of Kirk's first name, after repeatedly referring to him only via his rank, marks a true sense of personal intimacy, returning the characters to the homosocial, even homoerotic, sphere.

The shift in the characters is interesting, even provocative, although Abrams's reconfiguration of Kirk and Spock, individually and together, must be contextualized as part of a larger effort to reimagine *Star Trek*, allowing the reboot to move in new directions and speak to contemporary viewers. Given the decades between the reboot and the original *Star Trek*, Abrams's films, like the other films I discuss, may also foreground the effects of real-life shifts in ideas of masculinity. In *Masculinities and Culture*, scholar John Beynon argues that there has been a move from an older, more rigid, masculinity to greater flexibility due to a number of sociopolitical changes:

The outcome is that many men are now upholders of a hybridized masculinity that is experienced and displayed differently at different times in different situations. Perhaps what we are currently witnessing at the start of the twenty-first century is nothing less than the emergence of a more fluid, bricolage masculinity, the result of "channel-hopping" across versions of "the masculine."¹⁷

Thus, Abrams's reconfiguring of Kirk and Spock may speak to a more liminal masculinity, at least on film—one that can move between the diverse positions of geek and rake and the more extreme elements of these figures, mixing them, and other aspects of gender and sexuality, together.

The final text I will consider—*Scott Pilgrim vs. the World*—blends the genres of comedy, science fiction, and fantasy, just as it blends elements of geek and rake in the person of its protagonist: Scott Pilgrim. The film dramatizes the adventures of a young, unemployed Canadian who shares

an apartment and bed with his gay friend Wallace and who is a member of a rock band called Sex Bob-Omb. Scott is dating a high-school student named Knives Chau, but he meets a girl called Ramona Flowers for whom he feels an instant attraction. To be with her he must, like the famous demi-god Hercules, go through a succession of labors. These take the form of video game-style duels with Ramona's seven powerful, cunning exes: the League of Evil Exes. Drawing on his skill playing video games, Scott defeats six exes; however, Gideon, the final ex, momentarily defeats him. Scott dies, returns to life to best Gideon and apologize for his behavior to his friends and girlfriends, and unites with Ramona.

Scott's efforts to gain the attention, then love, of Ramona highlights both the geek and rake elements of the character. Attempting to court Ramona, Scott's social unease and lack of confidence make it difficult for him to even strike up a conversation, his attempts undermined by his sister Stacey, who says to Ramona, "Please excuse my brother—he is chronically enfeebled." The character's geekiness is further highlighted by his expertise in video games and his clothing choices, particularly the manner in which his graphic T-shirts foreground his love of pop culture (one features the Fantastic Four logo, another *Astro Boy*: a Japanese comic) and his lack of self-confidence (visualized in a shirt that reads "Zero").¹⁸ Gangly and physically and emotionally vulnerable, Scott is an unlikely hero for a deadly, high-action quest, and much of the movie's pleasure derives from the unexpected ways in which this underdog not only survives his confrontations with the formidable exes but, through a combination of skill, smarts, and the help of his friends (including Knives and Ramona), conquers them.¹⁹ That Scott is played by Michael Cera, discussed at the opening of this chapter as an actor associated with playing geek characters, further foregrounds these elements of the character. However, the complex nature of Cera's stardom, which, as Vary notes, encompasses not only geekiness but elements of sex appeal, also introduces elements of the rake figure into the character's already-amorous nature.

The most overt way in which Scott is characterized as a rake figure is in his multiple love interests—from former girlfriends Kim and Envy to his current involvement with Knives and Ramona—and in the mobility of his desire, which quickly transfers from Knives to Ramona. Yet Scott is a somewhat failed rake, still reeling from Envy's dismissive treatment of their past relationship and unable to succeed with Ramona who, his acerbic friend Julie assures him, is "out of your league." It is through his battles with the exes that Scott gains Ramona's trust and affection

and progresses toward a personal confidence that moves him closer to the rake figure's power and prominence.

