VISUAL AND METAFICTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR THE RECLAMATION OF A LEGACY IN *CANDYMAN* (NIA DACOSTA, 2021)

ALEJANDRO LÓPEZ LIZANA

1. INTRODUCTION: "BELIEVE IN ME"

Throughout the film, the monstrous villain in *Candyman* (Bernard Rose, 1992) displays a relentless obsession with maintaining a place in the collective memory. His preferred victims are those who speak his name five times in front of a mirror, an act that itself implies the sceptical disbelief of the speaker: Candyman kills those who don't take him seriously, and in so doing, he feeds his own legend. This is why he feels compelled to intervene when Helen Lyle, a PhD student researching urban legends, discovers a criminal gang exploiting the evil spirit's reputation. With an earthly culprit to blame for the murders in Chicago's Cabrini-Green housing project, Candyman runs the risk of losing the faith of his believers; to prevent this, he must spill more innocent blood so that his legend might live on.

Meanwhile, Helen's encounter with the supernatural plunges her into an existential crisis that grows worse when she is wrongfully charged for the murder of her friend Bernadette, and finally pushes her over the edge when she discovers her striking physical resemblance to Candyman's former lover. The monster, determined to work a *miracle* that will assure his immortality, seduces Helen into joining him. Although she ultimately betrays him to save the infant Anthony from the fire that almost consumes all three of them, Candyman keeps his promise. After her death, a mural of Helen is painted on a city wall in Cabrini-Green, and her addition to the Candyman legend is rendered complete when, embracing her new spectral nature, she murders her husband in revenge for his cheating on her with a student.

The spiritual transcendence that Candyman promises Helen is not limited to her transformation into a ghost but also involves her integration into a story that is worthy of being remembered and (re)told (Wyrick, 1998: 101). And indeed, this quest for immortality is consummated as well on

a metacinematic level, as the huge success of the first film ensured that Candyman's legacy would carry on thanks to the all-too-predictable production of sequels. The most recent addition to the franchise—*Candyman* (Nia DaCosta, 2021)—explores this idea of a legacy once again: at the climax to the film, when Anthony bids his girlfriend goodbye after being assimilated into the spectre, all that he asks of her is for her to tell everyone about what happened so that his story is never forgotten. In this way, the never-ending repetition of icons that characterises the horror film genre allows Nia DaCosta and Jordan Peele to play a metafictional game that combines Helen/Anthony's determination to get to the bottom of the Candyman legend, Candyman's own need to be talked about, and the relationship between the creators of the sequel, their product and the original film on which it is based. Anthony's resurrection of Candyman (who had been dormant for years) thus effectively alludes to the revival of the saga itself by means of its 2021 instalment. This revival should be understood not merely in commercial terms but also on a thematic level. Challenging the notion that the tiresome production of sequels and remakes was one of the symptoms (or causes) of the crisis that afflicted the horror genre in the 2000s (Hantke, 2010), *Candyman*'s status as a sequel actually enriches the film as it expands the idea of legacy inherent in its predecessor.

At this point, it is worth considering the thematic continuity between the two films. Mikel Koven (1999: 158) cites Danielson (1979) and Wood (1979) to argue that the evolution of horror as a genre and of monster-victim dynamics in particular reflect the tensions of contemporary society.[1] Along the same lines, Knöppler suggests that the production of a remake reveals either the continued relevance of the themes explored in the original film or the need to update them in accordance with the current cultural climate (2017: 10).[2] In this sense, a comparison of two different films in a franchise can reveal how the themes they deal with have evolved over time (2017: 12). In the specific case of the 2021 *Candyman* instalment, Falvey, Hickinbottom and Wroot (2020: 5) identify its screenwriter, Jordan Peele, as a leading exponent of "revisionist horror", a contemporary movement characterised by the use of "the genre's dark thematic currency as a means of scrutinising prevailing social anxieties."[3] It could therefore be expected that his adaptation of *Candyman* would be written with the aim of revising the issues of race raised in the original film.

In view of the considerations outlined above, this article explores the context in which the 2021 sequel to *Candyman* revises the 1992 film that inspired it, and how the ideas of legacy and memory, which are key to the plotlines of both films, are reflected in the design of the saga and in its potential political reading.

2. EXAMINING THE PAST

Before the release of *Candyman* in 1992, the African American community had no horror icon that could be compared to the likes of Freddy Krueger, Michael Myers, or other slasher stars. In 2012, Virginia Madsen, who portrayed Helen Lyle in the film, suggested that Candyman was created with the idea of being "an African American Dracula" (Caprilozzi, 2012). Twenty years earlier, however, Madsen had feared that audiences would reject the idea of a Black killer and had even remarked: "I don't think Spike Lee will like this film" (Lovell: 1992).

