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THE WOMAN ON THE SCAFFOLD

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THE WOMAN ON THE SCAFFOLD

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B.A., History, B.A., Film Studies  
Georgia State University, 2001

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An abstract of  
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Abstract

THE WOMAN ON THE SCAFFOLD  
By Theresa Ann Starkey

Nathaniel Hawthorne's Hester Prynne functions as a springboard for my discussion of women on display. The transgressing female body becomes a source of spectacle, a prismatic site on which society's fears, anxieties and desires are projected.

Lizzie Borden, Iva Toguri ("Tokyo Rose"), Patricia Hearst, and Martha Stewart are controversial, prismatic figures that have captured the American public's imagination with their notorious (sometimes merely legendary) crimes.

They, like Hester, are icons and symbols of female rebellion. The way these criminalized women are represented in popular culture provides a profound cultural index of American subjectivity in terms of how female sexuality and agency are perceived. Each chapter is a case study, an examination of how a woman's real life tale has become a consumable commodity that demands a fictionalized articulation, one that struggles and fails to contain each woman's ambiguities.

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## Introduction

My dissertation is interdisciplinary in both form and content, and is intended to join conversations in Women's Studies, history, film, literature, and American Studies. In my work, I focus on women who have been accused of sensational crimes in the United States and examine how their narratives and images are consumed, digested, and rearticulated in popular culture. Lizzie Borden, Iva Toguri (condemned as "Tokyo Rose"), Patricia Hearst, and Martha Stewart are controversial, prismatic figures that have captured the American public's imagination with their notorious (sometimes merely legendary) crimes.

For me these iconic women are interlockers that connect artists, writers, and audiences to a shared and imagined experience of transformation. The idea of transformation is nothing new in terms of American storytelling. However, when stories of transformation are anchored to narratives about real women, especially those who have committed a crime, they reveal America's persistent obsession with female deviancy. I am interested in fleshing out where artists locate the site of transformation, specifically as it relates to notions of the body and female pathology.



All of the women under examination have been fictionalized in some form or another. Their stories have inspired poets, novelists, filmmakers, songwriters and others, who have sifted (and continue to sift) through the details of their lives for source material. In the process, each artist becomes a revisionist, reimagining his or her subject for new audiences.

Each woman under examination represents what I refer to as the woman on the scaffold. Whether she is Patty Hearst wielding her automatic weapon while dressed as an urban guerilla or Tokyo Rose bewitching U.S. soldiers with her voice, an element of display surfaces in how these women are scrutinized and judged as transgressive figures. For me, these women are texts that artists and audiences alike read in the hopes of discovering the *real* woman behind the crime.

Hester Prynne functions as a springboard for my discussion of women on display. The image of Hester holding little Pearl on the scaffold as she defiantly confronts the puritan community that surrounds her is a powerful one. On the scaffold, the transgressing female body becomes a source of spectacle, a prismatic site on which society's fears, anxieties and desires are projected and through which they pass as fractured images. In my examination, the

scaffold is both a real and imagined space. It is the jury stand, a stage, a movie screen, a pedestal and a pillory. The scaffold (like the prison door from which Hester emerges) is a focal point that defines boundaries - a threshold.

I use Hawthorne's conception of Hester Prynne as a central image. She sprang from the history of America's real outlaw women and Hawthorne's guilt over his ancestors' treatment of them. The mistreatment of Anne Coleman and Anne Hutchinson, as well as the injustice of Salem's notorious witchcraft trials, haunted Hawthorne. Hester likewise haunts our modern sensibilities, for she continues to provide the ground upon which we view and judge the female accused. Although Hester Prynne and her acts of transgression are constructs of Hawthorne's imagination, she has become a *real* point of reference as a symbol of female rebellion. She is an outlaw woman, a skilled practitioner of domesticity, a single working mom, a saint and a whore - a cultural paradox. Her haunting image has been examined, reproduced, wrestled with and even abused, but like her ambiguous letter, her meaning cannot be easily contained.

The other women I write about are *real* but their stories and images have become narratives, works of

fiction, mythic in scope. They, like Hester, are American icons and symbols of female rebellion. The way these criminalized women are represented, whether in fiction, film, newspaper articles, photographs, or other media - the way in which each new scarlet letter is applied - provides a profound cultural index of American subjectivity in terms of how female sexuality and agency are perceived. Like Hester Prynne, all my subjects were marked as criminals and reintegrated back into society. Yet, more often times than not, their acquittals or pardons are forgotten. What is remembered instead is the charge or stigma of transgression. Patricia Hearst and Lizzie Borden fascinate, frighten and delight the imagination because they remain ambiguous figures.

Hearst and Borden were ordinary women who became extraordinary. The suspicion that they "got away with it" continues to be a subject of debate, but beneath the speculation, the real epistemological issue at play is what catalyst or agent set the stage for these stories of transformation. Where the artist pinpoints the moment of change often taps into deeply held myths about gender and female pathology. Depending on the artist, the reimagined narrative of transformation can be subversive and rupture static images and stereotypes about women's roles or become

a reductionist pastiche that works to reinforce nightmarish fears about a woman's hidden possibility. On display, the offending female body becomes a site of possibility, an open text that artists (and the public) read again and again for new meanings.

What is revealing about the women under examination is that in committing their crimes, whether real or imagined, a misstep in proper female etiquette and social roles becomes visible; a rupture occurs that destabilizes and defamiliarizes their identities. This misstep, or social slip, regardless of the historical moment, produces the same cultural desire, which is the need for a narrative to provide a stable framework for female containment. Even the most well-intentioned and liberal artist in his or her struggle to free the rebellious muse participates in the act of reconciliation as he or she works to piece together a fixed identity.

One of the central questions for me is why these women and their specific acts are so frightening and disruptive, aside from the obvious charges of, say, matricide and patricide in the accusations levied against Lizzie Borden, or the fear of the exotic, seductive and deadly spy embodied in the popular conception of Tokyo Rose. Other fears emerge from a closer examination of these half-

articulated cultural anxieties, masked in rhetoric and ideology that reveal deep-seated concerns over female sexuality and power. The sensational, the fantastic, the monstrous and grotesque, are the threads that tie these women's stories together in a never-ending process of cultural production and consumption.

The books which speak most directly to my conceptual framework are works like Susan Bordo's *Twilight Zones* and *Unbearable Weight*, and Jane Caputi's *Goddesses and Monsters: Women, Myth, Power and Popular Culture*, books that identify and illuminate female archetypes in a thorough and innovative way, usually through the kind of case studies that I hope to employ. Both authors explore issues of the female body on display in film and other channels of popular culture. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* have been instrumental for me in thinking about gender and performance theoretically, specifically the notion that

the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always doing, though not by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 33.

Karen Haltunnen's *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, along with her *Murder Most Foul*, and Daniel A. Williams' *Pillars of Salt* have had a profound effect on my thinking, and have helped to shape the five cases studies that I explore in the following chapters. The criminal confession, the mutations of the jeremiad in popular literature, the transformation of the role of the accused from redeemable sinner to monstrous other or outsider, the individual versus the community - these notions explored by Williams and Haltunnen intersect at various points in the stories I examine and in the different historical moments they portray.

In Chapter One, "Hester Prism," I examine four cinematic adaptations of *The Scarlet Letter* and explore how Hester's image is refracted again and again with each new version. The scaffold, Hester's lonely cabin, and her scarlet letter surface as transcendent elements in a cycle of historical memory-making in which Hester stands exposed, condemned and isolated before a real and imagined public eager to unravel her mysteries. The films under discussion exhume Hester and her community of puritan New Englanders as emblems of traumatic neurosis.

Chapter Two, "The Bodies of Lizzie Borden," explores how Borden emerges as the perpetrator in four literary

works and examines how her image and imagined body are contested in an attempt to contain her ambiguities. Lizzie emerges as an ahistorical poster child for a contemporary cautionary tale, one that echoes and updates nineteenth-century anxieties about what happens to a woman who wants too much. Intimate female relationships, lesbianism, and nymphomania surface as manifestations of female desire run amok and turn longing for individual autonomy and personal control into a faux pas with bloody consequences.

In Chapter Three, "Aid and Comfort: Tokyo Rose and the Subversion of the Feminine Ideal," I tease out how the myth of Tokyo Rose haunts the American psyche. She was the product of Japanese wartime propaganda, which fed off the already-existing fantasies of GIs, made real by a public eager to visualize and punish the seductress. The myth of Tokyo Rose and the true story of Iva Toguri, the Japanese-American wartime broadcaster who was tried for treason, convicted and eventually pardoned, oscillate and collide in the popular imagination. Tokyo Rose is a cultural symbol, America's Asian Eve, a fantasy that was superimposed on the life of a real woman. Hollywood, in its role as mythmaker and arbitrator of visual justice, has envisioned Tokyo Rose as one woman (rather than a composite of dozens of

broadcasters) with a devilish voice, bent on the destruction of white American men.

Chapter Four "The Abductions of Patricia Hearst" explores how Hearst's image continues to fascinate and frighten a public obsessed with a cipher. Hearst's violent kidnapping in 1974 by the SLA and her questionable criminal activities with the group are part of American cultural lore. Her suspect conversion to Tania provides an iconic image of an American female trickster. Hearst's elusive double materializes as a transgressive force whose acts and voice challenge conventional gender roles, or just as often, a nightmarish figure who reveals the hidden monster in all women.

In Chapter Five, "From Homemaker to Heretic: The Domestic Interloper and the Marketplace," I flesh out how images of the working woman breach boundaries that separate the home from the workplace. As a domestic exploiter and marketplace interloper, the working woman complicates idealized visions of a woman's place. Hester Prynne's scarlet letter may have branded her as the town's adulteress but it also boldly advertised her marketable skill with the needle. I use Martha Stewart as a springboard for my examination of the working woman as marketplace interloper. Like her predecessor, she too had a



public fall and went to prison, not for adultery, but for insider trading - another form of cheating. Martha Stewart, like Hester, manipulates the sacred rites of womanhood when she turns domesticity into a commodity. The image of the working woman, like the context and meaning of Hester's letter, is dependent upon the imagination of the beholders, whose gaze oftentimes reveals more about their own interiority and fear of the monstrous than the subject before them. In fact, I demonstrate that the public's reaction to Martha Stewart's crimes, and its open relishing of her punishment, fit neatly into a preexisting package, an often retold cautionary tale of the woman who obscenely mixes the warmth of domestic bliss with cold, commercial ambition, calling into question fundamental assumptions about feminine desire - a misreading of *The Scarlet Letter* that sometimes proves more satisfying to a public hungry for simple stories with reassuring morals than the deliberate ambiguities of Hawthorne's mysterious and guilt-ridden tale.

### Hester Prism

Hester Prynne is born as a character from the womb of the prison. She emerges, like all newborns in the Puritan tradition, with the mark of original sin. As she is reborn in American popular culture and historical imagination, Hester acquires as many meanings as the letter on her breast – the Aleph from which all other letters come, the letter of birth, potential, and ambiguity. Hester also stands above her various incarnations, as if emerging from the prison door into each new era with a secret secure in heart, a secret that each generation wrestles with but none can quite resolve.

When Hollywood wants to make a historical picture it often digs into the literary barrel: novels, short stories and plays are adapted into screenplays and produced as films. Key figures and events, one could say icons, are necessary elements for the story. Historical plays and novels are part of a myth-making narrative history and serve as a form of “narrative memory, which is at the core of historical representation both on paper and on film.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Robert A. Rosenstone, ed., *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 100. Michael S. Roth is writing about *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959) in his article “You Must Remember This.” It is perhaps odd, or even willfully perverse, to bring a discussion of Hawthorne by indirectly invoking both World War II and the French

They express ideas and notions of the past, and although period stories and costume dramas may be highly fictionalized, they often contain characters that actually existed and replicate events that occurred in order to add a textually authoritative tone to the narrative. Hawthorne himself, in the custom house introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*, plays with the trick of borrowed authenticity. He hopes, like Hollywood after him, to establish a credible, objective-seeming historical base from which to speak of his own times, fears, and concerns.

Hester herself, though, stands *outside* of history, an atypical woman for Puritan times. She functions as a gate or door through which we, with our modern sensibilities (like Hawthorne with his), can leave the prison of our own contexts and penetrate history through an imaginative medium. Bearing in mind Croce's well-known remark that "all history is contemporary history,"<sup>3</sup> we will find that Puritan New England is not so much a real place as a spectral *imagined* space first mapped out by Hawthorne, with its own resonant geography (prison, cabin, forest, scaffold, sea),

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New Wave, but Roth makes the general point with admirable economy. In fact, we may seemingly venture even farther afield in the body of this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> quoted in Fredrick Jameson, *The Political Unconsciousness: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act* (New York: Conrell, University Press, 1981), p. 18. Jameson adds a caveat: Croce does not mean to say "that all history is our contemporary history; and the problem begins when your epistemological break begins to displace itself in time according to your own current interests..." – a qualification that our current subject will explore.

against which we continue to rebel, but against which we also instinctively measure ourselves.

Hollywood returns to *The Scarlet Letter* again and again for adaptation (and reinterpretation). Hawthorne's novel of Puritan New England has come to represent a historical truth in the popular imagination and has helped shape America's idea of its beginnings. One of Hawthorne's accomplishments in *The Scarlet Letter*, according to Andrew Delbanco in *The Puritan Ordeal*, is that he captures "a portrait of a people stalled in preening adolescence - in a time devoted to conformity, when mercy has not been learned."<sup>4</sup> Men, women and children clad in somber hues with grim expressions and pious dispositions are mythical cultural icons that flicker in the American consciousness, and work, as they did for Hawthorne, to personify the repressions of a given generation, particularly in the way the past continues to haunt and restrain the present.

Richard Davenport-Hines has called Hawthorne "the progenitor of American studies."<sup>5</sup> Hawthorne scoured primary documents and literature and

analyzed the role of Puritan conscience in the mass mentality of Americans and recognized that even his contemporaries who rejected traditional American

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<sup>4</sup> Andrew Delbanco, *The Puritan Ordeal* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 48.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines, *Gothic: Four Hundred Years of Excess, Horror, Evil, And Ruin* (New York: North Point Press, 1998), p. 278.

theology were still saturated in the attitudes of puritanism.<sup>6</sup>

Hawthorne tangled with his Puritan heritage as the artist, the writer. In "The Custom-House," Hawthorne reflects on the cruelty of William Hathorne, his "first ancestor,"<sup>7</sup> and the harsh punishments William inflicted on the Quakers, especially the heinous punishment of Ann Cole, who, after receiving several lashings, was dragged behind a horse-and-cart through the settlement and banished from the community into the dark ominous woods, a fit place for an overzealous outcast. William's son, John, according to Hawthorne, also "inherited the persecuting spirit and made himself so conspicuous in the martyrdom of the witches, that their blood may fairly be said to have left a stain upon him."<sup>8</sup>

The pressing presence of their memory weighed on him, representing "the repressive side of Hawthorne himself."<sup>9</sup> The frustration and psychic condemnation with which Hawthorne battled stemmed from the restraints of a censorship that he imposed on himself in respect to his craft. The Puritan image for Hawthorne signifies what

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<sup>6</sup> Davenport-Hines. p. 278.

<sup>7</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (New York: Modern Library, 2000), p. 8. Originally published in 1850.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Fredrick Crews, *The Sins of the Fathers: Hawthorne's Psychological Themes* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 31.

Fredrick Crews calls "the censorship of the imagination."<sup>10</sup> The uninvited, unwelcome Puritan magistrate of Hawthorne's consciousness is a daimon personifying "a primitive, unreasonable conscience which is none the less tyrannical for being despised and ridiculed."<sup>11</sup>

Like his interpreters after him, Hawthorne is in part a prisoner; he can only battle strictures and repressions within the rigid, systemic framework that those bonds have created.

Part of the power of Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* resides in the fact that Hawthorne created a mythical cultural icon, one with the capacity to project itself prismatically in the American consciousness. Different historical epochs pass through this prism. Hester becomes a medium through which various aspects of the American historical consciousness pass reflexively, a transference that also exposes elements of the American unconscious, revealing its repressions and fears. Dread and anxiety surface from the darkness and are given form.

Different renderings of *The Scarlet Letter* can provide a profound cultural index of American subjectivity at different times, illuminating its particular strengths and

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

weaknesses. What I propose in the following pages is this: to examine *The Scarlet Letter* in conjunction with four cinematic adaptations of the text, with a view of charting the peculiar reflexive quality of Hawthorne's prism as Hester and her badge are translated and interpreted by different directors at various historical and social junctures.

Hawthorne, in creating Hester, constructed a prismatic icon with many faces, only a few of which will be examined here, with implications that stretch beyond the American consciousness, into a realm approaching universality. Hester stands on the scaffold of history, both gazing and gazed upon, a haunting image that is often examined, reproduced, wrestled with and even abused, but which cannot be easily exhausted or shattered.

The 1995 film version of *The Scarlet Letter*, for example, tries to liberate Hester from the constraints both of history and of Hawthorne. While on its surface, and in its intent, a straightforward if loose period adaptation of Hawthorne's work (supplemented by more "accurate" portrayals of actual historic figures like Metacom), the film in essence transplants a modern, independent liberal white woman (Hester as a yuppie with her own fashion business) into a Puritan theme park. In its attempt to

empower Hester, the film incidentally *disempowers* a character of its own creation, the self-sacrificing, sexually stunted African American slave woman whom Hester, as the good liberal white woman, nurtures and enlightens (and who, like so many "good" black characters since the beginning of film history, dies to protect her kind white mistress). Like Hawthorne, the filmmakers are trapped within the invisible cultural fishbowls that frame their contexts.

Hawthorne's context was New England with its townships, busy marketplaces and rustic dwellings, jagged coastline, and dark forests. For Hawthorne, it is a more-than-real place, a shifting panorama of imagined spaces with their own distinct boundaries. The scaffold, Hester's lonely cabin, the forest, and the scarlet letter on Hester's bosom are only some of the images that transcend the text (or the film). *The Scarlet Letter* is a cycle of social and individual trauma, exposure and redemption. The image of Hester with Pearl in her arms on the scaffold, isolated from the community and on display, is a haunting spectacle that cannot fail to move the viewer despite the particular shortcomings of a given adaptation.

The various cinematic adaptations reinforce this collective *imagined* traumatic memory of the exposed,



condemned and isolated woman created in the text. The films under discussion exhume Hester and the community of Puritan New England as emblems of traumatic neurosis. The "disease of inheritance"<sup>12</sup> (Gregg M. Horowitz's phrase) is wrestled with as boundaries are refigured. Puritan piety and social conformity are worked and reworked within the space of the frame. Horowitz describes the "impossibility of taking up the past, due to the crushing mechanism of inheritance the past would have provided as its legacy."<sup>13</sup>

The film adaptations under examination are from different eras and by different directors, each competing in his own way with the "crushing mechanisms" of Hawthorne's text, Puritan New England, and the overlap and divergence of the two.