These spectacular battles—showcasing the contrast between the highly skilled and muscled exes, with their formidable weapons, and the gawky, vulnerable Scott—become the film's central trope. Foregrounding the character's and the film's connection with video games and pop culture, Scott's victories are graphically tallied just like battles in a video game, with numbers appearing on-screen as he gains points with each success. The conquest of the exes, who dissolve into a shower of silver coins when they are defeated, emphasizes this and highlights the spectacular nature of their bodies in connection to and in contrast with Scott. In his final battle, Scott wields a sword named "the Power of Self-Respect," this visible sense of his growing confidence, along with a timely assist from Knives, ensuring his ultimate success over Gideon. Seemingly real, yet deliberately fantastic, improbable, yet part of a clear character arc from awkward vulnerability to dominance, the battles remove elements of the character's geekiness, even as the visual and aural references to video games reinforce Scott's geek characteristics and serve as a reminder of the film's creators', and viewers', own pleasures in gaming and pop culture.

By the finale, Scott is no longer either a socially and sexually insecure geek or a rake constantly on the prowl for another girlfriend but a confident young man in a committed relationship, while Ramona's long list of exes and the sexual experimentation those relationships (one with twins, another with a girl) represent seem to have disappeared.²⁰ The film's conclusion serves, to an extent, to shut down the more fluid gendered and sexed elements of both characters, removing Scott from his homo-social world with Wallace (including sharing a bed with Wallace and a string of Wallace's boyfriends) and divorcing Ramona from her complicated, diverse dating past.

The character of Ramona is a particularly interesting, and vexed, element of the film and its representation of gender and sexuality. In a twist, many of the aspects of the rake figure are placed in the character of Ramona, not Scott, particularly the sense of seriality (her seven exes) and the power balance in these relationships (she ends them). This transfers some of the more powerful, but also ambivalent, aspects of the rake figure to Ramona, excusing Scott from some of the rake's more negative aspects while still allowing him the mobility of desire to pursue multiple love objects, even as he finally makes a decision to unite with Ramona.

The character of Ramona is a vital aspect of *Scott Pilgrim*, the source of Scott's quest, yet also something of an enigma: a character who is both active, assisting Scott in his labors, yet also passive, ultimately an observer and largely powerless in Scott's final battle with Gideon. The film's treatment of Ramona forms a reminder of the relatively limited role of women in the texts I have discussed, in which female characters are both a necessary part of, and apart from, the central narrative and the adventures of the male characters. These female characters are important as objects the male characters pursue—for love or simply sex—and, considering the manner in which the films move the characters away from the homoerotic, as a means of overtly foregrounding heterosexual desire. However, they rarely become more than focal points of desire, and their agency is limited. The films' narratives largely marginalize female characters and female desire, using their bodies and desire primarily as a goad to male desire and activity (as in the case of Ramona's exes), despite the fact that women are a significant part of the audience for these films; so much so that Abrams notes in his commentary for *Star Trek* that he created his opening scene to deliberately court female viewers.²¹

The ramifications of a combination of geek and rake are thus diverse and thought-provoking. For example, through this process the normally powerless, outsider geek is reimagined as socially and sexually successful, even dominant. In mixing elements of geek and rake, textual producers not only rewrite both types but also seem to speak to the nature of contemporary masculinity, a masculinity that may appear more fluid and flexible. Yet such a combination, and the nature of the efforts to create this, is complex. While this fusion seems to speak to a greater liminality of male types, the result, at least as played out in these films, sometimes feels less than truly liberating. In truth, the masculinity created is ambiguous, even ambivalent: seemingly more fluid, yet relatively rigid—one that encourages emotional affect, particularly toward other males, yet clamps down on such display to focus on physical goals and adventures; one that foregrounds male-male bonding, yet moves away from the implications of homoeroticism to focus on strictly heterosexual desire; and one that both displays and denies the male body as a source of visual spectacle and erotic desire. Thus, while the transformation of the geek may, on the surface, seem empowering and liberating for geek characters and the viewers who identify with them, the results are decidedly more ambiguous for screen visions of contemporary masculinity and for gender and sexuality as a whole.

