ABSTRACT

RACHEL LEIGH MOSHER. “The woman…ought never to be conquered:” Mitchell Lichtenstein’s *Teeth* as a Feminist Text. (Under the direction of Professor Devin Orgeron)

Rape-revenge films have a long, storied history debating whether they, through often violent and graphic depictions of sexual violence, are shining light on the problem of sexual violence or exploiting it for titillation. Some argue that rape-revenge films lend themselves bring positive, if explicit, attention to the ghastly nature of rape, while others believe that depicting sexual violence in graphic fashion only eroticizes it and makes sexual violence acceptable. Similar arguments have followed portrayals of the mythical *vagina dentata* and other female monstrosity in media, because these myths directly reflect and reinforce anxieties regarding women’s bodies and sexuality. There are films, however, such as Mitchell Lichtenstein’s *Teeth* (2007), which successfully utilize the rape-revenge narrative in order provide feminist critique of contemporary society and its attitudes towards rape. This essay argues that *Teeth* appropriates the *vagina dentata* myth as part of its rape-revenge narrative in order to critique 20th and 21st century abstinence culture and its links to rape culture and the harm they pose to women.

Space will be dedicated to the history of American rape-revenge films, paying particular attention to their history as exploitation films, and the numerous debates that have surrounded these films and their portrayals of rape. In addition, an overview of global *vagina dentata* myths and their links to patriarchal and misogynistic ideas about female bodies will be provided. Lastly, the rise of abstinence culture and its links to contemporary rape culture will be explored. This will illustrate that, through its nuanced portrayal of sexual violence and exploration of female monstrosity, Lichtenstein’s *Teeth* lends itself to a feminist reading.