### **Sjostrom's Letter (1926)**

Victor Sjostrom's 1926 silent version accepts and presents Hawthorne's view of the Puritans as plain historical fact, opening with an inner-title that informs the spectator, "here is recorded a stark episode in the

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<sup>12</sup> Gregg M. Horowitz, *Sustaining Loss: Art and Mournful Life* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 124.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

lives of a stern, unforgiving people, a story of bigotry uncurbed and its train of sorrow, shame and tragedy."<sup>14</sup>

Sjostrom deviates from Hawthorne in revealing (like most of the subsequent directors) Hester's and Reverend Dimmesdale's fall into moral turmoil, in a filmic spectacle designed to shock and titillate the viewer. The two lovers embrace by a stream, as their reflection glistens in water. Small ripples distort their image as they sit on the bank. The stream functions as mirror, and reflects an imagined world, a space where Hester and Dimmesdale can exist in union with nature outside of society. The stream is also a boundary for the couple, a social division that sets them outside the laws of society.

Sjostrom shocks the audience by showing Hester and Dimmesdale's embrace and ardent kiss, but veils the sex act by concealing the couple in a thicket. The image and the viewer's imagination work together and, although the sin is partially revealed, it maintains its mystery and sense of taboo. The visualization, even with its contextually necessary modesty, marks a tentative break with Hawthorne's willful ambiguity.

Although the sin in question is obvious, Hawthorne, as Leslie Fiedler points out, makes it deeper, broader and

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<sup>14</sup> *The Scarlet Letter*, directed by Victor Sjostrom, 1926.

more mysterious by allowing it to remain "unnamed" which "removes it from reality." The sin becomes

displaced in time, postulated, rather than described. So displaced, that the act becomes in the psychologist's sense, prehistoric; affects us much as the spied upon primal scene (mother and father intertwined in bed).<sup>15</sup>

The biblical motif of Adam and Eve in the Garden (the emblematic "mother and father intertwined") resonates within Sjoström's scene. The early Puritans of New England had a dualistic view of their Edenic environment. (Eden is, after all, both Paradise and the home of the serpent.)

The Puritans immigrated to the New World to avoid temptation, vice, moral corruption and the contamination of a materialistic society. The forest took on a symbolic role; on one level it was viewed as dark wilderness inhabited by savages to be tamed, controlled, transformed, cultivated, and converted or exterminated. On another level, such transformation symbolized the possibility of a new Eden, one without the plucked apple. Martha L. Finch in her examination of the environments of early New England points out that "the polarized categories of wilderness and

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<sup>15</sup> Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death and the American Novel* (Normal, Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 1997), p. 230.

garden might be transposed into other familiar dichotomies; nature and culture, wild and civilized space and place."<sup>16</sup>

Sjorstrom strips the environment around Hester's cabin by deforestation. Her tiny dwelling remains, as in Hawthorne, "on the outskirts of the town, within the verge of the peninsula,"<sup>17</sup> but stands visible without the shelter and obscurity of the forest that Hawthorne's text provides.

In Sjostrom's version, the cabin's exposure and isolation emphasizes Hester and Pearl's alienation from nature and society, as well as their role as social (and cinematic) spectacle. The cabin is displaced along with its inhabitants.

In Hawthorne, the cabin has a history. The land before Hester and Pearl's arrival was uninhabitable, "built by an earlier settler, and abandoned, because the soil about it was too sterile for cultivation."<sup>18</sup> Though surrounded by the woods on one side and the ocean (another wilderness, and the border between the Old World and the New) on the other, the cabin's land cannot sustain life.

In Sjostrom's deforested version (civilization hacking mercilessly at nature?), numerous decimated tree trunks

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<sup>16</sup> from her article " 'Civilized' Bodies and the 'Savage' Environment of Early New Plymouth," in Janet Moore Lindman and Michele Lise Tarter, eds. *A Centre of Wonders: The Body in Early America* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> Hawthorne, p. 73.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

haunt the landscape like ghosts of trees and cast their low shadows within Sjostrom's frame. Sjostrom extends Hawthorne's vision of the parched cabin yard into the surrounding forest, as if an infectious barrenness radiates from the center of Hester's isolation. The wildness of Hawthorne's forest becomes a blighted memory, the remnants of Hester's lost Eden. The forest, as Robert Pogue Harrison has written, "is at once a temple of living pillars and a scene of horror, an enchanted wood and a wood of abandon."<sup>19</sup> The amputated forest around Hester's cabin, in which only the horror and abandon remain, will never offer up its fruits to civilization.

Pearl is the fruit that Hester bears, but her natural gift is rejected and feared by the community. Pearl is the incarnation of uninhibited passions and weakness, a symbol of transgression to the township. Pearl represents, in part, the Calvinist belief that "infants were corrupt from birth."<sup>20</sup> She is a radiant bud to behold but tainted from within, and endowed "with a moral character already formed—and that character was the sinful one settled upon all mankind in the decree of damnation consequent to Adam's

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 183.

<sup>20</sup> Darrel Abel, *The Moral Picturesque: Studies in Hawthorne's Fiction* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1998), p.193.

fall."<sup>21</sup> Patricia Crain has written extensively on the special meaning for Puritans of the letter A:

"In Adam's fall/ We sinned all." The opening lines of *The New England Primer's* image-and-rhyme alphabet associate first man, first sin, and first letter of the alphabet.<sup>22</sup>

And Pearl, of course, is the embodiment of the letter, clothed in "the richest materials that could be procured."<sup>23</sup> Pearl flourishes in exile. Sjostrom has Pearl peek out from the tiny cottage window, and gaze across the desolate landscape. She is a spectator, a miniature voyeur positioned within two frames—both the window and the film itself. Pearl explores the stark vista that leads toward society; she waits and watches for signs of life. Her animated image contrasts sharply with Sjostrom's repressed environment.

Pearl, according to Darrel Abel,

is a reincarnation of the best human possibilities of her progenitors - of potentialities that, imperfectly realized in past generations, are once more offered opportunity for better realization in "this germ of womanhood."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 193-94.

<sup>22</sup> Patricia Crane, *The True Story of A: The Alphetization of America from the New England Primer to the Scarlet Letter* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000). p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> Hawthorne, p. 81.

<sup>24</sup> Abel, p. 197.

Little Pearl is in a period of gestation, and represents the possibility of a cohesiveness - a union between nature and society, individual passions and principles.

The audience is confronted with yet another union of opposites: an *imagined* "eruption of the past into the present, the past turning against the very idea of the self-contained present."<sup>25</sup> The space within the frame becomes ruptured and expands contextually. Film, literature and art, as Horowitz describes them, are "the site of culture turning against itself and vomiting up all the unredeemed promises that have been affected, even derogated, by every philosophical history and culture."<sup>26</sup>

Sjorstrom's Hester (played by Lillian Gish) is petite and childlike in attitude and manner. She is the antithesis of Hawthorne's image of the woman who stands "tall, with a figure of perfect elegance, on a large scale,"<sup>27</sup> a woman "characterized by a certain state and dignity rather than by the delicate, evanescent, and indescribable grace."<sup>28</sup> Sjorstrom's Hester is angelic and innocent. Even before her fall she stands outside the community by virtue of a nymphlike otherness. She moves through the spaces within the frame as an ethereal vision. Gish's Hester parallels

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<sup>25</sup> Horowitz, p. 129.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Hawthorne, p. 47.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Hawthorne's only in her displacement. Her innocence (like Hester's ostracism) reveals, as Hawthorne illustrates, that

in all her intercourse with society, however, there was nothing that made her feel as if she belonged to it. Every gesture, every word, and even the silence of those with whom she came in contact, implied, and often expressed, that she was banished, and as much alone as if she inhabited another *sphere*, or communicated with the common nature by other organs and senses than the rest of human kind. She stood apart from moral interests, yet close beside them...<sup>29</sup>

Sjorstrom emphasizes Hester's relationship with nature, and her disconnectedness from society, through a sequence that begins with close-up shots of church bells ringing on the Sabbath. The shots of the bells swinging back and forth in the church tower are crosscut with shots of Gish, as she runs down a path into the woods after her pet bird. Sunlight twinkles through the branches of the trees. Shots of the bells are crosscut with medium close-ups of a solemn community as they file into church. Hester's hair comes loose and cascades around her shoulders as she laughs at her failed attempts to grab her pet. She pauses in front of a waterfall and looks around, startled. The bells penetrate the forest's realm and beckon Hester back. Hester wrestles with her own duality, and struggles with her social self versus her emotional and passionate nature.

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<sup>29</sup> Hawthorne p. 76.



In the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century, when Sjostrom's film was made, the splintered ideologies of Progressivism drove diverse American social groups concerned with stimulating change on various levels of society. Films were a way to educate the public on social issues and dangers and the consequences of deviant behavior. Sjostrom's film delves into subject matter that was generally tackled by low budget exploitation filmmakers. Adultery and unwed pregnancy were regular motifs in exploitation cinema. The emphasis was moral panic. The policing and social censorship of a shifting society were fundamental to many progressive groups that had the public good at heart.

Censor boards deemed an earlier film release of *The Scarlet Letter* (1914) inappropriate for audiences under twenty-one. The film received a "pink permit," (not quite a scarlet letter) as an emblem of moral distaste. After the police had banned the film in Chicago due to its illicit subject matter,

a delegation of women, having seen the film, requested the police to allow the film to be shown. The official in charge replied that he did not know how he could explain to his fifteen-year old daughter what the scarlet "A" meant, therefore he could not pass the film...<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 126. Originally published in 1975.

The encounter reflects the conflicts men and women struggled with in regard to the policing of society and the female body. The issue of sexuality pierces the social realm and creates a space for discourse, like Hester's emergence from the confines of her prison. In the dark space of the theater Hester emerges on the screen and is "thus [drawn] forward; until on the threshold,"<sup>31</sup> bringing two realms together. She stands within the confines of the cinematic frame in much the same way as she stands on the scaffold in the text.

In the book, the opening scaffold scene is dreamlike, and exists almost as a hallucination, or as a twilight memory on the verge of being called forth. As Leslie Fiedler observes, "Hester is simply not there until the prison doors open..."<sup>32</sup> The same observation holds true for Pearl, for each would exist in limbo without the other. Pearl is born in the prison; Hester is born *of* the prison. She makes her way through the darkness as if by her own free-will. She bore in her arms a child, a baby of some three months old, who winked and turned aside its little face from too vivid light of day; because its existence, heretofore, had brought it acquainted only with the gray twilight of a dungeon, or other darksome apartment of the prison.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Hawthorne, p. 47.

<sup>32</sup> Fiedler, p. 231

<sup>33</sup> Hawthorne, p. 47.

The first sites erected by the community's founders are the graveyard and the prison. Each spot is a place of confinement, and a symbol of horror, fear, and dread. The locations of dread were, according to Hawthorne, established on "virgin soil."<sup>34</sup> Hawthorne calls the prison the "black flower of civilized society."<sup>35</sup> The soil is covered by the structure's foundation, yet even with these restrictions an anomaly occurs. Pushing up from the soil a rosebush thrives, with its thorns, fragile petals and its sweet smell, visible on "one side of the portal, and rooted almost on the threshold"<sup>36</sup> of the prison door.

The rosebush's constant rebirth is mysterious. Hawthorne speculates that perhaps it "has been kept alive in history."<sup>37</sup> The rosebush, along with Hester and Pearl, are products of painful births. Pearl's birth occurs in the confines of the prison, the inverse image of an ideal birth, one in which a child is born at home in the bosom of domesticity. Pearl is granted such a home, if not by Hawthorne or Sjoström, then in the curiously domestic vision of Hester that Hollywood soon produced.

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<sup>34</sup> Hawthorne, p. 42.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

### Hawthorne and the Hays Code (1934)

Robert Vignola's version of *The Scarlet Letter* (1934) depicts Hester as a matronly woman, simple in appearance and modest in manner. Mother and daughter cross the prison's threshold and take their place on the scaffold once more. Hester and Pearl on the scaffold are objects of spectacle for three audiences: the town elders that gaze down upon them from a balcony, ready to pass judgement; the community of spectators positioned below the structure, who stare up, observing not only the stained woman and child, but the central figures of authority; and the viewer who voyeuristically observes all three groups arranged within the frame.

Several close-ups of little Pearl in Hester's arms punctuate the sequence. Colleen Moore as Hester stands stoically in the center of the scaffold; erected behind her is a large wooden pillory. The device resembles a crucifix, a symbol of transcendence and isolation.

Robert S. Friedman, borrowing from Mircea Eliade, refers to "the scaffold as axis mundi."<sup>38</sup> The scaffold's place within the text (emphasized in Vignola's frame by the

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<sup>38</sup> Robert S. Friedman, *Hawthorne's Romances: Social Drama and the Metaphor of Geometry* (Netherlands: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000), p. 57.

symbol of the pillory/cross) functions, according to Friedman, as a "secularized, profane recasting of the sacred space."<sup>39</sup> Hester and Pearl are released from the confines of the prison, an earthly hell, ascend the scaffold to be judged by God's emissaries on earth, as the heavens look down upon them. For Friedman, the scaffold is "a temple, a place where heaven and earth, and hell conjoin... also where earthly temporality is exchanged for a mythologized time and place of original creation."<sup>40</sup>

The audience of the 1934 film receives a visual sermon and witnesses the exposure and public humiliation of a mother and daughter as they are objectified as spectacle.

Religious displays (church sermons), and public punishments - as well as movies - are social rituals that serve to engage the spectators and affect them on an emotional level. Stephen Brie and David Torevell (lecturers in screen studies and theology respectively) have noted:

Ritual is never merely a performance or spectacle, but a stylized and instrumental action, able to tap those sources of our world and being which we often associate with the archaic or primitive. It has the power to transport the participant or spectator into another world, away from the mundane and everyday...<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Friedman, p. 57.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Stephen Brie and David Torevell, "Moral Ambiguity and Contradiction in *Dead Poets Society*," Clive Marsh and Gaye Oritz, eds. *Exploration in Theology and Film* (Malden, Maine: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd, 1997), p. 172.

The opening scaffold scene transports the spectators to a space that David J. Skal has called (in the context of horror films) the "realm of psychic lawlessness,"<sup>42</sup> by confronting them with the fallen woman and allowing them to imagine the passionate motivations and deviant mind of Hester, while remaining safely in their seats.

Colleen Moore's portrayal of Hester in Robert Vignola's adaptation adds a curious ambiguity to the spectacle; she is, almost, Hester as housewife. Moore's Hester performs the matronly duty of caretaker and tender nurse to the ill. In one scene she nurses a dying elderly woman, who is apparently a spinster or widow, with no family of her own to tend to her. Hester, in her vigil by the bedside, feeds her patient broth, as she bestows tender smiles and words of encouragement. Hester's role as nurse in the text enables her on her charitable journeys to cross thresholds

not as a guest, but as a rightful inmate, into the household that was once darkened by trouble; as if its gloomy twilight were a medium in which she was entitled to hold intercourse with her fellow-creatures.<sup>43</sup>

For Hawthorne, when Hester's foot touches the doorway to the chambers of the ill and downtrodden of her

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<sup>42</sup> David J. Skal, *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), p. 114.

<sup>43</sup> Hawthorne, p. 146.

community, it signifies another descent for her into yet another prison. For Moore's Hester, such visits are neighborly, homey, a Welcome Wagon in Puritan costume, with a sense not of confinement, but of community - literally (as with the broth), of communion.

On another level, however, Robert Vignola's Hester remains an inmate within the confines of the frame, stitched into her niche as matron even as she crosses into the forest realm with Pearl and Dimmesdale at her side. She never escapes the prison of convention. Hawthorne's Hester, on the other hand, is sexualized in the forest and blooms when she removes the scarlet letter from her bosom, as she and Dimmesdale recline beneath sheltering branches of the forest. The forest scene in the text is a release, for both Dimmesdale and Hester.

The stigma gone, Hester heaved a long, deep sigh, in which the burden of shame and anguish departed from her spirit. O exquisite relief!... By another impulse, she took off her formal cap that confined her hair; and down it fell upon her shoulders, dark and rich, with at once a shadow and a light in its abundance, and imparting the charm of softness to her features. There played around her mouth, and beamed out of her eyes, a radiant tender smile, that seemed gushing from the very heart of womanhood. A crimson flush was glowing on her cheek, that had been long so pale. Her sex, her youth, and the whole richness of her beauty, came back from what men call the irrevocable past, and clustered themselves, with her maiden hope, and a

happiness unknown, within, the magic circle of this hour.<sup>44</sup>

No magic circle materializes in Vignola's mise-en-scene, no crimson for Moore's cheek. While one can imagine Sjoström's shimmering black-and-white producing at least the implication of a passionate blush, Vignola's dim picture is black-and-white in more ways than one. Hester councils Dimmesdale as he rests his head on her lap, confessing his fears and anxieties to her. She tends to him as one of the oppressed, with no more passion than she showed while feeding broth to the dying spinster. In the context of the scene, Hester remains prudent, modest, and above all concealed. Moore never becomes sexualized, as Hawthorne's Hester, or even Sjoström's, does. She never removes the scarlet letter from her breast, nor does she remove her cap. There is no release. She remains clad in her habit.

The change in Hester reflects a larger change in movies themselves. Moore's Hester is the victim of yet another layer of confinement: The Production Code. This Code, which had been in place in varying strengths since 1927, was a "tool of industry self-regulation"<sup>45</sup> by the movies, under the leadership of Will H. Hays ("former

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<sup>44</sup> Hawthorne, p. 186.

<sup>45</sup> Skal, p. 162.



chairman of the Republic National Committee... Presbyterian elder" and "Postmaster General in Warren G. Harding's administration," a post he resigned to become "frontman for the movie industry").<sup>46</sup>

By 1933, the need for a new, strengthened Code was evident. Outside forces, notably the Catholic organization, the National League of Decency, rated and denounced specific movies from the pulpit, and threatened "a mass boycott aimed at forcing Hollywood to discontinue its exposures and sensationalisms and make what were vaguely described as 'good' films."<sup>47</sup> Hays, alarmed at the decrease in theater attendance, gave the Code renewed muscle with a vigorous rewrite by a Catholic priest and layman, and set up the Production Code Administration "under the supervision of a young Catholic newspaperman, Joseph I. Breen, to enforce the Code and, in effect, to police the production of every film from first screen treatment to finished product."<sup>48</sup>

It was in *this* prison that Vignola gave birth to his pearl. The film's opening inner-title informs the spectator that the movie depicts "a slice of history."<sup>49</sup> The setting

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<sup>46</sup> Sklar., p. 83.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Griffith and Arthur Mayer, *The Movies: Revised Edition* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970), p. 296.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.