NOTES

1. Harold Weber, *The Restoration Rake-Hero* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 3.
2. Don Juan first appears in Tirso de Molina's 1630 work *El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* (*The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest*).
3. Laura J. Rosenthal, "Masculinity in Restoration Drama," in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. Susan J. Owen (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 100–102.
4. On p. 78 of his essay "From Monkey to Maudlin: Jerry Lewis in the Films of Frank Tashlin," from *Film and Television Stardom*, Ethan de Seife describes the personas the duo maintained from the 1940s on thus: "Martin was the suave, easygoing lothario who got the girl, and Lewis was his manic, apelike sidekick who caused the problems that Martin had to solve" (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008).
5. As co-creator of TV's *Lost* (2004–2010) and *Fringe* (2008–2013), and director of the *Star Trek* reboots and *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015), Abrams is a particularly notable influence.
6. On p. 50 of *Sick in the Head: Conversations about Life and Comedy*, Apatow notes that being a year younger than his fellow kids and physically smaller shaped his experiences: "On some level, I guess it made me feel less masculine. And as a result, I often feel like a nerd. I have a beautiful wife, I'm successful. But I still feel like the kid who's picked last in gym class. And that shaped my idea of comedy being about outsiders. It was a way for me to attack all of those systems that I thought were unfair to me" (New York: Random House, 2015).
7. Anneke Smelik, "Gay and Lesbian Criticism," *Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, eds. John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 140.
8. On p. 10 of *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, Henry Jenkins discusses clichés associated with fans of the *Star Trek* texts (and fans in general). While he does not use the terms geek or nerd in discussing these fans, many of the clichés he lists—as feminized or desexualized, obsessively devoted to particular media texts, and "social misfits"—connect to clichés often used in discussions of geeks (London: Routledge, 1992).
9. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 123.
10. Kathleen Karlyn, *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 8.
11. On pp. 1–2 of *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick discusses what she terms "male homosocial desire," noting that the phrase is "intended to mark both discrimination

- and paradoxes," going on to argue that "To draw the 'homosocial' back into the orbit of 'desire,' of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of the continuum between homosocial and homosexual—a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted" (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
12. Discussing often-dichotomous perspectives on masculinity on pp. 18–19 of *Masculinities and Culture*, John Beynon cites the work of Paul Hoch, who "identifies two recurring themes in the history of masculinity, namely the 'puritan theme,' which celebrates a masculinity based on duty, hard work and the meeting of laudable goals and the 'playboy theme,' the emphasis being upon enjoying life, leisure and pleasure" (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2002). This split of the playboy and puritan speaks directly to the dualism of Kirk and Spock in the Prime universe.
 13. Arguably, the original characters, even the seemingly one-note Kirk Prime, are already somewhat complex. On p. 12 of the essay "A Part of Myself No Man Should Ever See," from *Enterprise Zones*, Elyce Rae Helford notes, "I argue that the figure we call 'Kirk' is made up of multiple masculinities through which he variously appears as stereotypical patriarch, feminized man, and a more complex patriarchal subject of gender play—a figure who reveals masculine and feminine as constructs that bear no relationship to the biological male or female other than that which we ascribe for sociopolitical reasons, even as he retains traditional political dominance" (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).
 14. This is due, the film reveals, both to his human side and because Vulcans maintain a focus on logic and a cool exterior as a way to channel the intense emotions simmering inside them.
 15. A number of scholars have discussed this, notably Joanna Russ in her chapter "Pornography by Women, For Women, With Love," from *Magic Mommas, Trembling Sisters, Puritans and Perverts* (Berkeley: The Crossing Press, 1985), based on her essay "Another Addict Raves about K/S" from *Nome*.
 16. She says, "You're much cleverer than your reputation suggests, Captain Kirk." In the Prime universe, Marcus and Kirk later have a son: David. Marcus then cites the negative experience of her friend Christine Chapel with Kirk, who does not seem to recall Chapel.
 17. Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture*, 6.
 18. Much of the visual representation of the character comes from the source material, including Scott's "Zero" shirt.
 19. In his DVD commentary, director Wright argues that the improbability of Scott's success is part of the point: "the idea that if you got really good at *Streetfighter* you might be able to hold your own in a real-life fight."
 20. The mobility of her desire is treated somewhat differently than his. Scott acknowledges the problem of his rakish ways to Knives and Ramona,

