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## Final Master's Portfolio

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## **FINAL MASTER'S PORTFOLIO**

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A Final Portfolio

Submitted to the English Department of Bowling Green State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in the Field of English  
with a specialization in Literary & Textual Studies

May 13, 2019

Dr. William Albertini, first reader  
Ms. Kimberly Spallinger, second reader

## Table of Contents

<b>I.</b>	Introduction / Analytical Narrative .....	<b>1</b>
<b>II.</b>	Cultural Anxieties, Apocalyptic Masculinity, and the “Taming” of the Other in 1950s Film Noir: The Case of <i>Kiss Me Deadly</i> (1955) .....	<b>13</b>
<b>III.</b>	“Robbed!”: Masculine Anxiety and the Taming of the Non-Normative Female Other in Hitchcock’s <i>Marnie</i> (1964).....	<b>32</b>
<b>IV.</b>	Gender, Sexual Abuse, and the Redemption of King Lear’s Daughters in Jane Smiley’s <i>A Thousand Acres</i> .....	<b>58</b>
<b>V.</b>	The “Angel in the House” to the Femme Fatale: Reconciling the Dawn of the “New Woman” in Collins’ <i>Jezebel’s Daughter</i> .....	<b>75</b>

### **Analytical Narrative**

In the fall of 2016, I set out on a journey to obtain my master's degree at Bowling Green State University (BGSU) in the field of English with a specialization in Literary and Textual Studies. Although I established a strong foundation in literary analysis and criticism as an undergraduate, I knew there was still a great deal I wanted to learn. In particular, I wanted to learn more about the relationship between a culture and the texts it produces. Over the course of the last two years, I have expanded my knowledge by analyzing literary works from diverse cultural contexts, studying the relationship between texts and watershed moments in history, and developing my ability to situate an argument in the broader context of a theoretical/critical conversation; additionally, I have developed my technical knowledge of the English language in several courses about grammar and language. The following portfolio is a compilation demonstrating my growth as a scholar, writer, and literary critic. The works contained within the collection represent the research and intellectual exploration that has characterized my master's degree.

As my time in BGSU's English program draws to a close, I am able to reflect on the large body of work I have produced and the lessons I have learned in the process of its creation. Within this portfolio, you will find four pieces adapted and expanded from works produced during my time in BGSU's MA program. Originally, I chose these pieces because they represented my strongest work in literary criticism, research, and theoretical application; however, through the process of re-examining, revising, and placing the works in a single portfolio, I began to notice a common thread. Beginning in the Victorian era before progressing to the 1950s, 1960s, and the 1970s—with gestures to the Jacobean era and the contemporary period—each piece in my portfolio examines one or more text(s) as a vignette demonstrative of

changing gender issues within the context of American and British culture. By situating each text within its historical and cultural milieu, my portfolio examines efforts, in different instances, to reassert long-standing gender norms throughout the ages. Not only does my work highlight the anxieties surrounding a perceived threat to traditional gender roles, but it also examines a ritual of “taming” the other that threatens to break down these roles.

The first piece in my portfolio is titled, “Cultural Anxieties, Apocalyptic Masculinity, and the ‘Taming’ of the Other in 1950s Film Noir: The Case of *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955).” This piece originated in Dr. Bill Albertini’s “Undercurrents of the 1950s,” a semester-long graduate-level course in which my classmates and I studied texts produced between 1945 and the early 1960s as responses to the inconsistencies and anxieties of the period. For my final project, I chose to examine a text from the period by creating a conference-length paper that was well-researched, well-written, and engaged with current intellectual debates in the field. Although we analyzed numerous interesting texts through a variety of theoretical lenses during the course, I was especially fascinated by American director Robert Aldrich’s 1955 science fiction film noir, *Kiss Me Deadly*. In the film, Aldrich presents the story of a private divorce detective named Mike Hammer as he attempts to unravel a nuclear mystery of cataclysmic proportions. As I initially watched the film, I was both perplexed and captivated not only by this character, but also by the way supporting characters—particularly those in minoritized groups—seemed to respond to his often-anti-social conduct. Despite the fact that Mike Hammer is aggressively focused on his own ambitions, keen on physical violence, and sexually uninhibited—all traits in contrast with social expectations at the time—he is regarded by many characters with respect and admiration. This inconsistency served as the guiding question and foundation for my research. Many critics argue the film does not intend for audiences to identify-with Mike Hammer. In my paper, I choose this

as my point of departure, instead arguing that the film presents Mike Hammer as the embodiment of a necessary survival-focused, exaggerated masculinity that is capable of “taming” perceived threats.

Over the course of the spring 2019 semester, I worked under the guidance of Dr. Albertini to expand upon and strengthen my original project. My goal at the beginning of the revision process was to create a strong start to an article that could be submitted for publication in a scholarly journal. Initially, a great deal of my revisions occurred as I addressed miscellaneous items. This included the simplification of dense syntax, an unpacking of theoretical terms, improved paragraph cohesion, and an improved sense of hierarchy among sub-arguments. As I delved deeper into the project, my primary text, and various secondary texts for a second time, however, I began to notice areas deeper in the reasoning of my argument that could be developed further. Dr. Albertini was invaluable throughout the revision process—particularly so in this area. Due to the simple passing of time between when I originally penned the work and when I set out to revise it, I was able to see the project through fresh eyes; however, by engaging in a dialogue with Dr. Albertini regarding the piece, I benefitted from the additional perspective of an outside reader. If there was an area where Dr. Albertini had a question, I knew this may be a good area to revisit. In the historical context portion of my piece, as well as throughout, I provide background information crucial to understanding the cultural moment in which *Kiss Me Deadly* was produced. In the revised version of my project, I expanded this information to better accommodate readers who may not have a background in noir film or Cold War era U.S. American texts. This included the integration of many new historical sources, as well as a more comprehensive explanation of masculinities in the 1950s. Within the text, I also sought to improve cohesion between two key portions of my argument:

Mike Hammer's masculinity illustrated via his own characterization and Mike Hammer's masculinity illustrated via his interaction with the racial other, the female other, and the queer other. Whereas some of Hammer's masculinity is developed in his own characterization, the rest is established by his interaction with others. To improve cohesion, I chose to discuss this strategy early in the piece in addition to improving the transition between the sections. Although there were many other modifications, these are the primary areas of improvement between the original and revised projects.

The second piece in my portfolio is titled, "'Robbed!': Masculine Anxiety and the Taming of the Non-Normative Female Other in Hitchcock's *Marnie* (1964)." This piece originated in Dr. Piya Pal-Lapinski's "Introduction to Theory and Criticism," a semester-long graduate-level course in which my classmates and I studied some of the major theoretical moments and influences in contemporary literary studies. For my culminating project, I chose to explicate and apply one of the theoretical frameworks discussed in the course to a text. Although we discussed numerous engaging theories and possible applications over the course of the semester, I knew immediately that I wanted to discuss Alfred Hitchcock's 1964 film, *Marnie*. Specifically, I wanted to discuss Hitchcock's use of Freudian psychoanalysis within the context of changing gender norms in the 1960s. In the film, Hitchcock presents the story of a young thief named Marnie who is slowly and supposedly cured of her misandrist demons by an aggressively persistent man named Mark. Over the course of the film, Mark employs a variety of techniques derived from Freudian psychoanalysis to gradually transform Marnie from a traumatized misandrist to a dutiful housewife in a process I refer to in my paper as the "taming." As I initially watched the film, I was both perplexed and horrified by the manner in which Mark pursues Marnie in the name of love. Despite the fact that Mark blackmails, assaults, and stalks Marnie,

this behavior is framed within the film as acceptable—and even necessary—when a woman is considered to be damaged. This inconsistency between my own expectations and the nature of the plot served as the guiding question and foundation for my research. After reading what others were saying about the film, I discovered there is not a critical consensus about the film, perhaps in part because it has received considerably less attention than Hitchcock's other films. In my paper, I argue the film represents an intersection of two cultural moments: the so-called “golden age” of psychoanalysis and the sexual revolution of the 1960s. After beginning with the argument that the film represents the intersection of two cultural moments, I argue that the film uses psychoanalytic theories as a justification for taming a woman who embodies some of the freedoms found in the nascent sexual revolution of the 1960s.

As with my *Kiss Me Deadly* project, my goal at the beginning of the revision process of my *Marnie* piece was to create a strong start to an article that could be submitted for publication in a scholarly journal. In the beginning of the revision process, I addressed miscellaneous items identified in conversation with Dr. Albertini. This included the inclusion of additional evidence, including film quotes and scholarly sources. Other recommendations included contextual information in the form of footnotes, the simplification of dense syntax, and an improved sense of hierarchy amongst sub-arguments. As I delved deeper into the content areas of the piece, I sought to unpack and clarify theoretical concepts while keeping in mind that a reader may not be familiar with Freud's work on fetishism. This also entailed distinguishing between the terms “normative” and “heteronormative.” Perhaps the greatest amount of revision can be seen in the framing of my central argument. As I re-read my project, I realized my introduction might leave readers who are unfamiliar with the post-war period with more questions; additionally, Dr. Albertini and I discussed many ways I might better introduce and position my argument as one

entering a scholarly conversation. To address this issue, and to better frame my argument as one that is entering a pre-existing conversation, I revised my introduction to provide a more thorough historical context and a discussion of its significance in the creation of *Marnie*. To ensure my argument is stated clearly and directly, I broadened the funnel of my introduction and sharpened my thesis statement. The paragraphs discussing historical context in the revised version of my project are new additions and the third paragraph has been revised to state my argument more directly. Final modifications included improved paragraph cohesion and a more detailed discussion of the sexual assault scene.

The third piece in my portfolio is titled, “Gender, Sexual Abuse, and the Redemption of King Lear’s Daughters in Jane Smiley’s *A Thousand Acres*.” This piece originated in Dr. Stephannie Gearhart’s “Shakespeare and Adaptation,” a semester-long graduate-level course in which my classmates and I examined adaptations of Shakespearean plays through the lens of adaptation theory. For my culminating project, I chose to expand my knowledge by creating a conference-length essay offering readers insight into a Shakespearean adaptation. For this project, I chose to analyze Jane Smiley’s novel, *A Thousand Acres* (1991). In the novel, Smiley draws upon the framework of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* to tell the story of familial conflict triggered by an aging father’s decision to transfer ownership of his extensive Iowa farmland to his three daughters during the 1970s. Whereas traditional interpretations of *Lear* tend to the two older daughters, Regan and Goneril, in the antagonistic role, Smiley’s adaptation reimagines the story through a feminist lens. As I read the novel for the first time, I was fascinated by the manner in which Smiley not only addresses the problematic politics of the source material, but also does so while commenting on the way these problematic elements endure in the contemporary. This point of interest served as the guiding focus for my research. In my paper, I

argue *A Thousand Acres* highlights the manner in which patriarchal authority maintains control through the commodification and subjugation of the female body. By adapting Shakespeare's text into the 1970s, a key period for the women's reproductive rights movement, Smiley reminds readers that, although Western gender politics have changed considerably since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, some problematic elements remain the same.

With this piece, I began my revision process by revisiting my primary text, secondary texts, and the original project. Dr. Gearhart also provided insightful feedback that served as an excellent starting point. I worked to tidy syntax and improve sub-argument hierarchy amongst my body paragraphs. In conversation with Dr. Albertini, I identified areas in the project where I led with summary, and so I modified these sections ensuring they led with a distinct statement of my focus for that portion. I also revisited all paragraphs to make this organization feel more cohesive. Dr. Albertini and I also determined a strong revision would be to refine my central argument to ensure I was stating my case clearly and directly. As I was refining my argument and gathering additional historical information, I made the connection between the commodification and subjugation of the female body and the reproductive rights movement during time period in which the novel was set. As I researched the women's movement in the 1970s, I discovered that I was building upon the research I had conducted previously regarding the 1950s for my *Kiss Me Deadly* piece and the 1960s for my *Marnie* piece. Not only was I developing a strong factual knowledge of the women's rights movement in the United States and Great Britain but, through my research as I revised these projects, I was also developing a sense of some of the responses, in specific historical moments, to changing gender and sexual norms. Even my British Victorian-era piece—described below—examines a particular reaction to changing gender norms in its historical context. This realization was a particularly exhilarating

moment in my process because it was then that I discovered this common thread seemed to tie together all of the projects I had chosen to include in my MA portfolio. After sharpening my argument, I made a few minor changes in the area of quotes, improved footnotes, and simplified syntax. Following these modifications, my revision of the project was complete.

The fourth and final piece in my portfolio is titled, “The ‘Angel in the House’ to the Femme Fatale: Reconciling the Dawn of the ‘New Woman’ in Collins’ *Jezebel’s Daughter*.” This piece originated in Dr. Piya Pal-Lapinski’s “Victorian Femme Fatales: Fiction, Art and Film,” a semester-long graduate-level course in which my classmates and I studied representations and the emergence of the “fatal woman,” or femme fatale, trope in 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> century fiction and art. For my culminating project, I chose to explore this trope further by creating a well-researched critical analysis of an artwork or text portraying the fatal woman in a Victorian context. For this project, I chose to analyze Wilkie Collins’ novel, *Jezebel’s Daughter* (1880). In the novel, Collins follows the story of a pair of widows, one of whom is a dangerous schemer and another who is an honorable woman. When I first read the novel, I was intrigued by the manner in which the femme fatale, a German woman named Madame Fontaine, is established as a villain and juxtaposed with her virtuous counterpart, Mrs. Wagner. I was especially intrigued because, although the foil of the femme fatale is traditionally the ‘Angel in the House’ figure (a term derived from Coventry Patmore’s narrative poem by the same name, published 1854–1862), Mrs. Wagner does not seem to fill this role. Instead, Madame Fontaine’s daughter, Minna, is the novel’s serene figure of the Victorian feminine ideal. As an independent proponent of women’s employment and mental health reform, Mrs. Wagner does not behave in accordance with traditional Victorian gender norms, yet the novel frames her in a positive light. I was intrigued by this contradiction and made it the foundation of my research. Whereas critics

studying the novel tend to position Madame Fontaine and Mrs. Wagner as the novel's only juxtaposition, I choose instead to put the novel's three female characters—Madame Fontaine, the often-forgotten Minna Fontaine, and Mrs. Wagner—in dialogue with one another as models of differing femininities. In my paper, I argue the three women represent a collision of *femme fatale*, the Angel in the House, and the New Woman emerging in Victorian culture at the time. Rather than simply condemning the *femme fatale* and applauding the Angel, the novel does this while positioning the still-developing New Woman femininity as a suitable guardian for traditional Victorian femininity. It does so, however, by creating a character who embodies new gender roles while containing them.

I began the revision of my final portfolio piece by revisiting my primary text, secondary texts, and the original project under the guidance of Dr. Albertini. After doing so, I focused on defining my central argument and stating this argument more directly. As I re-read my original project, I realized my introduction may leave readers who are unfamiliar with the Victorian era with more questions. To address this issue, and to better frame my argument as one entering a critical conversation, I revised my introduction to provide a more thorough historical context and its importance in the creation of *Jezebel's Daughter*. The revised version of my project includes two new paragraphs of contextual information crucial for understanding the cultural moment as it pertained to gender. In conversation with Dr. Albertini, I identified a few areas in the project that led with summary rather than a distinct claim in support of my overarching argument. To address this issue, I worked to improve sub-argument hierarchy within each body paragraph, ensuring each begins with a sub-claim. In addition to these revisions, I worked to improve evidence presented in the paper. In particular, I revisited cited portions of secondary sources to ensure they were the best fit for these sections. As the result, some quoted sources were

removed, and others were added following additional research. In the final stage of the process, I addressed various issues including simplified syntax, increased novel summary for reader context, and the clarification of theoretical terms used in the project.

When I initially joined BGSU's MA in English Literary and Textual Studies program, I knew there was still a great deal I wanted to learn, particularly about the relationship between a culture and the texts it produces. Within this portfolio, I present four pieces, each focusing on a specific text. In addition to situating the primary text within its historical and cultural milieu, each piece examines reactions in different instances to changing gender norms. Not only does my work highlight the anxieties surrounding changing gender roles, but it also offers some insight into efforts to restore traditional gender norms. In the first piece, regarding Aldrich's *Kiss Me Deadly*, I discuss the manner in which Cold War era anxieties regarding gender contributed to the production of an armored, survivalist masculinity later exemplified by the 1980s by what Susan Jeffords has labeled "hard body" masculinity. In the *Marnie* piece, I place the on-screen subjugation of a man-hating subversive woman in the context of the 1960s sexual revolution. In the third piece, I discuss Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* as a commentary on the reproductive rights debates of the 1970s. In my final piece, I examine Collins' *Jezebel's Daughter* as an attempt to reconcile the emerging New Woman with pre-existing models of Victorian femininity. Each of the pieces in the following pages of this portfolio represents the culmination of the research and exploration I have conducted over the course of my graduate program; additionally, this compilation demonstrates my growth as a scholar, writer, and literary critic.

As I type the final words of this introduction and prepare to submit my portfolio, I am able to reflect on the abundance of knowledge and experience I have gained over the course of my master's degree program. During the last two years, I have spent countless hours analyzing

textual works from diverse social contexts, exploring the relationship between texts and culture, and developing my ability to situate—and sustain—an argument in the broader context of a theoretical/critical conversation. I have spent immeasurable hours engaging in scholarly discussion with knowledgeable peers and supportive advisors, developing in the process an ability to adapt and work collaboratively in the academic setting. I have also familiarized myself with writing at the technical level in a variety of grammar courses. In the process, I have even developed my ability to write intelligibly and strategically by authoring a public health campaign. Outside of my coursework, I have taught four courses in both introductory composition and English for language learners, and I have served as program assistant to the graduate program coordinator, literature program director, and ESOL director. In the process, I have gained invaluable experience in college-level pedagogy and administration. I originally joined BGSU's MA in English Literary and Textual Studies program because there was still a great deal I wanted to learn. Although my time in the program has come to a close, I am certain the skills and experiences I have gained will serve me well as I move into the future.