In fact, Clive Barker's short story "The Forbidden", on which the film was based, makes no reference to Candyman's race. As Madsen points out, Bernard Rose thus knew that the film would become a talking point when he chose Tony Todd to play the title role and decided to change the setting from Liverpool to Chicago (Caprilozzi, 2012). Nevertheless, his idea was not welcomed by all critics. While acknowledging that the film attempts to offer a well-intentioned social critique,

Judith Halberstam argues that ultimately the horror "[…] stabilizes in the ghastly body of the black man whose monstrosity turns upon his desire for the white woman and his murderous intentions towards black women" (Halberstam, 1995: 5).[3]

It is worth noting that Jordan Peele, screenwriter and producer of the 2021 sequel, has justified his reclamation of the franchise by asserting the importance that the original film had for his generation (Collis, 2020). Moreover, for the film's co-writer and director, Nia DaCosta, it was crucially important that this time the story should be articulated through a "black lens" (Travis, 2020). This decision may be interpreted in two ways: on the one hand, the role of primary audience is assigned to black spectators, whose existence is not usually taken into account in this type of film (Sobande, 2019: 239) and for whom the real horror often involves seeing themselves reduced to "abject figments of white imagination" (Wester, 2012: 25); and on the other, the 2021 *Candyman* drops the character of Helen to focus instead on Brianna and (especially) Anthony, whose experience is the film's main focus. In giving the lead role to a middle-class white woman, the 1992 *Candyman* was accused of perpetuating the cliché of the white saviour (Briefel & Ngai, 1996: 79), and even of undermining the appropriation of the *privilege* of scaring and being scared, which for the first time in the history of the genre was held by the Black community (Briefel & Ngai, 1996: 85, 90). But in contrast to the first Candyman, Anthony is not a mere reflection of blackness understood as a representation of monstrous otherness,[4] but a feeling individual[5] who is undergoing a gradual process of physical and psychological deterioration.

As will be discussed further below, there are undeniable parallels between Anthony and Helen. First of all, both are outsiders in Cabrini-Green who decide to investigate the Candyman legend for selfish reasons. Driven by their (possibly prophetic) desire for recognition, these investigators immerse themselves in the testi-

monies of locals and experts to reconstruct a legend that they have unwittingly been a part of all along: Helen as a reincarnation of Daniel Robitaille's former lover, and Anthony as the *miracle baby* of the first instalment, destined to revive the belief in Candyman among the residents of Cabrini-Green, who had sworn never to summon him again after the events of 1992. The main difference between the two is that while Helen maintains her individuality when she is turned into a spectre, Anthony merges with Candyman after he is gunned down by the police. DaCosta and Peele introduce the idea here that Candyman was never really just one man; instead, he is a kind of *hive*, made up of hundreds of victims representing all the pain and the injustices suffered by African Americans (Langston League, 2021: 43). By being turned into a symbol of intergenerational trauma, the idea that Candyman punishes those who do not believe in him takes on an element of social struggle. Accordingly, DaCosta's inversion of the hegemonic vision of monstrosity with the character of Anthony can be extrapolated to his victims. While in the original film Candyman murders an innocent Black woman, in the sequel he only attacks white people who exhibit some form of deplorable, racist behaviour (the bullying by the girls in the school bathroom, the tyrannical attitude of the gallery owner, the lofty disdain of the art critic, or the brutality of the police). This distinction addresses another common concern of African American artists: the popular depiction of violence and oppression of Blacks against Blacks (Wester, 2012: 254).

Moreover, the representation of the monster as a collective connects with the titling of the 2021 film simply as *Candyman*, without a number or subtitle to identify its position in the saga (a common practice for remakes but unusual for a direct sequel). Just as the spectre is revealed to be an amalgam of different faces and stories, the matching title suggests that the continuity in relation to the 1992 film is not linear but a case of con-

Image 1. Troy tells the story of Helen. © 2020 Universal Pictures and MGM Pictures

vergence around the same mythology. The way the 2021 version is placed in the franchise also contributes to this effect: by taking only the original Bernard Rose film as its point of reference, ignoring both *Candyman: Farewell to the Flesh* (Bill Condon, 1995) and *Candyman 3: Day of the Dead* (Turi Meyer, 1999),[6] the saga as a whole is effectively turned into a collection of testimonies that do not always agree with one another. In this way, the coexistence of different versions of the story is a reflection of the way its protagonists reconstruct the legend based on mutually contradictory sources.

Helen's absence in the 2021 *Candyman* is also used as a way of exploring this question. At the beginning of the film, Brianna's brother tells the couple a version of the Helen Lyle legend that is very different from the one we know: after a series of murders, she tried to burn a baby alive,

THE MATCHING TITLE SUGGESTS THAT THE CONTINUITY BETWEEN THE TWO FILMS IS NOT LINEAR BUT A CASE OF CONVERGENCE AROUND THE SAME MYTHOLOGY

but she threw herself into the flames when the locals of Cabrini-Green managed to subdue her and seize the baby from her. Just as striking as this apocryphal version of the events is the way that DaCosta depicts them, as the story is represented with a shadow puppet play that interrupts the scene at Anthony and Brianna's apartment. These puppets are used repeatedly throughout the film as a substitute for the traditional flashback or direct narration by one of the characters. Notably, one of the initial sequences also uses them to foreshadow Candyman's appearance, although on this occasion it is revealed that it is a child playing with them. Beyond their potential for creating tension, the tone of fable or children's game reinforces the sense that the story being told is not reliable. Finally, in relation to one of the questions discussed above, the use of shadow puppets also completely eliminates the need to depict explicit violence against Black victims.