but the film does not critique his romantic history as it does that of the female characters, particularly Ramona and Envy.

21. Abrams begins with a scene designed to engage viewers' emotions in order, he notes, "to get our wives to watch this."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Apatow, Judd. *Sick in the Head: Conversations About Life and Comedy*. New York: Random House, 2015.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Ed. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- Beynon, John. *Masculinities and Culture*. Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2002.
- de Siefe, Ethan. "From Monkey to Maudlin: Jerry Lewis in the Films of Frank Tashlin." *Film and Television Stardom*. Edited by Kylo-Patrick R. Hart. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008. 76–89.
- Helford, Elyce Rae. "A Part of Myself No Man Should Ever See." *Enterprise Zones: Critical Positions on Star Trek*. Edited by Taylor Harrison, Sarah Projansky, Kent A. Ono, and Elyce Rae Helford. Boulder: Westview Press, 1996. 11–31.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Karlyn, Kathleen. *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995.
- Rosenthal, Laura J. "Masculinity in Restoration Drama." *A Companion to Restoration Drama*. Ed. Susan J. Owen. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001. 92–108.
- Russ, Joanna. *Magic Mommas, Trembling Sisters, Puritans and Perverts: Essays on Sex and Pornography*. Berkeley: The Crossing Press, 1985.
- Scott Pilgrim vs. the World*. Directed by Greg Mottola. Universal City, CA: Universal Studios, 2010.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.
- Smelik, Anneke. "Gay and Lesbian Criticism." *Oxford Guide to Film Studies*. Edited by John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 135–147.
- Star Trek*. Directed by J.J. Abrams. Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2009.
- Star Trek: Into Darkness*. Directed by J.J. Abrams. Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2013.
- Superbad*. Directed by Greg Mottola. Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2007.
- Vary, Adam B. "The Year of the Geek." *Entertainment Weekly*. 21 Dec. 2007. Time, Inc. 23 Nov. 2015.
- Weber, Harold. *The Restoration Rake-Hero*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986.

The Horror of the Geek: The Geek Archetype in Slasher Film

Sotiris Petridis

INTRODUCTION: THE SLASHER FILM SUBGENRE

This chapter will examine the representation of the "geek" characters in slasher films. In this subgenre, all the characters are structured in a manner that gives them stereotypical traits, making their representation just a part of the whole formula. The Final Girl is the most well-known archetypal character of slasher films, followed by the killer. The geek archetype is a relatively new character form that has not been analyzed thoroughly. I will analyze three distinctive slasher films from three different decades—*Scream* (Craven 1996), *Halloween: Resurrection* (Rosenthal 2002), and *The Cabin in the Woods* (Goddard 2012)—for an understanding of the geek's representation in slasher films and society as a whole. Based on an in-depth analysis, I will see how the geek archetype is represented in the subgenre and how this affects the formula of the narrative.

Cinematic horror is one of the most popular genres and constitutes an integral part of pop culture. The genre itself has many famous subgenres,

S. Petridis (✉)
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki,
Thessaloniki, Greece

© The Author(s) 2018
K.E. Lane (ed.), *Age of the Geek*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65744-8_14