**Works Cited**

Jeffords, Susan. *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*. Rutgers Univ. Press, 2004.

## Cultural Anxieties, Apocalyptic Masculinity, and the “Taming” of the Other in 1950s Film Noir: The Case of *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955)

During the early post-war period, or the mid-1940s to early 1960s, the United States found itself attempting to navigate the complex social and political aftermath of nuclear weaponry’s birth. In response to the anxieties surrounding the possibility of an atomic detonation in the U.S. during the Cold War, the country saw the rise of the wholesome, serene nuclear family and the ascent of the capable, dutiful “organization man”<sup>1</sup> patriarch. Although classic television shows, such as *Leave it to Beaver* and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* offered playful caricatures of the composed, white-collar father of ‘50s suburbia, other cinematic works created at the time reflected a greater discomfort resulting in an outright rejection of the placid organization man. Originally released in 1955, Robert Aldrich’s black-and-white science fiction film noir *Kiss Me Deadly* depicts a version of masculinity in radical contrast to the norms portrayed in *Leave it to Beaver* and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*. Unlike the sometimes-befuddled paternal figures in these works, Aldrich’s depiction of private detective Mike Hammer—played by Ralph Meeker and based on author Mickey Spillane’s hardboiled detective character—functions as a hyper-masculine, often violent protagonist whose primary function is survival in an increasingly hostile world. Though critics like Christopher Sharrett have argued Aldrich “simply puts Hammer on display, without flourishes to make us love him” with “little possibility for audience identification,” I argue that the film actually presents Hammer as an alternative, nihilistic response to a multitude of “crises” seemingly threatening an apocalyptic end to 1950s patriarchal *status quo*. By effectively

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<sup>1</sup>In William H. Whyte’s seminal text, *The Organization Man* (1956), he discusses and critiques what he believes to be an *en masse* abandonment of individualism that characterized the early pioneer frontier of the U.S. in favor of a collectivist, corporation-dominated society during the 1950s. The “organization man,” according to Whyte, adopts a “utopian” belief that “man exists as a unit of society. Of himself, he is isolated, meaningless; only as he collaborates with others does he become worth while [*sic*]” (7).

“taming” the racial/ethnic other, the queer other, and the female other, Aldrich’s Hammer is presented as a necessary alternative to the dutiful organization man—one capable of weathering the apocalypse and reasserting patriarchal authority in an increasingly anxious post-war nation.

In *Kiss Me Deadly*, Aldrich presents the story of a private divorce detective named Mike Hammer as he attempts to unravel a nuclear mystery of cataclysmic proportion. Aggressively focused on his own desires, unafraid of physical violence, and highly attractive to women, Hammer takes 1950s notions of the capable, patriarchal man and amplifies them to the point of creating a survival-focused, exaggerated masculinity that is treated by the film as a necessity. Deviating from notions of peaceful suburban living, Hammer embodies a survivalist<sup>2</sup> version of masculinity rooted in self-preservation. After picking up a hitch-hiker named Christina, Hammer discovers she is the protector of a mysterious boxed device capable of unleashing destruction on the world. Although the device is never named directly, viewers are presented a few words, “Manhattan Project. Los Alamos. Trinity,” each referencing a location of significance in the development and detonation of nuclear weaponry<sup>3</sup> (*Kiss Me Deadly*). For viewers already primed to recognize and fear these words, the suggestion is that this is a nuclear device capable of vast destruction. When Christina is murdered, Hammer attempts to recover the doomsday device with the help of his street-smart female sidekick, Velda. Slowly unraveling the mystery by interacting with various side characters, Hammer battles members of a shadowy criminal organization in a

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<sup>2</sup> In *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*, Susan Jeffords explores the renegotiation of masculinity in the post-Vietnam era by examining the depiction of the male body in 1980s Hollywood blockbuster films like *First Blood* (1982), *Die Hard* (1988), and *Robocop* (1987). According to Jeffords, this Hollywood “hard body” masculinity employs “muscular physiques, violent actions, and individual determination”; additionally, “hard body” male characters represented “individualism, liberty, militarism, and a mythic hero”—traits symptomatic of the historical moment (21, 16). Though the term “survivalist” entered the lexicon in 1976 (Douglas, “survivalist”), I argue Hammer is a proto-survivalist character emerging in response to post-WW2 and Cold War era anxieties.

<sup>3</sup> The Manhattan Project was a research and development endeavor that eventually resulted in the production of the first nuclear weapons; Los Alamos, New Mexico, was the birthplace of the first nuclear weapons; “Trinity” was the code-name for the first atomic bomb detonation in New Mexico (Cirincione 3, 4, 11).

race to recover the device. In spite of his efforts, the effects of the device are unleashed by a dangerously curious—and equally traitorous—femme fatale, Gabrielle, alias “Lily Carver.” In the end, Hammer saves Velda from the explosion and the two characters are left standing alone on a dark beach watching as the device unleashes fiery anarchy into a dark, desolate world. Though the audience does not know if this is a localized explosion or a large-scale cataclysm, the pair is evocative of an apocalyptic Adam and Eve, seemingly suggesting large-scale destruction and rebirth.

Though the serene nuclear family and dutiful organization man dominated mainstream discourse during the 1950s, anxieties of a looming danger circulated simultaneously. In *Dr. Strangelove's America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age*, Margot A. Henricksen describes this split between outward appearances of stable assuredness and inward feelings of hopelessness, isolation, and powerlessness. She writes, “In the aftermath of Hiroshima and America’s successful splitting of the atom, *Time Magazine* espied ‘a new age in which all thoughts and things were split’...Struggling under the surface serenity and outward security of the mainstream cold war American mind was an unstable and paranoid underground American psyche in a state of panic” (Henricksen 85). Although this sense of panic was not felt by all, some believed reality was a far cry from the stable, unified assuredness portrayed by much of mainstream 1950s entertainment. In addition to fears of possible nuclear annihilation, social movements on the rise at the time—such as the civil rights movement, the homosexual liberation movement, and the women’s rights movement—were a point of apprehension for many. At the root of this apprehension, for some, was the perceived threat to the organization man’s position of patriarchal authority in dominant U.S. culture by the racial/ethnic other, the female other, and the queer other. In James Gilbert’s book, titled *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in*

*the 1950s*, he identifies this so-called “masculinity crisis,” as “a moment when observers begin to notice that assumptions about masculinity and expected male behavior [were] being undercut by circumstance and social and psychological changes” (16). Rather than making the case for a true “crisis” of masculinity, however, Gilbert argues the 1950s are better understood as a revolutionary time in which a wide range of role models for masculinity were circulating, ranging from Elvis to Marlon Brando to Liberace to John Wayne (4).

According to some scholars, this perceived weakening of masculinity was tied closely to fears regarding national security. Historian Jürgen Martschukat writes, “A fear of masculine decline permeated American society, caused by the conformist urge and the obviously limited options of suburbanized and corporate life. Talk about a ‘crisis’ among heterosexual white men was everywhere, and this supposed crisis was perceived as a crisis of America at large: of its strength and stability” (10). During this period, strict gender norms were regarded as a way of maintaining national security. Brian Baker further discusses this perceived connection between masculinity and national security, writing, “Masculinity...is clearly connected with the ideological imperatives of the American nation-state. To fail in producing hegemonic masculinity is to open the floodgates to communism...An armored masculinity must be therefore produced to withstand [the communist flood]” (66). Because popular binary-based ideology at the time linked stability and strength to masculinity, the racial, sexual, and queer other were tied to notions of a weak, passive femininity. If a failure of masculinity could indeed bring down the U.S. by making it vulnerable to invasion, the re-establishment of a masculinity capable of taming the “other” and persisting where the organization man could not; thus, a “new” form of masculinity arose.

Whereas middle-class white men were criticized by some as “effeminate, soft, and—in a word—‘emasculated,’” due to an increase in “non-authoritarian child-rearing, father involvement with children and male interest in domestic life” in the years following the war, the hardboiled film noir hero encountered no such issue (Martschukat 15, Gilbert 21). Unlike the organization man whose hours were owned by his employer and whose daily actions were determined by male domestic obligations, the film noir masculine protagonist lives by his own rules and is liberated from stifling domestic responsibilities. In Stephen Faison’s *Existentialism, Film Noir, and Hard-Boiled Fiction*, he frames the masculine film noir character using the term “antihero,” which he defines as “generally a brooding, cynical loner with ambiguous morals, alienated from a society perceived as thoroughly corrupt” (“The Existential Ethics of Noir,” n.p.). Though Faison believes the antihero’s status is that of a dishonorable individual, he believes “[the antihero’s] honorable actions serve as a contrasting commentary on the polluted world he inhabits” (“The Existential Ethics of Noir,” n.p.). Armed with the ability to commit casual acts of violence and freed from mundane everyday duties, such as a career, a monogamous relationship, and children, the film noir anti-hero serves as a sharp contrast to the gendered expectations otherwise generally imposed upon inhabitants of 1950s U.S. society. Despite this deviation, the noir antihero is designed in a manner which allows the viewer to admire and identify with the character, either as an object of aspiration, or an object of desire. Although Hammer, in many ways, is a match for the description of an “antihero,” the label is not quite accurate. Hammer is a brooding, cynical loner alienated from a corrupt society inhabited by criminal organizations, yet his actions are not entirely honorable—a trait that distinguishes Hammer from the antihero trope populating many other films noirs circulating at the time. As Hammer follows the mystery of the atomic device, the audience is never told this pursuit is motivated by a heroic desire to save the

world. The closest audiences get to an honorable action from Hammer is his efforts to avenge and rescue Velda when she is kidnapped and placed within blast range of the atomic device. Even in this moment, however, Hammer's lack of consideration for Velda's safety earlier in the film is the reason she is in danger. In the bleak world of *Kiss Me Deadly*, Hammer is a flawed character whose primary admirable quality is his ability to survive.

Over the course of the film, perhaps one of the most conspicuous elements of Hammer's characterization—aside from his nice car and cool apartment—is willingness to get physical, perhaps even delighting in casual violence. In *What Ever Happened to Robert Aldrich?*, Alain Silver and James Ursini suggest a propensity for physical engagement is a key component of the *Kiss Me Deadly* protagonist's characterization. They write, "Hammer's very name [reveals] it all: a hard, heavy, unrelenting object pounding away mindlessly at social outcasts like twopenny [sic] nails" (176). When on the hunt for information regarding the location of the mysterious MacGuffin, he engages in frequent shows of violence. In addition to scenes in which Hammer defeats various men through physical combat, there is one scene that highlights his willingness to engage in violence. When a mortician demands further bribery after receiving an initial bribe from Hammer for an item certain to further the quest, Hammer slams a drawer shut on the man's hand and holds it in place as the man screams in pain. His cries are so horrible the Lily, assuming the role of a damsel in distress, claps her hands over her ears to drown out the sound. Rather than being disarmed by the sound, as is his female companion, Hammer grins. In fact, the camera focuses on Hammer's face—a face grinning in apparent pleasure—while screams fill the room. It is only after the man submits to Hammer that his hand is released. Through this show of violence, Hammer not only forces a greedy man into submission, but he also does so in a manner which starkly contrasts the stereotypical feminine response of empathy. Lily's presence in this

scene serves to highlight the contrast. Simultaneously, Hammer's abuse of the doughy, wheedling mortician serves as on-screen punishment for the man's perceived lack of masculinity. Not only is Hammer fearless in this moment, but he delights in the show. Unlike the organization man criticized by some as "'never talking loud [sic], never talking back, never taking a stand'," (qtd. in Matschukat 15) Hammer is capable of asserting his patriarchal authority over others as the result of this hypermasculine show of violence. He is the forceful primary mover, speaking loudly, talking back, and taking a stand against those who would work against him.

In addition to a lust for violence, Hammer demonstrates a remarkable ability to seduce virtually every woman he encounters with absolutely no effort. When Hammer first encounters Christina early in the film, she takes an instant liking to him, in spite of his threatening comments about throwing her off the cliff. Similarly, Velda is bound to Hammer as both a sexual partner and sexual tool, in spite of his willingness to put her in uncomfortable, dangerous situations and to pressure her into forms of sex work in order to run their divorce detective business. When they return to Hammer's apartment after his near-death experience, Velda attempts to kiss Hammer whilst he constantly interrupts to ask Velda business-related questions. It is as though Velda cannot resist Hammer, yet he is immune to her feminine charms. This helpless attraction by women to Hammer's apparent sexual virility is perhaps most apparent in the character crime boss' sister, Friday. When he approaches the crime boss' hideout, Hammer merely says, "How do you do?" before Friday begins kissing him. After they break apart, she then asks, "Seconds?" as though Hammer is a delicious, irresistible treat. Supporting this understanding of Hammer as a treat, Friday comments on his "taste," identifying it as unlike anyone she knows and "wonderful." Without saying anything more than a simple greeting and

the word “OK” to Friday’s request for “seconds,” Hammer thoroughly seduces this woman, demonstrating his hypermasculine desirability to a woman made powerless by his “unique” manliness. Though this incident alone may be dismissed by some as Friday belonging to a sexually suspicious milieu, her response to Hammer mirrors those of other women, thus suggesting this attraction is genuine. By demonstrating Hammer’s attractiveness to women, the film furthers establishes the character’s masculinity as a desirable one.

In addition to a willingness to use violence and apparent sexual virility, Hammer possesses immense physical strength. In the late 1940s, anthropologist Carl C. Seltzer argued masculinity is tied to the body’s physical traits. Discussing Seltzer’s findings, Kathleen Starck writes, “Seltzer claims that if men possess a strong ‘masculine component,’ i.e. narrow hips, muscles and a certain angularness, they also display more of the masculine traits of strength and vitality” (41). The film echoes these ideas in its characterization of Hammer. Early in the film, Hammer’s sharpened physical form is referenced by Christina, the original damsel in distress; she says, “Bet you do push-ups every morning just to keep your belly hard” (*Kiss Me Deadly*). Though Christina is mocking Hammer in this moment, the film admires this part of his characterization. In addition to Christina’s comment Hammer’s toned appearance, Hammer’s physical strength is showcased throughout *Kiss Me Deadly*, particularly in combat scenes. When two thugs attempt to defeat Hammer in hand-to-hand combat, he overpowers one with ease and sends the second man running away in fear. They are only able to subdue him in a later attempt using stealth—a form of attack historically feminized and contrasting Hammer’s own method of head-on combat. When remembering his defeat by Hammer, one of the thugs comments on Hammer’s strength and physical capability in a tone akin to one of admiration, commenting, “I was out for two hours after you flipped me... Couldn’t move a muscle” (*Kiss Me Deadly*).

Further highlighting his physical prowess when he is tied up in the interrogation house, Hammer manages to overpower a man with just one hand freed from constraints holding down one arm and both legs; conveniently, the logistics of this great feat are not captured on camera.

Perhaps the greatest contrast in strength-focused physical representations of masculinity occurs in the home of the art dealer responsible for aiding in the abduction of Hammer's assistant/lover, Velda. Obese, a lover of the arts, and a coward who would rather play dead than fight, the art dealer is the antithesis of Hammer and a pronounced contrast occurs during their interaction. Quoting Seltzer, Starck writes, "...men whose bodies are 'rounder, softer, broad-hipped, less well-muscled' are more feminine in their personality traits and therefore, weaker, indecisive and tending towards the arts" (41). Whereas the art dealer represents the feminized man, Hammer is the hypermasculine response. When Hammer abuses "bad examples" of masculinity in the film, such as the cowardly art lover and the greedy, wheedling mortician, he effectively punishes these men for their lack of hegemonic masculinity and asserts himself as the more effective option. This method of asserting Hammer's masculinity through contrast with other characters is additionally seen toward the end of the film when Lily—whose real identity is the villainous Gabrielle—has the nuclear weapon. In possession of the box, she faces two male challengers who seek to take it: Dr. Soberin and Mike Hammer. After taking a bullet to the stomach, Dr. Soberin is seemingly rendered lifeless. Though he sustains a nearly identical wound, Hammer is able to rescue Velda and escape, saving both their lives in contrast with the greedy doctor. Due to his hypermasculine strength, Hammer is able to further secure his position of patriarchal authority over the other characters.

In addition to establishing an armored masculinity in Hammer's own characterization, the film utilizes Hammer's interactions with other characters—namely, the racial/ethnic other, the

female other, and the queer other—to establish Hammer’s brand of masculinity as necessary. In Jack Halberstam’s quintessential work of queer theory, *Female Masculinity*, he builds from the concept of gender performativity<sup>4</sup> to argue that masculinity is a construct often created through the use of male-coded items. He cites one of the most well-known male heroes of the Western world, James Bond, writing, “...Bond battles the usual array of bad guys: Commies, Nazis, mercenaries, and a superaggressive [*sic*] violent femme type. He puts on his usual supply of gadgetry to aid him—a re-tractable belt, a bomb disguised as a pen, a laser weapon watch, and so on. But there’s something curiously lacking in *Goldeneye*, namely, credible masculine power” (Halberstam 3). According to Halberstam, James Bond possesses no credible masculine power, yet he is established as a masculine character using a collection of objects. Though Hammer embodies the hallmark traits of macho masculinity—as well as accessories like an expensive car and fancy apartment—a great deal of his characterization is established as positive through his interaction with other characters, particularly the queer other, the racial other, and the female other. Not only is Hammer established as a hypermasculine, proto-survivalist ideal by means of his physical traits and personality, but he is also established in this manner through the depiction of the manner in which others—particularly those in marginalized groups—respond to him at an interpersonal level. In *Kiss Me Deadly*, representatives from these groups function as accessories designed to highlight Hammer’s own hypermasculinity and patriarchal authority.