<sup>49</sup> *The Scarlet Letter*, directed by Robert G. Vignola, 1934.

is the Puritan past of old New England, where "times are hard and punishment hard, but necessary for the development of America."<sup>50</sup> A certain amount of repression, along with moral and religious censorship, are necessary in order to maintain and mold a virtuous America, one anchored in family values and decency. The tone of the inner-title mirrors the formula that Hollywood censors adopted in the early 1930's in order to regulate the content of films. As Robert Sklar points out:

their solution allowed for a fairly wide leeway in depicting behavior considered immoral by traditional standards—adultery or murder, for example—so long as some elements of "good" in the story balanced what the code defined as evil. This was a formula of "compensating moral value": if "bad" acts are committed, they must be counteracted by punishment and retribution, or reform and regeneration, of the sinful one. "*Evil and good are never to be confused; the audience must not be allowed to sympathize with crime or sin.*"<sup>51</sup>

*The Scarlet Letter* in this new context provides a space of justification for enduring patiently the hardships of the Depression and an appreciative mirror of the strictures of a reinvigorated Production Code. Americans in the early 1930's were frightened and anxious over the instability of the marketplace; morale was low due to massive unemployment; the uncertainty of the times created

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Sklar, p. 174.

an air of pessimism. The New Deal Administration sought to alleviate the nation's social woes and boost the people's mood and spirit by developing various relief programs and government aid. The Administration worked to "[foster] a spirit of patriotism, unity and a commitment to family values,"<sup>52</sup> in order to cement the fissures erupting in American society. The Hollywood dream machine cooperated by producing films that symbolized "the basic moral, social and economic tenets of traditional American culture."<sup>53</sup>

Vignola's Hester functions as a symbol of reform. Vignola, under the guidance of the Production Code, doesn't allow his Hester to stumble in the forest a second time. The last scene in the film is Dimmesdale's confession on the scaffold as he reveals the letter "A" on his chest, formed from a mass of scar tissue. The dead minister rests his head once more on Hester's lap as Pearl gazes at her father's tranquil face. The three figures are united under the pillory, as well as under the eyes of God and the community. In Dimmesdale's public confession, his hidden shame and sins are revealed. The last image is a medium long shot of the scaffold; the community kneels beneath it with their heads bowed, as Hester and Pearl remain

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 175

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

transfixed in their sorrow. Hester and Pearl are abandoned to the scaffold and imprisoned within the frame for good.

Vignola's *Scarlet Letter* emphasizes that personal ambition and passions must be controlled and repressed for the public good. Hester's individual desires cannot be put ahead of the community; her nation's prosperity depends on civil obedience and unity. Once personal ambition is transcended, the nation's regeneration can take place. Hester's loss is the community's gain; society is cleansed the moment a corrupted public is rid of their tainted spiritual leader - Dimmesdale, the social pollutant. The political body is stabilized and controlled.

The scaffold and pillory remain the focal point; the three characters become mythologized and desexualized in the temple as the screen fades to black. Hester's traumatic inheritance is repressed and denied as she returns to the darkness. Hester's stigma is transformed, its ambiguity *forgotten*. The "A" becomes formless. The Puritan community's exploitations and inequalities are denied. A sterile inheritance and false memory is transferred through "homogeneous, empty time"<sup>54</sup> (the antithesis of real history for Benjamin) and "conceived as a deep, horizontal

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<sup>54</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in his *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, tr. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 261.

comradeship,"<sup>55</sup> with the paternal line of the nation's forefathers. Maternal amnesia allows the nation to begin Anew!

### **The Wenders Version (1972)**

A German director, Wim Wenders, resurrected Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* in 1972. Wenders was an active participator in the German cinema's renaissance "known as the *Neues deutsches Kino*, or New German Cinema."<sup>56</sup> America and Europe during the 1970's were in economic and political flux. In Europe "the certainty and confidence of the postwar settlement had all but disappeared."<sup>57</sup> The American dollar was devalued in 1971 under Nixon's administration, as the Vietnam War caused protests to break out on both sides of the Atlantic. In the 70's Europe's

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<sup>55</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 7. The phrase comes from a section of Anderson's working definition of a "nation": succinctly, "An imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." (p. 6) The filmic use of *The Scarlet Letter* in the 1930s (to further the conception of a determined, uncomplaining country ready to accept harsh measures for harsh times) would seem to fit well with Anderson's bold assertion that "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined." (Ibid.) Hawthorne's villager Young Goodman Brown would, no doubt, agree with Anderson's parenthetical statement. Goodman is, in fact, unable to maintain face-to-face contact with his townspeople after discovering just how imaginary the community bonds are. The dubiousness of such social fictions carries over into *The Scarlet Letter*.

<sup>56</sup> Alexander Graf, *The Cinema of Wim Wenders: The Celluloid Highway* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> Asa Briggs and Patricia Clavin, *A History of Europe: Modern Europe 1789-1989* (London: Addison Wesley Longman Inc., 1997), p. 439.

economy "encountered a new economic phenomenon: 'stagflation' (unemployment - structural and cyclical - combined with high levels of inflation)." <sup>58</sup>

The New German Cinema reflected the country's cultural attitudes and anxieties; its tone was often bleak and fatalistic. The young directors of the movement often tackled themes that dealt with "the problems of terrorism, feminist and political issues, or the continuing issue of coming to terms with the then-recent German past in films." <sup>59</sup>

*The Scarlet Letter* as a vehicle for "portraying the first generation of Europeans in America" <sup>60</sup> intrigued Wenders. Wenders had a long-held fascination with American culture, especially its music and film. In an interview, Wenders recalled

I liked Hawthorne's novel, which I'd read when I was fifteen or sixteen. It might have been the first book I read in English. <sup>61</sup>

Wenders has an affinity for outsiders; it is not surprising then that Hawthorne's female pariah of Puritan New England appealed to him.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Graf, p. 7.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>61</sup> Wim Wenders, *The Logic of Images: Essays and Conversations*, tr. Michael Hoffman (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), p. 31.

Wenders' New England landscape is vast and panoramic. The coastal community is surrounded by open spaces but even within this environment the atmosphere is claustrophobic, due to his manipulation of the frame. Hester and Pearl's first appearance in the film is on a bluff facing the ocean. The two stand still as the wind whips their garments and rustles the tall blades of grass around their feet. Mother and daughter are isolated from the community; the town beadle makes his way along a path up the jagged face of the cliff towards Hester to summon her back to the scaffold. Hester descends the cliff in order to join society.

Wenders, tangled in the letter's threads, transforms Governor Bellingham's sister, Mistress Hibbins, from an aged madwoman who entertains the devil in the woods into a fiery redhead with a pale complexion, played by the Russian actress Yelina Samarina. Samarina, as Hibbins,

serves as an alter ego for Hester and a vehicle for demonstrating the repression of women in Puritan society. She sees the sexual repression enjoined on Hester as the roots of her own madness.<sup>62</sup>

Hibbins, as Hester's doppelganger in physical form, moves freely through the community, protected by her blood ties to Bellingham. Governor Bellingham's paternal role

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<sup>62</sup> Kathe Geist, *The Cinema of Wim Wenders: From Paris, France to Paris, Texas* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), p. 31.

towards his sister shields her from the community's retribution. Hester is forced to remain voiceless, and she moves through the community as a specter to evoke fear and fascination in the hearts and minds of the townsfolk. The community openly condemns her by calling her a whore and a witch, but is forced to remain silent in the face of Hibbins' demonstrations.

In Wenders' adaptation, Hester is brought to the scaffold seven years after her first public humiliation and condemnation, to the stand where the community first beheld her scarlet letter and little Pearl. Hester, played by Senta Berger, stands on the scaffold as the town elder demands a confession. Senta refuses and remains fixed on the small stage. Off screen a voice calls out "Hester Prynne, Hester Prynne," as Mistress Hibbins approaches the small gathering of onlookers. She encourages Hester to remove her token of shame and to flee with her into the forest, which is a far better place than where she is now. The community and town elders remain silent as Hibbins addresses Hester. Hibbins' tirade is interrupted by her African-American servant, who guides her back to the Governor's house like a confused child who has wandered away from her parent. Hibbins is the monstrous other, both childlike and womanly, a symbol of female multiplicity.



Samarina, as Hibbins, portrays what Marina Warner refers to as a "bogey doppelganger," which she describes in the following way:

the child who can be understood to be the potentially insatiable devourer, the possible monster of greed and gratification and excess... this ogre within corresponds to the ungovernable id, which is pictured as somehow fitted inside, as if the prompter concealed below threatened to take control of the performer on the psychological stage of the ego.<sup>63</sup>

Samarina freely pins a yellow "A" on her dress on the Sabbath and wears it to church as a symbol of mockery. Another scene of rebellion occurs when Samarina dresses in Bellingham's magisterial wig and robe (his masculine totems of propriety, religion and judicial control) and sets her garments aflame on the scaffold as a group of townsfolk silently observe the spectacle. The scene is captured in a medium longshot that allows the audience to view it with as much detachment as the small crowd of spectators can. Wenders' Hibbins represents movement. As in Hawthorne's conception, she is always watching and commenting on her environment. When Governor Bellingham dies, Samarina, as Hibbins, crouches in his bedchambers, and hides in the shadows. She watches Chillingsworth open Dimmesdale's shirt and reveal a large red welt in the form of an "A" on his

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<sup>63</sup> Marina Warner, *No Go the Bogeyman: Scaring, Lulling & Making Mock* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), p. 81.

breast. For Wenders, Hibbins' yellow "A" seems to represent *Action*, and *Alter-ego*. In fact, the dynamism of the character may arise in part from the circumstance that Wenders originally wanted to cast Samarina as Hester, but was overruled by his producers. Wenders gets his revenge by turning Hibbins into the lively, vocal embodiment of everything that Hester must repress.

But patriarchal repression finally subdues feminine energy. Hibbins laughs maniacally when Dimmesdale exposes himself to the congregation. A man in the crowd grabs Hibbins and covers her mouth with his hand, as she struggles in vain to get away. Hester and Pearl flee the church, as Hibbins is silenced by the violent act, an act that the community had been forced to repress while the governor was alive. The scene is shot in close-up and medium close-ups. The spaces within the church and within the frame are tight; people huddle and push close together in the mayhem as the social cloth comes unraveled. Hester and Pearl make it to the ocean and a dinghy that waits to take them aboard a ship - the Providence.

The ship's name is not a coincidence. Earlier in the film Wenders shoots Pearl and Hester on the beach; Hester asks Pearl if she knows who Anne Hutchinson was. She tells Pearl that Hutchinson was a very wise woman, not a witch,

and that she fled to Providence, where a different government reigned. Wenders' Hester is reborn, precisely as her doppelganger is silenced. Wenders' Hester is an attempt to materialize Hawthorne's vision of a prophetess for whom *his* Hester can only pave the way:

The angel and apostle of the coming revelation... a woman... lofty, pure, and beautiful; and wise, moreover, not through dusky grief, but the ethereal medium of joy; and showing how sacred love should make us happy, by the truest tests of a life successful to such an end!<sup>64</sup>

Hibbins' confinement is Wenders' sacrifice for the future. He, of all the directors, seems most attuned to Hawthorne's realization "that the past was not merely prologue to the present, but prophetic of it."<sup>65</sup> Hester and Pearl sail off to an *imagined* space outside the frame, to a place where women are prophets and where single mothers rear their young without fear of retribution and judgement. A sailor asks Pearl what her mother's "A" stands for; she replies simply: "America."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Hawthorne, p. 241.

<sup>65</sup> Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), p. 18.

<sup>66</sup> *Der Schrlachrote Buchstabe*, directed by Wim Wnders, 1972. Speaking of prophecies, Carl van Doren seems to have anticipated one aspect of Wenders' treatment of the Hawthorne story. Writing in 1920, van Doren imagines how someone other than American might have conceived the narrative: "A Frenchman might have painted the joy of Dimmesdale, the lover, with his forbidden mistress; an Italian might have traced the fierce course of Chillingsowroth (sic), the husband, to a justified revenge; *a German might have exhibited Hester, the offending wife as actually achieving an outer freedom to match that one within.*" The italics are mine. I found the essay in the "Commentary" section of my Modern Library edition of *The Scarlet Letter*. The particular quotation appears on page 265.

Wenders' experience directing *The Scarlet Letter* left its mark upon him. He was forced to repress his love of spontaneity. He wrote as follows in 1973:

Every film is... a documentary of itself and the way it was made. For me, *The Scarlet Letter* documents conditions under which I wouldn't care to work again: I don't ever want to make another film in which a car or a petrol station or a television set or a phone aren't allowed to appear.

That sounds emotive, but emotion is what it's about: emotion is only possible in films which haven't been subjected to restrictive conditions, and which don't subject the things in them to such conditions either...<sup>67</sup>

Hester then finally confuses and defeats Wenders, to the degree that he vowed of his experience, "it's important that women make films about themselves and men make films about themselves."<sup>68</sup>

### **Hester in Hollywood (1995)**

Hollywood, however, has never shown much interest in women making films about themselves. While Wenders seemed humbled and chastened by his restrictions and limitations, the 1995 Hollywood version of *The Scarlet Letter* simply refuses to acknowledge any restriction - of source material, history, social realities or dramatic sense.

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<sup>67</sup> Wenders, *The Logic of Images*, p. 8.

<sup>68</sup> Geist, p. 32.

The 1995 version, directed by Roland Joffe, jettisons Demi Moore straight from the cover of *Vanity Fair* into the 17<sup>th</sup> century as Hester Prynne. Demi Moore's Hester is unrestrained and vocal. Hawthorne's Hester

might have come down to us in history, hand in hand with Anne Hutchinson, as the foundress of a religious sect. She might, in one her phases, have been a prophetess. She might, and not improbably would, have suffered death from the stern tribunals of the period, for attempting to undermine the foundation of the Puritan establishment. But in the education of her child, the mother's enthusiasm of thought had something to wreak itself upon.<sup>69</sup>

For Hawthorne, Hester is imprisoned by circumstance and is too much a part of her society, even in her separation from it, to become a schismatic. Demi Moore as Hester has no such compunction. She mingles with other marginalized women; Joffe's film presents a parade of feisty rebellious women, robbing Hester of her ambiguous, haunting power, and provides an imagined picture of a New England where assertive modern women practically outnumber the Puritans. Mistress Hibbins becomes Hester's closest friend and neighbor - a midwife and herbalist who keeps a house on the outskirts of town. Hibbins' houseguests consist of prostitutes and women who have lived in captivity among the Indians, and who still long for the wilderness. Mistress Hibbins' place is a sanctuary for

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<sup>69</sup> Hawthorne, p. 146.

these deviants; it is the place where Hester goes to discuss her religious views openly, views that challenge the validity of the community's elders and their opinions on religion and government. Social mores and society's laws, according to Demi Moore's Hester, are but "the laws of man..."and formed by "the imagination of mortals."<sup>70</sup>

Joffe's adaptation of Hawthorne's tale is an attempt to control history, to erase and re-remember Puritan New England, to empower, in Hollywood's particular way, the disenfranchised *other*: the Native American, the African American slave, the repressed minister who takes God too seriously and the liberally minded woman of the new world. They are all freed within the space of the frame; Hollywood pacifies the traumas of historical repression. For Joffe, Hester's "A" represents *All*-- all are included and all will have a rebirth and regeneration in this *reimagined* past. However, all are not represented with the same understanding. Joffe, in his attempt to empower the disenfranchised, paralyzes them instead; his African- and Native-American characters are flattened liberal cliches as lifeless as the racist caricatures that proceeded them in film for so long.

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<sup>70</sup> *The Scarlet Letter*, directed by Roland Joffe, 1995.

Demi Moore, in the role of Hester, moves easily among the community and occupies the spaces generally reserved for men. Specifically, she shops at the marketplace, at an auction, where a man takes bids for indentured servants, slaves and livestock. Hester purchases two men and an African-American woman named Matuba, who is mute (an unintended commentary on mainstream Hollywood's use of African Americans as set decoration). She also purchases a lonely cabin on the bluff and freely accepts exile. The forest and the ocean once more form the boundaries of a new Hester's incarnation, but the cabin has been transformed from a complex symbol of alienation and isolation to a shrewd real estate deal by a self-assured businesswoman.

The boldness she exhibits in public extends to the privacy of her cabin and the geography of her own body. Hester, in the guise of a Clintonian Hollywood liberal, enlightens her African-American slave to the wonders of masturbation, though the slave is only able to gain this information through voyeurism (a voyeurism shared by the audience), not through conversations with her mistress. The film implies that an African-American woman could not discover her sexuality on her own. Hester's tutelage of her appreciative servant includes a lesson on bathing: the good

white mistress introduces her dark sister to the luxuries of civilization.

Matuba sacrifices herself and is murdered in trying to protect the white woman. This has nothing to do with Hawthorne, but everything to do with a firm Hollywood tradition dating back virtually unchanged to the beginnings of the feature film.<sup>71</sup>

Joffe's *Scarlet Letter* also falls into the Hollywood cliché of showing the good Indian and the bad Indian. The good Indian is a Christian who can read and moves freely within the white community; the bad Indian does not want the white man's presence. Yet the noble Indian, a schoolmaster named Moose, is seen reverting to his supposedly natural savage state at the end of the film, while the bad Indians attack the white settlement. Metacom and his tribe have come to rescue his people who live among the Puritans. His converted brothers and sisters are being herded together in order to be massacred, so that the community can avenge the death of one of its members.

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<sup>71</sup> An early example appears in *With Lee in Virginia* (1913), when, in the climax, a black man is shot by a firing squad to "protect the heroine." A fuller description can be found in Kenneth M. Cameron's *America on Film: Hollywood and American History* (New York: Continuum, 1997), pp. 22-23. The best known instance of the odd cinematic trope probably occurs when the kindly former slave Big Sam saves Scarlett from some former slaves who are considerably less kindly in *Gone With the Wind* (1939). The childlike self-sacrificing black man in *The Green Mile* (1999) is dispiriting proof that the offensive trend did not die with Matuba.



The crime (we are now so far from Hawthorne that we may never get back) has been committed by Chillingworth dressed in Indian gear. Chillingworth slits the throat of his victim and scalps him under the cover of darkness using Indian tactics, believing his prey to be Dimmesdale.

In the climatic battle scene, Moose the Christian Indian is shown slitting someone's throat in close-up. The evil white man, Chillingworth, has libeled the Indian by performing a cliched ritualistic slaughter; the Indian extracts revenge by living up to the cliché. It is as if Joffe is haunted by his own historical restraints - not the Puritanism that burdened Hawthorne, but a repository of Hollywood cliches so powerful that even his liberal impulses cannot resist them. Perhaps we are meant to learn that Christianity should not be imposed on children of nature like Moose - but the racist overtones remain.

### **Conclusion**

For Borges, "Every language is an alphabet of symbols the employment of which assumes a past shared by its interlocutors."<sup>72</sup> His *Aleph*, in the story named after it, is

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<sup>72</sup> Jorge Louis Borge, *Collected Fictions*, tr. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin, 1998), p. 282. Borge has reservations about Hawthorne. See his *Other Inquisitions: 1937-1952*, tr. Ruth L.C. Simms (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), pp. 47-65 for a full account of both his praise and his doubts. Particularly puzzling is the argument (which Borges reiterates with displeasure several times) that Hawthorne writes about "situations, not characters," (p. 53) The irony should be evident: For all his genius, one does not

the point at which everything in the universe can be seen, including the Aleph itself:

I... saw the Aleph from everywhere at once, saw the earth in the Aleph, and the Aleph once more in the earth and the earth in the Aleph, saw my face and my viscera, saw your face, and I felt dizzy...<sup>73</sup>

Likewise, Hester is our Aleph, through which we see our past and our present, a simultaneous view from the crowded town square and the lonely scaffold. By identifying with Hester we, at the same time, condemn her to the pillory of our own subjective views. In the "Afterword" to his *Book of Sand*, Borges writes of "memory, which makes each person both spectator and actor."<sup>74</sup> He means individual memory, but the phrase also applies to the shared traumatic communal memory (like many recovered memories, an imaginary one) of the exposed, condemned and isolated woman standing in silent, shamed opposition to the community.