In contrast, in the opening scenes to the 1992 film, Candyman's voiceover is followed by a close-up of Helen at her university, interviewing a student whose story about the spectre is presented in the form of a flashback. Later, at the dinner where Professor Purcell explains the death of Daniel Robitaille in detail, there is no visual support

to the story; instead, the camera focuses entirely on the professor's speech. These two strategies are combined in the 2021 *Candyman* when Anthony meets Billy Burke, the Cabrini-Green resident who is the first to tell him about Candyman. It is noteworthy that the only cases where the film makes use of flashbacks are the moments when Billy talks about his experiences as a witness; all the other stories, including the moment when Anthony discovers that he was the baby in Helen's story, are presented using shadow puppets. As a direct testimony, the veracity of Billy's flashback is beyond doubt, and his status as an expert is confirmed when we see him reading a novel by Clive Barker (the extracinematic source of original Candyman story). In an ironic twist, however, the child we see playing with the puppets at the beginning of the film turns out to be Billy himself as a small child, as he has been plotting Candyman's return for years and has been manipulating Anthony to achieve it. In this way, the contrast between the realism of the flashback and the playful folktale quality of the shadow puppet theatre serves as a strategy that plays with the spectator's expectations. While the exploration of the space between legend and reality was already central to

the first *Candyman* (Wyrick, 1998: 89-91), DaCosta and Peele take this question further by making use of a false dichotomy between apparently contradictory narrative devices that end up sharing authorship.

3. PARALLELS AND MIRROR VISIONS

As noted above, some critics have pointed out that the killer-victim dynamic between Candyman and Helen served to perpetuate traditional gender and racial binaries. More recently, however, Lucy Fife Donaldson has suggested that the connection between the two characters is portrayed using complex strategies of representation that depict them more as doubles than as binary opposites (Donaldson, 2011). Although these two different propositions need not be mutually exclusive, the replacement of Helen with Anthony in the 2021 sequel not only avoids the problem that afflicted its predecessor but actually leverages this image of the double to emphasise the relationship between the two films.

First of all, contrary to the norm for "final girls" in slasher films (Clover, 1992), Candyman never tries to kill Helen or Anthony, but instead engages in an emotional destabilising strategy that foreshadows a special destiny for both characters. In his analysis of the scene where Candyman appears to Helen for the first time, Donaldson (2011) notes that the disruptive nature of the encounter is structured around Helen's visual experience: the shot of her face, in a trance-like state, is interrupted by the image of the monster and by fleeting cuts to the graffiti of Cabrini-Green, revealing both the neighbourhood's growing malaise and the supernatural quality of the phenomenon. Anthony, meanwhile, is rendered catatonic by his successive encounters

Image 2. Billy with the Clive Barker book. © 2020 Universal Pictures and MGM Pictures

with Candyman, although the definitive trigger is the conversation with his mother when she confesses the truth about his origins. Like Helen's scene in the original film, a long shot of Anthony's face is interrupted to show both the source of his grief (his own mother while she tells him the story) and a series of unreal images (various cuts to the shadow puppets). The similarities in visual composition serve a dual narrative purpose, as in addition to accentuating Helen's and Anthony's status as victims, they occur just when Anne-Marie recalls the moment that Helen saved Anthony's life.

Image 3. Anthony experiences an illusion in the mirror. © 2020 Universal Pictures and MGM Pictures

Secondly, part of Candyman's destabilising strategy consists in making Helen/Anthony look guilty for crimes they have not committed. For Ian Conrich (2015: 112), this exchange of guilt is one of the defining features of the post-slasher.[7] Due to the fact that a supernatural entity cannot be charged with murder, Helen is pursued and arrested for Candyman's crimes. This obviously drains her psychologically, however much she may declare herself incapable of committing such heinous acts. The sequel adapts this premise to its purpose of social commentary, with the police gunning Anthony down without evidence and even coercing Brianna to testify against him. However, although it is true that neither of the two characters have actually killed anyone, both films play with the idea of guilt at a structural level: Helen, through the position of superiority she assumes when she arrives in Cabrini-Green, sacrifices herself in a kind of atonement for the white liberal hegemony that keeps the neighbourhood in its deprived state (Briefel & Ngai, 1996: 79, 88), while in 2019, Anthony cannot deny that he is one of the artists and intellectuals responsible for the neighbourhood's gentrification.