In the years following World War II and at the height of the Cold War, tensions ran high in the United States in fear of an infiltration by the other—particularly the racial/ethnic other. With the rise of Joseph McCarthy’s witch-hunt for secret communists, radical leftists, and

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<sup>4</sup> On gender performativity, see Judith Butler’s “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution.”

anarchists, the “Red Scare” resulted in a wide-spread panic and suspicion for any non-white individual.<sup>5</sup> In *Kiss Me Deadly*, Hammer frequently encounters the racial or ethnic other. Rather than being a threat to Hammer, however, these members of minoritized races and ethnicities function to further Hammer’s authoritative masculinity in various manners. Most frequently, these characters take the form of submissive assistants and admirers. Perhaps the most prominently featured of these characters is “Va Va Voom” Nick, the Greek immigrant. An epitomized stereotype of a Grecian immigrant, Nick is short, enthusiastic, loves cars, and speaks in a thick Greek accent punctuated by his signature onomatopoeic phrase, “Va va voom!” Visibly fond of Hammer, Nick conspicuously admires Hammer’s car (one of his multiple masculine “gadgets”) and gladly performs tasks to assist Hammer, including one that eventually costs Nick his life. Similarly, an old Italian man moving the deceased Christina’s personal items admires Hammer for his physical strength and offers a helpful clue. In the nightclub in which Hammer consumes copious amounts of alcohol rather than verbalize some kind of remorse for Nick’s death, he is met with sympathetic comments from the black male bartender and black female singer. They offer Hammer aid in the form of encouraging words. These minoritized characters of different racial / ethnic backgrounds are all sympathetic and deferential to Hammer. In turn, he treats them kindly; however, there is one instance when a minoritized character defies Hammer’s patriarchal authority: the Italian opera lover. Dramatically dancing and singing an Italian love song, the opera lover is feminized and, as the result, his lack of motivation to help is presented as simple misbehavior rather than criminal obstruction. When Hammer is unable to gain the Italian man’s sympathy and passivity, he snaps the man’s prized record in half. Though

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<sup>5</sup> In *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948–1968*, Jeff R. Woods links fears of Communism and anxieties around early civil rights efforts in the twentieth century. According to Woods, “...as the cold war and civil rights struggles increasingly dominated public discourse after [WW2], the charge that Communists were behind the struggle for black equality gained critical political and emotional significance” (p. 12).

this act is less violent than the physical encounters he has with uncooperative white men, Hammer immediately gains the man's submission and assistance. By demonstrating Hammer's masculine authority over a feminized ethnic other, as well as his power to render these characters deferential, Aldrich further establishes Hammer's armored hypermasculinity as a remedy for racial anxieties.

In the years during and following the second world war, an immense deal of anxiety surrounding the "masculinity crisis" was rooted in the fear of an authoritative, independent, and sexually provocative woman. In Philip Wylie's 1942 text, *Generation of Vipers*, he condemns what he refers to as "Momism," or the growing social worship of the "puerile, rusting, raging creature we know as Mom and Sis" (9). Though Wylie is known as particularly provocative for his context, he is indicative of a growing discomfort regarding a perceived increase in female authority—an increase he believes can only suggest a decrease in male authority. In addition to utilizing casual violence and physical strength to establish Hammer's character as positively hypermasculine, *Kiss Me Deadly* depicts Hammer's authority over the female other in a manner which asserts patriarchal social standards.

In Aldrich's film, viewers are presented three primary female characters: Christina, Lily, and Velda. In the opening of the film, audiences view the frame of a panicked, visibly distraught Christina, draped in nothing but a short light-toned trench coat. Her feet are noticeably bare, and her light-toned hair is cut short. She is presented as a quintessential damsel in distress, on the run and desperately in need of rescue. This state of helplessness is emphasized by the hysterical crying track played in the background during the opening credits. Hammer initially regards her with cool contempt, telling her he assumes she has been sexually assaulted in a date-gone-wrong and that he "should have thrown [her] off the cliff" (*Kiss Me Deadly*). Although Christina is

wary at first, she quickly takes a liking to Hammer, deciding to entrust him with the nuclear object of ultimate power and destruction despite only just meeting him. Murdered by the criminal organization, Christina's dying mission is placed entirely in Hammer's hands as he assumes the role of providing authoritative assistance to this damsel in the grave (or mortuary cabinet, in this case). Because she is presented as helpless and disarmed (as evidenced by her feet, demeanor, lack of real attire, and demise), Christina's perceived passive femininity and dependency upon her hero allows Hammer to assume the post of hypermasculine authority.

Though she initially presents as a damsel in distress, Lily/Gabrielle is a classic example of the dangerously seductive femme fatale archetype. Even Lily's chosen alias seems to hint at her intentions. Whereas the name "Lily" is derived from the flower and represents innocence and purity, the word "Carver" harkens to "a knife designed for cutting meat" (*Oxford Dictionaries*). In her white bathrobe, with noticeably bare feet and short blonde hair, Lily adopts a disguise that echoes the appearance of Christina. For the majority of the film, Lily/Gabrielle uses the façade of child-like dependence on Hammer to conceal her true greed, independence, and deadly curiosity. There is an expression of sexual interest in Lily/Gabrielle's interactions with Hammer, though it is only after her femme fatale nature is revealed that she becomes overtly sexual. During the confrontation scene, she demands menacingly, "Kiss me, Mike. I want you to kiss me. Kiss me. The liar's kiss that says I love you and means something else" (*Kiss Me Deadly*). In this moment, Lily/Gabrielle's sexuality is paired with the menacing nature of her tone and weapon, highlighting the potential danger of female seduction. Silver and Ursini argue this dangerous feminine immorality is visible, writing that lighting/shadow effects, in the glow of the opened nuclear box cause Lily/Gabrielle to look "hellish," and "her demonic aspect as she screams anticipates her immolation by [the nuclear device's] 'brimstone'" (Silver and Ursini 182). In Dr.

Soberin's acknowledgment that Lily/Gabrielle has provided "many creature comforts," we also learn she used her sexuality to gain access to the criminal enterprise. Wielding a gun (a classic object of phallic power), Lily/Gabrielle asserts herself as the embodiment of "masculinity crisis" Momism anxieties: an authoritative, sexually vested, independent female other. In the novel, Lily/Gabrielle meets her end after being burned alive by Hammer—a death similarly reminiscent of divine, punishing hellfire—though the film chooses an alternative route in which Lily/Gabrielle brings punishment upon herself. In Aldrich's adaptation, Lily/Gabrielle's character demonstrates a dangerous curiosity similar to Lot's wife and Pandora. The filmic version of Lily/Gabrielle chooses to open the doomsday device, concealed within a box, on her own accord due to curiosity. In this adaptation, she is her own destruction, thus suggesting a woman is naturally incapable of rationality and self-governance. Whereas Lily is unable to control her own desires, thus resulting in her destruction, Hammer stands alive and in control. In the film's end, we are shown "woman as a destroyer, with a deadly kiss that brings sinister and dark nuances to the screen" (Jaber, *Criminal Femmes*). Whereas the novel's Hammer is the punisher of the villainous and sexually provocative woman, the film chooses to depict the woman as her own destruction. As the result, *Kiss Me Deadly* avoids offending censorship regulations of the 1950s—regulations which would have potentially barred a man setting a woman on fire—while ensuring the woman is punished for her deviance. As the result of his armored masculinity, Hammer survives as the woman perishes.

Unlike Christina—the endangered hero-dependent damsel—and Lily/Gabrielle—the vanquished threat to masculinity (and mankind)—Velda functions as a third variety of female character who blends certain qualities possessed by both characters. Paralleling Lily and Christina, Velda is shown with short hair, barefoot, and in a robe during the pivotal scene in

which Hammer asks her to do his bidding. Though the costuming style is the same as the other two women, a subtle shift from the light colors worn by the other two women to darker colors set Velda apart. When this is paired with her matter-of-fact discussion of a hangover, the result is an intriguing, multi-dimensional, humanized character who neither adheres to conservative 1950s gender norms nor is characterized as a treacherous femme fatale. Due to her role as Hammer's investigative assistant, Velda embodies certain femme fatale qualities. She is a seductive woman who uses wit and sexuality as a tool of power over men. Unlike Lily/Gabrielle, however, this power is not used for murder or violence, nor is it used for her own gain. Velda is not an eternal damsel in distress, yet she is not quite a femme fatale. In this manner, she is a striking example of emerging representation of women as complex, multifaceted characters in 1950s cinematography and culture. One key component of Velda's character, however, is that she uses her powers of seduction—sometimes against her own wishes—for Hammer's benefit, and by his command. Although Velda is, in some ways, evident of changing gender politics, she remains subservient to Mike and does not challenge his position as the patriarchal authority. Eventually, Velda is captured by the film's villains and she is rendered a damsel in distress who can only be saved by Hammer. In this manner, Velda negotiates a post-war womanhood such that a forthright, active, sexual woman functions to promote rather than threaten Hammer's machismo.

In addition to establishing Hammer's masculinity in a positive light through the depiction of his authoritative position over the racial and female other, *Kiss Me Deadly* utilizes anxieties directed toward the queer other to establish Hammer as a post-war masculine ideal. At the time in which Aldrich's film was released, "homosexual menace" panic prompted a fearful othering of queer figures in mainstream social discourse. Homosexual men, in particular, were often

stereotyped as feminine, pedophilic, and rapists.<sup>6</sup> In *Kiss Me Deadly*, Hammer effectively utilizes his hypermasculinity to evade “homosexual incursion.” In Robert Lang’s article, “Looking for the ‘Great Whatzit’: ‘Kiss Me Deadly’ and Film Noir,” he picks up on queer undertones in the text, identifying the knife the alley-way assassin attempts to use on Hammer as a phallic object; however, his interpretation of this scene is that Hammer is coded as a gay man cruising for a homosexual encounter. Contrasting this interpretation, I argue the film actually promotes the rejection of these metaphorical homosexual advances. When Hammer is approached by the man brandishing a knife, or the phallic object, Hammer actively attempts to evade and thwart the man’s attack. If we consider the knife as coded phallic, it is significant to note the knife does not penetrate; instead, it is removed from its holder and claimed by Hammer as a totem of his own increased power, authority, and dominance over the attacker. This theme of foiled “homosexual rape” is later repeated when Hammer is captured by the criminal entity and is tied to a bed on his stomach. Though this is a domestic setting reminiscent of a suburban home, the structure is full of men with the intention of attacking Hammer whilst he lays in a vulnerable position on his stomach, arms and legs tied to the four posts of a bed. When one of the criminals prepares to kill Hammer, he approaches the down-turned body with a knife, his own phallic object; however, because Hammer was able to use his intellect and strength to free himself and replace his own body with that of the crime boss, the knife penetrates the crime boss and Hammer once again evades an attack coded as same-sex rape. By demonstrating his rejection of and strong defense against homosexual advances, Hammer’s own heterosexual masculinity is further strengthened.

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<sup>6</sup> The SAGE Encyclopedia of LGBTQ Studies, edited by Abbie E. Goldberg, discusses an increased awareness and fear of the “homosexual menace,” a phrase that gained popularity following WW2. In addition to purging government of Communists, there was a push to remove “sexual perverts” from office and to warn youths about supposedly pedophilic homosexuals, leading to what was known as the “Lavender Scare.” In spite of this milieu of prejudice, the period also saw the emergence of significant gay groups, such as the Mattachine Society, “one of the earliest gay rights groups in the [U.S.] in 1950,” and Daughters of Bilitis, “the first lesbian civil rights group in the [U.S.] in 1955” (Goldberg, n.p.).

Though originally released to audiences more than six decades ago, Aldrich's adaptation of Mickey Spillane's *Kiss Me Deadly* continues to capture the attention of audiences from a variety of cultural contexts and backgrounds. In particular, the film's male protagonist, Mike Hammer, provides viewers an insightful look into the complex matter of wrestling with 1950s cultural anxieties of masculine decline and invasion by a feminized other. As Frank Krutnik notes of noirs films, "The hero's potency has to be proved and asserted, rather than being simply assumed. The quest requires him to face up to various forms of obstruct...and these provide opportunities for a testing of his prowess..." (89). Combatting fears of an emasculated "organization man" vulnerable to attack, Hammer embodies a white, middle-class reinforced masculinity marked by a willingness to be violent, physical strength, mastery of emotions, and effortless sexual virility. Throughout the film, these qualities are also established and proven via Hammer's interactions with those around him to the effect of creating a steadfast masculinity. In particular, Hammer is able to test his masculinity and authority while furthering this narrative through his interaction with the racial other, the female other, and the queer other—all minoritized populations tied to anxieties in the 1950s cultural climate. Whereas viewers at the time may have feared invasion by Communists, homosexuals, villainous / sexually aggressive women, and others, Hammer possesses qualities that seemingly allow him to not only face these individuals, but to render them no longer a threat. By examining the film's attitudes toward Hammer's masculinity, it becomes increasingly apparent that we must consider the film a product of its time.

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**“Robbed!”: Masculine Anxiety and the Taming of the Non-Normative Female Other in Hitchcock’s *Marnie* (1964)**

During the 1950s-1960s, the United States found itself in the midst of a multi-faceted social revolution. Between the end of the World War II and the beginning of the Vietnam War, the country saw a marked shift in its gender politics. As men abandoned their factory positions to fight in World War II, the resulting labor deficit allowed many women, including those with children, a “taste of freedom and accomplishment” that inspired a record number to seek employment outside the home in the post-war period (Reiss vii). Critics like essayist Mary Eberstadt have also classified the period as one defined by the emergence of advances in female sexual liberation due to increased access to reliable birth control. Eberstadt writes, “The technological revolution of modern contraception has...fueled the...widely noted ‘sexual revolution’—defined here and elsewhere as the ongoing destigmatization of all varieties of nonmarital sexual activity, accompanied by a sharp rise in such sexual activity...It may be possible to imagine the Pill being invented without the sexual revolution that followed, but imagining the sexual revolution without the Pill and other modern contraceptives simply cannot be done” (“Introduction”). Although some welcomed changing politics, others believed this breakdown in traditional gender roles to be the catastrophic and symptomatic of a social collapse. Howard Sorokin, founder of Harvard’s Department of Sociology, for example, linked “sex freedom” and “sex anarchy” to a “long list of social ills,” including rising divorce rates, increased numbers of abandoned children, and an increase in mental disorders (qtd. in Eberstadt, “Introduction”). Similarly, sociologist Carle Zimmerman criticized the breakdown of the

“atomistic family” unit and changing gender politics to be horsemen of apocalyptic social decline (Eberstadt, “Introduction”).<sup>7</sup>

As the gender debate raged, the period saw a reemergence of psychoanalysis, particularly the theories of Sigmund Freud. According to Mark Leffert, the postwar period is considered to be the “golden era” of psychoanalysis (199). He writes, “Psychiatrists returning from the war were impressed by the application of psychoanalytic principles to what was then called combat fatigue (post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD) and sought analytic training in droves; psychoanalysis as a treatment, not just as a concept, captured the interest of Americans as both a cultural icon and panacea” (Leffert 199). At this intersection of sex and psychoanalysis was Freud, a theorist most Americans “came to understand, correctly or not, that he had endorsed sex as a desire equal in importance to hunger or thirst” (Eig, “A Short History of Sex”). For the first time since the 1920s<sup>8</sup>, psychoanalysis saw a surge in popularity and even began to appear in film (Leffert 199). Some of such films were those of Alfred Hitchcock. Considered by many contemporary critics to be one of the most influential directors and filmmakers in cinema history, Hitchcock has produced a plethora of classic films such as *Rear Window* (1954), *Vertigo* (1958), and *Psycho* (1960). Many of his films are known for the use of the “Hitchcockian Blonde,” an emotionally-cold woman with blonde hair, and his 1964 film, *Marnie*, is no exception. Considered by many critics to be the third in a trifecta of films relating to issues of the human psyche—a trifecta also including *Psycho* (1960) and *The Birds* (1963)—*Marnie* tells the story of a young woman, played by *Birds* star Tippi Hedren, who travels between cities assuming

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<sup>7</sup> For more information regarding Carle Zimmerman’s work on the breakdown of the “atomistic family” as a symptom of social decline, see *Family and Civilization* (1947).

<sup>8</sup> For more information regarding psychoanalysis and its popularity in the 1920s, see Nathan G. Hale, Jr., in *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States: Freud and the Americans, 1917-1985* (1955).

disguises and stealing from a string of male employers as the result of her mother's misandrist sermonizing<sup>9</sup>. After her conning scheme is discovered by Mark, a business-owner who dabbles in zoology, played by Sean Connery, he threatens to turn her over to law enforcement if she will not marry him. Out of fear for her loss of freedom and with limited options, the young woman—aptly named Marnie—agrees and conflict ensues. Over the course of the film, Mark, armed with a collection of do-it-yourself psychoanalysis books and an air of all-knowing patriarchal authority, effectively “tames” the frigid Marnie by uncovering past traumas that have seemingly resulted in this man-hating, deviant criminal behavior. Following this taming, which reaches its climax after Mark guides Marnie through a Freudian regression episode, the pair drive off into the sunset, happily matched.

As individuals began to challenge 1960s gender expectations of the passive, nurturing, sexually-chaste housewife and the authoritative patriarch, dominant culture responded with the production of textual narratives designed to reassert hegemonic gender roles. One of such texts is Alfred Hitchcock's film, *Marnie*. Although the 1964 trailer for *Marnie* describes the film as “a sex story,” a “mystery,” “a detective story,” “a romance,” “a story of a thief,” “a love story,” and “more,” I argue *Marnie* actually emerges as a response by Hitchcock to the ongoing sexual revolution and anxieties regarding a breakdown of traditional gender roles. Utilizing the popular psychological framework of his period as justification, the film positively depicts the taming of a woman who embodies some of the freedoms found in the nascent sexual revolution of the 1960s by an authoritative, all-knowing patriarchal character. Additionally, he creates a narrative about

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<sup>9</sup> Marnie's mother was forced to become a prostitute when Marnie was young in order to support her child. An incident resulted in a fight with Marnie's mother and a client. A young Marnie attacked the man and killed him with a fireplace poker. The fight resulted in Marnie's traumatic amnesia, a rift between mother and child, and the mother's permanent limp; additionally, this past causes Marnie's mother to despise all men and teach Marnie to do the same.

making the female body accessible to heterosexual male contact as a means of reasserting patriarchal male authority. Because Mark has knowledge of psychoanalysis—assumedly also castration anxiety and penis envy—he is able to tame Marnie’s non-normative proclivities, effectively reasserting 1960s gender roles by the film’s end. Though *Marnie* was released more than five decades ago, the film offers a thought-provoking look into a response to an authoritative, independent, and non-normative female other in the 1960s.

In psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud’s classic essay, “Fetishism,” he discusses the fetish as the direct response to a deeply traumatic experience in male childhood: the boy’s discovery that his mother does not have a penis and that, if his mother has lost her penis, the boy might one day lose his, too (953). According to Freud, the fetish is a “substitute for the penis,” though not just any male genital. He argues the fetish originates as a means of coping with the discovery that his mother does not have a penis. Freud writes, “To put it more plainly: the fetish is a substitute for the woman’s (mother’s) penis that the little boy once believed in and—for reasons familiar to us—does not want to give up” (953). With his use of the words “familiar to us,” Freud demonstrates a belief in the value of the penis. Readers may interpret this to be a reference to Freud’s prior work, or an assertion of the penis’s inherent value. Because the boy is terrified that he might be castrated like his mother, he creates a sort of mental “blind spot,” or he “scotomizes”; however, this blind spot is not truly blind. In response to constant reminders of his mother’s castration and, thusly, his own, the boy lies to himself by identifying a replacement penis: the fetish. Freud writes, “Yes, in his mind the woman has got a penis” (954). The boy is interested in this “replacement,” which here means the fetish, because it assuages his fears of castration. Freud states, “[The fetish] has taken its place, has been appointed its substitute...and now inherits the interest which was formerly directed to its predecessor” (954). However,

because the scotomization is only partially effective, the sight of the vagina is a constant reminder of genital mutilation and the fetishist has an aversion to vaginas as the result. The fetish becomes a token of the man's triumph over and protection against castration.

Throughout *Marnie*, the film utilizes these Freudian notions of the threat of castration to establish Marnie as a dangerous woman. Calling upon Freud's assertion that scotomization via the fetish is only partially effective and that the vagina reveals castration threat, the film assails viewers with a barrage of vulvic objects in a possible attempt to bring the threat of this impending castration to the forefront of his viewers' minds. In the opening shot of the film, viewers are presented a close-up shot of a yellow cleave reminiscent of the female genitals. At the macro level, without the context provided by a wider frame, the viewer has no way of knowing what kind of object this could be other than the initial subconscious association with the vulva. As the cleave moves further from the camera and more of the setting is revealed—including the cleave's actual identity as a handbag under the arm of a woman—the appearance of various fetish objects, such as the woman's high heels, skirt, and long hair emerge, removing some attention from the cleave. As the woman's back is to the camera, her identity is anonymous, though she is still marked as female by these fetish objects. Even the revealing of the vulvic cleave as a handbag reduces some of the potential discomfort Freud would attribute to castration anxiety; however, the bright color of the handbag and its linear path forward from the camera—a path which does not disturb the handbag's vulvic cleave—causes it to remain the object of fascination in the frame. As the result, the viewer is encouraged to oscillate between viewing the purse as a harmless fetish object (a handbag) and as a castration threat (a vulva); thus, *Marnie* calls attention to the fragile nature of these fetish objects and their limited ability to

ward off castration anxiety. Even in the presence of fetish objects, scotomization is only partially effective and the threat of castration remains.

In *Marnie*, the film's namesake female character uses a series of disguises designed to conceal her true identity. Alternating between black, blonde, and brown hair, as well as a series of outfits and names, Marnie's adoption of fetish objects allows her to steal money from the vaults of men. After Marnie's first crime in the film is revealed, the men attempting to come up with a description are only able to remember her as a "pretty woman" whose list of features include "five feet five, 110 pounds, size 8 dress, blue eyes, black wavy hair, [and] good teeth" (Hitchcock). In their memory, Marnie's identity is based almost entirely upon her appearance as a sex object. According to Freud, fetish items conceal the castration threat by rendering the woman "tolerable as a sex object" (Freud 954). For these men, Marnie is an anonymous woman made up of a collection of signifying fetish objects; thus, she is dangerous because she is aware of this fact and uses it against these men. Upon adopting the brown hair disguise, Marnie replaces her yellow handbag with a brown variation; however, in spite of Marnie's attempts to use fetish objects to conceal her castration threat, certain elements of her identity peer through. Most notably of these is her name, as well as the vulvic form of the handbag.

Though Marnie has several decoy names, as evidenced by her stack of social security cards, each name bears a common trait. These names—Marion, Mary, Margaret, Martha—including her own name, all contain the letters M-A-R. In this case, the letters M-A-R are a hint to Marnie as a wolf in sheep's clothing. Merriam-Webster defines "mar" as 1.) "to ruin or diminish the perfection or wholeness of," and 2.) "to inflict serious bodily harm on" or "destroy." The suggestion here is that, even though Marnie is capable of concealing her identity from the men she robs, certain elements of her identity will peer through the disguise of fetish objects. A

similar effect is seen with Marnie's vulvic handbag. Even though Marnie replaces her yellow handbag with a new brown version, the vulvic cleave remains. This is a fact the film ensures readers know through a repetition of the opening scene: a shot in which the back of an anonymous woman—whom we now know is the film's central female character—is adorned by a vulvic cleave in the form of an under-the-arm handbag. The close-up shot of the vulvic object is repeated and gradually pans out to reveal the rest of the disguise. By having Marnie's back to the camera when the vulvic object and fetish objects are revealed, her anonymity allows her to symbolically become any and every woman. Through the Freudian lens, she is rendered simply a castration threat covered by a disguise of fetish objects. Even after Marnie disposes of her handbag, the children lurking outside her mother's house sing a song a bizarre nursery rhyme about "the lady with the alligator purse" in a distinct nod to Marnie. Rather than singing about an "alligator skin" purse, the children simply use the descriptor "alligator" purse, referencing a predatory, toothy reptile in the form of a purse. Though Marnie's vulvic purses are not made of alligator skin, they are symbolic of a threatening creature: the vulva that represents a castration threat. By including these enduring elements of Marnie's identity, M-A-R and the vulvic handbag, in spite of her disguise change, Marnie's character mirrors Freud's assertion that scotomization with fetish objects is only partially effective in concealing the feminine castration threat.

In addition to the handbags marking Marnie as one who literally and figuratively holds the threatening vulva, another vulvic item emerges in the form of money vaults. Throughout *Marnie*, viewers are shown the repeating motif of the once-full, now-empty vault. Through her theft of her male employers' money, she threatens to remove their social and economic power by claiming it as her own. In her article, "Male Desire, Male Anxiety: The Essential Hitchcock,"

Robin Wood writes, “Within patriarchal culture, the phallus is the supreme symbol of power; conversely, power is ‘phallic.’ Loss of power on any level (money, prestige, social status, authority over women, domination of children, and so forth) is therefore symbolic castration” (226). In Wood’s article, she uses Freudian thought to highlight the connection between the phallus and power. If a man is to be perceived as masculine in a patriarchal culture, he must possess more than simply the male genitalia; he must also possess objects indicative of phallic power, such as money, authority over women, etc. Because these items are aligned with the phallus, Freud’s supreme symbol of power, their loss results in an emasculating loss of patriarchal authority.

Using disguises to conceal her true nature and motives, Marnie robs the money vaults of her male employers, rendering their vaults barren and hers full. The result is a metaphorical castration and the creation of a phallic woman, a monstrous being according to 1960s social consensus. Though these men were previously the supreme ruler of their respective companies due to their possession of funds, the loss of this money serves as a loss of power and, thus, a symbolic castration. In addition to this castration, the male victims become aware of Marnie’s true identity—the dangerous female castration threat—and her use of fetish objects (a masculine self-defense mechanism) against them; thus, they are made to feel foolish as well due to their lack of phallic authority over a woman. Reflecting this Freudian castration, the first word spoken in the film, directly following the close-up shot of the vulvic handbag, are by a man remarking upon the theft of his money. “Robbed!” he declares, staring into a barren vault. The viewer, directed by Hitchcock, stares into the vault with the man, as well as several other men. As the money is representative of the powerful phallus, the vault becomes symbolic of the female genitalia, now rendered empty of the phallus. Whereas Marnie’s male victims previously

possessed the phallus in the form of money and social spending power, they are now rendered holders of a solely feminine vulvic object—the empty bank vault. Consequently, Marnie now possesses the symbolic attributes of the phallus—authority and spending power—thus rendering her a phallic woman and a danger to all men who would like to retain their masculine authority. Further reflecting the passivity Freud identified in female patients, the men are rendered helpless when it comes to recovering their money, as well as their phallic authority. Without a real name or knowledge of Marnie’s true identity, the men (aside from Mark, whom we will discuss later), can only stare into their empty vaults, lament their lack, and wait passively for the authorities to locate their stolen masculinity. Contrastingly, Marnie’s possession of the phallus grants her the freedom to travel to a new city, unencumbered by social mores and gendered expectations.

Not only does Marnie’s theft result in the emasculation of these men, but it also serves the effect of rendering her the temporary possessor of phallic power and an adversary to heterosexual male access to the female body. When Marnie empties the bank vaults of her male employers, “what she is really stealing is their control of the master signifier...She does not have penis envy, but rather she has phallus envy. She wants to take the power-signifier from the Other in order to prevent men from controlling her as an object” (Samuels 98). By removing the symbolic male phallus (money) from the feminine vulvic object (vault), Marnie disrupts the representation of male-female copulation. Marnie not only lacks penis envy, but she is wholly opposed to the union of male and female bodies, as viewers observe in her removal of the phallic object from the vulvic object. Through this breakdown of heteronormativity, Marnie renders herself the masculine wielder of phallic authority. With her stolen funds, Marnie is free to do as she wishes without the presence of the man, rendering her an independent being unregulated by gender constraints, as well as heteronormative social expectations. Whereas women in 1960s

U.S. society were generally relegated to the domestic sphere with only some women venturing into less-than-lucrative support positions (such as Marnie's typist positions)<sup>10</sup>, Marnie's possession of the phallic stacks of money make her an authoritative, self-governing power.

In the scene in which Marnie enters the home of her mother and gives her an expensive fur, it parallels the classic heteronormative, patriarchal scene of the husband entering the domestic space with money for his wife and children. Marnie becomes the central provider in this instance, as the result of her phallic theft; however, the non-heteronormative family she has formed in this instance—a unit consisting of Marnie, her mother, and a neighborhood child—is depicted as deeply dysfunctional. Not only does Marnie's mother rebuke her daughter's child-like requests for declarations of love, but the child in this family triad is a point of conflict. The child dislikes Marnie, as evidenced by her discreet malicious scowls behind the back of Marnie's clueless mother, and Marnie dislikes the child, as corroborated by her own spiteful glares. Though Marnie attempts to assume the position of the bread-winning, authoritative masculine figure in the home, she fails to fill this role effectively. Marnie's mother is able to connect with the child, but Marnie is left to feel a disconnected sense of jealousy. Not only is Marnie reduced to competing with the child for the mother's love, but she fails in this endeavor. As the result, she is reduced to a childlike figure, stripped of phallic authority by the family unit. Because Marnie is a woman, she is unable to spark a positive Oedipus complex in the child, whom seems to demonstrate an affinity for Marnie's mother. Freud often linked negative Oedipus complex—or the unconscious desire for the same-sex parent and hatred for the opposite-sex parent—with homosexuality and neurosis, thus suggesting the child in this non-

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<sup>10</sup> In *America in Revolt During the 1960s*, Rodney P. Carlisle and J. Geoffrey Golson state that women who chose to work outside the home “primarily worked in clerical, nursing, and teaching jobs,” often facing “both sexual harassment and wage discrimination” (158).

heteronormative family unit will be “burdened” with the same misandrist, neurotic tendencies as Marnie.

By modeling this non-normative family as the epitome of domestic dysfunction, the film accomplishes two things: Firstly, using the support of Freud, it rejects the possibility that Marnie, a woman, could assume the phallic masculine authority successfully; consequently, it asserts this authoritative position of bread-winner and head-of-house can only be assumed by a man—a notion that promotes 1960s binarized gender roles. Regardless of Marnie’s attempts to function in this role, she is reduced to isolation and unhappiness. Secondly, the film suggests a non-heteronormative family—particularly one headed by women—can only result in horrific dysfunction that will be felt for generations to come, as evidenced by the child’s inability to accomplish a positive Oedipal relationship. As the child of a non-heteronormative nuclear family headed by a single woman, Marnie serves as a Freudian case-study of a child who has grown up without a male influence. The child a prostitute and one of her anonymous customers, Marnie’s father figures were a revolving collection of men whose only intention was to take, rather than to provide. In fact, the only male Marnie encounters as a child on-screen is the customer who attempts to molest her and murder her mother. As the result, Marnie is unable to form a positive Oedipus complex, a failure Freud argues will result in neurosis. Building from Freud’s theories, Marnie is portrayed as a troubled, neurotic woman.

Due to her inability to form a positive Oedipal relationship with a male and female parent, Marnie is unable to progress through the Phallic stage. The third stage in Freud’s five-stage psychosexual development theory, the Phallic stage features the development of the child’s libido, or sexual desire—a desire which manifests in the form of unconscious attraction to the opposite-sex parent. Because the Phallic stage centers upon the acknowledgement of genitalia

and gender differences (i.e. the discovery of penis=boy and vagina=girl), an inability to progress through this stage can result in an array of consequences including an aversion to one's own genitals and desire, neurosis, inability to acknowledge gender difference, and a failure to gain access to the Latency stage. Nearly all of these symptoms can be viewed in the characterization of Marnie, rendering her a classic Freudian case study. In addition to being portrayed as neurotic, Marnie's theft of her male employers' phallic power and efforts to establish herself as a breadwinner demonstrate an unconscious inability to identify herself within a binarized gender system—a feature undoubtedly placed by Hitchcock, whose infamous micromanaging of film sets was so extensive it often extended into the personal lives of his actors.<sup>11</sup> As Marnie is unable to form a positive Oedipal relationship with a male father-figure, she does not establish what Freud believed to be a healthy response to the opposite sex: a self-acknowledged sexual attraction. Though Marnie desires phallic power, she demonstrates a pronounced abhorrence to her own sexual desire—specifically, a desire for men. It is this lack of desire for men that renders Marnie a threat to heterosexual standards of 1960s hegemonic patriarchy.

Throughout the film, a key source of conflict is Marnie's rejection of Mark's relentless sexual advances which are framed as attempts to cure Marnie of her non-normative desires. As Marnie appears to be deeply opposed to Mark's advances, she is marked as non-normative. In Lucretia Knapp's article, "The Queer Voice in Marnie," she argues this non-normativity results in a film "rich with queer moments" (10). In addition to finding Mark's use of the psychoanalytical book *Aberrations of the Female Criminal* as "more than a passing hint of lesbianism," Knapp identifies queer elements in Marnie's characterization, writing, "...although Marnie does not conform to lesbian stereotypes...she is the spinster, the outlaw, and a part of the

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<sup>11</sup> See Donald Spoto's *Spellbound by Beauty*, Three Rivers Press, 2009, p. 170 for more on Hitchcock's extensive and invasive micromanagement of Tippi Hedren's personal life during *Marnie* filming.

women's community...she has the invisibility of the femme" (15-6). With a keen ability to see through Marnie's fetish-object disguise—a skill Freud would attribute to her lack of castration anxiety—Mark's former sister-in-law, Lil, develops an almost obsessive interest in Marnie. When Mark asked Lil what kind of love she is waiting for, she responds, "I'm queer for liars." Knapp points out that, in this scenario, Marnie has already been revealed quite conspicuously—for viewers, anyway—a liar, thus suggesting there is a degree of same-sex desire between the women (18). When establishing her argument regarding queer subtext in the film, Knapp dismisses the possibility of a heteronormative Freudian subtext in *Marnie*, calling it "too obvious" and a "trap" (11). As a result, Knapp passes up a valuable opportunity to put the subtextual readings in conversation with one another. According to Knapp, the Freudian reading suggests Marnie is "out for daddy" with "daddy" being Mark in this case (18). I would argue, however, that this is not necessarily true. As Freud identifies, unsuccessful resolution of the Oedipus complex can result in neurosis, as well as homosexuality<sup>12</sup>. By positioning Marnie as a queer figure, the film further establishes Marnie's characterization as a "misbehaving other" that deviates from heteronormative, hegemonic gender roles of the 1960s. Because she can be coded as queer, Marnie is further developed as a threatening figure to audiences supportive of a patriarchal society.

From early in the film, Mark is able to see Marnie's true intentions, despite her use of a series of disguises consisting of fetish objects designed to conceal criminal intentions. Though married once before, Mark's former wife is deceased, and her presence is effectively removed from the equation due to a falling tree's destruction of the various fetish objects—trophies, we can assume, from the previous "domestication" of a woman. As the result of this previous

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<sup>12</sup> See Sigmund Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) for more on homosexuality and possible outcomes of unsuccessful Oedipus complex resolution.

relationship, Mark enters his relationship with Marnie possessing a degree of knowledge about the female other, as well as gaining access to the female body. By using a deceased former wife as a means of establishing this experience, the film avoids the negative associations that might have arisen had Mark gained this experience outside wedlock. Though the 1960s saw the advent of oral contraceptives and changing attitudes toward sex, taboos regarding pre-marital sex still existed in the minds of many<sup>13</sup>; thus, by orchestrating the death of Mark's former wife and the fetish objects representing her, the film effectively removes her from the equation without saddling Mark with the negative associations divorce<sup>14</sup> lingering in the minds of many during the time period. Through the implementation of these strategic gestures in the development of Mark's character—as well as his handsomeness, intelligence, and professional success—the film presents Mark as a sympathetic character many *Marnie* viewers can either aspire to be, or aspire to be with; or, at least, this seems to be the film's intention.