Even the most rudimentary filmed versions of *The Scarlet Letter* capture some of the power of that image, but Hester herself remains elusive. In trying to enter the story through her, the directors (even when they attempt to

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generally come away from a Borges story relishing a rich, fully-rounded, believable character but rather with wonder over what we might call (with great understatement) a *situation*. Borges does admit that the characters in *The Scarlet Letter*, "especially Hester Prynne... are more independent, more autonomous, than those in [Hawthorne's] other stories." (p. 60) Even this statement, however, is qualified immediately thereafter.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., pp. 283-84.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 484.

liberate Hester from the confines of Hawthorne or history) manage to exercise their own forms of repression.

A high school teacher, a friend of Flannery O'Connor's, once heard from a student "that the moral of *The Scarlet Letter* was, think twice before you commit adultery." O'Connor remarks with distaste that "Many students are made to feel that if they can dive deep into a piece of fiction and come up with so edifying a proposition as this, their effort has not been in vain."<sup>75</sup> No doubt, O'Connor would also disapprove the different, if equally simplistic, moral advanced by filmmakers of several generations: *History was terrible, and thank God we are past it.*

If *The Scarlet Letter* was Hawthorne's depiction of the past as a nightmare from which no one ever fully wakes (to paraphrase James Joyce), filmmakers have used his text in an opposite way: to announce and celebrate the triumph of the present. Their Hesters (flapper, matron, feminist, yuppie) stand as emblems of social progress, time travelers pointing the way for a benighted, ignorant community. In the new town square of the movie theater, the audience can feel superior to the Puritans while incidentally enjoying

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<sup>75</sup> Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*, select. and ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Staus & Giroux, 1989), p. 129. Originally published in 1969.

the spectacle of the woman on the scaffold. For the movie director, the Puritans are the outsiders and Hester is one of us (even Vignola, in his conservative version, uses her as a Depression-era beacon of self-sacrifice and reform). Hawthorne's more chilling implication is that *we*, the audience, will *always* be the Puritans and Hester the eternal outsider. Even Hawthorne, however, as Hester's progenitor, fails to catalog, exhaust, or even appreciate the scope and span of her prismatic manifestations. As for Hester herself, she remains stubbornly ambiguous.

### **The Bodies of Lizzie Borden**

...as soon as the face has a name, once you recognize her, when you know who she is and what it is she did, the face becomes as if of one possessed, and now it haunts you, you look again and again, it secretes mystery. *Angela Carter "The Fall River Axe Murders"*

In August of 1892, the town of Fall River, Massachusetts, was unsettled by the grisly murders of Andrew and Abby Borden. The prominent New England couple was bludgeoned to death in the family home by an object that authorities could only assume was an ax. The frenzied murders were committed within minutes of each other. Abby was slaughtered in an upstairs bedroom, followed by her husband, who had his head quietly hacked to pieces as he napped on the sofa in the parlor. No one on the street heard a sound, nor even the other two occupants who were about the house that afternoon: Lizzie (Abby's stepdaughter and, at 32, Andrew's youngest dependent) and the family's Irish housekeeper, Bridget.

Lizzie Borden was charged, put on trial, and eventually acquitted. The court case was as sensational as the crimes and turned Lizzie into an instant media spectacle. After being found innocent, she returned to the Fall River community, which had embraced her during the trial, only to discover that their support was as short-lived as the memory of her acquittal. No longer dependent

on her father, Lizzie became a woman of means. She moved from the family home and took up residence in a house on the hill alongside the elite of Fall River.

Wealth and an uptown address signified her ascent but no one welcomed her arrival. Lizzie remained an outsider and object of scorn and curiosity. Like Hester Prynne, she remained the eternal outsider. She continued to pop up as a subject of conversation in newspapers, as reporters documented the details of her social life, friendships, and possible misdemeanors (shoplifting) to a public eager for information, tiny tidbits to illuminate the real woman's nature. But Lizzie's isolation was as much a badge of honor as a mark of shame. Like Hester, she could look down on the village as they gazed up at her. As Julianna Baggott puts it in her poem "Lizzie Borden in Love,"

the Borden's house is on the Hill,  
                            finally, rightfully,  
lit and singing ...<sup>76</sup>

Today, the public continues to wrestle with Lizzie's image in an attempt to discover the woman behind the lore. More often than not, what people recall is not the outcome of her trial, but her assumed guilt. No other example

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<sup>76</sup> Julianna Baggott, "Lizzie Borden in Love," *Lizzie Borden in Love: Poems in Women's Voices* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 2006), p. 51.

illuminates her suspect position in the public's  
 imagination than the nursery rhyme

Lizzie Borden took an ax,  
 And gave her mother forty whacks.  
 When she saw what she had done,  
 She gave her father forty-one.<sup>77</sup>

The image of a madwoman out of control emerges from the  
 verse, but perhaps what frightens the imagination more is  
 the reverse image of a woman completely in control. After  
 the first murder, Lizzie pauses for a moment to contemplate  
 her deed and then decides to continue on with a bit of  
 patricide.

Fictional representations of Lizzie are numerous; she  
 has been the subject of operas, plays, poems, docudramas  
 such as a made-for-TV movie starring Elizabeth Montgomery,  
 and a ballet choreographed by Agnes De Mille in which  
 Lizzie stands on the scaffold, found guilty of murder (in a  
 striking historical revision) as the community stands in  
 judgment. In each interpretation, the murders - the bodies  
 of the deceased - become an afterthought.<sup>78</sup> The real  
 narrative exists in the accused's past - in *Lizzie's* body.  
 Her private life, her secret desires and romantic  
 interludes (all fictional) become pieces of manufactured

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<sup>77</sup> The original source of the famous rhyme is unknown.

<sup>78</sup> The various interpretations have been admirably catalogued and commented on in Annie Schofield's article "Lizzie Borden Took an Axe: History, Feminism and American Culture," *American Studies*, Vol. 34, no. 1, Spring 1993. Schofield also notes the typical assumption by artist and public of Borden's guilt.

trace evidence that create a composite image of a murderess. Often, her motivation for murder hinges on the emergence of her corporeality and sexual awakening. Evan Hunter's potboiler *Lizzie* and Elizabeth Engstrom's equally torrid *Lizzie Borden* present readers with a vision of Lizzie that taps into archetypal images of the hungry woman whose insatiable appetite causes her to consume and destroy all she touches.

Both authors assume the pseudoscientific position of expert. Engstrom and Hunter use a medical lens to explore their subject. In their roles as writer/physician, both authors attempt to make Lizzie transparent. Through a series of deductions, Hunter and Engstrom defuse and contain Lizzie's symbolic chaos and mystery.

As Susan Bordo points out in her examination of the body in popular culture

In the medical model, the body of the subject is the passive tablet on which disorder is inscribed. Deciphering the inscription is usually seen as a matter of determining the "cause" of the disorder; sometimes (as with psychoanalysis) interpretation of symptoms will be involved. But always the process requires a trained - that is to say, highly specialized - professional whose expertise alone can unlock the secrets of the disordered body.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 67. Originally published in 1993.



What I propose in following chapter is this: to explore how Lizzie Borden emerges as the perpetrator in four literary works and examine how her image and imagined body are contested in an attempt to contain her ambiguities. I hope to tease out the ways in which the two pop historical novels reflect America's persistent anxiety and fear over female agency and sexuality. Lizzie's sexual awakening becomes the springboard for nightmarish coming of age tales in which a problematic cause-and-effect scenario emerges to explain the murders in terms of female pathology.

Lizzie emerges as an ahistorical poster child for a contemporary cautionary tale, one that echoes and updates nineteenth-century anxieties about what happens to a woman who wants too much. Intimate female relationships, lesbianism, and nymphomania surface as manifestations of female desire run amok and turn longing for individual autonomy and personal control into a faux pas with consequences. Hilary Neroni, in her examination of representations of violent women in contemporary American cinema, discusses how certain acts of female violence exist in the public consciousness as a source of traumatic collective memory.

We deem violence so antithetical to femininity that when a woman murders someone it doesn't make sense within our symbolic system. Our reaction to the female

murderer is hysterical because instead of trying to analyze her case or action, our encounter triggers the hysterical question, "What does this woman want?" This leads to an attempt, through ideological fantasy, to mould her back into what a woman should be.<sup>80</sup>

For Neroni, the act of fantasy performs a dual role, in that it covers the trauma of female violence and situates the offender in an ordered social cosmology. The antithesis of the violent woman as an ideological construct, then, idealizes a woman without desire, hunger, or agency. As a hegemonic template, Lizzie's exploited body in both novels provides readers with a cultural and social index in which to explore taboos and the boundaries of female sexuality. Audiences can safely transgress as they recall the horror of Lizzie's act(s) because the hysterical question "What does a woman want?" is answered, her desires contextualized through fantasy.

In the second half of the chapter, I will contrast the two novels with two short stories by Angela Carter, examining how hunger emerges as a motif in Carter's work and exploring how she tweaks both coming-of-age conventions and ideas of Lizzie's body itself as a way to tease out notions of trauma and rage. Like Hunter's and Engstrom's, Carter's Lizzie is guilty; however, she emerges as a

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<sup>80</sup> Hilary Neroni, *The Violent Woman: Femininity, Narrative, and Violence in Contemporary American Cinema* (Albany: State University of New York Press: 2005), p. 62.

different kind of nightmare - at once more ambiguous and fully realized - for readers in search of flashes of the real Lizzie Borden.

### **Female Friendships and Contagious Desires**

In his novel *Lizzie*, Evan Hunter imagines Borden as a menstruating, ax-wielding lesbian who seduces the hired help. Hunter's Lizzie murders her stepmother to conceal a morning tryst with the maid, and kills her father because he discovers the murder. A broken heart, rage, and hormones drive Lizzie insane. For Hunter, Lizzie is a deviant before she kills. Her lesbianism and monthly cycle mark her as an outsider, an aberration.

Before her sexual awakening in Europe two years prior to the Fall River murders, Lizzie leads an unremarkable life. Hunter takes Lizzie's actual, if sparsely documented, trip abroad and fictionalizes her encounters. He exposes his character to a world beyond Fall River, a world of decadence and vice embodied by Alison Hastings, a beautiful Englishwoman who charms and seduces her in a summer romance.

Hunter's novel, like his *Lizzie*, suffers from a split personality. He shifts back and forth between Lizzie's

journey abroad and her trial. By blending courtroom reportage and cheap erotica, Hunter creates an uneven melodrama with Lizzie Borden as the unstable villain.

In the "Afterword," Hunter describes his novel as "a work of fiction, much of it rooted firmly in fact."<sup>81</sup> In order to obtain the facts surrounding the case, he scoured trial transcripts and newspaper articles. Lizzie is as much a mystery to Hunter as she was to the reporters who scrutinized her every move during the trial. In the courtroom, Lizzie's body was a text for the public and the press, who became detectives in their search of the real woman. From the first day of the trial, the *New York Times* was ready to provide its readers with all the apparent facts, when they reported, for example, that Miss Lizzie Borden

wore a black brocade dress and black lace hat... as she stood there, the pink flush, which those who have watched her have learned to know denotes excitement, came to her cheeks.<sup>82</sup>

Like the press, Hunter details his subject in almost photographic terms. In Hunter's fictionalized courtroom, the image of a self-composed woman emerges.

[She] covered her face with both gloved hands, as though trying to hide from her eyes the images he conjured for her. She sat that way for what seemed an

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<sup>81</sup> Evan Hunter in *Lizzie: A Novel* (New York: Arbor House, 1984), p. 427.

<sup>82</sup> *New York Times*, June 6, 1893, p. 2.

eternity, motionless, her hands covering her face, but he heard no sound from her. He waited. At last, she lowered her hands. The grey eyes were dry. They met his own eyes unwaveringly.<sup>83</sup>

Every gesture and word exposes an element of her character and betrays her façade.

Lizzie turned slightly in her chair. Her eyes met Knowlton's momentarily - he would never forget the glacial look in them - then she turned stiffly to the marshal.<sup>84</sup>

The "glacial look" of those "unwavering eyes" reveal a woman in control of her emotions. Hunter's details function as persuasive pieces of evidence. He wants the reader to form an opinion of Lizzie based on her behavior. The newspapermen of Borden's time formed their own conclusions. Their "pink" is human, tender, feminine; Hunter's "gray" is flat, cold, metallic.

The fiction writer who cloaks his novel in historicism promises readers a glimpse of the truth. For Hunter, the lesbian body becomes a text for readers to explore in the search of clues that explain Lizzie's mental disintegration. Lizzie's sexual awakening becomes the catalyst that sets a tragic course of events in motion.

Lizzie's awkwardness with her body and girlish crush on Alison Hastings contrasts with her cool composure in the

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<sup>83</sup> Hunter, p. 95.

<sup>84</sup> Hunter, p. 112.

courtroom. The two competing narratives reveal a before-and-after image of Lizzie. The possibility that a woman can contain a dual nature or that her home is something other than a site of domestic bliss first emerges in the guise of Alison Hastings, who appears to be a proper married woman. Beneath Hastings' mannered façade lurks a freethinking, sexually active woman with secrets. Hunter creates a dichotomy between two images of womanhood. For Lizzie (and Hunter), Alison is something completely other and mysterious.

There was in Alison's voice, as a counterpoint to its low typically English musicality, a note of mockery, was it? -and Lizzie felt somewhat uncomfortable in her presence. She could not imagine any respectable woman of her acquaintance making sport, first of the cherished precepts of ladylike expectation, and next-not a moment later-of religion, which Lizzie considered the mainstay of her life in Fall River. Nor could she imagine that Alison would have dared to speak so boldly in the presence of her husband. And yet, hadn't there been that same challenging tone on the train when Albert was talking about naming a child? "Note the male posture," Alison had said, with the same slight raising of the eyebrows, the same half-smile on her mouth, the same slightly derisive edge to her voice.<sup>85</sup>

Alison's deviant nature reveals itself in her mannerisms. Like the reader, Lizzie reads Alison's body in the hopes of uncovering a bit of evidence of her true (monstrous) nature. The counterpoint in Alison's voice, her subtle

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<sup>85</sup> Hunter, p. 58.

mockery of proper female values and raised eyebrows are little tells that expose her. Lizzie, by contrast, displays all the virtues of ideal womanhood. For instance, she feels uncomfortable in Alison's presence when the woman disregards female etiquette.

And like the "pink flush" from the *New York Times*, Hunter's early Lizzie prettily blushes when embarrassed.<sup>86</sup> When quizzed by Alison about her life and interests in Fall River, Lizzie responds with the proper answers; she "enjoys embroidery and knitting and common sewing... Flowers, our gardens."<sup>87</sup> And when she needs advice on fashion, she reads "*Harper's Bazaar*, of course. And *Peterson's Magazine* and *Godey's Lady's Book* and *Frank Leslie's Gazette of Fashion*..."<sup>88</sup> She reads novels, but only those that are "morally acceptable."<sup>89</sup>

On a symbolic level, Alison becomes a mirror. As Lizzie gazes at her and listens to her speak, she slowly imagines herself in the eyes of another.

You have such marvelous color, Lizzie, that wonderfully fiery hair, and those incredible grey eyes. It's a pity cosmetics are so frowned upon these days—oh, a little pearl powder, perhaps, or a faint dusting from a *papier poudre*, but only for married women, of course... how I'd love to rouge your cheeks—or my own, for that matter—as many dotty dowagers do, or

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<sup>86</sup> Hunter, p. 62. Alison Hastings remarks to Lizzie "How prettily you blush."

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Hunter, p. 63

daub a bit of lip salve on your mouth, or line your eyes with kohl as black as Cleopatra must have used. How silly of me, you're quite beautiful enough without any artifice.<sup>90</sup>

The brief passage functions as a seduction. Alison presents Lizzie with an inverted image of herself. The metamorphosis hinges on Alison physically remaking Lizzie from the outside in. For Alison, gender and class are mere performances that require a bit of theater or stagecraft. As the make-up artist, she can create a new role for Lizzie. At first glance, the process of transformation appears liberating or transgressive.

However, beneath Alison's parlor performance and flirtation, an epistemological issue is at play, one that mars Hunter's novel: his notion that lesbianism evolves out of a power struggle or a dysfunctional apprenticeship of sorts. Lizzie's modest statement "I've... never considered myself beautiful..." and Alison's reply: "Are there no looking glasses in all of Fall River then?"<sup>91</sup> reveals a bizarre Hegelian tea scene, one that implies Lizzie's subjectivity is solely dependent on Alison's recognition.

Alison's seductive influence over Lizzie touches on deep cultural anxieties about female sexuality. She subverts the active/passive dualism that permeates western

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<sup>90</sup> Hunter, pp. 60-61.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.



thought, a dichotomy that casts men in the role of agent - the possessor of will, reason and spirit. The material body of the woman, in contrast, lacks agency, and rather than being associated with the mind or spirit is seen as primitive and earthy. In her analysis of the poem "The Heavy Bear" by Delmore Schwartz, Susan Bordo describes how Schwartz's analogy of the bear as body haunts us

with its passive materiality, its lack of agency, art, or even consciousness. Insofar as the "spirit's motive" is the guiding force, clarity and will dominate; the body, by contrast, simply receives and darkly, dumbly, responds to impressions, emotions and passions. This duality of active spirit/passive body is also gendered, and it has been one of the most historically powerful of the dualities that inform Western ideologies of gender.<sup>92</sup>

Hunter delves into the realm of cliché when he casts Alison as the threatening lesbian. She, like Lizzie, represents woman as body, however she is the female "body in extreme."<sup>93</sup> As Barbra Creed points out in her examination of stereotypes, "historically and culturally, the lesbian body - although indistinguishable from the female body itself - has been represented in extreme: the pseudo-male, animalistic and narcissistic body."<sup>94</sup> These characteristics manifest themselves in the "normal"<sup>95</sup> female body, yet the

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<sup>92</sup> Bordo, p. 11.

<sup>93</sup> Barbra Creed, "Lesbian Bodies," in Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn, eds., *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 101.

<sup>94</sup> Creed, p. 101.

<sup>95</sup> "Normal" body is my emphasis.

"ideological function of the lesbian body [is] to warn the 'normal' woman about the danger of undoing or rejecting her own bodily association."<sup>96</sup>

To the world around her Alison appears gentle, the model of femininity. Appearance, manners and fashion conceal her deviant tendencies. According to Creed

To function properly as an ideological litmus paper, the lesbian body must be instantly recognizable. In one sense, the femme lesbian is potentially as threatening - although not as immediately confronting - as the stereotyped butch because she signifies the possibility that all women are potential lesbians. Like the abject, the stereotyped mannish/animalistic/auto-erotic lesbian body hovers around the borders of gender socialization, luring other women to its side, tempting them with the promise of deviant pleasures.<sup>97</sup>

After prolonged exposure to Alison's influence, Lizzie begins to display symptoms of a deviancy. After exploring the seamy side of Paris, and having an afternoon cocktail, Lizzie develops the flu. Hunter begins the chapter with a bit of gothic flair.