At this point, the parallels and connections between the saga's three main characters are made explicit in the sequel in scenes such as the elevator scene or the art critic's visit, when Anthony sees Candyman's reflection instead of his own, foreshadowing their inevitable union. This of course involves one of the most predominant visual elements in the film: the mirror. In practical terms, it is a frequently used object in horror films due to its potential to surprise and subvert expectations. For example, Clive Privler's murder takes place in an art gallery filled with looking glasses that reveal Candyman's reflection while the invisible spectre exacts his revenge. On the other hand, in the scene where Anthony summons the spectre, the mirror is shrouded in shadow: the camera focuses on Anthony and Brianna, and the spectator's inability to see what the characters see reduces the tension of the moment. The mirror's ability to attract and redirect the gaze gives it the quality of a door into the supernatural, and consequently, a space of confrontation, but also

THE MIRROR'S ABILITY TO ATTRACT AND REDIRECT THE GAZE GIVES IT THE QUALITY OF A DOOR INTO THE SUPERNATURAL

of introspection. The ritual requires the summoner to keep his gaze fixed on his reflection while he speaks Candyman's name five times;[8] in other words, the summoner must be able to endure his or her own gaze. Generally, Candyman's victims are able to perform the ritual without remorse because they don't believe in its consequences—or, by extension, in Candyman. The only exception is Brianna: fully aware of the monster's existence, she uses the invocation to punish the police officers who killed Anthony, which is why she herself is not targeted in the massacre. In return, the ritual requires her to actively seek out and confront her own gaze, in an external expression of her battle with her own conscience.

In relation to the introspective potential of the mirror, one innovation of the 2021 film over its predecessor is the idea that the mirror's reflection can serve to change the perspective of the observer. This is at least the purpose behind Anthony's installation for the art gallery: based on the Candyman legend, his idea is to install an ordinary mirror which, when opened, reveals a small, ominously lit room filled with paintings portraying the suffering of the Black community. The invitation to the game is in turn an invitation to reflect, to confront reality, but Anthony plans it at a point when he does not yet believe in the supernatural. Later, after Clive and his girlfriend have been murdered in the gallery, Brianna catches Anthony in a trance in front of the bathroom mirror: this is the point when he begins to submit to Candyman's hypnotic powers, symbolising a change to the meaning of the mirror for him.

Another interesting aspect of Anthony's installation is its outward resemblance to Helen's mirror. In the original film, when Helen removes the medicine cabinet from the bathroom wall, she finds a hole connecting her apartment to the one next door. She thus discovers that her apartment was built according to the same plans as the apartment blocks in the nearby Cabrini-Green neighbourhood, which in turn provides a rational

explanation for the deaths attributed to Candyman, given that anyone could get into one apartment from another through the mirror. Both this theory and Anthony's installation constitute a vain attempt to domesticate the supernatural quality of the spectre based on the premise that it is possible to *uncover* the truth just as easily as it is for both characters to reveal a hidden room. Once again, the 2021 *Candyman* becomes a reflection of its 1992 counterpart, with the exception that in the new film the game of mirrors operates on two levels: Anthony is connected to Helen and Helen is connected to Candyman through a place of residence whose architectural similarities to the Cabrini-Green apartments are obscured by the dramatic socioeconomic differences between the two neighbourhoods (Briefel & Ngai, 1996: 81).

The importance of urban space in both films is obvious right from their opening sequences. In the 1992 *Candyman*, an aerial shot follows cars driving down one of the many freeways that criss-cross the city. After this opening shot, the Philip Glass music gives way to the sound of Candyman's voice, speaking to the spectator while a huge swarm of bees rises up and engulfs the city skyscrapers. Then, finally, Helen appears. As Abbot points out, while the monster's monologue is typical of the slasher, the shot of the Chicago cityscape establishes an urban setting that is highly unusual for the genre, which until then was more commonly set in rural or residential areas than in the heart of a big city (Abbot, 2015: 69-71). The 2021 *Candyman* opens with a quote from the original film: immediately after the flashback presenting the story of Billy and Sherman Fields, the camera similarly moves through the streets of Chicago, but this time with a POV from the ground looking up. Instead of Candyman and his swarm of bees, the sequence culminates with a rotating shot that finally focuses on Brianna's brother and his partner, who are on their way to the dinner where Troy will tell them the story of Helen Lyle. In this way, the sequel is presented as a reflection

of the original, from which it has inherited the notion that the hero and the villain of the story are connected through the urban landscape (Abbot, 2015: 70).

The editing thus foreshadows are key moment in the storyline of both films. The failed Cabrini-Green housing project constitutes a convention of the slasher film that Carol Clover refers to as "the terrible place", an apparently safe setting that ultimately proves fatal for the protagonists (Clover, 1992: 30-31). Far from being a faithful, realistic representation of Cabrini-Green, the cinematic version of this residential area depicts a maze of passages and tunnels reminiscent of the Gothic tradition (Abbot, 2015: 76), dispossessed of its inhabitants in order to convey the illusion of a remote, forgotten wasteland (Briefel y Ngai, 1996: 82). The terrible place evokes a "concentration of memories" that blurs the divide between the real and the imaginary (Abbot, 2015: 70).