In addition to possessing knowledge of women and the female body prior to his relationship with Marnie, Mark has the distinct ability to see through Marnie's disguise, an ability that is chalked up to his knowledge of predatory behavior. As a man who dabbles in zoology, Mark possesses unique knowledge in what he refers to as the instinctual behavior of predators. This knowledge is reflected in the rare and exotic artifacts Mark uses to decorate his office, as well as the picture of the “Jaguarina,” a fierce jungle cat that he has domesticated. Incidentally, the [-ina] suffix added to the word “Jaguar” is often reserved for feminine objects,

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<sup>13</sup> In Edward J. Rielly's book, *The 1960s: American Pop Culture Through History*, he writes, “Prior to the 1960s, many people...engaged in premarital sex, but they continued to give public allegiance to permanent and monogamous relationships sanctioned by marriage...Sex was not spoken of much in public, and if nice young men and women engaged in sexual relations, they (especially the women) did not broadcast that fact to others” (28).

<sup>14</sup> In Andrew Cherlin's *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage*, he asserts that attitudes toward divorce did not begin to change markedly until the 1970s when “more than half of the states enacted some form of no-fault divorce” over the span of the decade (49).

suggesting the once-wild cat Mark has tamed is coded female.<sup>15</sup> Because Marnie is positioned as a predator operating upon a basic survival instincts for the majority of the film, this knowledge places Mark in a position of phallic authority over Marnie. Unlike the other men Marnie has deceived, Mark's knowledge of the predatory mindset gives him a distinct advantage and knowing authority over Marnie, thus establishing the beginning of the "tamer" and "tamed" binarized relationship between Mark and Marnie. Perhaps detecting danger instinctually upon discovering Mark's knowledge of her private psyche, Marnie attempts to uncover its extent by asking about predatory behavior in women. With his statement that women are the most instinctual, predatory creatures—a theory which seems to align with Marnie's patterns of predatory phallus theft—Mark's authoritative power is revealed to the viewer, as he is privy to a degree of authority over a phallic woman who has rendered other similarly powerful men passive and helpless. In spite of Marnie's use of fetish objects to obscure her dangerous nature, Mark's command of the phallus is made greater than her own due to his possession of phallic knowledge.

Further establishing the tamer-tamed relationship between Mark and Marnie through the use of phallic knowledge, Mark uses a collection of zoological and psychoanalytic books and essays as an operating manual for Marnie. Using these texts, he becomes an expert on Marnie, somehow knowing more about Marnie's psyche than even she does. Many times, Marnie runs away from Mark; yet, he somehow tracks her down with ease every time she disappears, asserting an all-knowing aura of patriarchal authority and guaranteeing his access to Marnie. Further supporting Mark's position of authority over Marnie, her attempted theft of his phallus/money is foiled. As though Marnie is a hysterical animal that must be tamed to prevent it

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<sup>15</sup> "Jaguarina" may also be a subtle reference to Ella Hattan, also known as La Jaguarina, a famous nineteenth-century female fencer known for her skill with a sword.

from hurting itself and others, Mark studies a collection of books including his own “The Criminal Class of the Animal World,” *Animals of the Seashore*, and, perhaps the most blatant, *Sexual Aberrations of the Female Criminal*. As highlighted by his reading list, Mark’s marriage to Marnie involves treating her as both an untamed animal and a mentally deranged child. The union of these two concepts is clear when Marnie asks, “You Freud, me Jane?” Parodying the classic line associated with the feral child Tarzan in Edgar Rice Burrough’s *Tarzan of the Apes*,<sup>16</sup> Marnie illustrates a parallel in which she is the feral child and Mark is the father of psychoanalysis. Though her utterance suggests she places herself in the Tarzan role, her decision to label herself as Jane further suggests gender is at the forefront of this 20<sup>th</sup> century “taming.” Marnie is an animal Mark has trapped and, using the key to unlocking Marnie’s psyche, Freudian psychoanalysis, Mark is able to “tame the beast” and bring about a heteronormative, hegemonically feminine woman.

Though contemporary viewers may observe the clear power inequality and red flags of abuse in the Mark-Marnie relationship, viewers are not meant to view this treatment in a negative light. During the time in which *Marnie* was released, Freudian psychosexual developmental theory and psychoanalysis were still very much in their heyday; consequently, many of the problematic issues contemporary scholars identify in Freud’s theory relating to gender and sexuality were viewed as possible—even probable—truths. For contemporary viewers, one of the most difficult-to-reconcile scenes is the honeymoon cruise rape scene. As Mark approaches Marnie in her bedroom<sup>17</sup> following their marriage, she verbally expresses a lack of consent for

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<sup>16</sup> The quote is “Me Tarzan, you Jane.” This is not a true quote from the novel, but it has become part of the cultural memory of the book. In this instance, the quote is used as a reference to the idea of the Tarzan character—a feral child lacking knowledge of Western cultural norms.

<sup>17</sup> Although it is not explicitly stated the pair have separate bedrooms, the implication is that Mark is planning to sleep elsewhere.

sexual activity. After Marnie tells Mark, “If you don’t want to go to bed, please get out,” he tells her, “But I do want to go to bed, Marnie. I very much want to go to bed” (*Marnie*). As it becomes clear Mark is referring to sexual activity, Marnie screams, “NO!” before Mark rips off her nightgown. Although Mark initially backs off and apologizes, he then pushes Marnie back onto the bed and the screen goes black as a romantic soundtrack plays, suggesting a sexual encounter. For contemporary viewers, the implication is very clearly that of a rape made even more disturbing by the romantic touches to the scene, such as the soundtrack and Mark’s caressing of Marnie’s face after he initially apologizes for asserting dominance. According to Freudian theory, Marnie’s apparent frigidity is, in-part, due to her lack of a successful progression through the Phallic stage. As the result, she has developed an aversion to her own unfamiliar desire and genitals. Regardless of if it is indicative of a homosexual response or an asexuality—both are in the realm of possibility according to Freud—Marnie is not heteronormative, an attribute generally socially unacceptable in the 1960s. Though the scene is disturbing, it is presented by the film as a necessary step in Marnie’s taming and eventual recovery from past traumas.

Mark’s views on Marnie’s lack of heterosexual desire seem to mirror those of Freud. When Marnie tells Mark she cannot “bear to be handled,” she does not state she does not want to be touched by Mark in particular. Instead, she tells Mark she cannot bear to be touched by “You... Men!” In this quote, Marnie labels Mark as the personification of every man, identifying her frigidity as a lack of heterosexual desire, rather than a lack of desire for Mark. As the result of this comment, Mark identifies this lack of sexual desire as both a symptom and a cause of her apparent neurosis. The Freudian implication—one which has been condemned for its misogyny since after the 1960s—is that Marnie *does* want to be “handled,” she just doesn’t know this yet.

This is the same form of misogynistic thinking seen at the beginning of Marnie's taming by Mark: the all-knowing patriarch knows the female body better than the female. Reflecting this mindset precisely, Mark responds to Marnie's lack of consent by saying, "You didn't seem to mind at my office that day, or at the stables. And all this last week I've handled you...I don't think you're capable of knowing what you want."

Taking up the position of Marnie's psychoanalyst who knows what she wants and also a "tamer" who controls her, Mark uses the knowledge he has gained through his zoological and psychological research to cure Marnie of her perceived ailments. In particular, he seeks to cure her lack of heterosexual desire and her contempt for patriarchal phallic authority. Because non-heterosexuality, particularly homosexual desire, was viewed as aberrant, taboo ailment during the 1960s,<sup>18</sup> Marnie is both punished and cured/saved via Mark's sexual assault; additionally, the assault serves to reassert Mark's position as the patriarchal authority in possession of the phallus and Marnie's position as one who is lacking. This theme is not unique to *Marnie*, nor is it a remotely recent development. In fact, this idea of a taming a non-normative, misbehaving female other through the act of implied sexual assault is seen in William Shakespeare's seventeenth-century comedy, *Taming of the Shrew*. Mirroring this notion of correcting the misbehaving female other, *Taming of the Shrew* centers upon a new bride's punishment and attempted curing of a non-heterosexual, non-normative femininity to restore patriarchal order. As spousal rape was not illegal until 1993 and 1991 in the United States and Britain respectively, these husbands were well within their legal rights. In addition to legal rights, the husbands are also well within the

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<sup>18</sup> The SAGE Encyclopedia of LGBTQ Studies, edited by Abbie E. Goldberg, discusses an increased awareness and fear of the "homosexual menace," a phrase that gained popularity following WW2. In addition to purging government of Communists, there was a push to remove "sexual perverts" from office and to warn youths about supposedly pedophilic homosexuals, leading to what is known as the "Lavender Scare" in the 1950s. The Stonewall riots, often considered to be an important marker for changing attitudes toward homosexuality, did not occur until 1969.

social rights of their respective historical contexts—“Not until the last half century<sup>19</sup> was rape understood to be an offense against the woman, against her dignity, instead of against her family’s or her husband’s honor” (Lehr-Lehnardt 317).

Although Mark shows some hint of not wanting to assault Marnie, as evidenced by his initial hesitation and statement of, “I’m sorry; I won’t,” he seemingly changes his mind due to the assumption that it is for Marnie’s benefit, or perhaps because he cannot resist Marnie.<sup>20</sup> Regardless of if the latter is the case, the result is the same; the assault of Marnie and the film’s attitude toward this assault as a necessity valorizes male punishment and correction of women who deviate from expected gender norms. Through this act, Mark reasserts himself as the patriarchal, all-knowing phallus-wielder capable of conquering the symbolic castration threat, or the vulvic woman; additionally, Mark halts Marnie’s development as a phallic woman by modifying her non-normative behavior. Though Marnie backslides several times via attempts at suicide and escape, Mark’s desire to turn Marnie into a housewife shows some signs of progress—progress in the sense that she submits to the majority of his requests, including his instruction for her to kiss him as he leaves for work following the honeymoon cruise.

After Marnie is forced to euthanize her beloved horse, an act that threatens to bring up the repressed memories that traumatized Marnie, she flees Mark’s house and it seems as though the zoology-based training backed by Freudian psychoanalysis has been a failure; however, as Marnie opens Mark’s vault and views its vulvic form filled united with phallic money, she is unable to disrupt the representation of male-female copulation. Seemingly paralyzed, Marnie can

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<sup>19</sup> Article written in 2007. Though *Marnie* was released in 1964, changes in attitudes regarding spousal rape were slow to change.

<sup>20</sup> It is important to note that, like Marnie, Mark’s name bears the “mar” prefix, suggesting he is also capable of causing harm.

only stare at the vault as she seems to fight her own body for control of her arms. Using his all-knowing patriarchal superpowers to locate her, Mark appears behind Marnie and attempts to goad her into taking the money, an act which would thus eviscerate their union and result in reverse phallic possession. Even with Mark's goading, as well as his physical attempt to force her hand into the vault, Marnie cannot bring herself to end the symbolic copulation, to symbolically castrate Mark, and to reclaim her position as a non-normative, phallic woman; thus, this marks a key turning point in the film. By leaving the money, Marnie decides to accept her role as a hegemonically feminine housewife in a heteronormative relationship. In this sense, Mark's taming is wildly successful and Marnie—previously a symbolic threat to 1960s patriarchal mores—is rendered an accessible, obedient body that reinforces hegemonic social standards.

Though this scene marks a victory for Mark and dominant 1960s culture, the plot does not end here, as there is still the issue of Marnie's lack of sexual desire and unresolved plot trails. Not only must Marnie obey Mark, but she must also desire him if she is to be cured of her supposedly aberrant behavior. Within the home of Marnie's own distant, frigid, and misandrist mother—a place depicted as the source of her neurosis—Mark uses his phallic knowledge of Freudian psychoanalysis to unlock the traumas preventing Marnie from progressing through the Phallic stage to reach mature, heteronormative sexual desire. Though Marnie's mother—a woman with actual knowledge of Marnie's trauma—is present, it is Mark who prompts Marnie to enter a classic Freudian regressive trance. According to Freud, regression involves a return of the ego to an earlier developmental stage as a defense mechanism. As Marnie remembers the attack by the sailor, she reverts to a childlike state, speaking simple words in a high-pitched voice. During the regression, it is Mark who becomes something of a psychoanalyst treating a

patient. Though they are in the home of Marnie's mother, Mark is very much the authority in the room as he tells her when to speak and when to be silent. Mark asks Marnie questions that prompt her to delve deeper into her trauma and, when the episode is over, he speaks the classic words of the stereotypical doctor: "There... You're alright now." In this scene, Mark not only adopts the role of analyst, but he also does so while maintaining his role as her authoritative husband; thus, in this scene the film does not distinguish between husband and analyst. As an all-knowing patriarchal figure, Mark is capable of repairing Marnie's deviance. Rather than distinguishing between the two roles, the film treats the overlap as something to be admired.

Extending the overlap even further, Mark becomes a surrogate father figure for Marnie during the regression episode; thus, he is rendered analyst, husband, and father—an omniscient, omnipotent male figure with access to every part of Marnie. Not only does this figure have access to Marnie's body, psyche, and memory, but it also seemingly knows precisely what is best for her. Whereas the family unit formed early in the film consisted of two women and a daughter, the symbolic unit formed now consists of Mark, Marnie's mother, and Marnie. In this scenario, Marnie is permitted to revert to childhood and symbolically possess a heteronormative, loving family. Marnie is able to finally identify with her mother when she acknowledges Marnie is "the only thing [she has] every loved" and Mark serves as a stand-in for Marnie's absentee father figure. As Mark is not truly her father figure, she is able to perform the Freudian self-defense mechanism of displacement to shift sexual desire from the symbolic father (Mark) to her literal husband (also Mark). Through the disembodied promptings of her all-knowing, authoritative husband/analyst/father, Marnie is able to rapidly progress through the psychosexual developmental stages by visiting past trauma and re-forming a positive Oedipus complex. Rather than presenting *transference*—a psychoanalytical term referring to the patient's attachment to the

analyst as a father-figure or idealized lover—is not something to be overcome and move past; instead, it is present as something to be celebrated as the goal. In the end, through the direction of the phallus-holding psychoanalyst/husband/symbolic father, Marnie's trauma is resolved, and the couple rides off into the sunset. Though it is not openly stated, the implication of the positive Oedipus complex is that Marnie's neurosis is cured, and she will now feel heterosexual desire for her husband; additionally, she will no longer feel the need to challenge binarized gender roles; thus, effectively wrapping up the film's Freudian plot.

Though *Marnie* is not generally considered one of Alfred Hitchcock's masterpieces, it is an invaluable text that brings a great deal of insight into the anxious gender relations and strained binarized systems of the 1960s. In addition to representing the intersection of psychoanalysis and the sexual revolution, the film demonstrates the manner in which psychoanalytic theories could be used as a justification for taming a woman who embodies some of the freedoms found in the emerging sexual revolution of the 1960s. Throughout the film, viewers observe the taming of a misbehaving female other that serves as a threat to heteronormative patriarchal authority by an all-knowing male figure. Not only has Marnie been designed to represent the threat of figurative castration, but she is threatening due to her subversive use of fetish objects to conceal her predatory proclivities and her initial insistence upon restricting male access to her body. A classic case-study of Freudian theory with a psyche modeled after many of Freud's well-known hypotheses, Marnie is dangerous because she disrupts gender binaries by claiming phallic power for her own and rendering her male victims weak and feminized; additionally, she challenges heteronormativity, as she does not possess heterosexual desire, nor a desire to adhere to heteronormative relationship structures. Furthermore, Marnie challenges male patriarchal authority by preventing male access to her body. By the film's end, however, Marnie undergoes

a domestication conducted by an authoritative, all-knowing man who transforms Marnie into a conforming member of the hegemonic patriarchy as an obedient housewife; thus, the film reaffirms the dominant social discourse of the 1960s and disavows efforts to change gender roles. This theme can be viewed throughout every aspect of the film, including the film release poster, which features Hitchcock seemingly wagging a disapproving finger at Marnie as she stares at him from inside a soon-to-be robbed vault (Appendix 1). Relying upon a Freudian framework to develop meaning, *Marnie* explores the manner in which psychoanalysis was taken up by hegemonic discourse in the decade as a tool of patriarchal control. Due to its reliance on the theories of Freud, a theorist now often criticized for his conception of women, and its position in a historical context known for its inequitable treatment of women, *Marnie* is problematic for these same reasons; however, by critically engaging with the film's presentation of these notions, contemporary viewers are able to learn more about the way gender roles have been defined and regulated. Though created decades ago, *Marnie* offers a thought-provoking look into a response to fears of an inaccessible, independent, and non-heteronormative female other in the 1960s.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1

Unknown. *German publicity poster (24"x33") for "Marnie".* Digital image. *The Alfred Hitchcock*

*Wiki.* 1964. 03 May 2018.



Gender, Sexual Abuse, and the Redemption of King Lear's Daughters in Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*

Since it was first brought to the stage in 17<sup>th</sup> century England, William Shakespeare's classic tale *King Lear* has captured the hearts and minds of viewers from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures, spawning countless adaptations in an equally vast number of genres. Of particular interest to many of such adaptations has been the issue of gender and the portrayal of female characters. Set in the United States during the 1970s, nearly four centuries after the initial publication of *Lear*, Jane Smiley's 1991 novel, *A Thousand Acres*, draws upon the framework of its Shakespearean predecessor to tell the story of familial conflict triggered by an aging father's decision to transfer ownership of his extensive Iowa farmland to his three daughters in an effort to evade inheritance taxes. Whereas popular narrative has long positioned father figure Lear and youngest daughter Cordelia in a sympathetic light, Smiley imagines the issue as much more complex, particularly when considered through a feminist lens. With the characters of Ginny and Rose, contemporary reincarnations of Goneril and Regan respectively, *A Thousand Acres* challenges audience conception of these characters as scheming, two-dimensional femme fatales; instead, they are depicted as complex characters influenced by traumatic events in a microcosmic patriarchal society insistent upon the subjugation and commodification of the female body. Using the plot framework of Shakespeare's *Lear*, Smiley creates a social commentary exploring the manner in which an authoritative patriarchal force maintains control through the commodification and subjugation of the female body. Not only is *A Thousand Acres* a tale of an abusive authoritative patriarchy and the society that perpetuates his abuse, but one that understands patriarchal authority through a narrative of sexual abuse. By adapting Shakespeare's text into the 1970s, a key period for the women's reproductive rights

movement, Smiley reminds readers that, although Western gender politics have changed considerably since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, some problematic elements remain the same.