The peculiar thing about Lizzie's illness was that it came without warning. In the hectic days that followed their visit to the Moulin Rouge, there wasn't the slightest hint that her energy was waning; indeed, when finally she was stricken, it all but seemed that Anna's predictions of ill health befalling one or all of them had been heeded by a vengeful God-and a capricious one at that, else He would most certainly have chosen Ann herself as the victim.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Creed, p. 101.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Hunter, p. 204.

Once introduced into the system, the lesbian strain weakens the body and obviously affects a woman's moral judgment.

In its vulnerable state, feverish and frail, only Alison can properly tend Lizzie's ailing body.

Day and night it was Alison now who regularly took her temperature; Alison who changed the sheets when the chambermaids were too slow to respond to the summons of the bedside button; Alison who soaked rages with alcohol and bathed Lizzie's trembling body from head to toe; Alison who slept beside her each night, alert to her every moan or sigh.<sup>99</sup>

The parallels to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and vampirism are unmistakable. The image of the seductive, sophisticated lesbian as vampire is a familiar stereotype in popular culture and a reoccurring image in Hollywood cinema, especially in such horror films as *Dracula's Daughter* (1936), *The Hunger* (1983), *Nadja* (1994) and less overtly in other films like the melodrama *Young Man with a Horn* (1950), in which Lauren Bacall plays Amy North, a married, predatory socialite who obviously prefers the company of women. As a vampire trope, Alison represents what Sarah Sceats refers to, in her examination of vampire forms, as the "emotional" vampire.

The emotional vampire seeks out and feeds off an (often willing) victim in a furious attempt to make someone fill the emotional or spiritual vacuum in his or her being, resulting in a mutual bondage... The vampire is entirely dependent: s/he can only exist in

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<sup>99</sup> Hunter, p. 218.

relation to the victim host; the overwhelming desire for oneness, figured in a fleeting act of incorporation of the other.<sup>100</sup>

Like the traditional upper-class vampire in his opera cape, Alison moves freely through society above suspicion, thanks to her class standing and sham marriage. In their very first meeting alone, already described above, Lizzie experiences the premonitory uneasiness that future victims feel in the presence of an unctuous vampire. And like a vampire, Alison uses her extreme politesse to camouflage coy hints of sinister things to come (as one particularly vampiric example, her blithe mockery of religion). Alison eventually consumes Lizzie emotionally and physically. Once she satisfies her desire, her need for Lizzie lessens. Back in Fall River, Lizzie has no one in whom to recognize herself. Like the victim-turned-vampire, she casts no reflection. Her rejection and unsatisfied hunger (marked by a sense of emptiness) make her a slave to her bodily impulses.

In his "Afterword," Hunter advises the reader that "[w]hile not an entirely unsupported conjecture, Lizzie

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<sup>100</sup> Sarah Sceats, "Oral Sex: Vampiric Transgression and the Writing of Angela Carter," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring, 2001), p.108. Sceats examines the vampire as a shifting form whose meaning changes depending the socio/historical moment.

Borden's lesbianism should also be taken as part of the fiction."<sup>101</sup>

The problematic crux of Hunter's novel is the underlying supposition that lesbianism is transferable. In an interview, Hunter attempts to make the case that Lizzie kills not out of shame but as an act of empowerment.

I would certainly never suggest that any lesbian be ashamed of her sexual preference. This is something quite else. Her stepmother calls her "Monster! Unnatural thing." If I may quote from the novel: "She immediately rejected this deformed image of herself, blind anger rising to dispel it, suffocating rage surfacing to encompass and engulf this woman who stood quaking now against the closed door to the guest room, the fearsome threat of revelation to her father, the unfairness and stupidity of not being allowed to live her own life as she CHOSE to live it!" Aside from that being some damn fine writing (he said modestly) it doesn't speak of shame. If anything, it's a cry for understanding. It's a woman pleading for the freedom to be herself.<sup>102</sup>

But it is Hunter who turns Lizzie into an "unnatural thing" the moment he hinges her transformation on her sexual awakening and the despair she feels when Alison rejects her. The act of murder as form of freedom of expression for a woman who just wants "to be herself" as a lesbian destabilizes any form of positive identity construction. In Hunter's cosmology, the lesbian identity forms a black hole

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<sup>101</sup> Hunter, p. 428.

<sup>102</sup> "Writer's Corner: Interviews: Evan Hunter, Author of *Lizzie*." Lizzie Andrew Borden Virtual Museum and Library, <http://lizzieandrewborden.com/WritersCorner/Interviews.htm>, (March 29, 2010).

into which all positive matter gets sucked and ceases to exist.

Lizzie's act of murder is not the real crime; rather it is the questionable seduction of Maggie, the family's Irish servant,<sup>103</sup> that illuminates Lizzie's corrupted nature. The murders of Lizzie's parents function as a gruesome sideshow. The Borden house becomes another infected body. The lesbian power play scenario surfaces once more but in contrast to Lizzie's genteel seduction by Alison, Lizzie becomes the savage out of control, driven by feelings of revenge and repressed sexual frustration. Maggie's body becomes a crime scene and site of domestic violence.

Maggie tried to pull away. She gripped her wrist more tightly ("You're hurting me," Maggie whispered) [as Lizzie]... pulled her toward the stairs, the words still pouring forth in a torrent, helpless to stop the words, wanting to tell her of what she'd almost done yesterday, but instead spewing threats she knew she could not possibly enforce, "Would you like to lose this job, Miss, join the town's Chinamen perhaps, wash the laundry of the millworkers, have the toughs and brawlers pawing you like the slut you are," bitter accusation, "or have they already done so, have you peddled pussy on a stick like a common tart," solemn reprimand, "for shame, for shame, Miss, confess yourself to God for the harlot you've become," ... she said, and hurled her through the open door into her bedroom, snapping her out like a whip so that she staggered into the room, almost falling. Lizzie closed the door behind them.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Maggie was the nickname of Borden family servant Bridget Sullivan.

<sup>104</sup> Hunter, p. 397.

Lizzie uses her class position to dominate and disempower Maggie. Hunter's feeble attempt to strike a blow at patriarchy fails. Instead, he substitutes one hierarchy for another and turns the lesbian body into a site of sexual excess, fantasy, and horror.

### **Lizzie and the Ravenous Body**

Elizabeth Engstrom presents readers with a panoply of dysfunctional women. Lizzie Borden's narrative becomes a cautionary tale about the threat of the hungry woman. Engstrom imagines Lizzie as a naïve, pleasant spinster who yearns for financial independence and freedom, a home of her own, a home away from her codependent father and the other unhappy, hungry women in her life, away from her sister Emma, who secretly binge drinks out of financial frustration and the hate she feels for their father, away from her stepmother Abby, the pitiful woman who fattens herself with every piece of pie or biscuit she consumes out of despair.

Emma and Abby's forms of rebellion are ineffectual; neither woman ruptures her social niche or attains a permanent sense of peace or freedom from their dependent

roles as daughter and wife. The Borden women are domestic prisoners trapped under the thumb of a patriarchal warden. The only place Emma and Abby assert control is over their bodies. Weight gain, bruises, and a bloody lip turn the body into a text on which Abby and Emma inscribe their frustrations, anger, and dejection.

The image of free women does materialize. In contrast to the Borden women, they appear perfect on the surface. They own a flat or home, live alone, work to earn their own money or have a tidy nest egg; most importantly, they possess a sense of agency and determination. In Engstrom's vision of nineteenth-century America, confidence is a mask strong women wear. The underlying theme of *Lizzie Borden*, and a problematic one at that, is that all women are pathological, repressed, and self-destructive.

Engstrom deconstructs her powerful female characters when she subverts their motivation. Agency, drive and determination signify selfishness, greed and shallowness. In short, all the women of Fall River are maligned in some fashion. Whether independent or free, they display unhealthy cravings and are slaves to their bodily needs and addictions: food, drink, sex, money.

Representations of the woman as deviant plague Engstrom's novel and reveal the enduring coerciveness of



the hungry or out-of-control woman as an archetypal image. Engstrom's identity politics, her notions of sexuality and gender, tap into cultural stereotypes about the female body. In a Hunteresque move, she advises readers that

This is a work of fiction, written in the framework of an actual incident. As such, personalities and character traits have been assigned to those who played a part in the great Borden mystery. Some of these are not flattering, and I apologize in advance to any descendants of those with whom I have taken liberties. My purpose is not to offend; it is to justify.<sup>105</sup>

Engstrom's noble claim to justify and present a sense of truth to the reader about Lizzie's crime and the incidents surrounding the affair are reminiscent of Jack Webb's flat, moralistic narration of *Dragnet*, intended to authenticate and socially justify the portrayal of sordid crimes.

The fictitious characteristics and personality traits function as representational truths. Engstrom's dual role as pathologist and sleuth allow her to assume the position of authority. Lizzie emerges once again as a source of mystery. Again, her interiority and motivations (like those of all the actors) in the historical drama can be understood through a thorough examination of the details.

Like Hunter, Engstrom builds her narrative around Lizzie's supposed lesbian sexuality. In the afterword, she

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<sup>105</sup> Engstrom's author note.

makes a passing reference to Lizzie's "flamboyant affair"<sup>106</sup> with the actress Nance O'Neil.

Lizzie frightened nineteenth-century America because she challenged the fantasy that women were by nature satisfied to be passive, dutiful and devoted to the men in their lives. She presented the public with a nightmarish image of a woman taking a whack at patriarchy.

According to Engstrom's afterword, Lizzie became an "oddity, an embarrassment to the community" after her trial.<sup>107</sup> But in reality, Lizzie was an oddity in Fall River before she was accused of murder, in that she was a spinster and thus already viewed as suspect or flawed. Much like the nineteenth-century public she criticizes, Engstrom defines Lizzie through her oddity, centering it in her lesbianism. Lizzie's friendship with Nance O'Neil becomes a referential signifier that points to the seamy side of female independence.

For Engstrom, contact with an independent woman (all independent women, in Engstrom's fictional world, are blatant or implicit lesbians) has the potential to unleash and transform a woman's sexuality. Engstrom, like Hunter, uses Lizzie's trip abroad as a way to pinpoint the moment

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<sup>106</sup> Elizabeth Engstrom, *Lizzie Borden* (New York: Tor, 1991), p. 342.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

she begins her journey of self-discovery. Engstrom's catalyst (like Hunter's Alison Hastings) is a beautiful, sophisticated Englishwoman. This is probably not plagiarism so much as the irresistible twin pull of literary convention and pop psychology stereotype.

Beatrice is the woman Lizzie wants to become. The moment Lizzie sees Beatrice she recognizes herself as flawed.

Beatrice was fashionably dressed, all in peach from her hat to her shoes. Lizzie felt dowdy in her traveling blacks, and watched the lovely young woman take in the sights, have a cup of tea and be on an excursion by herself while totally self-possessed. Lizzie envied that quality.<sup>108</sup>

The two women never meet again after their brief encounter on the ferry. However, Beatrice's presence and power lingers over Lizzie through their correspondence. Beatrice's letters and a self-help book she sends by post function as surrogates. Like Alison Hastings, or Dracula (the subject, after all, of an epistolary novel), she can mesmerize and control her subject from afar. Each fetishized object represents Beatrice's absent body.

Engstrom plays with the displaced body metaphor when she describes how Lizzie "saved every letter from Beatrice, and when she read them, each word had the flush of those

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<sup>108</sup> Engstrom, p. 14.

succulent peach-painted lips and that soft lisp with a British accent.”<sup>109</sup> The letter and the female body are interchangeable texts that Lizzie consumes.

Engstrom, like Hunter, uses the lesbian body as a site of sexual fantasy.<sup>110</sup> When Lizzie holds Beatrice’s book “next to her” she become dissatisfied, and craves a new (used) identity. “If only she could wear peach. If only she had a figure like Beatrice. If only she could be as self-assured and self-contained.. If only she could have a flat in the city.”<sup>111</sup>

Lizzie’s first real, physical lesbian encounter is with Kathryn Peters, a stylish, unmarried woman of good reputation, who selfishly takes advantage of Lizzie and strings her along for her own sexual gratification. Her second lover, Enid, is an independent, bisexual widow, who likes to wear men’s clothes and sleeps with Lizzie’s father for money. Each lesbian encounter Lizzie has functions as a source of voyeurism both for the reader and Lizzie, who constantly re-views and savors each encounter. In both novels, Engstrom and Hunter delve into pornography. Female relationships and intimacies are exploited in order to

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<sup>109</sup> Engstrom, p. 18.

<sup>110</sup> Schofield (p. 94) notes the “construction of illicit romance and desire” and “fevered sexual passages” common to both books.

<sup>111</sup> Engstrom, pp. 18-19.

sustain a patriarchal ideology that supports heterosexual gender norms and boundaries. As Jane Caputi points out,

Pornography and mainstream morality both stem from and continually reinforce a worldview that makes a complex of body/low/sex/dirty/deviant/female/devil and then severs these from mind/high/spirit/pure/normal/male/god. For both, sex itself is the core taboo. Moralism systematically upholds the taboo and pornography systematically violates it... Without patriarchal moralism's misogyny, homophobia, demand for sexual ignorance, and sin-sex-shame equation, pornography as we know it would not exist. And, together, the two work to maintain the sex and gender status quo.<sup>112</sup>

The act of voyeurism and surveillance propels Lizzie forward as she strives to become more active. She is a self-voyeur, constantly imagining herself in Beatrice's eyes. On her walk to Kathryn's house, the evening of her first affair, she projects an ideal image of herself becoming Beatrice's desire.

"All right, Lizzie Borden," she said, smiling to the ends of auburn hair. "Here's the challenge: In every way, in every thought and every deed, be the person you want Beatrice to see. *Every* thought. *Every* deed. Beginning now. Bold. Adventurous. Self-Assured. Claim control of your life and *live* it. *Be* it."<sup>113</sup>

Lizzie's ability to "live" and "be" are contingent upon her embracing a new sexual identity and mastering the self-improvement rituals in her mysterious book, the contents of which are never revealed to the reader. Lizzie splinters

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<sup>112</sup> Jane Caputi, *Goddesses and Monsters: Women, Myth, Power, and Popular Culture* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), p. 75.

<sup>113</sup> Engstrom, p. 113.

and develops multiple visions of herself in her struggle to become whole.

Like Hunter's *Lizzie*, which is a blend of pulp, true crime reportage and *Hustler*, Engstrom's novel is a pastiche of science fiction, erotica and melodrama. Each author creates a vision of Lizzie as a monstrous other. Engstrom's Lizzie materializes as a surreal, almost supernatural lesbian by the end of the novel, even developing the surprising ability to astral project her splintered identities. The frustrated, shattered astral projection of her repressed self acts out and kills.

The manifestations of her frustrated longings present readers with the real culprit. Lizzie becomes the victim of her own emerging sexuality. The consumption of food and the will to violence become interchangeable acts that Lizzie performs to satisfy her pathological impulses. As Lizzie is splintered and broken, so are ultimate taboos. The cannibalistic (vampiric) implications are explicit in the scene where Lizzie hides in the barn to eat and daydream.

She thought if she had a little hatchet, a little kindling hatchet, she could split it [her father's head] right down the center. She crunched a big bite of the pear. She would spilt one of those loose eyes right down the middle like a grape. She crunched another bite, and the juice ran down her chin. Again,

and again she would hit him, just hit him and hit him, feeling the bones crunch like a pear...<sup>114</sup>

Lizzie ruptures her domestic niche by escaping her body. The out-of-body experience creates a murderous phantasm. Both murders occur while Lizzie is satisfying an urge. For example, Lizzie's angry doppelganger murders her stepmother in the guest bedroom while Lizzie masturbates in the barn. Each bizarre scene functions as a source of gratuitous excess and turns the female body into a freak show.

#### **Angela Carter's Lizzie: The Gestation of a Crime**

In her short story "The Fall River Axe Murders," Angela Carter - like Engstrom and Hunter - assumes that Lizzie is the perpetrator of the crime. Carter's Lizzie is starved emotionally and spiritually. Repression, claustrophobia, hate and longing fester behind the closed, locked doors of the Borden house. Carter's image of Fall River and nineteenth-century America is bleak. The consumption of food, money, property, labor and life are part of the daily cycle.

Carter spins a dark tale in which Lizzie is a member of the living dead. Her father, one of the community's

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<sup>114</sup> Engstrom, p. 337.

wealthiest men and the town's former undertaker, profits from his early dealings in death. Old Mr. Borden moves through the town like a grizzled, bearded reaper. His home rots from the inside out like a corpse. Hunger and death are reoccurring motifs of a grotesque family drama, the house a textual body and symbolic coffin (a permanent home for the dead).<sup>115</sup>

Unlike Engstrom and Hunter, Carter refrains from hinging Lizzie's crime on a sexual awakening. Rather, Lizzie is a woman with a breaking point, one who lashes back at her parents for gobbling up her pet pigeons for dinner.

*Saints and Strangers*, the title of the collection in which the story appears, hints at the complex nature of female otherness. Carter's Lizzie is an outsider before she commits the murders, a spinster who suffers from "peculiar spells."<sup>116</sup>

Like Hunter and Engstrom, Carter plays with historical details. Lizzie's documented headaches and her monthly

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<sup>115</sup> I find, after the fact, that A. Muller-Wood has also noted the similarity, calling Carter's rendition of the Borden home "so claustrophobic it resembles one of the coffins Andrew Borden produces" in her article "Disconcerting Mirrors: Angela Carter's Lizzie Borden Stories," *Literature Interpretation Theory*, 15: 282, 2004. Muller-Wood critical examination of Angela Carter's two short stories about Lizzie Borden is sharp and insightful. Muller-Wood explores her subject through an Oedipal lens as she, too, teases out the blatant Marxist overtones present in Carter's stories. Her examination of Carter's narrative as a postmodern strategy explores how this maneuver frees Carter to engage with her subject without the constraints of history.

<sup>116</sup> Angela Carter. "The Fall River Axe Murders," *Saints and Strangers* (New York: Viking), p. 13.



cycle at the time of the murders take on symbolic meaning yet again. Carter's Lizzie, like Engstrom's, is almost supernatural. However, she doesn't astral project and splinter into a small army of doppelgangers. She doesn't learn magic from a book, nor does a wily foreigner influence her. Rather, her visionary headaches come from within.

Lizzie's dementia functions as a source of freedom. Her daydreams and memory lapses are forms of escape that allow her to transcend the confines of the family home. Lizzie's peculiar spells allow her to occupy a space betwixt and between two worlds. Her monthly cycle amplifies her visions. Her trances mirror the ecstatic bodily experience of religious saints rather than the unnatural urges of sexual deviants.