4. ART AND MEMORY

A perfect example of how the cinematic version of Cabrini-Green is depicted as an epistemological labyrinth is the slogan "Sweets for the sweet" that appears in graffiti scrawled on the walls around the neighbourhood. On the one hand, the phrase alludes both to Candyman and to the local drug trade, encouraging a twofold reading of the urban setting on mythical and historical levels; and on the other, the atmosphere of decline turns a real-life setting into the perfect location for the slasher film's "terrible place" (Abbot, 2015: 75). Moreover, for Wyrick, graffiti is a symbol of the repossession of the city by its marginalised inhabitants[9] and reminds us that Helen's attempts to appropriate this space by imposing meaning on it culminate with her being *possessed* by the graffiti that immortalises her after her sacrifice (Wyrick, 1998: 93). In this sense, the burst of mental images of this graffiti used by Candyman to destabilise Helen symbolises the effective demolition of her preconceived ideas about Cabrini-Green. Prior to this point, in fact, the method Helen applies to her research in the neighbourhood reveals a treatment of space as a mere source of data to support her theories; as Donaldson (2011) points out, the camera position and the editing are focused on Helen's gaze rather than on the details of the location, and the researcher's over-confident attitude suggests that she would rather ignore reality (in-

Image 4. Anthony taking pictures of the walls of Cabrini-Green. © 2020 Universal Pictures and MGM Pictures

cluding the potential danger she faces) if it means she can extract more information.

It is worth noting that in Clive Barker's original short story, Helen is not doing her thesis on urban legends but studying graffiti in Liverpool. This transition from image to word as an object of study is reversed in the 2021 film through Anthony, an artist who is desperate to shake himself out of a creative slump. Although both characters arrive in Cabrini-Green with the same equipment to document their findings (a photo camera and a recorder or a notebook), the importance that these objects have for each of them is inverted: it is no accident that the first thing we see after Anthony's encounter with Billy is the protagonist painting in his studio, while Helen spends her time transcribing notes for her thesis. This foreshadows a shift towards the visual that is expressed in various ways. For example, as noted above, shadow puppet sequences are inserted into the sequel to support the narration; conversely, the scene in the original film where Helen interviews the student places obvious emphasis on the orality of the act, with the camera focusing on the tape recorder and on Helen's attentive expression. Moreover, as Koven suggests, the flashback that presents the story could be interpreted as a mirror universe within the diegesis, with Helen listening to her student's story in the same way she would watch a movie (Koven, 1999: 161). For Bernard Rose, Koven argues, cinema is "a medium of narration [...] linked to traditional oral storytelling" (Koven, 1999: 161), but DaCosta's conception seems to be quite the opposite; thus, the reflection of this "story within a story" is located precisely in the "work of art within art" that Anthony presents at his exhibition.

Of course, Anthony's profession represents another connection to Candyman through Daniel Robitaille, the monster's *alter ego* in the original film. Robitaille, an acclaimed artist of his day despite being the son of a freed slave, was lynched by a mob for having a sexual relationship with a white woman. As part of his punishment, his assailants cut off his hand and replaced it with a hook, an act that Wyrick interprets as a kind of castration that prevents him from being able to express himself artistically and dooms him to repeat the violence he has suffered, perpetrating it on others (Wyrick, 1998: 110). In the original *Candyman*, whose plot revolves around the relationship between Candyman and Helen, the hook could be understood in the context of the slasher's fondness for sharp weapons, which result in a more *intimate* death (Clover, 1992: 32). In the sequel, however, Robitaille's story becomes just one more among thousands of unjust deaths that must be remembered, which is in turn what inspires Anthony to begin painting the faces of dozens of unknown people as Candyman's influence over him grows stronger.

In a way, the transition from one film to the other could be summed up in the shift from the "be my victim" appeal that the monster directs specifically at Helen to the "say my name" tagline featured in the marketing campaign for the sequel: the invitation to perform the ritual that summons Candyman is maintained, but it is stripped of its intimate nature and acquires a tone of reclamation through the connection of the name to the memory of the victims who now form part of the spectre. When Anthony joins the hive and is no longer able to compensate for Robitaille's artistic castration, the monster confers upon Brianna the task of keeping his legend alive. As a gallery director, she is called upon not only to tell others about

---

THE TRANSITION FROM ONE FILM TO THE OTHER COULD BE SUMMED UP IN THE SHIFT FROM THE APPEAL "BE MY VICTIM" THAT THE MONSTER DIRECTS SPECIFICALLY AT HELEN TO THE TAGLINE "SAY MY NAME" FEATURED IN THE MARKETING CAMPAIGN FOR THE SEQUEL.

Images 5 and 6. Lighting in the art gallery and police car scenes. © 2020 Universal Pictures and MGM Pictures

what happened, but to show Anthony's work to the world. While Wyrick (1998: 104) argues that what motivates the original Candyman is a "retributive cyclicality" that lacks a revolutionary purpose, Peele and DaCosta's reinterpretation maintain the character's thirst for vengeance but channel it through art towards an enduring call for social change.