When adapting *Lear*, one of the key challenges often faced by adapters is determining how to handle differences in gender politics between the time the play was initially penned and the contemporary. Kathleen McLuskie, for example, has argued the emotional structures of *Lear* are organized against its female characters in a way that nearly eliminates any chance for a feminist reading (Salkeld 65). Similarly, Marianne L. Novy has noted the *Lear* plot gives Goneril and Regan no opportunity to “point out wrongs done to them in the past” nor to question “the fairness of their society’s distribution of power” in the same way as Edmund, a male character who is disparaged due to his illegitimate birth (qtd. in Thompson 123). Focusing on character dialogue, John Kelly has identified a proliferation of “vagina shaming” lines that can make any contemporary adaptation a challenge.

Rather than simply staging the play as it is written in the source material, Smiley makes the decision to rewrite its plot as a novel. To better understand Smiley’s motivation for utilizing such a problematic text for a feminist novel, we must understand some different approaches to adaptation. Whereas fidelity critics like Casie Hermansson have argued the value of an adaptation hinges primarily on its “fidelity,” or faithfulness to its source material, others like as Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier have argued the term “adaptation” is empty of meaning because every fragment of culture exists as “wild adaptation.” Margaret Jane Kidnie offers an alternative, writing, “...a play...is not an object at all, but rather a dynamic *process* that evolves over time in response to the needs and sensibilities of its users” (2). Replacing words like “text” and “play” with a more flexible term “work,” Kidnie essentially argues that we cannot categorize or compare adaptations of source material because they are merely an extension of the original,

molded to fit a new context. Instead of tension, it is a “reciprocal relation” (5). Seemingly in the same school of thought as Kidnie, Smiley has described the process of writing *A Thousand Acres* as if there were “two mirrors facing each other in the present moment, reflecting infinitely backward into the past and infinitely forward into the future” (56). In the context of a novel, Smiley gains space to change the source material to suit her own purposes. Though it was published several centuries following the first production of Shakespeare’s *Lear* and is set in an entirely different context, Smiley’s *A Thousand Acres* functions as an extension of Shakespeare’s play to the effect of not only molding the tale to fit a different cultural moment. By utilizing this framework, Smiley draws our attention to the fact that a plot laden with sexual misogyny is not out of place in the 1970s.

Published during the height of the women’s rights movement and the push for abortion and reproductive rights, *A Thousand Acres* re-creates the patriarchal hierarchy of *Lear* to the effect of establishing the subjugation of the novel’s female characters in a society many at the time believed offered adequate access to rights for women. Although the decades prior to the 1970s saw a great deal of social change, including the technological revolution of oral contraceptives<sup>21</sup> and an increased number of women joining the workforce<sup>22</sup>, “politics, work, the family, and sexuality” remained an area of concern for many women (Burkett, “Women’s Rights”). Although the Equal Rights Amendment was opposed by many who believed “women should remain in traditional roles and that they already had all the rights they needed,” it was passed and submitted by Congress to the states in 1972 (Mendoza and Stuart 200). The following

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<sup>21</sup> Eberstadt, Mary. “Introduction.” *Adam and Eve after the Pill: Paradoxes of the Sexual Revolution*. Ignatius Press, 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Reilly, Edward J. *The 1960s: American Popular Culture Through History*. Greenwood, 2003.

year, *Roe v. Wade* legalized first-trimester abortion, thus ending a tradition of underground abortions in the U.S.,<sup>23</sup> and Mary Daly published “Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation.” Though the 1970s saw a great deal of progress in the realm of women’s rights, it was not without immense difficulty. By the end of the decade the Equal Rights Amendment was still not ratified by all U.S. states (Napikoski, “Highlights”). Additionally, lingering stigmas surrounding abortion and oral contraceptives limited access for women in spite of legal availability.

At the time in which *King Lear* was penned, England was governed by a strict power hierarchy in which “God ruled all...Man was inferior to God...but superior to all animals, birds, fish, plants and minerals. God ruled Heaven, kings ruled on Earth (and princes, dukes, counts, etc.) and fathers ruled families, like God at home” (Linley 11). In *Lear*, this hierarchy is established by positioning Lear as both a king and a father, a dual position which, according to 17<sup>th</sup> century social norms, grants Lear the highest degree of authority a human can possess. In Smiley’s *A Thousand Acres*, Larry Cook is a well-respected farmer and owner of a multi-million-dollar farm in a rural Iowa community. Although he is not a king in the traditional sense, he is something of a king in the nation-state microcosm that is his expansive farm. Presiding over his daughters and their husbands, Larry calls upon Jacobean-era notions of the father as “God at home” and is aligned more closely with God than with a monarch (Linley 11). In the voice of her narrator, Ginny, Smiley writes, “When I went to first grade and the other children said their fathers were farmers, I simply didn’t believe them...I knew that those men were imposters, as farmers and as fathers, too. In my youthful estimation, [Larry] Cook defined both categories. To believe that others even existed in either category was to break the First Commandment” (19).

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<sup>23</sup> For more information about the underground abortion scene of the 1960s–1970s, see Kaplan’s *The Story of Jane: The Legendary Underground Feminist Abortion Service*.

Not only does Ginny believe Larry is the only true father and the only true farmer, but she also understands Larry's supreme position through the biblical commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). For Ginny, the notion of God, father, and farmer are conflated. The same notion is repeated later when Ginny says, "Trying to understand my father had always felt something like going to church..." (Smiley 20).

Though Larry is positioned as a god over the daughters, we learn quickly that this is not a benevolent god, and this disparity encourages us to empathize with the daughters. The novel's positioning through the eyes of one of the daughters allows us to better identify with her character, as well as her perspective of Larry as an oppressive force. As he is the ruler of the farm, Ginny and Rose depend on Larry's fear his wrath and depend on his benevolence. As Ginny reflects on her childhood, she remembers her father as an intimidating and commanding man whose qualities made her avoid looking at him (Smiley 19). Still, however, she found his "fearsomeness" reassuring because she believed it would be protection against monsters and robbers (Smiley 19). Although readers are more likely to dismiss this intimidation early in the novel due to the narrator's young age, it is revealed to be progressively nefarious. When the daughters are older, this fearsomeness results in outbursts of wrath that are increasingly erratic. When Caroline, Larry's youngest daughter refuses to agree with Larry, he abruptly disowns her and curses her name. For Ginny and Rose, the two daughters who live on Larry's land and depend on his benevolence for their livelihood, they must submit to his will in spite of his abusive name-calling and childhood abuse or lose everything. Because of this unfair power dynamic, the older daughters initially bow to his every command. Instead of love, Ginny and Rose's early relationship with Larry is based upon fear, dependency, and an expectation of worship-laden subservience. By positioning Larry as a God-like figure, Smiley establishes the

steep power difference between Larry and his daughters, as well as a constricting father-daughter relationship dynamic based upon subjugation. As Larry's extensive sexual abuse and physical abuse of the older daughters is revealed (Smiley 302), readers are even more likely to empathize with the daughters. This wrath-, abuse-, and fear-driven power difference allows readers to empathize with the novel's female characters as the novel progresses and they eventually dismantle this unhealthy system seemingly unproblematic in Shakespeare's *Lear*.

After developing reader empathy for Ginny—and thus her sisters—through means of illustrating Larry as an oppressive power, Smiley further humanizes Ginny by granting her a narrative authority Goneril lacked in *Lear*. Perhaps the most apparent shift in Smiley's novel is the re-assignment of narrative voice. Whereas narrative authority in historical renditions of *Lear* was granted to male stage directors, as well as the text itself,<sup>24</sup> Smiley, a female author, places narration in the hands of the Goneril character previously considered villainous, Ginny. Because Ginny serves as narrator in the novel, she is granted the authority of truth-speaker and her voice is given precedence over the voices of others in the novel, including male characters. This change in narration serves as a sharp contrast to the limited speaking parts given to female characters in Shakespeare's *Lear*. In spite of their key role in the plot, "Regan and Goneril speak 187 lines and 181 lines respectively (each representing close to 6 percent of the total lines spoken) and Cordelia only 115 (approximately 4 percent of the total)" (Alter 147). As the result, "many productions of *King Lear* have simplified the multifaceted women in a play so filled with intriguing male characters that the reductive handling of the daughters often goes unnoticed" (Kordecki and Koskinen 2-3). In some ways, Ginny is a flawed character. This is evidenced by her spiteful impulses and jealousy, as well as the anger she feels when discovering her sister is a

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<sup>24</sup> The text determines authority in the sense of which characters utter key speeches, which character is centered in the narrative structure, which characters audiences are invited to empathize with, and more.

love rival. Though Ginny is a flawed character, her role as narrator encourages readers to view events through her eyes and experiences; thus, Ginny is granted a voice of authority and an opportunity to break from Goneril's two-dimensional characterization as an evil femme fatale. In moments where Ginny's memory or reliability fails, her sister Rose serves to bring the truth to light. When Ginny attempts to ignore suspicions that she has repressed memories of abuse, Rose prompts her to remember. By reimagining the *Lear* plot through a lens empathetic to gender-based injustices, Smiley develops a previously one-sided character into a multifaceted one—a gesture Kordecki and Koskinen identify as crucial in a feminist approach to re-visioning *Lear* (4).

Whereas women in the Shakespearean *Lear* are depicted in a black-and-white fashion, with Cordelia cast as a righteous, faithful daughter and Goneril/Regan cast as corrupt, heartless daughters, Smiley's women are neither inherently evil nor intrinsically good. Because the novel centers upon its female characters, their motivations can be explored and viewed in their contextual entirety. In the novel, many of Ginny and Rose's actions stem from distinctly female traumas which impact their ability to function as producers and commodities. Rose, for example, suffers from breast cancer and Ginny endures multiple miscarriages. As occupants of a rural farming community in which women are expected to assume traditional gender roles—specifically, cooking, cleaning, child-bearing—Ginny and Rose are unable to meet the expectations of those around them to produce children and to function as a desirable commodity. Due to her single-breast mastectomy, Rose is viewed with shame by a husband who cannot bear to see her without her nightgown. Not only does this signify a decreased ability to feed potential offspring via breast-feeding, but it also signifies her inability to function as an object of desire for her male partner. Similarly, Ginny is at odds with the gender expectations of the farm due to

her inability to have children. Though she deeply wants to have children, Ginny is unable to be a producer and is humiliated by her father with taunts of infertility. Not only does this remind readers of Larry's disapproval for an unproductive female body, but it also reminds readers that Ginny feels ashamed and undesirable due to her inability to produce. Similar to Ginny and Rose, Caroline does not fit into this producer / desirable commodity mold. This is evidenced by her childhood comment of, "When I grow up, I'm not going to be a farmwife," which is then followed by the proclamation that she wants to be a male-coded "farmer" instead (Smiley 61). Unlike her sisters, however, Caroline escapes the stifling gender expectations of her homeland to become a lawyer in the city. It is only when Caroline returns to the farm—essentially, her father's Iowa kingdom—and demonstrates independence by not immediately agreeing to her father's inheritance proposal that conflict arises.

Whereas the chemicals used by Larry allow the farm to be successful, they are particularly toxic to its female inhabitants<sup>25</sup>, suggesting the farm itself is coded as masculine. Later in the novel, Smiley reveals Rose's breast cancer was likely caused by harsh pesticide used to subjugate the land and Ginny's miscarriages are possibly the result of toxic fertilizer used on the farm by Larry as a means of swelling productivity (Smiley 164, 259). Reinforcing this parallel between Larry and the farm, Ginny tells her sister, "He's got everyone on this place under his thumb...He is this place" (Smiley 104). Whereas Larry is empowered by his position as a farmer and only begins to weaken when he renounces this role, the women inhabiting this toxic farm are reduced to their sexuality and base bodily functions. Whereas the "catechism" enforced by Larry states, "a farmer is a man...," Rose and Ginny, as well as Caroline, are

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<sup>25</sup> Motifs of poison and toxicity about in the text. At one point, Ginny makes a list of clandestine poisons on the farm, identifying rat poison, insecticides in the hog houses, kerosene, diesel fuel, paint thinner, Raid, aerosol degreasers, and used motor oil (Smiley 311).

referred to in terms of livestock, or the commodity used by the farmer (Smiley 45). When Rose and Ginny are discussing Caroline's imminent marriage, Rose recalls a comment made by their father that Caroline's marriage is occurring just in time, as it would soon be too late to "breed her" (Smiley 10). Though this comment is presented in humor, the insinuation here is that Caroline's value is linked to her ability to produce, as is the case with the farm animals. Not only is this woman-as-livestock ideology placed on the daughters by Larry, but it has also been internalized by the two older daughters. When Ginny and her husband, Ty, are planning to open a sow breeding/holding farm, the discussion seemingly blurs sow breeding lines and Ginny's own "breeding line" (Smiley 24). Smiley writes, as Ty, "You get a good breeding line of your own going and you can put those babies up for adoption. Everybody wants one" (24). Ginny then responds, "I've already started his college fund" (Smiley 24). For Ginny, a woman who has been taught her entire life that the female body must be desirable and productive, she cannot help but consider her own reproduction when discussing that of farm animals.

Not only are the women on the Cook farm subjugated by their father, but they are treated as a means of production, mirroring the treatment of the land and livestock by its male farmers. Demonstrating this emphasis on production, we are told, "Beside [Larry's conservatism] lay his lust for every new method designed to swell productivity" (45). In addition to utilizing various chemicals and efficiency methods to tame the wild flood-lands his farm is built upon, as well as the methods used to ensure increasing numbers of livestock, Larry utilizes the bodies of his two older daughters following the death of their mother for his own gratification. For Larry, who is unable to acknowledge or apologize for the abuse of his two older daughters, this abuse is simply a new method designed to swell productivity. Though this is horrific for the average contemporary reader, Larry treats his daughters as a form of property that can be used to satisfy

his desires. Though productivity does not bear the same meaning here as it does with the livestock—meaning reproduction—Ginny and Rose are treated as objects designed to serve their owner. In this sense, they are commodified bodies made to serve the authoritative patriarch. Despite the trauma of the abuse, Ginny and Rose grow up believing it is their duty to provide this service due to the internalized understanding of Larry as a “God at home” and their role as desirable producers. As the result of this abuse, Ginny becomes alienated from her own body, finding it “unfit, panting, and ridiculous in its femininity” and even “hateful” (Smiley 115, 308). As Ginny recalls the abuse by Larry, she thinks, “One thing Daddy took from me when he came in my room at night was the memory of my body” (Smiley 280). After losing agency over her body, she internalizes the expectations of the men on the farm and tries desperately to be a successful producer of children. However, unable to produce children, Ginny does not fit the mold of the ideal producer. Due to her internalized understanding of the female body as productive property, Ginny can only view her supposedly faulty body with shame, alienation, and disgust.

Even when the older daughters are given the farm and, consequently, power by their father, they are treated with suspicion as the result of their gender. Though Rose and Ginny initially intend to continue to treat their father as the true owner of the farm, their desires change as they become increasingly independent and aware of the many injustices they have suffered as the result of the patriarchy’s abuse of women. When suspicion begins to take root in the area that Rose and Ginny have maneuvered their father to steal his land—a conspiracy theory planted and nurtured by Larry—the insults directed at them are almost entirely variations of the words “whore,” “bitch,” and “slut” (Smiley 181). Ginny, in particular, is referred to by Larry as a “dried-up whore bitch” and a “barren whore” (Smiley 181). Rather than referring to the women

using an insult based in deceit, such as “liar” or “thief,” Larry chooses to reduce Rose and Ginny to their sexuality and gender identity. Instead of addressing this perceived theft and betrayal, Larry accuses his daughters of being sexually promiscuous. Though there are many ways of interpreting Larry’s insults, one way is that the betrayal is treated as sexual infidelity. This is especially relevant in consideration of Larry’s past sexual abuse of his daughters. The underlying perceived crime, however, is that they have authority over Larry. Though the women are in legal possession of the farm, Larry, enraged by their newfound power, seeks to reduce them to bodies made to serve men. Whereas the daughters accepted this fate earlier in the novel, they become increasingly eager to escape the clutches of their father, as well as the other men in their lives, as the novel progresses. The implication here is that, as the women become increasingly aware of their subjugation and commodification, they will seek freedom.

Contrasting her two older sisters, Caroline serves as an example of an empowered, independent woman who manages to resist the commodification and subjugation forced on her sisters. A lawyer in lives and works in the city, Caroline is financially independent and relatively free from the stifling gendered expectations of her conservative hometown. Additionally, because Caroline was shielded from her father’s molestation by her sisters, Caroline maintains a sense of agency over her own body. As the result, Caroline is not afraid to assert her opinion when speaking to her father. In the novel, Ginny observes an exchange between her father and Caroline, noting that, whereas Ginny and Rose are always careful to speak to their father as daughters and never as women, Caroline always speaks as a woman (Smiley 21). Whereas Caroline feels comfortable disagreeing with her father, the older daughters are too fearful to assert their own opinions and power, likely due to the sexual and physical abuse they encountered at the hands of their father when they were young. Whereas Caroline has been able

to advance from child to woman, Ginny and Rose remain Larry's "daughters," a title signifying his oppressive, stifling ownership over them and their bodies. As a woman spared sexual abuse and the gendered pressures of her hometown, Caroline has been permitted to escape the crippling abuses that still haunt her sisters. Rather than being simply marked as the more chaste, loving, and genuine daughter as is Cordelia in *Lear*, Smiley positions Caroline's alignment with her father as the result of her escape from the subjugation and commodification imposed by Larry on the other daughters. This fact is especially apparent when Ginny urges Caroline to "respect" her father by behaving in the same subservient, infantile manner Ginny has learned via her interactions with Larry (Smiley 33). Whereas this is the reality that Ginny has lived in for the duration of her life, this conflation of respect and subservience is foreign to Caroline and it is one she rejects vehemently. There is a resulting argument, as Ginny cannot imagine a father-daughter exchange that is not derived from fear and ownership. Due to her ignorance of Ginny and Rose's molestation-driven subjugation, Caroline becomes an avatar for the reader of *Lear* who—due to the two-dimensional characterization of the "villainous" sisters—is unaware of the complexities of their motivations.