From puberty, she had been troubled by these curious lapses of consciousness that often, though not always came at the time of her menses; at these times, everyday things appeared to her with a piercing, appealing clarity that rendered them mysterious beyond words, so that the harsh, serrated leaves knocking against the window were those of a tree whose name she did not know in which sat birds whose names were not yet invented, whirring, clicking, and chucking like no birds known before, while a sputtering radiance emanated from everything. All the familiar things, at those times, seemed to her not only unknown but also unknowable, always unknowable.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Carter, p. 15.

Like her father and stepmother, Lizzie is depicted as freakish. Her family trauma makes her monstrous.

Carter tries to illuminate a flash of Lizzie's humanity by exposing her sense of loss. In the Borden house there is no room for tenderness. Lizzie's birds are her connection to nature; she loves them without restriction. The Borden house and Lizzie's body are interchangeable texts. It is no coincidence that Hunter's novel takes as its frontispiece a blueprint of the Borden home. For fiction writers, the crime scene is an extension of the criminal - a calm, domestic exterior masking unspeakable impulses. In Carter's story, the house, like Lizzie, is "peculiar" and filled with secrets.

It is a peculiarity of the house, that the rooms are full of doors and - a further peculiarity-all these doors are always locked. A house full of locked doors that open only into to other rooms with other locked doors. Upstairs and downstairs, all the rooms lead in and out of one another like a maze in a bad dream. It is a house without passages. There is no part of the house that has not been marked out as some inmate's personal territory; it is a house with no shared, no common spaces between one room and the next.<sup>118</sup>

For Carter, the home as a haven or sanctuary is an illusion. Behind the picket fence and properly trimmed hedges, the family home is a site of danger and violence.

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<sup>118</sup> Carter, p. 13.

In the home, psychological trauma is just as damaging and hurtful as physical abuse, leaving its own set of invisible scars on the victim. The Borden sisters reflect their social position in their mores and dress. Although the women are over thirty, the community considers them "girls." According to Carter, they are stunted. The domestic realm creates an artificial state of limbo, one that perpetuates a gendered performance in which middle-class women suppress their desires and deny their material bodies. The act of labor becomes a source of taboo.

In this city of working women, the most visible sign of the status of the Borden girls is that they toil not. "Clickety clack, clickety clack, You've got to work till it breaks your back!" the looms sing to the girls they lured here, girls fresh from Lancashire, the dark-browed Portuguese, the French Canadian farmer's daughter, the up-country girls, the song, whose rhythm now govern the movements of their dexterous fingers. But the Borden girls are deaf to it.<sup>119</sup>

Race, class and gender define one's place and social rank in Fall River. The lower class working woman exposes the paradoxes of gender. Carter uses her image to reveal the female body in motion. She skillfully juxtaposes the problematic figure against the image of the apparently passive, white middle-class woman - a deprivation of energy and movement, a lethargy that erupts in rage.

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<sup>119</sup> Carter, p. 14.

Carter's Fall River is a social body that suffers from dualisms, prejudices and social hierarchies that keep men and women disconnected from one another. Working-class women, as bodies in motion, represent the life force of an industrializing nation. The goods that the female workers produce, like their labor, are digested in the never-ending cycle of consumption and production.

Carter's "perpetual girls" work, but their labor is rendered invisible because it occurs in private, away from public view. The reality of factory life transforms the naïve farmer's daughter and "the girls fresh from Lancashire,"<sup>120</sup> into women. But instead of examining the slums and mills of Fall River, Carter chooses to pull the curtain back and expose the equally exploitative middle-class home.

The Borden sisters are prisoners, confined by an artificial image of ideal womanhood produced, commodified and defined for them in ladies journals and periodicals.

Strange, that endless confinement of these perpetual "girls" who do not labour in the mean house of the rich man. Strange, marginal life that those who lived it believed to be the very printing of the page, to be just exactly why the book was printed in the first place, to be the way all decent folk lived.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Carter, p. 14.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

Female labor, like family abuse, becomes the unspoken thing that social propriety and middle class values deny. In Carter's Fall River, the home is just another factory.

However, at the end of the day when the whistle blows, the workingwomen of Fall River get to leave their looms. Lizzie and her sister are denied such a luxury and remain "in their father's house,"<sup>122</sup> doomed to live under the supervision and surveillance of Mr. Borden, who, in Fall River, is just another foreman.

For Carter, Lizzie's marginal position in the home and society is the real crime, one that has a ripple effect. The real Borden mystery is how the family managed to live together for so long. Behind locked doors the occupants

did not rub along together, somehow; they rubbed each other up the wrong way all the time, and yet: they lived in each others' pockets.

Correction: they lived in Old Borden's pocket and all they had in common was the contents of that pocket.

The days open their cramped spaces into other cramped spaces and old furniture and never anything to look forward to, nothing. Empty days. Oppressive afternoons. Nights stalled in calm. Empty days.<sup>123</sup>

Feelings of rage and disempowerment spread like a slow disease and warp Lizzie. Lizzie's stepmother spreads and feeds off the family fortune. Like her husband, Abby has an appetite that cannot be satisfied. The couple are

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<sup>122</sup> Carter, p. 14.

<sup>123</sup> Carter, p. 28.

Mr. and Mrs. Jack Spratt in person, he tall and gaunt as a hanging judge and she, such a spreading, round little doughball. He is a miser, while she-she is a glutton, a solitary eater, most innocent in her vice and yet the shadow or parodic vice of his, for he would eat up all the world... he would like to gobble up the city of Fall River. But she, well, she just gently, continuously stuffs her self...<sup>124</sup>

The female appetite out of control emerges an underlying theme in the Borden saga.

It surfaces in both Hunter and Engstrom's novels. Both authors envision female hunger as pathology, but in the end, their novels only expose their own facile fears and anxiety over female sexuality. For Hunter and Engstrom *lesbian* and *murderer* are interchangeable signifiers that explain Lizzie's criminally insatiable nature. Like Hunter and Engstrom, Carter uses hunger as a theme, and as a way to explain Lizzie's depravity. For Carter, Lizzie's deviancy is anchored in her class position. Thus in Carter's America, hunger becomes a form of middle-class pathology, a byproduct of capitalism.

The Marxist overtones in Carter's story are undeniable. Fall River, the Borden house, and its occupants are reflections of monstrous capitalism. Carter's Lizzie symbolically strikes a blow at the monsters that oppress her. It is the appetite out of control that horrifies

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<sup>124</sup> Carter, p. 19.

Lizzie. Her stepmother's excess and folds of fat are constant reminders of her own sense of emptiness and lack. As Carter makes clear, "[Lizzie] cannot bear to watch her stepmother eat. Each bite the woman takes seems to go "vroo croo."<sup>125</sup>

In the end, Lizzie is consumed by her own rage. Lizzie's rage transforms her into a body in motion, a body whose movements coincide with the rhythms of the City Hall clock and the town's factory whistles. Lizzie moves in unison with the mill workers as they scurry to the numerous Fall River infernos. Carter's juxtaposition of images builds tension and allows her to create a violent, visual crescendo.

At the first stroke of the City Hall clock, the first factory hooter, blares, and then, on another note, and another, the Metacomet Mill, the American Mill, the Mechanics Mill... until every mill in the entire town sings out loud in a common anthem of summoning and the hot alleys where the factory folk live blacken with the hurrying throng, hurry! scurry! to loom, to bobbin, to spindle, to dye-shop as to places of worship, men, and women, too and children, the streets blacken, the sky darkens as the chimneys now belch forth, the clang, bang, and clatter of the mills commences.<sup>126</sup>

For A. Muller-Wood, this passage exemplifies capitalism as a deranged religion.<sup>127</sup> But Carter also uses it intentionally to eclipse Lizzie's eruption and deny readers

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<sup>125</sup> Carter, p. 31.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Muller-Wood, p. 287.

access to Lizzie's crime. She replaces the scene with another violent image, a workers' death march en masse. The "first stroke" of the City Hall clock signifies Lizzie's first strike with her axe.

Lizzie becomes a domestic revolutionary. Lizzie's "strike" turns the home into a public arena and site of anarchy. The home as crime scene exposes the sordid consequences of capitalism and patriarchy. Carter's Lizzie is guilty but she is as much a victim of exploitation and repression as the workers who meet their demise in the mills. The real perpetrator of the crime is an insidious, capitalistic system that invades, corrupts and consumes the social fabric of Fall River and America itself.

For Hunter, Engstrom, and Carter, the tale of Lizzie Borden functions as an ideological springboard. Each writer twists and turns Lizzie's image to suit his or her own ideological/forensic position. In reimagining Lizzie's narrative (and motivation), each writer struggles to contain and destabilize (in Carter's case release) the image of a woman out of control.

Capitalism and the nightmares of a monstrous middle-class home turn Carter's Lizzie into an anti-heroine who oscillates between competing images; she is a female avenger, a victim and rebel. Her violence is a byproduct



and consequence of a nation's social and cultural disunity. Lizzie's violence functions as a cathartic response to social and cultural repressions. For Carter, violence and American capitalism are entwined. The two cannot be separated from the myth that surrounds Lizzie Borden. Carter's Lizzie functions as a symbol of dichotomy and a metaphor for America, a nation whose mythic narrative is violent, bleak and brilliant.

### **Angela Carter's Pearl**

"Lizzie's Tiger" is Carter's rag-to-riches tale. Like "The Fall River Axe Murders," it subverts the myth of the American dream and notions of the self-made man.

However, in contrast with her strategy in "The Fall River Axe Murders," Carter chooses to examine her subject through the lens of childhood. Gender, class, and sex become part of an exotic underworld. Carter creates a fictional past for little Lizzie, a backstory revealing the social factors that make a murderess. The façade of the domestic realm, the factories with their blaring whistles, dissolve into darkness on the night the circus comes Fall River. At the age of four, Carter's willful Lizzie sneaks out to see the tiger.

Carter's Lizzie begins her childhood "in a very poor way."<sup>128</sup> Economic enterprise comes with a price, as Carter makes clear when she playfully states, "everyone knows the first hundred thousand is the most difficult."<sup>129</sup> Mr. Borden's money, "breeding slowly," becomes a loaded metaphor.<sup>130</sup> Like her father's wealth, Lizzie is in a period of gestation. She is Carter's black pearl, an enigma like Hawthorne's Pearl from *The Scarlet Letter*. Lizzie, like Hawthorne's elf child, displays a sense of agency and spirit that forces readers to imagine childhood as an inverted, dark romance.

Unlike Hawthorne's Pearl, Lizzie isn't exotic or radiant. Instead, she has a "square-jaw" and "gruff appearance" with a dour aura about her.

Lizzie was not a demonstrative child and did not show affection easily, except to the head of the house, and then only when she wanted something. She knew where the power was and, intuitively feminine in spite of her gruff appearance, she knew how to court it.<sup>131</sup>

Imagination, a secret inner life, and precocious knowledge are commonalities that Pearl and Lizzie share.

The forest and nature are Pearl's realm. In the woods she is free, a part of something transcendent, an ethereal

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<sup>128</sup> Angela Carter, "Lizzie's Tiger" *American Ghosts & Old World Wonders* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), p. 3.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Carter, "Lizzie's Tiger," p. 3.

vision, rather than a social outcast. In the forest she appears to Hester and Dimmesdale

like a bright-apparelled vision, in a sunbeam, which fell down upon her through an arch of boughs. The ray quivered to and fro, making her figure dim or distinct,- now like a real child, now like a child's spirit,- as the splendor went and came again.<sup>132</sup>

Lizzie, in contrast, roams a different kind of wilderness - the slums of Fall River. Darkness surrounds her rather than light.

Carter's urban wilderness is filled with want and misery. For Lizzie, poverty is part of a grotesque reality that she experiences daily. In her imagination, the circus becomes a site of forbidden possibility: "The circus! The word tinkled in her head with a red sound, as if it might signify a profane church."<sup>133</sup> The circus is a scarlet space where Fall River's immigrant poor go to escape the grind of the mill.

Carter's disenfranchised - the Irish, the Portuguese and the "plump, pink cheeked Lancashire mill hands"<sup>134</sup> - are exotic figures. In Fall River, the poor are the freaks. For a night, the circus allows them to participate in a realm where they are free. Their drunkenness and displays of sexuality reveal a hidden world of pleasure. Their

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<sup>132</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne *The Scarlet Letter* (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), p. 187. The novel was first published in 1850.

<sup>133</sup> Carter, "Lizzie's Tiger," p. 6.

<sup>134</sup> Carter, "Lizzie's Tiger," p. 7.

transgressive revelry separates them from the rigid men and women of Fall River, like Mr. Borden and his ilk, who hail from proud New England stock. Muller-Wood's description of Angela Carter's circus could apply to the idea of the circus in general: "a place of carnivalesque inversions of hierarchies – a strange heterotopia where existing power structures can be turned on their head."<sup>135</sup>

On her way to the big top, Lizzie is befriended by a group of Irish children. She realizes her position as outsider when they encounter, the crowds gathered on outskirts of town:

She was impressed by the great number of people, for it seemed to her that the whole town must be out tonight, yet, when they looked closely at the throng, nowhere at all was anyone who looked like she did, or her father did, or Emma; nowhere that old New England lantern jaw, those ice-blue eyes.  
She was stranger among these strangers...<sup>136</sup>

Lizzie arrives at the circus at twilight, emphasizing strangeness, alienation, and crossing over. The collision of time and space create a symbolic threshold. Carter uses the imagined space of the circus to explore and comment on Lizzie's desire for experience. In the "Fall River Axe Murders," capitalism isolates and severs the emotional and social bonds that connect individuals and communities. The

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<sup>135</sup> Muller-Wood, p. 289.

<sup>136</sup> Carter, "Lizzie's Tiger," p. 8.

factory and the Borden home are sites of social and moral regulation that prohibit experience or emotional excess.

Carter inverts the childhood fantasy of the circus and infuses it with images of violence. The circus becomes a double signifier in terms of representation, symbolically exhibiting a multiplicity: within it exist the sacred and the profane, the carnivalesque and infernal. In David Harvey's summary of Henri Lefebvre's "Spaces of Representations" he posits imagined space as

mental inventions (codes, signs, 'spatial discourses,' utopian plans, imaginary landscapes, and even material constructs such as symbolic spaces, particular built environments, paintings, museums, and the like) that imagine new meanings or possibilities for spatial practice.<sup>137</sup>

The circus is a dialectically charged zone. The foul and the sweet mingle: "frying donuts; horse-dung; boiling sugar; frying onions; popping corn; freshly churned earth; vomit; sweat..."<sup>138</sup> The sensory overload causes Lizzie to lose herself. At the circus, she is part of a transgressive community.

The longing for connection and the desire for experience propel Lizzie through the night. Carter's tale, on a basic level, is about a child's desire for access to

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<sup>137</sup> David Henry, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origin of Cultural Change*, (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 218-219. Harvey is building on Henri Lefebvre's *La production de l'espace*.

<sup>138</sup> Carter "Lizzie's Tiger," p. 8

an adult world with its lure of hidden knowledge and power. Lizzie bridges the distance between social spaces when she sneaks away from home. For Harvey, "distance is both a barrier to, and a defense against, human interaction."<sup>139</sup> If examined through Harvey's spatial lens, Lizzie assumes the role of a rover. Her rebellion and willingness to cross social and cultural boundaries allows her to explore a forbidden terrain.

Lizzie experiences the thrill of being a part the raucous crowd, an unwieldy body in motion. The working class mass envelops Lizzie.

[She was] tossed about among the insensitive shoes and petticoats, too close to the ground to see much else for long: she imbibed the frenetic bustle of the midway through her nose, her ears, her skin that twitched, prickled, heated with excitement so that she began to colour up... her cheeks marked with red, like the marbling on the inside of the family bible. She found herself swept up by the tide of the crowd to a long table where the hard cider was fold from the barrel.<sup>140</sup>

Lizzie's invisibility as child enables her to become part of a social body and savor the exoticness of an adult world.

She becomes a four-year-old drunk, intoxicated from drinking cider, a young peeper when she navigates the dark fields around the tent, where from the shadows she watches

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<sup>139</sup> Harvey, pp. 221-222. Here Harvey is referring to the spatial practice of "accessibility and distanciation."

<sup>140</sup> Carter, "Lizzie's Tiger," pp. 8-9.

and "listens to the "surprises... going on all around her in the bushes."<sup>141</sup> Like the trapeze act or fire-eater's performance, sex functions as another form of spectacle. The naked woman with her large breasts that "jiggled entrancingly"<sup>142</sup> becomes just another clown or circus freak, who performs for the pleasure of the spectator.

For Carter, Lizzie is both voyeur and victim. In the darkness, no one notices the man who sees Lizzie not as a child but as an object of sexual gratification. In the topsy-turvy world of the circus, desire and pleasure, repulsion and loathing, spectacle and exploitation emerge as shifting sites of excess. The collapse of social barriers produces a space in which a seemingly infinite number of possibilities exist for experience and transformation. In the end, however, the circus becomes just another closed space for Lizzie, a space that she internalizes and hides away as her dark secret.

At the end of the night, Lizzie's encounter with the tiger leaves its own set of psychological scars. Like her sexual abuse, the experience functions as a source of deep repression. For a brief moment under the glaring lights

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<sup>141</sup> Carter, "Lizzie's Tiger," p. 11.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

Lizzie bonds with the wild beast. Lizzie empathizes with the caged animal.

The emotional contact and recognition that Lizzie craves occur when she sees herself not in the crowd that surrounds her but in the tiger's eyes. Lizzie experiences love. Her contact with the animal is spiritual rather than carnal, as Carter makes clear when she describes their meeting:

I cannot tell you how much she loved the tiger, nor how wonderful she thought it was. It was the power of her love that forced it to come to her, on its knees, like a penitent...

There was a wrinkle in its nose and it buzzed and rumbled and they never took their eyes off one another, though neither had the least idea what the other meant.<sup>143</sup>

The denial of recognition and forced submission crystallize as harsh social realities for Lizzie the moment she witnesses the oppression and exploitation of the tiger. "Crack! The spell broke. The world bounded into the ring."<sup>144</sup>

In Carter's Fall River there are no sacred spaces or private moments free from the intrusions and taint of capitalism. Under the big top, as in the mill and the home, escape and freedom are illusions. The crack of the whip and

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<sup>143</sup> Carter, "Lizzie's Tiger," p. 15.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.



the liontamer's bark "In my cage, among my cats, I have established a hierarchy of FEAR and I am TOP DOG..."<sup>145</sup> become the speck of grit that shapes Lizzie's anger. Hawthorne's elf child, disfigured in a cracked funhouse mirror, represents the dark side of American possibility.

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-18.

**Aid and Comfort  
Tokyo Rose  
And the Subversion of the Feminine Ideal**

*Has she sent you a letter lately, Joe? I bet she hasn't... I bet you haven't heard from her for a long, long time... Tokyo Rose (Lew Landers, 1946)*

**A Portrait**

Seven men surround the young woman - some are soldiers, others newspapermen. The space within the frame is filled; the composition of the shot creates a feeling of claustrophobia. The woman's face is oblique, perhaps even a mask of unconcern. In her black pigtails and v-neck sweater, the latter pulled over a white long sleeved blouse, her left arm draped over a purse perched on her lap, she might be waiting for a tardy date. She seems to be an island of poise in the sea of masculine activity around her.