Once again, this idea points towards a meta-cinematic reading of *Candyman*. While a connection has been suggested between the legend of the monster and the films themselves, the quality of reclamation in the spectre's final appearance in the sequel is consistent with DaCosta aim in updating the saga. This time, however, the filmmaker plays with reality and fiction in a way that depends decisively on the visual by exploiting the assumptions of the slasher genre. In the story, Anthony uses violent images, dark colours and all kinds of expressive excesses to ensure that his paintings affect the viewer, but his work is dismissed by the art critic who finds the message to be too obvious and unoriginal. Although her attitude changes when Clive's death gives Anthony's work some media coverage,[10] it is already too late: she is also murdered by Candyman, and the crime marks a turning point for Anthony, whose portraits become increasingly horrific as the

spectre's influence over him grows stronger. This conclusion suggests that the visual excesses that typify the slasher (Abbot, 2015: 68) offer an ideal way of grabbing society's attention: the originality demanded by the art critic is thus dismissed in view of the urgent nature of the message that the art is seeking to convey. Along the same lines, the process of destabilisation that Anthony suffers as Candyman draws closer to him is much more physical than Helen's, with several scenes revelling in the progressive decay of his skin and his flesh.

Furthermore, the original *Candyman* made use of camera and sound effects to create sensory illusions that highlight the monster's dreamlike quality and mark a break from ordinary daily experience (Abbot, 2015: 73). The sequel, on the other hand, adopts a naturalist aesthetic that anchors the events in the real world, in keeping with the approach of the neoslasher (Adams, 2015: 96), while maintaining its predecessor's strategy of destabilising the realistic setting. The mechanism used to achieve this, however, is different from the device used in the first film, as it more often involves playing with the lighting (as in the elevator scene) and with the palette of colours. Specifically, the killing of Clive and his girlfriend exploits the location of the art gallery to tinge the atmosphe-

re in blue and red hues, a chromatic choice that links the scene to the film's denouement (with the police car sirens lighting up the dark streets of Cabrini-Green). Once again, DaCosta establishes a connection between artistic expression and social injustice that reveals the ethical intent of her film.

5. CONCLUSIONS

According to Briefel & Ngai (1996: 90), the horror genre is an inadequate vehicle for addressing the issues that *Candyman* (1992) attempts to explore, because "social reality murders myth." Nevertheless, Nia DaCosta and Jordan Peele use a strategy involving the appropriation of the Candyman legend in order to examine the intergenerational trauma of the African American community. The result is an ambitious effort in which the concept of legacy inherent in the character, its visual iconography, the sequel's relationship to the rest of the saga, and the slasher genre all converge in a reclamation of the revolutionary and healing potential of art both inside and outside the diegesis. Although DaCosta is not the first filmmaker to explore issues of racism through horror (Pisters, 2020: 158-68), her contribution confirms Leeder's hypothesis that the conservative climate following the election of Donald Trump as president may have favoured the development of the genre (2018: 87).[11] On the other hand, the cyclical nature of horror cinema and the constant return of its monsters (Wyrick, 1998: 113) serves as a reminder that the injustice embodied in Candyman has by no means disappeared. With historical precedents as recent as Michael Brown (2014), Tamir Rice (2014), Walter Scott (2015), and George Floyd (2020), the scene where the police murder Anthony in the denouement to the new *Candyman* represents an explicit condemnation of ongoing institutional racism in the United States, where the monster's obsession with having us speak his name is reshaped as a call to remember the victims.

NOTES

1   Similarly, Douglas Kellner suggests that Hollywood horror films after the 1960s have often offered symbolic representations of "both universal fears and the deepest anxieties and hostilities of contemporary U.S. society" (Kellner, 1996: 271).

2   On the other hand, as Adams points out, the aesthetics of the horror genre tend to reflect both the trends of the genre itself and the other media consumed by its target audience (Adams, 2015: 93). This means that DaCosta's *Candyman*, as a product of its time, cannot be considered in isolation from the latest trends in horror and slasher films; in fact, DaCosta's film displays the "obsession with assaulting the body in protracted and inventive ways" (in Anthony's gradual process of physical decay, but also in the complexity of Candyman's murders) and the distrust in human nature cited by Conrich as defining features of the genre since the September 11 attacks (Conrich, 2010: 3-4).

3   Cfr. Briefel & Ngai (1996: 85, 90) and Kydd (1995: 63).

4   For further exploration of this idea, see Sobande (2019: 240). The conception of horror as a normality threatened by the monstrous can be traced back to Wood (1979).