In *Jane Smiley's A Thousand Acres: A Reader's Guide*, Susan Farrell discusses criticism of Smiley's decision to write the *Lear* surrogate, Larry, as a sexual abuser of his own daughters. Although reviewers such as Christopher Lehman-Haupt of *The New York Times* argued this characterization "robs" *Lear* of the "majesty" he possessed in Shakespeare's rendition and critics, Farrell argues this depiction "exposes possible hidden subcurrents in *King Lear*," particularly elements of incestuous desire emphasized in the "love test" scene (Farrell 50). In her article, Lynda Boose argues that *Lear* attempts to use the promise of land to coax from his daughters pledges of love that would "nullify those required by the wedding ceremony," thus,

effectively asserting Lear's own position as partner for his daughters (333). Similar to Lear's knowledge that his youngest daughter is in the stages of marital courtship prior to the "love test," Larry is aware Caroline has recently become engaged to a fellow Des Moines city lawyer and will likely never return to live on the Cook farm prior to his proposal to form a corporation. When he drunkenly proposes the division of the property, Ginny identifies Larry's plan as "a trapdoor plunging [Caroline] into a chute that would deposit her right back on the farm" (Smiley 21). Although Caroline was able to escape Larry's sexual abuse and control previously, this "trapdoor" scheme would allow him to "regain control over the one daughter who has been able to escape his grasp (and, apparently, his midnight visits as well)" (Farrell 51). By including this incestuous plot turn, Smiley highlights the undercurrents already found in Shakespeare's play to the effect of further developing our understanding of the work and character motivations.

Instead of being the sole product of incestuous desire, however, Larry's attempt to reclaim Caroline via the corporation scheme is also the expression of a desire for patriarchal ownership or possession of the female body. Throughout the novel, readers observe the manner in which Larry asserts control over his older daughters by way of life-long commodification and subjugation stemming from sexual trauma. If we recall Ginny's statement, "He is this place," meaning Larry is the farm, this offer to divide the land signifies Larry's renewed attempt to give his body to the three daughters. By encouraging Caroline to accept Larry's land/body out of fearful respect, Ginny mirrors Rose's and her own childhood response to Larry's molestation: denial, and the belief that absolute submission to the patriarch is a necessity. Caroline's refusal sets off a chain of events that results in the destabilization of the patriarchy and its commodification of Rose and Ginny; by the novel's end, Rose (via death) and Ginny reject the male-coded farm and the entire contents of their former homes, allowing the farm to be leveled

by a large, nameless corporation. In the ultimate act of agency and self-realization, Ginny makes the decision to abandon the farm and her husband to work as a waitress in a diner. It is only after committing this act of rejecting Larry and the remaining symbols of her trauma that Ginny begins to heal and move on with her life. Unlike Ginny, however, Rose chooses to accept the farm and to suffer in anger, mirroring her response to Larry's abuse; as the result of her inability to escape and heal from the traumatic farm, the cancer returns, and she dies. Ginny then becomes the adoptive mother of Rose's children—three daughters symbolizing Ginny, Rose, and Caroline. As the protector of these three daughters, Ginny assumes the role of her mother, a character that was absent from her life and absent from the plot of Shakespeare's *Lear*. Wiser, independent, and determined to create a strong new generation that refuses to be commodified and subjugated by a patriarchal society, Ginny is a reminder that change takes time; however, with the leadership of strong women, it is possible to recover from the traumas of the past.

Though *King Lear* is a classic story that has been revised countless times in the centuries following Shakespeare's initial play, Smiley's adaptation provides an insightful take upon the tale through the lens of contemporary feminist critique. In particular, Smiley's adaptation highlights efforts to commodify and subjugate the female body during the 1970s reproductive rights movement. Furthermore, *A Thousand Acres* argues for the importance of breaking free from these oppressive forces. Describing Angela Carter's feminist revision of fairy tales, Maria Aristodemou writes, "By juxtaposing new stories on old texts feminist writers can reveal the oppressive nature of previous stories as well as uncover...new roles for women within them...All texts...are the carriers of ideas and ideologies and it is the task of the new writer to use and abuse the genre to best suit her new purposes" (qtd. in Ayers 147). By highlighting the subjugation and commodification of women in her adaptation using the plot skeleton of *King*

*Lear*, Smiley encourages readers to re-see Shakespeare's *Lear* characters in a new light by developing their histories and motivations, essentially to the effect of granting voices to the "silenced sisters" (Ayers 147). Though they are often interpreted as malignant, two-dimensional villains, Goneril and Regan are redeemed by Smiley in her adaptation through their depiction as flawed, complex human beings whose actions are shaped by the gender-based injustices present in their environment. By building from the commodification and subjugation of women by a patriarchal authority, Smiley demonstrates an enduring presence of these traditions in the context of the 1970s. In addition to a shift in narrative voice from an authoritative male to the Goneril surrogate, Ginny, *A Thousand Acres* demonstrates the inequitable, exploitative treatment of the female body by a male-dominated contemporary society that mirrors Jacobean social hierarchies, in spite of the differing centuries. By adapting Shakespeare's text into the 1970s, a key period for the women's reproductive rights movement, Smiley reminds readers that, although Western gender politics have changed considerably since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, some problematic elements remain the same.

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### **The “Angel in the House” to the Femme Fatale: Reconciling the Dawn of the “New Woman” in Collins’ *Jezabel’s Daughter***

In addition to being remembered as the zenith of imperialism, the British Victorian era is perhaps best-known as a time marked by its staunch regulation of gender roles. Whereas prior centuries allowed women to work alongside husbands and male relatives in family businesses while attending to household duties, changing economic factors<sup>26</sup> resulted in the adoption of a “separate spheres” lifestyle and ideology in which men and women worked separately (Hughes, “Gender”). In the public sphere, men were responsible for finances and decision-making while women were relegated to the domestic sphere where they oversaw family servants and the production of children. At the foundation of the separate spheres philosophy resided the belief that men were “competitive, assertive and materialistic” while women, calling upon Patmore’s “Angel in the House,”<sup>27</sup> were “pious, pure, gentle and sacrificing” (Nsaidzedze 1). Though this pattern of living was considered the norm for much of the century, the *fin de siècle* brought about an impetus for change in numerous areas, including a push against the inflexibility of roles for women. With the *fin de siècle* came the birth of the so-called “New Woman,” an independent, educated woman disinterested in marriage and children who threatened “conventional ideas about ideal Victorian womanhood” (Buzwell, “Daughters”). Although some found the idea of an independent woman to be “sensible and desirable,” others believed this breakdown of strict gender roles to be symptomatic of an apocalyptic social collapse (Buzwell, “Daughters”).

Victorian era social pundit Max Nordau, for instance, referred to the “feminization of men and

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<sup>26</sup> In Kathryn Hughes’ “Gender Roles in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century,” she attributes this change to a literal shift in the structuring of towns. Though shops connected to homes were popular in prior centuries, they became less common during the 19<sup>th</sup> century as large factories, shops, and offices gained popularity. As men were required to commute to work, women remained at home to oversee servants and household duties.

<sup>27</sup> See Coventry Patmore’s narrative poem *The Angel in the House* (1854–1862).

the increasingly mannish nature of women” as “The Dusk of Nations” and wrote about the topic—along with other various so-called social ills—in his infamous 1892 book, *Degeneration* (Buzwell, “Daughters”).

Though it was not until the mid-1890s<sup>28</sup> that the New Woman trope was named and appeared frequently in literature, the notion of women behaving outside of societal norms gained a great deal of public and literary interest. Initially, in the decades prior, the breakdown in gender roles leading to New Woman debates was believed by many to be an evil tied to social and economic class. Unlike wealthy and middle-class women who could remain at home, thus preserving their moral and physical purity, the poorest women of Victorian society often resorted to crime, physical labor, and prostitution as a means of survival. In this manner, economic poverty became linked to issues of morality.<sup>29</sup> Beginning in the 1850s, however, a series of wealthy and middle-class female murderers captured public intrigue and caused many to fear for the supposedly iron-clad morality of the Victorian woman.<sup>30</sup> In 1857, perhaps one of the most infamous cases was that of Madeleine Smith, a wealthy socialite accused of poisoning to death her lover in an affair brimming with scandal, illicit sex, and blackmail. For a society that held demure upper-class women as the ideal of moral purity, the case was noteworthy and followed closely by news publications. Another particularly infamous case was that of Adelaide Bartlett, a wealthy woman accused of poisoning to death her similarly wealthy husband in 1886. Though

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<sup>28</sup> In “Daughters of Decadence,” Greg Buzwell traces the term “New Woman” to two articles by novelists Sarah Grand and Ouida (Maria Louise Ramé) in an 1894 issue of *North American Review* (n.p.). Buzwell also states that the “heyday” of New Woman fiction occurred during the mid-1890s.

<sup>29</sup> For more information regarding the perceived link between morality and poverty, see Judith R. Walkowitz’s *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (1980).

<sup>30</sup> For more information about news coverage of female-perpetrated crimes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Knelman’s “Class and Gender Bias in Victorian Newspapers” (1993).

Bartlett was eventually acquitted, the trial was followed closely by news publications and their readers.<sup>31</sup>

Flourishing alongside these court cases, Victorian era “sensation novels” emerged as a low- to middle-brow mixture of “contemporary domestic realism with elements of Gothic romance,” and were perhaps best known for their exploration into social taboos relating to “...crime, often murder as an outcome of adultery and sometimes bigamy, in apparently proper, bourgeois, domestic settings” (Brantlinger 1). Habitually blending reality with fiction, sensation novels often drew inspiration from fantastic scandals and uproars at the forefront of public attention. Although sensation novels were widely criticized as “threaten[ing] to erode literary standards and to undermine domestic tranquility” due to their depiction of passionate women driven to scandalous criminal acts, they were immensely popular (Bernstein 213). This was particularly true with female readers and writers who closely followed stories of sensational female-driven drama and scandal. Unlike most high-brow fiction created at the time, Victorian era sensation novels provided a means by which readers and authors alike could attempt to reconcile the taboo social realities of the century with their own beliefs. Because sensation novels offered a unique space where taboo topics could be publicly explored, many writers such as Wilkie Collins used this venue to address social issues otherwise considered off-limits, including those pertaining to the shifting state of traditional Victorian era gender roles. Originally published in 1880 and one of Collins’ lesser-known works, the sensation novel *Jezebel’s Daughter* provides an engaging look into the gender role debate occurring at the onset of the *fin de siècle* by imagining a collision of the “angel in the house,” the “femme fatale,” and the early “New Woman” in a single narrative. Though it initially presents itself as a soapy

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<sup>31</sup> For more information about the Bartlett and Smith trials, see Helfield’s “Poisonous Plots: Women Sensation Novelists and Murderesses of the Victorian Period” (1995).

cautionary drama featuring the punishment of a misbehaving middle-class, foreign woman, the novel actually attempts to reconcile the emerging New Woman femininity by positioning it as a suitable guardian for the feminine ideal of the prior century. Each serving as a possible model for femininity, Widow Fontaine, Minna Fontaine, and Mrs. Wagner bear markers of the classic femme fatale, *Angel in the House*, and a hybridized early New Woman, respectively. By means of this trichotomy, *Jezebel's Daughter* reflects the gender and cultural dynamics of the Victorian period while serving as an instructional guide for feminine conduct in the historical moment.

Spanning the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British Victorian era was marked by emergence of a variety of cultural anxieties related to marriage, courtship, domesticity, and a perceived challenge to empirical sovereignty. As rebellions in British-occupied colonies threatened to break down patriarchal power structures abroad, attention turned to solidifying these power structures within Britain, particularly within the domestic sphere. In the same manner in which British soldiers assumed a patriarchal authority in India over a feminized other, men were expected to rule their homes over women who were understood to be passive and childlike. Whereas men were expected to serve as providers and guardians, women were largely relegated to the domestic sphere to serve as maternal, chaste, and passive beings submissive to the will of their husbands. As Lynda Nead writes in her article, "Forms of Deviancy: The Adulteress," "...moral purity and the family were essential for imperial success, and the empire was the expression of a spiritually sound English nation"; thus, any perceived threat to these roles could be seen as a threat to national security (86). In addition to fears regarding Britain's weakening grasp on its Eastern colonies and an invasion by the racial other, concerns regarding the deterioration of patriarchal authority within the household spawned a plethora of developments in the arts. One of such developments was the adoption of the "fatal woman" trope as a key

figure in the Pre-Raphaelite and Decadent painting tradition, as well as in works by major and minor Victorian writers. In Bram Dijkstra's seminal text, *Idols of Perversity*, he argues historic representation of women in art and literature has long served to reinforce patriarchal cultural attitudes of women as the root cause of social ills (371). The "fatal woman" character—exemplified in biblical figures of Judith and Salome—describes a woman who deviates from traditional feminine dictates by being aggressive, sexually promiscuous, non-maternal, or unwilling to submit to male desires (Dijkstra 371). According to Dijkstra, the "fatal woman," or *femme fatale*, reflects male anxieties and cultural pressures relating to women's sexuality and behavior outside of patriarchal gender norms. Whereas the Angel in the House trope emphasized chastity and innocence—the feminine ideal in Victorian England—the *femme fatale* in Victorian sensation novels engaged with some of the taboos surrounding women's roles and sexuality.

Set in 1828, *Jezebel's Daughter* centers on a series of events surrounding two widows, Madame Fontaine—the widow of a German scientist obsessed with poisons—and Mrs. Wagner—the widow of a prosperous British merchant. Early in *Jezebel's Daughter*, Collins begins to juxtapose Madame Fontaine and Mrs. Wagner by framing the novel with the deaths of their husbands. Though located in different countries with different occupations, the two men died on the exact same day, leaving their middle-aged widows to fend for themselves in a society engineered for male-controlled family structures. A key difference established early in the novel, however, is their class and financial situation. Though the two women were the wives of middle-class men, the ambition of Mrs. Wagner's deceased husband places her in a position of plentiful finances and a stable economic situation. In contrast, Madame Fontaine is thrust into poverty and debt as the result of her marriage to a man with little financial ambition. Not only does this difference serve as a plot device, but it serves also as an early indicator of Madame Fontaine as a

femme fatale. In Jill Matus' piece, "Maternal Deviance," she discusses the manner in which women of lower economic positions were often blamed for behavior irreconcilable with traditional Victorian era femininity. According to Matus, "One way to recuperate the all-sacrificing, ministering mother in the face of apparently monstrous maternal acts was to argue that certain classes of women were losing their natural instincts through the effects of their physical and moral conditions" (157-8). Moral condition and femininity, then, were thought to be linked to economic class. Though the two women previously belonged to the same social class, the deaths of their husbands and the resulting impact on their now-differing class circumstances would have likely served as an early indicator of the two women's moral characters for Victorian readers conscious of the stereotypes surrounding working-class women.

In addition to utilizing economic class to establish Madame Fontaine as a potential femme fatale and Mrs. Wagner as an example of socially-compatible femininity, Collins draws upon centuries of racial/ethnic othering and Victorian era xenophobia to establish an uneven moral hierarchy between the two women. Initially, this ethnic othering is established via the husbands of the women; unlike Mrs. Wagner's dead husband, the fiscally responsible British Mr. Wagner, Madame Fontaine's former husband was a German chemist who worked with Eastern-coded poisons. The establishment of ethnic difference is also developed in the characterization of Mrs. Wagner and Madame Fontaine. Whereas the British Mrs. Wagner is described early as possessing chiefly Western-coded physical traits—"a clear, pale complexion, a broad low forehead, and large, steady, brightly-intelligent grey eyes"—Madame Fontaine's description bears numerous gestures toward ethnic othering and exoticization (Collins 7). She is described as possessing an unremarkable middle-height stature, thin lips, black hair just becoming grey-streaked, a too-small chin, and a complexion that "wanted color" (Collins 44). Though these

characteristics may seem mundane to contemporary readers, various Victorian era physiognomy studies attempted to link physical characteristics with intellectual characteristics. Several of these studies sought to link diminished height with inferior intellect<sup>32</sup> (Hall 257). As these beliefs are inherently biased against certain backgrounds and Western-centric—tall height and pronounced jawlines are often Western European features—they serve to further establish Madame Fontaine as non-Western; additionally, by assigning Madame Fontaine a complexion “wanting color,” Collins suggests a wan appearance historically linked with Eastern-coded witches and vampires.<sup>33</sup> As witch symbolism abounds in the text, it would seem this exoticism plays a key role in Collins’ portrayal of Madame Fontaine. Because witches were often believed to be aligned with Satan, this symbolism establishes Madame Fontaine as a direct contrast to the domestic female angel aligned with God.

In Collins’ description of Madame Fontaine, he pays particular attention to highlighting Madame Fontaine’s non-British German heritage by subtly linking her to the occult. Her manner is described as that of “indescribable witchery” and she possesses “dark eyes, never fully opened” with “something sensual in their *strange* expression” (44, emphasis added). Whereas Mrs. Wagner’s light, “clear,” and “bright” coloring would have been considered by Victorian era readers to be indicative of Western-European genetic lineage and British sensibilities emphasizing logic, reason, and honesty, Madame Fontaine’s “strange” and “dark” description serves as a reminder that she is coded as non-Western and, therefore, suspect. This difference is, perhaps, most notable in the eyes, which have been referred to as the “window to the soul”

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<sup>32</sup> For more information regarding height and intellect, see Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso’s comments on the shortness of ‘imbeciles’ and ‘idiots’ in *Criminal Man* (1876), as well as William W. Ireland’s *On Idiocy and Imbecility* (1877).