The photograph appeared in the *New York Times* on September 9, 1945, exactly a week after Japan officially surrendered to the U.S. at the end of World War II. The young woman in the picture is Iva Toguri, also known as Iva D'Aquino (her married name). Below the photograph she is identified as "the enemy."<sup>146</sup> The shot freezes Toguri's last free moment before she was placed into custody by army

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<sup>146</sup> *New York Times*, September 9, 1945, p. 16.

officials under suspicion of committing war crimes against the United States as the legendary Tokyo Rose.

### **A Brief History**

Iva Toguri was born on July 4, 1916 and grew up in Southern California as a Nisei, or second-generation American of Japanese descent. Both of Toguri's parents had emigrated from Japan and were thus not entitled to American citizenship - nor, therefore, to vote or hold property - due to discriminatory immigration laws. The Naturalization Act of 1790, which would not be revamped until 1924 (and even then would remain unfavorable to Asians), ensured citizenship to *free whites*, but legislatures reserved the right to define and interpret whiteness.

"White" Americans were suspicious of Chinese and Japanese immigrants, who tended to settle and live in their own segregated communities and cling to the traditions of their homelands. Many Japanese immigrant parents ("Issei") encouraged their children to adopt American clothing, learning, language and habits in order to escape being targeted. Traditional Japanese customs were often observed in secrecy, in the privacy of home. The Nisei generation, according to Wendy Ng,

has often been described as growing up in two worlds, one Japanese, the other American. The issue of citizenship and nationality was complex for them. Until 1916, Japan followed the practice of *jus sanguinis*. Anyone born of a Japanese father was a Japanese citizen. The United States followed the practice of *jus solis*, which recognized citizenship by place of birth, and so anyone born in the United States was a citizen. Thus, Nisei could technically hold dual citizenship.<sup>147</sup>

Toguri and her brother and sisters were taught to embrace American culture. Toguri's family actively worked to Americanize their children through a variety of means: observing Christian holidays, introducing a diet of western food into their lives and emphasizing the importance of an American education. Toguri's parents, according to Russell Warren Howe, strove to create an

ultra-American atmosphere [for their children], partly out of a need to confirm their own wisdom in emigrating, partly from a belief that total Americanization was the basic requirement for real opportunity.<sup>148</sup>

The American Dream of social mobility was theoretically available to immigrants who assimilated into the melting pot and openly embraced the myth that wealth, opportunity and social advancement were based on physical ability and merit.

Such myths were shattered by the bombing of Pearl Harbor, as government officials and the largely white

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<sup>147</sup> Wendy Ng, *Japanese American Internment During World War II: A History and Reference Guide* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002), p. 5.

<sup>148</sup> Russell Warren Howe, *The Hunt for "Tokyo Rose"* (Lanham, Maryland: Madison Books, 1990), p. 29.

public questioned the alien loyalties of Japanese-Americans. No apparent amount of assimilation erased the fears of conspiracy. Racial prejudice and wartime anxieties facilitated the systematic removal and evacuation of large numbers of Nisei and Issei living on the West Coast to relocation centers and internment camps.

On February 19, 1942, Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, giving the military the right to evacuate citizens that it deemed as a threat to national security. The Order allowed the evacuation and forced migration of over 110,000 people of Japanese descent and confined them behind barbed wire fences, segregated from the rest of the population. The language of the order was vague and did not directly imply that the threat to national security was the Japanese - it was understood.

The same loopholes that denied the Issei true citizenship made them ineligible for the fundamental constitutional privileges and protections afforded to white American citizens - due process, the right to a fair and speedy trial and equal protection were a few of the casualties. Nisei were legally citizens under the eyes of the law and therefore eligible for all the fundamental protections afforded by the constitution. Nevertheless, Roosevelt determined to "decouple the Nisei's citizenship

status, which he recognized as an absolute, from their civil rights, which he considered contingent.”<sup>149</sup> Greg Robinson points out that the President’s actions highlight the

complex relationship between his conception of citizenship and his attitude toward racial difference... he refused on racial grounds to accept them on equal terms as Americans—legally in the case of the Nisei and morally in the case of the Issei. This refusal blinded him to the invidious and undemocratic character of repressive actions he and the government undertook...<sup>150</sup>

Italian-Americans and German-Americans were also questioned but never sequestered, placed in internment camps or isolated from the larger population.

The difference in treatment came in part from the fact that the Japanese had been pre-defined as the *other* in American society, long before American involvement in the war. Anglo-Americans were able to define themselves against Asian-Americans by negative example - whites were *not* strange, *not* “yellow,” and able, therefore, to visibly assimilate and embrace American culture.

The same *otherness* would cling to Toguri after the war, allowing Anglo-America to make an example of her with a terrifying and misguided ease of conscience that is typical of the all-American witch-hunt.

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<sup>149</sup> Greg Robinson, *By Order of the President: FDR and the Internment of Japanese-Americans* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 176.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

## Siren of the South Pacific

Tokyo Rose is often portrayed as one of the many tantalizing and taunting voices that were broadcast by Axis propaganda radio stations from the South Pacific and Germany during World War II. Tokyo Rose, however, was not one woman but rather a composite - a collective voice that was estimated to encompass at least seven to twelve different women. During the time of the actual broadcasts, the American press viewed them with good-natured amusement, not as a serious threat to American soldiers in terms of psychological warfare. On May 24, 1944, the *New York Times* ran the headline "Radio Programs Beamed at Them by Axis Amuse Troops Overseas, Officers Report." The article was clear:

The GI's in combat enjoy women propaganda voices on Axis broadcasts. Their favorites are Mme. Tojo, who reaches receiving sets in the Southwest Pacific and in Alaska, and Tokyo Rose, who is heard frequently in Alaska and in the Aleutians.<sup>151</sup>

American and Allied soldiers were credited as being invulnerable to the feminine wiles of enemy entreaties to give up the fight and go home because their wives and girlfriends were stepping out on them with other men.

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<sup>151</sup> *New York Times*, May 24, 1944, p. 5.

An earlier article in the *Times* had already proclaimed “‘Tokyo Rose’ A Hit With U.S. Soldiers: Forces in the Pacific, Immune to Propaganda, Enjoy Our Music on Japanese Radio.”<sup>152</sup>

“If a radio popularity poll could be taken out here among American fighting forces,” the article began, a surprisingly large number would go to ‘Tokyo Rose.’”<sup>153</sup>

The radio broadcasts provided servicemen with a disembodied female voice, a phantom for them to sexualize and construct a fantasy around. The fantasy of Tokyo Rose interrupted the monotony of military routines, drills and the long days that soldiers encountered adrift in the South Pacific. Soldiers built elaborate scenarios to explain her allure, far removed from her usual program of music and innuendo. She was “really Amelia Earhart,” or a Nisei native of Los Angeles, broadcasting from the “tallest of the Watts towers.”<sup>154</sup> Rose was rumored to be able to prophesize the outcome of battles and mysteriously gain access to top-secret coordinates of U.S. military operations in the South Pacific – she was an archetypal woman, a witch.

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<sup>152</sup> *New York Times*, March 27, 1944, p. 4.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> Paul Fussell, *Wartime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 39.



The fascination with her outlasted the war, as an Associated Press reporter noted in late 1945:

The American fighting man has found frustration at the end of the long road to Japan- "Tokyo Rose" is a figment of the fertile brains of the propaganda office. Or is she?

That feminine charmer whose tantalizing voice used to issue from the Tokyo radio to the accompaniment of music made in America in fact was several Japanese girls. Or was she?<sup>155</sup>

The journalist interviewed a young Nisei woman, who served as a guide to several correspondents and escorted them through Yokohama, in their quest to find Tokyo Rose. The young woman's name is never identified in the article and remains a mystery. The journalist deliberately teases readers and projects his (and the reader's) fantasy onto the guide, and in the process objectifies and sexualizes the young woman:

The guide is 25 years old, pretty enough to satisfy any GI's dream... See here, the guide is asked, the background you're wearing fits [the] part of that siren of Japan. How about it? ... Now the guide speaks nice English, was born in Downey, Calif., returned to Japan in 1940, and says she has been working for the Domei [Japanese news agency] for two years. Every time she mentioned "Tokyo Rose" to any of the correspondents, she smiled slyly... H-m-m-m-m. Come now, guide, weren't you "Tokyo Rose"?<sup>156</sup>

The young Nisei woman, the article implies, can't be trusted; she and every other Japanese woman, especially

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<sup>155</sup> *New York Times*, September 1, 1945, p. 4.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

Nisei women with their slippery duality, were potential tricksters and saboteurs.

During the war, for the press to have portrayed the Japanese radio propaganda activities as other than comic and lighthearted would have meant implicitly that American soldiers were susceptible to an invisible enemy temptress. After the war, with the "boys" out of danger, it was easy for the press to indulge in the darker flip side of the Tokyo Rose fantasy; the exoticism and intrigue of a harmless "oriental" flirt gives way to a clawing succubus (the classic "dragon lady" cliché) whose one desire is to corrupt and destroy a nation of young white men. The entertainment and solace (real aid and comfort) provided by Tokyo Rose could become the treasonous "aid and comfort to the enemy" punishable by death.

With attitudes properly adjusted, the stage was set for the witch-hunt to begin.

### **The One and Only Tokyo Rose**

Iva Toguri was arrested in Yokohama on September 5, 1945, by United States Military Police. The headline on page two of *The New York Times* accused Toguri of being the

"Purveyor of Enemy Words and Varied Music to Our Troops."<sup>157</sup>

The *New York Times* informed its readers that she was arrested after a press conference. "Miss Toguri, who said she was one of four Tokyo Roses, had just explained to correspondents she had been broadcasting 'for the experience.'" She further claimed that she only announced records and "never mentioned wayward wives or sweethearts, and 'forgotten men,'"<sup>158</sup> none of which dissuaded the public from thinking of her as *the* Tokyo Rose. It should be noted that Toguri's self-identification as one of four "Tokyo Roses" is a paraphrase rather than a quote. Toguri never claimed to have been called Tokyo Rose. In fact, during her trial, a government witness admitted that the propagandists first saw the name Tokyo Rose in a 1945 *Time* magazine:

"It contained an item about Tokyo Rose and it caused something of a stir. They all wondered if there was such a person, knowing that no one at Radio Tokyo was using that name."<sup>159</sup> Even to the Japanese, then, "Tokyo Rose" was a provocative mystery.

On October 18, 1945, Toguri was transferred to the Yokohama jail under the suspicion of treason. The duality of her citizenship (only the most tangible of the dualities

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<sup>157</sup> *New York Times*, September 6, 1945.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> *New York Times*, July 23, 1949, p. 5.

that Toguri and her phantom persona evoked) perplexed government officials, who finally decided that she was in fact an American citizen by birth - but the issue would remain a subject of contention for years to come.

Toguri remained in the Yokohama jail for a year, denied access to legal representation and due process. Army officials concluded on April 17, 1946, that she was innocent of the charge of treason, as it could not be substantiated with viable evidence. However, Toguri remained in jail for another six months until the United States Justice Department reached the same conclusion. The *New York Times* announced that the Tokyo Rose case had been dropped by the federal government because Tokyo Rose was a "composite person with at least a dozen voices... many other women in the broadcasting studio where she was employed as a stenographer also announced programs."<sup>160</sup> Nevertheless, her status as the femme fatale Tokyo Rose was enshrined in the public imagination. It contributed to her difficulty in returning to the U.S., and once she arrived, marked her as a treacherous vamp.

Toguri remained in Japan after her release, unable to obtain a United States passport. She had been in Japan since July, 1941, and had made several attempts during that

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<sup>160</sup> *New York Times*, October 22, 1946.

time to procure her passport - unsuccessfully, due to bureaucratic sluggishness. She had entered Japan with a certificate of identification. The document, as Masayo Duus clarifies, "was not issued by the Immigration Office. It was simply a notarized statement that Iva was leaving the United States temporarily to visit her [sick] aunt."<sup>161</sup> Toguri and her family were advised by officials that the document was only a temporary form of identification and that upon entry into Tokyo, Toguri could visit the United States Consul and apply for her passport there, when she was ready to return home.

### **Welcome Home**

Toguri's request for reentry into the United States after the war sparked controversy and protest from civic and military organizations. Her determination to return and see her family was publicized in American newspapers in the fall of 1947. The State Department was in no legal position to deny her wishes. Toguri was a U.S. citizen and all charges made against her by the Army and Justice Department had been dismissed the year before.

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<sup>161</sup> Masayo Duus, *Tokyo Rose: Orphan of the Pacific*, tr. Peter Duus (New York and Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1979), p. 46.

But her legal and social positions were two different things. Organizations such as the American Legion continued to pressure the State Department; the Kern-Millner American Legion Post of Toledo, Ohio

passed and sent to the Attorney General a resolution "to protest the re-entry into the United States of America of one woman of Japanese extraction known during World War II as 'Tokyo Rose.' This woman is un-American by birth and should the laws of this country permit her re-entry, each and every member present stated that she should be tried and convicted of treason..."<sup>162</sup>

In the winter of 1947 the FBI released a formal request in *The New York Times* that instructed anyone who had ever witnessed or heard Iva Toguri's radio broadcasting exploits to come forward with information. The FBI, it informed readers, had been pursuing a case against Toguri for two years and thus far been unsuccessful in obtaining the two witnesses against her required by law for the prosecution of treason.

The FBI announced that agents were continuing their investigation and working hard to present a case against Iva Toguri to a grand jury. They also reassured a nation fearful of her bewitching powers that "Mrs. D'Aquino is not being permitted" to return the United States "at this time."<sup>163</sup> It is the last line in the article, strategically

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<sup>162</sup> reprinted in *New York Times*, December 5, 1976, p. 125.

<sup>163</sup> *New York Times*, December 4, 1947, p. 19.

placed to soothe the anxieties of the various opposition groups.

The State Department was bent on making an example of Toguri. On August 26, 1948, Iva Toguri was rearrested for treason and extradited to the United States to be tried.

### **On the Scaffold**

Iva Toguri on was indicted by a grand jury in San Francisco, California, on October 8, 1948, and found herself facing eight specific counts of treason. She sat in jail until July 1949 before her case was heard. On July 5, 1949, the first day of jury selection for Iva's trial, Judge Michael J. Roche read the indictment to a jury panel of 110 members. Lawrence E. Davies covered the proceedings for *The New York Times*, recording the indictment that accused

her of "traitorously" giving "aid and comfort" to "enemies of the United States" by broadcasting propaganda "intended to destroy confidence in the war effort of the United States and its allies" to "undermine and lower Allied military morale," to "create nostalgia" in the minds of American soldier, and "create war weariness," and "impair the capacity of the United States to wage war against its enemies."<sup>164</sup>

Iva Toguri's charge of giving "aid and comfort" to the enemy is worth examination in context of gender subversion.

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<sup>164</sup> *New York Times*, July 6, 1949, p. 16.

During the nineteenth century woman was viewed as the angel in the wings, whose duty was to protect her husband and her family from the realities of a rapidly industrializing America. That image was still idealized in the patriarchal society of post-World War II.

Toguri had become the inverse of the legend, an anti-angel. She was a witch on trial for practicing the black art of propaganda. It was her American and Japanese identity, her duality, that overshadowed her case. She wore pigtails and giggled, she prophesized events, she had the ability to lower American soldiers' morale with "honey-voiced chitchat,"<sup>165</sup> she was Tokyo Rose - the woman with a dozen voices - the enemy other. As Vilho Harle points out,

malicious witches are a major incarnation of the Enemy, the opposite of all the positive values. Therefore, witches easily invoke an urge to purify the world through annihilation of some category of human beings imagined as agents of corruption and evil.<sup>166</sup>

Toguri was a dark and mortifying reflection to the all-white jury (six men and six women, "five of them housewives").<sup>167</sup> While white women at home had been encouraged to send cheer and comfort overseas (one advertisement advised, "SEND A STICK [of gum] IN EVERY

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<sup>165</sup> *New York Times*, September 6, 1945, p. 2

<sup>166</sup> Vilho Harle, *The Enemy with a Thousand Faces: The Tradition of the Other in Western Political Thought and History* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2000), p. 57.

<sup>167</sup> *New York Times*, July 6, 1949, p. 16.



LETTER TO YOUR SOLDIER BOY"),<sup>168</sup> Tokyo Rose had *been there*, providing the more necessary comfort (as one soldier later described it in the *Times*) of a break from the "same watches and drills, same food and smells, same heat and shipmates."<sup>169</sup>

The same American women had been held up as emblems of chastity and restraint, participants in and icons/victims of a media culture that was "thoroughly censored... puritan, chaste, and resolutely optimistic."<sup>170</sup> Meanwhile, Tokyo Rose was, as one American soldier called her, "lighthearted, and sometimes raunchy... There was a tongue-in-cheek quality to the relationship, an understanding between us."<sup>171</sup>

The jurors faced their enviable opposite, and it made no difference that Toguri was *not*, technically, Tokyo Rose. She was an exotic incarnation of all Tokyo Rose represented, and her ability to contain that multiplicity of shadowy voices within a young and innocent-looking exterior made her even more terrifying.

She was found guilty on one of eight counts of treason. The guilty verdict was based on a broadcast that aired in October of 1944, following the Battle of Leyte Gulf. In the broadcast she reportedly chided soldiers by

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<sup>168</sup> Fussell, p. 192.

<sup>169</sup> *New York Times*, December 5, 1976, p. 125.

<sup>170</sup> Fussell, p. 181.

<sup>171</sup> *New York Times*, December 5, 1976, p. 125.

saying "Orphans of the Pacific, you are really orphans now. How will you get home now that all your ships are lost?"<sup>172</sup> Toguri continued to maintain her innocence.

Toguri was released for good behavior on January 28, 1956, after serving six and a half years in the Federal Reformatory for Women at Alderson. Her persecution did not end there but continued until the mid-1970's. After her release, she was threatened with deportation by Immigration Services and restricted in her movements. For example, after prison she moved to Chicago to help her father run the family business and was put on an invisible leash that did not allow her beyond a fifty-mile radius of Chicago. The government made several attempts to "force her out of the country."<sup>173</sup>

Iva Toguri put the government in a particularly odd situation: the Supreme Court reasoned that since "Mrs. D'Aquino had not lost her American citizenship before her conviction, [she hence was] not deportable."<sup>174</sup> If Immigration officials had been successful in their attempt, it would have been the first time the government had ever denaturalized and deported a native born American citizen. The government wanted to expel Toguri and banish her from

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<sup>172</sup> *New York Times*, September 28, 1949, p. 16.

<sup>173</sup> *New York Times*, January 31, 1956, p. 3.

<sup>174</sup> *New York Times*, July 11, 1958, p. 3.

her home and family - a symbolic punishment for a woman who had desecrated the hearth.