5   Sobande (2019: 242) offered the same analysis of the protagonist in Peele's directorial debut, *Get Out* (2017).

6   There is a case similar to the title of the 2021 *Candyman* in *Halloween* (David Gordon Green, 2018), which also has the same title as the original instalment of its franchise (John Carpenter, 1978) and serves as a direct continuation that ignores all the other sequels. However, while there were already two films titled *Halloween 2* (the 1981 film directed by Rick Rosenthal, and the sequel to Rob Zombie's 2007 remake, released in 2009), the first *Candyman* sequel was actually only known as *Candyman 2* in Spain, as in the rest of the world its original title was *Candyman: Farewell to the Flesh* (Bill Condon, 1995) (and, therefore, numbering the film would not have caused confusion).

7   For Conrich, the "post-slasher" represented a period of transition in the development of the genre, from the end of the era of the classical slasher up until the

mid-1990s. However, there is no scholarly consensus as to the dates and names of the different periods, as other labels, such as neoslasher, are often used to refer to *Scream* (Wes Craven, 1997). Sotiris Petridis proposes a different classification, including *Candyman* in the classical period (1974-1993) and its original sequels in what he refers to as the "self-referential era" (1994-2000), and concluding his chronology with the neoslasher era, from 2001 to 2013 (Petridis, 2019: 1-3).

8   A variation on the ritual can be found in urban legends such as the Bloody Mary legend, which almost certainly served as inspiration for Candyman (Koven, 1999: 159-160).

9   The official study guide for *Candyman* links graffiti to the collective memory, but also to its use in the golden age of hip-hop as a way of claiming territory (Langston League, 2021: 35).

10 This attitude exposes the thin line between the celebration of African American art and its exploitation, as well as the tendency to promote African American art based on trauma for commercial ends (Langston League, 2021: 34).

11 In fact, Leeder identifies Peele precisely as the first and most important exponent of this trend. Similarly, Sobande (2019: 239) has also analysed *Get Out* in the context of Trump's electoral victory.

REFERENCES

Abbot, S. (2015). Candyman and Saw: Reimagining the Slasher Film through Urban Gothic. In W. Clayton (ed.), *Style and Form in the Hollywood Slasher Film* (pp. 67-78). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Adams, M. R. (2015). Roses Are Red, Violence Is Too: Exploring Stylistic Excess in Valentine. In W. Clayton (ed.), *Style and Form in the Hollywood Slasher Film* (pp. 92-105). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Briefel, A., Ngai, S. (1996). "How much did you pay for this place?" Fear, Entitlement, and Urban Space in Bernard Rose's Candyman. *Camera Obscura*, *13*[1(37)], 69-91. https://doi.org/10.1215/02705346-13-1_37-69

Caprilozzi, C. (2012, 14 December). Twenty Year Retrospective of Candyman with Virginia Madsen. *Horror News Network*. Retrieved from http://www.horrornewsnetwork.net/twenty-year-retrospective-of-candyman-with-virginia-madsen/

Clover, C. J. (1992). *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Collis, C. (2020, 27 February). Candyman trailer looks to hook your attention. *Entertainment Weekly*. Retrieved from https://ew.com/movies/2020/02/27/candyman-trailer/

Conrich, I. (2010). Introduction. In I. Conrich (ed.), *Horror Zone* (pp. 1-8). New York: I. B. Tauris.

Conrich, I. (2015). Puzzles, Contraptions and the Highly Elaborate Moment: The Inevitability of Death in the Grand Slasher Narratives of the *Final Destination* and *Saw* Series of Films. In W. Clayton (ed.), *Style and Form in the Hollywood Slasher Film* (pp. 106-117). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Danielson, L. (1979). Folklore and film: Some thoughts on Baughman Z500-599. *Western Folklore*, *38*(3), 209-219. https://doi.org/10.2307/1499246

Donaldson, L. F. (2011). "The suffering black male body and the threatened white female body": ambiguous bodies in Candyman. *Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*, *9*, 32-43. Retrieved from http://centaur.reading.ac.uk/36210/

Falvey, E., Hickinbottom, J., Wroot, J. (2020). Horror 2020: Introducing New Blood. In E. Falvey, J. Hickinbottom, J. Wroot (eds.), *New Blood: Critical Approaches to Contemporary Horror* (pp. 1-11). Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Halberstam, J. (1995). *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Hantke, S. (2010). Introduction. In S. Hantke (ed.), *American Horror Film: The Genre at the Turn of the Millennium* (pp. vii-xxxii). Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Kellner, D. (1996). Poltergeists, Gender, and Class in the Age of Reagan and Bush. In D. E. James, R. Berg (eds.), *The Hidden Foundation: Cinema and the Question of Class* (pp. 217-239). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Knöppler, C. (2017). *The Monster Always Returns: American Horror Film and Their Remakes*. Bielefeld: Transcript.

Koven, M. J. (1999). Candyman Can: Film and Ostentation. *Contemporary Legend n.s.*, *2*, 155-173.

Kydd, E. (1996). Guess who else is coming to dinner: Racial/sexual Hysteria in Candyman. *CineAction*, *36*, 63-72.