<sup>33</sup> In M. Gibson’s *Dracula and the Eastern Question*, he argues that nineteenth century vampire narratives were often set in the Near East as part of a “deliberate and coded practice” linking fears of the racial other with vampires (8).

historically. Whereas Mrs. Wagner's light, wide eyes suggest truth, clarity, and innocence, Madame Fontaine's dark, partially-closed eyes suggest secretiveness and a dangerous, exotic allure. This feature in Madame Fontaine's character places her in direct opposition to Mrs. Wagner, as well as the British value of chastity and passivity. Additionally, the chaste, childlike innocence symbolized by Mrs. Wagner's large, wide eyes contrasts the exotic eroticism of Madame Fontaine's dark, sensual eyes. As sexual chastity was a key tenant of Victorian female decorum, it is particularly significant that the two women differ in this particular area. Due to her description, Mrs. Wagner is further aligned with the Angel in the House trope lauded at the *fin de siècle* while Madame Fontaine is closer to the seductive *femme fatale*.

At a level deeper than physical appearance, a key distinguishing factor from Mrs. Wagner is Madame Fontaine's threat to male authority—in particular, Western male authority. This threat is perhaps most clearly represented in her symbolic castration of the love-struck Mr. Engelman, a wealthy elderly suitor seemingly enchanted by Madame Fontaine. Embodying traits of the exoticized Eastern seductress, Madame Fontaine possesses an ability to enchant the Englishmen around her using the “indescribable witchery of her manner” (Collins 44). As she and the novel's narrator, David, are walking in the park beneath the glow of the full moon—a symbol often associated with a witch's power—she enchants the nearby Mr. Engelman to such an extreme that he falls in love at first sight. When attempting to convey his feelings to David, Mr. Engelman does so by referring to his pipe: “‘Admire her!’ repeated Mr. Engelman. ‘Look here, David!’ He showed me the long porcelain bowl of his pipe. ‘My dear boy, she has done what no woman ever did with me yet—she has put my pipe out!’” (Collins 50). Later, after Engelman—now very clearly smitten—says happily that Madame Fontaine has “bewitched” him, the narrator notes, “For the first time, in my experience of him, he went out without his

pipe; and (a more serious symptom still) he really did not appear to miss it (Collins 56). In Piya Pal-Lapinski's text, *The Exotic Woman in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction and Culture*, she discusses the manner in which women hybridizing Western and Eastern spaces appeared as threatening figures capable of seduction to the point of emasculation. According to Pal-Lapinski, these women "transform a 'domestic' space into an eroticized interior where languid postures signify the consequence of sexual excess and the threat of emasculating disease" (26). In both lines from *Jezebel's Daughter*, Engelman's white pipe functions as a phallic symbol of Engelman's Western masculine authority. Drawn in by the exotic seductiveness of Madame Fontaine—a seductiveness that threatens to castrate as well as enchant—Engelman is too preoccupied to guard his own masculinity. Representing a metaphorical castration, Engelman leaves behind his pipe—an act described as an alarming "symptom" by the narrator. The illness-based word "symptom" is particularly significant when considering circulating fears regarding the contamination of the upper economic classes by lower economic classes and by the racial other. As Madame Fontaine is both impoverished and an exoticized racial other, her 'contamination' of Mr. Engelman calls upon these problematic stereotypes and further establishes her as a dangerously seductive *femme fatale*. Unsurprisingly, Mr. Engelman's realization of his symbolic castration and contamination results in the ultimate warning of castration: his untimely death.

Another key difference between Mrs. Wagner and Madame Fontaine are their attitudes regarding vanity and compassion. Early in the novel, the narrator tells us that, although Mrs. Wagner is a "notably attractive woman," she never "seemed conscious of her personal advantages, or vain of the very remarkable abilities which she did unquestionably possess" (Collins 7). Whereas Madame Fontaine is aware of her ability to persuade and uses her powers to

manipulate others, Mrs. Wagner chooses to maintain a degree of modesty traditionally required of the polite Victorian woman. Though Mrs. Wagner clearly has a mind for strategy and business, we are told she is somehow unaware of these traits; contrastingly, Madame Fontaine seems to pride herself in her own independent cleverness, calling it her “best treasure” (Collins 143). In the novel’s end, when the doctor discovers Madame Fontaine’s journal, he condemns her writings as evidence of vanity. Though the two women possess significant skills, high intellect, and are both placed in positions of power within their respective households, it is Mrs. Wagner who is able to possess these traits without forfeiting her socially-acceptable modesty. Madame Fontaine’s quiet vanity, however, serves to mark her as a woman deviating from conventional Victorian femininity.

Though Mrs. Wagner possesses modesty in spite of her physical and intellectual advantages, thus satisfying one expectation of Victorian gender norms, she demonstrates an unprecedented independence in her efforts to reform treatment of the mentally ill. Upon leaving the domestic sphere and visiting a mental hospital, Mrs. Wagner witnesses the cruel treatment of a patient named Jack Straw. Though the men in her circle, as well as the hospital employees, express their disapproval, Mrs. Wagner insists Jack be released into her care, sacrificing some comforts in the process. Though Jack, an erratic and violent man, bears markers of mental illness and racial otherness, Mrs. Wagner takes him into her home, essentially to the point of adopting him as her own child. Though Mrs. Wagner demonstrates an independence generally frowned upon in Victorian England, her disobedience is not cast in a negative light—in fact, this decision eventually saves her life. By being kind and nurturing to an otherwise unloved character, Mrs. Wagner establishes herself as a compassionate, maternal woman with a heart for the downtrodden. In fact, Mrs. Wagner is so skilled at mothering Jack that he rejects his non-

Western heritage in favor of an English gentleman's clothing and speech patterns. Though Mrs. Wagner's independence challenges Victorian gender norms, her rebellion is rendered safe through its maternal framing. Rather than being a problematic act of defiance, Mrs. Wagner's efforts to reform mental healthcare are portrayed as stemming from a compassionate, maternal heart. Not only does this action have a positive impact on the story's English characters—Jack Straw plays a key role in foiling Madame Fontaine's schemes—but it is also good for England. The compassionate care of Jack is capable of converting a mentally ill, Eastern-coded feral man into a helpful England-loving man-servant. As the result of her feminine compassion and insistence upon supporting childlike Jack, Mrs. Wagner is revived from her death in a seemingly miraculous revival reminiscent of the biblical tale of Jesus' resurrection.

Unlike Mrs. Wagner, Madame Fontaine demonstrates a meager capacity for compassion. Though the pitiful Mr. Engelman, symbolically castrated by Madame Fontaine's seduction, is inconsolable after she rejects his proposal, Mrs. Wagner remains wholly disinterested in marrying him. Though it is not generally considered valorous to marry a person in an act of pity by contemporary standards, Mrs. Wagner, presented as a beacon of compassionate sacrifice, strongly pressures Madame Fontaine to do just this. Despite the fact that marrying Mr. Engelman will solve her financial woes, Madame Fontaine refuses to provide sacrificial compassion by means of marriage for reasons unknown. Rather than framing Madame Fontaine's choice as one of free will and independence, it is framed by the novel as a selfish one that results in Mr. Engelman's untimely death. Further illustrating the divide between the two widows, Madame Fontaine's compassion fails in maternal situations. Whereas Mrs. Wagner is maternal toward the childlike Jack, Madame Fontaine's benevolence toward Jack is artificial, serving only to manipulate and gain favor. Though Madame Fontaine seems to possess maternal, self-sacrificial

compassion for just one person—her daughter, Minna—she finds herself growing increasingly disconnected and unable to perform maternal actions. As Madame Fontaine becomes increasingly caught in a web of poison and deceit, thus progressively counter-social and incompatible with Victorian sensibilities, she even finds herself unable to complete the simple act of hugging her daughter.

In addition to her exotic seductiveness, vanity, and a lack of maternal compassion, Madame Fontaine's *femme fatale* status in the novel is set-in-stone by her ambition to obtain social status and economic wealth. In the novel, Madame Fontaine uses cunning, calculated maneuverings to orchestrate a scenario in which her daughter will marry into a wealthy family, thus securing comfortable futures for both Fontaines and paying their debts. The quest for money was a primary route of corruption for women, according to Victorian sensibilities. Djikstra writes, "Woman's desire for gold was the root of all progress and all evil...woman's sexual hunger and her hunger for gold were one and the same" (366); thus, Madame Fontaine's ambition is another that establishes her position as a socially-undesirable *femme fatale*. According to Helfield, a way many were able to reconcile this behavior was to attribute the violence of these crimes to the corruptive "foreign" nature of the poison (170). As an exoticized, self-serving woman, Madame Fontaine poisons those around her who would prevent her from accomplishing her goal of obtaining wealth and a means of asserting her own authority. Madame Fontaine manipulates and commits acts of bodily harm against those who oppose her.

In addition to being presented as a pillar of faithful British citizenship, Mrs. Wagner exemplifies traditional British Victorian womanhood, though with a progressive twist demonstrative of increasing opportunities for women and the gradual ascension of the New Woman. In the introduction to the Oxford edition of *Jezebel's Daughter*, Jason David Hall draws

parallels between Mrs. Wagner's efforts to employ women and Madame Fontaine's marriage plot, identifying them as two manners of exemplifying "potentially disruptive female agency" (XV). Though their methods of accomplishing their goals differ, Madame Fontaine and Mrs. Wagner are similarly "positioned as an affront to the prevailing patterns of male exclusivity" (Hall XV). As Hall argues, Madame Fontaine and Mrs. Wagner do share many similarities, as they were both forced into roles as independent women in a male-dominated world; however, in spite of Mrs. Wagner's rebellious desire to revolutionize gender in the workplace and care of the mentally ill, it is essential to acknowledge she does these things to honor the wishes of her deceased husband rather than for her own ambition or financial gain. Contrasting the emasculating danger Madame Fontaine poses to male authority, Mrs. Wagner expresses a desire to trust in and remain loyal to the patriarchal authority of her husband. Demonstrating an excessive commitment to her husband and his wishes while steering clear of the sexually-charged fiscal greed identified by Djikstra, Mrs. Wagner says, "With all my heart... Whatever my good husband thought, I think" (Collins 188). Seemingly forgoing any wishes or thoughts of her own, Mrs. Wagner is content with relinquishing her agency to satisfy the desires of her dead husband. Selflessly compassionate, trusting, modest, nurturing, and eager to please the ghost of Mr. Wagner, Mrs. Wagner satisfies many Victorian requirements for a reputable woman; a nontraditional addition, however, is that Mrs. Wagner speaks her mind authentically and serves in a male-dominated leadership position successfully while revolutionizing the treatment of women in the family business along the way. Though she is not utterly idealized in the same manner as the angelic Minna and often speaks sharply when she feels strongly opinionated, Mrs. Wagner is not branded a Jezebel, nor is she labeled a *femme fatale*; instead, she is insulated by her Englishness, her submission to her husband's wishes, and her conscientious efforts to

maintain several key elements of traditional Victorian femininity. In this manner, the novel captures the changing atmosphere for acceptable female conduct while serving as a guide for being a successful woman in the changing world.

To assist in the establishment of Madame Fontaine as a poor example of Victorian womanhood, the novel relies on Minna Fontaine. Young, traditionally (almost tragically) beautiful, innocent, and eager to serve, passive Minna is the antithesis of the uncompassionate, castrating, conniving Madame Fontaine. Whereas Madame Fontaine seeks to control men with her exotic poisons, Minna seeks to serve men. Not only can this eagerness to serve be seen in her willingness to cooperate, but it can also be seen as she brings tea to David and expresses a desire to bring food to Fritz. Parallelization as a means of highlighting difference appears frequently in the novel and it can be seen here. When Minna brings tea to David, her action mirrors that of her mother's poisonings. Unlike her mother, Minna has chosen to dutifully aid these men, rather than work against them for her own ambitions as Madame Fontaine chooses. Though she is described as breathtakingly beautiful by those she encounters, Minna demonstrates no awareness of this trait, nor a desire to use her abilities to manipulate others. In fact, she also demonstrates a willingness to sacrifice selflessly; upon learning an ailing relative was unable to attend her wedding, Minna chooses to reschedule. Chaste and deeply modest with predilections for selfless compassion and passivity, Minna is the epitome of the Victorian era Angel in the House trope and the antithesis of her *femme fatale* mother. Furthermore, Minna demonstrates a resistance to the deadly draw of gold and self-serving female ambition afflicting her mother. Collins writes, "'I can cook,' [Minna] said, 'and I can make my own dresses—and if Fritz is a poor man when he marries me, I can save him the expense of a servant'" (50). By informing readers that Minna is disinterested in financial wealth and would be more than happy to serve as her desired

husband's maid—a subservient position—the novel establishes her as the ultimate self-sacrificing, virtuous female ideal. By including the character of Minna to accompany Madame Fontaine, the novel establishes the Angel in the House character to contrast his witchy *femme fatale*.

In spite of her status as a cautionary example of unsuccessful, destructive femininity, Madame Fontaine is partially redeemed after her death when the other characters read her diary and learn of her love for her child. In the end, the novel insists on an essential maternal impulse that redeems even the most dangerous woman. According to the post-mortem analysis of her diary, Madame Fontaine's plot would likely have been successful had she murdered the childlike Jack, attempted to corrupt her own innocent child into a partner in crime, or not pled her daughter's case-for-marriage so rashly. In the end, then, the novel argues Madame Fontaine's downfall was her inability to embrace her maternal nature fully and abandon a false nature. Despite the fact that Madame Fontaine has violated Victorian gender norms, as well as moral codes, the novel suggests even the wicked cannot truly be free of their feminine instincts. Collins writes, "The final entry in the Diary has an interest of its own...It shows the purifying influence of the maternal instinct in a wicked nature, surviving to the last. Even Madame Fontaine's nature preserved, in this way, a softer side" (251). This notion seems to be echoed in Collins' own dedication included before the novel. He writes, "...I have endeavoured [*sic*] to work out the interesting moral problem, which takes for its groundwork the strongest of all instincts in a woman, the instinct of maternal love, and traces to its solution the purifying influence of this one virtue over an otherwise cruel, false, and degraded nature" (Collins 4). In both the novel and Collins' introduction, the term "purifying influence" is used to discuss what is presented as an essential trait possessed by women. In the latter quote, Collins positions this maternal impulse as

a solution and refers to Madame Fontaine's negative qualities as part of a false nature. This idea that even the truly wicked have feminine instincts works to make the novel's inclusion of the New Woman safer for readers, because it's implied that women will never truly overthrow gender norms because of some innate obedience to these norms.

Madame Fontaine is a *femme fatale*, yet she is also pitiable in a way this redemption highlights. Madame Fontaine is also portrayed as having been tainted by the corrupting, dangerously seductive influence of the East, wealth, and technology—all issues which stem from her deceased, negligent husband; however, in spite of this, the source of Madame Fontaine's troubles lies in her disobedience to her father and decision to marry against his wishes. Within the narrow scope of the novel's plot, Madame Fontaine's descent into *femme fatality* could have been avoided had she obeyed the patriarchal authority of her father. As the result of this disobedience, as well as for her other crimes, Madame Fontaine is punished with a literal "taste of her own medicine"—the deadly exotic poison left behind by her dead husband. Although Mrs. Wagner is also poisoned by Madame Fontaine, she is miraculously revived by her young ward, Jack. Her revival scene mirrors that of a saint-like resurrection—bells ring, mirroring those of church bells, as she is revived in the crypt. In spite of her independence and the social change she represents, Mrs. Wagner's maternal, self-sacrificing compassion, modesty, virtuousness, and faithfulness to the West mark her as acceptable in the eyes of society, thus allowing her to be revived. In spite of her mother's fall from acceptable femininity and social norms, as well as her own non-British upbringing, Minna is a reminder that conduct is, in part, a choice. Like Jack Straw and Mrs. Wagner's dead spouse, angelic Minna can become naturalized into British society and, thus, be saved from the influences responsible for corrupting her mother. On the day of Minna's wedding, Mrs. Wagner stands in the place of Madame Fontaine and is referred to as

“Minna’s second mother” (Collins 253). Because Mrs. Wagner presents a version of femininity in-line with both tradition and the emerging New Woman, her character is deemed a suitable metaphorical and literal guardian to the Angel in the House, Minna. Together, the remaining characters provide a message of cautious optimism for the future.

Though it is one of Wilkie Collins’ lesser-known novels, *Jezebel’s Daughter* is truly a novel of its age. Embodying the various anxieties surrounding the deterioration of traditional Victorian era gender roles and an invasion by a dangerously alluring racial/ethnic other, *Jezebel’s Daughter* provides an engaging look into the intersection of these anxieties within the lives three women. With this intersection, the novel provides an instructional guide for feminine behavior in times of changing gender politics. In Minna, the novel epitomizes the Angel in the House trope and illustrates the feminine ideal as it existed in the collective consciousness of Victorian culture. With the character of Mrs. Wagner, the novel reconciles the long-revered Angel in the House version of femininity with the emerging New Woman interested in greater roles for women. Though Mrs. Wagner embodies many characteristics not assigned traditionally to women at the time, these actions are offset and made less threatening due to her framing as a beacon of maternal compassion and morality; additionally, Mrs. Wagner’s juxtaposition with a femme fatale demonstrates Mrs. Wagner’s distance from this title. Though Mrs. Wagner is not an Angel in the House, as demonstrated by her juxtaposition with Minna, she is depicted as a suitable guardian for this character trope. Naturally, the behavior of Minna and Mrs. Wagner highlights its sharp contrast with the femme fatale embodied in Madame Fontaine. In the character of Madame Fontaine, the novel presents a cautionary tale of the dangers of wholly abandoning traditional femininity in favor of disobedient independence, selfish pride, and greedy ambition. By means of the trichotomy constructed between the three female characters—Minna,

Madame Fontaine, and Mrs. Wagner—*Jezebel's Daughter* reflects the gender and cultural dynamics of the Victorian era while serving as an instructional guide for socially-acceptable feminine conduct unique to the historic moment.

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