Langston League (ed.) (2021). *Candyman: The Official Companion Guide*. Retrieved from https://dx35vtwk-llhj9.cloudfront.net/universalstudios/candyman-social-impact/syllabus/Candyman_TheOfficialCompanionGuide_Final.pdf

Leeder, M. (2018). *Horror Film: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Lovell, G. (1992, 29 October). Black Slasher "Candyman" Draws Fire Over "Racist" Depictions. *Chicago Tribune*. Retrieved from https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1992-10-29-9204080203-story.html

Petridis, S. (2019). *Anatomy of the Slasher Film: A Theoretical Analysis*. Jefferson: McFarland.

Pisters, P. (2020). *New Blood in Contemporary Cinema. Women Directors and the Poetics of Horror*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Sobande, F. (2019). Dissecting Depictions of Black Masculinity in *Get Out*. In S. Holland, R. Shail, S. Gerrard (eds.), *Gender and Contemporary Horror in Film* (pp. 237-250). Bingley: Emerald Publishing.

Travis, B. (2020, 14 April). Candyman: Why Jordan Peele Chose Nia DaCosta as Director. *Empire*. Retrieved from https://www.empireonline.com/movies/news/candyman-jordan-peele-chose-nia-dacosta-director-exclusive-image/

Wester, M. L. (2012). *African American Gothic: Screams from Shadowed Places*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wood, R. (1979). An introduction to the American Horror Film. In R. Wood & R Lippe (eds.), *The American nightmare* (pp. 7-28). Toronto: Festival of Festivals.

Wyrick, L. (Autumn 1998). Summoning Candyman: The Cultural Production of History. *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, *54*(3), 89-117. https://doi.org/10.1353/arq.1998.0003

VISUAL AND METAFICTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR THE RECLAMATION OF A LEGACY IN *CANDYMAN* (NIA DACOSTA, 2021)

Abstract

In 1992, *Candyman* (Bernard Rose) made history by featuring the first African American villain in a big slasher production. Nearly thirty years later, Jordan Peele and Nia DaCosta have brought back the killer with the hook to explore the current state of the fight against racism in the United States. This article explores the ways in which the new *Candyman* (Nia DaCosta, 2021) leverages its status as a sequel to examine the notions of legacy and memory inherent both in the Candyman legend and in the reclamation of the stories of victims of racist violence. It is argued that the film uses its place in the saga, the conventions of the slasher genre, and the visual mythology originally established by Rose to create an intricate metafictional game exploring the problems of confronting a traumatic past. Central to this discussion is the motif of the mirror, whose importance to the story is related to the numerous narrative and visual parallels between the two films, and to the call made to the audience to reflect on an uncomfortable reality that is given an enduring form through art.

Key words

Candyman; Legend; Memory; Legacy; Sequel; Slasher; Horror; Metafiction.

Author

Alejandro López Lizana holds a PhD in Literary Studies from Universidad Complutense de Madrid. He currently teaches at Universidad de Granada His research areas include comparative literature and intermediality studies, which has led him into the field of film studies. He has published several articles on horror cinema and film adaptation in academic journals. Contact: Alejandro.l.lizana@gmail.com.

ESTRATEGIAS VISUALES Y METAFICCIONALES PARA LA REIVINDICACIÓN DEL LEGADO EN *CANDYMAN* (NIA DACOSTA, 2021)

Resumen

En 1992, *Candyman, el dominio de la mente* (Candyman, Bernard Rose) hizo historia al presentar por primera vez a un antagonista afroamericano en un *slasher* producido por un gran estudio. Casi treinta años después, Jordan Peele y Nia DaCosta han recuperado al asesino del gancho con el fin de abordar el estado actual de la lucha contra el racismo en Estados Unidos. El presente artículo investiga cómo la nueva *Candyman* (Nia DaCosta, 2021) aprovecha su condición de secuela para profundizar en las nociones de legado y memoria que son inherentes tanto a la leyenda del monstruo titular como a la reivindicación de las víctimas de violencia racista. Se argumentará que la película se sirve de su adscripción a la saga, de las convenciones del *slasher* y de la mitología visual establecida por Rose para crear un intrincado juego metaficcional que aborda la problemática de afrontar un pasado traumático. Central a esta discusión es el motivo del espejo, cuya importancia para la diégesis se relaciona con los numerosos paralelismos narrativos y visuales entre ambas películas y con el llamamiento a que el espectador se enfrente a una realidad incómoda de mirar pero que perdura gracias al arte.

Palabras clave

Candyman; leyenda; memoria; legado; secuela; *slasher*; terror; metaficción.

Autor

Alejandro López Lizana (Madrid, 1990) es doctor en Estudios Literarios por la Universidad Complutense de Madrid y ejerce como Profesor Ayudante Doctor en la Universidad de Granada. Entre sus líneas de investigación se encuentran los estudios de literatura comparada y de intermedialidad, lo que le ha llevado a acercarse progresivamente al análisis fílmico. Es autor de diversos artículos sobre cine de terror y adaptaciones cinematográficas publicados en revistas científicas. Contacto: Alejandro.l.lizana@gmail.com.