Toguri did lose her citizenship *after* her conviction, a situation that President Ford rectified with a pardon on January 19, 1977. Among her most ardent supporters in the pardoning process had been the American soldiers to whom she had provided what they recalled as aid and comfort, and the white male jury foreman who had first pronounced her guilty. The jury, he said, had felt pressured by the hectoring of the Federal judge, and "should have had a little more guts."<sup>175</sup> Another telling apology came from the Japanese-American Citizens League, who acknowledged that they should have come to her side earlier, but were taken in by the "*legend* [my italics] of Tokyo Rose."<sup>176</sup>

Iva Toguri was only a small part of that legend, a radio station stenographer, but like Hester Prynne on the scaffold, she became a spectacle for a gawking, judgmental and ultimately titillated community, as she took the punishment for all the imagined sins of womankind.

The myth of Tokyo Rose haunts the American psyche. She was the product of Japanese wartime propaganda which fed off the already existing fantasies of G.I.s, made real by a

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<sup>175</sup> *New York Times*, February 17, 1976, p. 49.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

public eager to visualize and punish the woman whose "voice was native-American with a dash of soy sauce."<sup>177</sup> The myth of Tokyo Rose and the story of Iva Toguri oscillate and collide in the popular imagination. Tokyo Rose became a cultural symbol; she was America's Asian Eve, superimposed on the life of a real woman. Hollywood, the myth-making machine, helped shape the public perception of the monstrous broadcaster as much as the press coverage after the war. The cinema, another form of public spectacle, envisioned Tokyo Rose as one woman with a devilish voice, bent on the destruction of white American men. Lew Landers (1946), Etienne Perier (1961) and Clint Eastwood (2006) grapple with the myth of Tokyo Rose in their films, projecting their own image of the myth at different historical moments. Each cinematic vision indicts Tokyo Rose and therefore the American woman known as Iva Toguri.

### ***Tokyo Rose* (1946)**

Lew Landers' *Tokyo Rose* opens with a canned, orientalist score over a murky illustration of two radio towers that look like elongated pagodas. The illustration is nightmarish. The impenetrable Japanese characters

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<sup>177</sup> *New York Times*, December 5, 1976, p. 245.

imposed over the drawing fade in a slow dissolve. In a symbolic act, Hollywood assumes the role of the Orientalist and deciphers the text for audiences. The mysterious characters translated into English reveal the name *Tokyo Rose*. The film, a piece of postwar propaganda, was released at time when *Tokyo Rose's* identity was no longer a mystery. *Tokyo Rose* and Iva Toguri were interchangeable, synonyms in the popular imagination by 1946.

The image of *Tokyo Rose* changed after America's victory over Japan. On the postwar stage, an inverted image of *Tokyo Rose* as sinister stock caricature replaced the harmless, entertaining one. Propaganda radio was newly viewed as a horror and a destructive form of psychological warfare.

Landers' film brands *Tokyo Rose* as a monstrous other. Her Japanese-American identity and perceived duality reveal the nation's persistent anxiety over the threat of yellow peril, and expose cultural fears over female sexuality. In 1946, when the film was released, Iva Toguri was still in Japan. In the fall of 1945, public opinion of Toguri's wartime activities began to shift. The press informs readers that "it was uncertain whether charges would be filed against her for broadcasting sweet music and sour propaganda on the enemy radio. First it must be determined

if she is still a United States citizen."<sup>178</sup> The criminalization and denaturalization of Iva Toguri in the brief passage enforces her outsider status for readers.

With the mystery of her identity solved by the press, Landers constructed a new narrative for American audiences in which Tokyo Rose's citizenship issues are resolved and she returns home as a war criminal. *Tokyo Rose* gave audiences a resolution and a sense of containment with a complete revision of history bordering on hallucinatory fantasy.

As Richard Slotkin has pointed out in his examination of the frontier myth in American popular culture,

During the war the movie industry, like the larger culture of which it was a part, looked to its heritage of myth for moral and historical precedents that would give it a "handle" on the crisis and indicate the best course of action. The society as a whole had to learn to make war; the movie industry had to learn to make war movies.<sup>179</sup>

One of the central themes in the American frontier myth is conflict and containment. The symbolic cosmology of wilderness and enemy other changes depending on the historical context but the implied threat remains real in terms of being a danger or impediment to civilization and American values. The danger must be either totally

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<sup>178</sup> *New York Times*, Sep, 6, 1945, p. 2.

<sup>179</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman, Oklahoma: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), p. 313.

eradicated or contained (for example, the forced relocation of Native Americans to reservations in the late nineteenth century and the Japanese-American internment in World War II).

For Slotkin, the Hollywood war film followed "four basic stages of the war crisis: the pre-Pearl Harbor problems of engagement...the problem of morale arising from early defeats; the problem of defining the form and meaning of our imminent victory; and the problem of war-memory and postwar adjustments."<sup>180</sup> Lander's *Tokyo Rose* takes audiences to an imagined frontier behind Japanese enemy lines, where a lone U.S. soldier tracks an elusive enemy like the mythical pathfinder or a dime novel Buffalo Bill. An erasure of historical memory allows Landers to recreate *Tokyo Rose's* capture and in the process exposes the traumas that her broadcasts inflicted on soldiers. Before America's victory, hints of such psychological wounds were avoided or denied by Hollywood, as in William A. Wellman's *Story of GI Joe* (1945) where listening to Axis Sally (the German version of *Tokyo Rose*) was shown as a welcome respite from the grueling business of war.

The first sequence after the credits in *Tokyo Rose* is a montage that depicts U.S. soldiers listening to the

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<sup>180</sup> Slotkin, p. 315.

radio. The soldiers listen to Tokyo Rose in their foxholes, from their hospital beds and behind enemy lines in the prison camps. For Landers, no man is safe or free from her influence. She corrupts and destroys innocent soldiers through bewitchment and seduction. The main character in the film, a POW named Pete Sherman (played by Byron Barr), knows the type of threat Tokyo Rose poses to the war weary soldier. His denouncement of Tokyo Rose becomes almost evangelical, his last name perhaps an intentional mirror of the unstoppable earth-scorching general, placing the American soldier on a mythical plane in which he can face an omnipresent and nearly omnipotent Tokyo Rose on her own terms.

The film's release coincided with rise of the anti-Tokyo Rose/Iva Toguri movement in the U.S., particularly her desire to return home. As already noted, groups like the American Legion were vocal in their animosity towards Toguri, waging what Caroline Chung Simpson calls a "sustained campaign."<sup>181</sup> According to the Kern-Millner American Legion Post in Toledo, Ohio, the government had an

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<sup>181</sup> Caroline Chung Simpson, "How Rose Becomes Red: The Case of Tokyo Rose and the Postwar Beginnings of Cold War Culture," *An Absent Presence: Japanese Americans in Postwar American Culture, 1943-1946* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2001), p. 82.



obligation to pursue charges against a woman whom they believed was "un-American by birth."<sup>182</sup>

The Legion's cry mimicked those uttered in the late nineteenth century by nativists who supported restrictions on immigration and on U.S. citizenship for immigrants like the Chinese and Japanese.

The fear of being un-American would take on a new meaning during the cold war. The threat of communism presented Americans with a foe whose superficial resemblance to friends and neighbors made them unrecognizable. In a cold war culture of paranoia, this quality created an enemy with the real, bodily power - once attributed to the disembodied voice of Tokyo Rose - to be omnipresent.

During the war, America's enemy had been recognizable. With the collapse of the Axis powers, pre-war antagonisms and tensions with Russia returned. America's former wartime ally became the U.S.'s ideological enemy. The new political climate forced America to seek out new alliances and reconcile old prejudices. Japan's position was tenuous and suspect at best even with the U.S occupation. But as Caroline Chung Simpson points out, Japan's position as ally in the fight against communism was in bud. For Simpson

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<sup>182</sup> reprinted in *New York Times*, December 5, 1976, p. 125.

The corridor of time during which "Tokyo Rose" was tried and convicted, roughly early 1946 and until late 1949, represented instead a period of transition between the wartime antagonisms toward Japan and all things Japanese and the later cold war mood of a marriage or partnership with Japan as a safeguard against the influence of communism.<sup>183</sup>

Toguri, then, becomes the last in a line of dragon ladies whose treachery lies on the surface of their exotic faces and silky voices. The film *Tokyo Rose* is therefore required to present audiences with two dialectally charged images of the Japanese. In the shifting climate, Landers tries to capture an alternate Japanese identity running counter to that of Tokyo Rose and the Japanese military. The image of the Japanese as cruel and cunning enemy is a prominent theme in the film, but Landers complicates the narrative when Sherman forges an allegiance with a small group of Japanese saboteurs. Unlike Tokyo Rose, the rebels use the radio to *aid* the U.S military in their in the fight. The radio eventually comes to symbolize restoration rather than destruction.

The opening montage tells a different story. Sherman can't stand the sound of Tokyo Rose's voice. He tells the men to turn the broadcast off. The soldiers do not understand why Sherman makes such a fuss: her broadcasts are harmless. Sherman chastises the men and tells his naive

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<sup>183</sup> Simpson, p. 83.

friends (and the viewer) a story about an unfortunate soldier named Joe, a young man, who missed his wife and lost his life because he listened to Tokyo Rose too much, and took her lies and seemingly playful taunts to heart.

Sherman's story unfolds in flashback and has a noirish tone. The tale blurs the line between the battlefield and the urban garden. When Sherman tells his fellow POWs that "there was this kid, and there was this night, and her voice," he spins a dark fable about the power of the wrong kind of woman and a man's loss of innocence. The female voice as medium of mayhem and destruction touches on the biblical theme of Adam and Eve. The archaic image of Eve whispering to Adam as she coaxes him towards his fall is a classic representation of the femme fatale.

In the flashback, the men sit around the radio and listen to Tokyo Rose as she creates a vision of America without its faithful young husbands and dutiful, devoted boyfriends. The national body and female body are interchangeable. War has left the body vulnerable to sexual exploitation and moral corruption. The horrific implication of Tokyo Rose's taunts is that the war has created a group of displaced men and made them impotent to contain a body out of control.

Don't be a dope, Joe. While you're lying out there in the mud she is out with a guy riding around in a swell car, playing the juke joints. Has she sent you a letter lately, Joe? I bet she hasn't... I bet you haven't heard from her for a long, long time... Don't let her tell you the mails are slow, Joe... The other guys in your outfit are getting letters, aren't they? Not you, Joe. Women forget. I ought to know. Don't be a sucker, Joe...<sup>184</sup>

The broadcast is a dark catalyst that unhinges the young soldier completely. He runs from the camp into the darkness. Sherman chases after him, but the sound of gunshots reveals that Sherman's attempts to help the young man come too late. For Sherman, Tokyo Rose is the soldier's murderer, not the bullet.<sup>185</sup>

The scene establishes Sherman's deep-seated hate for Tokyo Rose. Sherman makes it clear to the men and the viewer that he plans, like the true pathfinder, to hunt and kill Tokyo Rose.

Like the archaic Eve, the pathfinder (Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo) goes by many names, and his image, like that of femme fatale, has become ingrained in the American psyche. As Leslie Fiedler points out in his

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<sup>184</sup> *Tokyo Rose*, directed by Lew Landers, 1946.

<sup>185</sup> For a detailed and insightful examination of how the myth of Tokyo Rose circulated among soldiers, see Ann Elizabeth Pfau's chapter "The Legend of Tokyo Rose" in her book *Miss Yourlovin: GIs, Gender, and Domesticity during World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), <http://www.gutenberg-e.org/pfau/chapter5.html> (April 5, 2010). Pfau explores how Tokyo Rose broadcasts were rumored to drive soldiers insane. See her account of how "one former soldier contacted the DoJ in 1949 with an offer to testify against Toguri. He claimed that she had singled out his buddy and killed him with her words. She told the young man that his wife was unfaithful, and as a result, this soldier lost his nerve, "jumped out of his foxhole," and "was immediately mowed down by Japanese gunfire." Landers's similar dark scene exposes cultural fears over radio propaganda as a form of psychic destruction.

examination of Fenimore Cooper's tales, this "prototypical" figure is

...a law unto himself: judge and executioner, the man with the gun, the killer—however reluctant. He is the prototype of all pioneers, trappers, cowboys, and innocently destructive children of nature, which is to say of the Westerner, quick on the draw and immune to guilt.<sup>186</sup>

Sherman must destroy Tokyo Rose in order to restore the confidence and faith of the war weary soldier and reestablish a vision of America in which virtue and loyalty are restored. Sherman must eradicate the oriental Eve who has infiltrated the sacred space of the male imagination.

Landers denies his audience visual access to his monster. He uses Tokyo Rose's voice to build suspense and create tension. Lander wants the viewer to feel the same revulsion and sense of dread that Sherman experiences whenever he hears her voice. Landers' use of sound to create tension mirrors Val Lewton's technique in *Cat People* (1942) directed by Jacques Tourneur. As Chris Fujiwara points out in his analysis of *Cat People*, "The most famous of the many ellipses in the film is the refusal to show the transformation of Irena into a cat. This refusal leaves a number of traces on the film."<sup>187</sup> Landers' refusal to show

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<sup>186</sup> Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Normal, Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 1997), p. 194.

<sup>187</sup> Chris Fujiwara, *Jacque Tourneur: The Cinema of Nightfall* (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 77.

Tokyo Rose creates a powerful sense of absence. It is the same kind of absence that marks Lewton and Tourneur's film. According to J.P. Telotte in *Dreams of Darkness: Fantasy and the Films of Val Lewton*, Tourneur and Lewton "understood the fundamental relation between our perception of the world and our conception of its nature."<sup>188</sup> For Lewton and Tourneur, the tight budget restrictions of B-movie shooting forced the men to be creative in their sound design and lighting in lieu of expensive special effects. Thus, as Telotte points out, in terms of a clever cinematic device "absence serves a fundamental rhetorical purpose, akin to the literary convention of atmosphere."<sup>189</sup> Being denied the monster's physical or visual presence, the viewer is left to imagine its form as it lurks unseen in the shadows.

For Telotte, the rhetorical strategy used in *Cat People* creates what Jacques Derrida calls a "deferred presence."<sup>190</sup> The very act of displacement triggers a warning in the viewer's subconscious that implies that "It [the monster] must be something that stubbornly resists

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<sup>188</sup> J.P. Telotte, *Dreams of Darkness: Fantasy and the Films of Val Lewton*, (Chicago, Urban: The University of Illinois Press, 1985), p. 22.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*.

signification."<sup>191</sup> What the forced confrontation reveals is that

What we fear in those disconcerting absences are, after a fashion, truly monstrous presences, but they are our own creation, modeled on a most disturbing anxiety-absence of meaning, of order, of any discernable difference between man and the dark, enigmatic realm in which he must live.<sup>192</sup>

In "deferring" Tokyo Rose's presence, Landers exposes the west's anxiety over an industrialized Japan. Landers' Tokyo Rose is a composite of orientalist stereotypes; she is the dragon lady, the geisha and Fu Manchu. In the film, Tokyo Rose uses science and technology to vanquish her American enemies, like the Chinese pulp villains exemplified by Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu and Caniff's Dragon Lady;<sup>193</sup> she is highly educated and familiar with the west and American culture. As William F. Wu has pointed out in his examination of Chinese immigrants and their representation in American literature and popular culture, it is Fu Manchu the "evil genius who personifies the Asian threat."<sup>194</sup> What makes him such a frightening figure,

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., pp. 23-24.

<sup>193</sup> With the beginning of U.S. involvement in World War II, the Dragon Lady, though still suspect, formed an uneasy alliance with the heroes of Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates* comic strip, as both battled a common Japanese enemy.

<sup>194</sup> William F. Wu, *The Yellow Peril: Chinese American in American Fiction 1850-1940* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1982), p. 164.

according to Wu, is that "he is an Asian whose behavior is uncontrolled by Europeans and White Americans."<sup>195</sup>

The fear of technology in the hands of the enemy surfaces when Sherman and the other soldiers are taken from the POW camp to Tokyo Radio by the chief of Japanese propaganda, Colonel Suzuki. The colonel informs the soldiers that the Japanese government needs their cooperation to dispel rumors that American soldiers have been mistreated. Suzuki's intentions on the surface appear genuine, he provides the malnourished men with a bountiful meal and promises them that every effort will be made to ensure their comfort. He implores the soldiers to eat. He presents himself as their amiable and gracious host. He only asks in return that the men answer a few questions about themselves, and go on Tokyo Radio to talk to the folks back home. The colonel's ingratiating performance, an obvious deception, makes his seemingly innocuous request menacing.

Suzuki casually tells the soldiers that they are part of an important study, one conducted by someone very familiar to them, who unfortunately can not join the men because she fears that a few of the boys dislike her. Tokyo Rose's familiar voice greets the men from a speaker that

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p. 182.



Japanese soldiers set up in the room. Like a true monster, she watches her victims from a hiding place. Her ability to see and listen to the men without their knowledge establishes her hierarchical position and taps into racial fears of the "uncontrolled Asian" in power.

This is Tokyo Rose speaking to you. It is good to see American faces again and hear American voices. The same faces and the same voices I once knew in the good ole U.S.A. I'd like nothing better than to meet you all in person and have a nice long heart-to-heart with you but they won't let me play it that way. They feel that some of you boys don't like me. You were brought here from prison camps so that I might study you and your reaction. You see, I've been away from America for so long that I've kind of lost touch. You might call this a sort of Gallup poll. I want to know how you boys are reacting to my program, who you are and all about you. Now, I'll listen while Colonel Suzuki asks you some questions.<sup>196</sup>

Tokyo Rose - ironically invoking such all-American marketing techniques as focus groups and the Gallup poll - emerges as a hermaphroditical figure. Landers takes Sax Rohmer's character and subverts him in an unconscious gender inversion. Tokyo Rose may have sounded like a woman but she acted like a man in power, with the same authority as Colonel Suzuki. Landers' phantasm is sinister rather than sensual. Her desire to reconnect with America through a "heart-to-heart" with the soldiers allows her to assume the role of sensitive pal and subvert hegemonic gender

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<sup>196</sup> *Tokyo Rose*.

norms which subscribe to the idea that women bond with others emotionally, in contrast to men, who take a more detached and analytical approach in establishing a connection to others. Tokyo Rose's scientific quest exposes her twisted, pathological nature.

The scene touches on the theme of the mad scientist out of control who performs cultural taboos on the human body. Dr. Frankenstein hidden in his laboratory stitching a pastiche of organs together resonates in the popular imagination as a classic example of science run amok. Obsession likewise drives Tokyo Rose. Her insatiable hunger for information makes her an unsettling female villain. Like Dr. Frankenstein, she wants to unlock the secrets of the mind. Nora Cook, in her reading of *Frankenstein*, points out that the novel

invented the archetypal mad scientist, whose vainglorious obsession with realising *anything* that the human mind can conceive and whose refusal to set artificial limits to human capabilities threaten to destroy the very humanity that they claim to benefit and ennoble.<sup>197</sup>

Tokyo Rose's access to American soldiers and their objectification as disposable lab rats presented audiences with a vision of a woman without emotional or moral boundaries. Her willingness to delve deep into the American

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<sup>197</sup> Nora Cook, "Mary Shelly, *Author of Frankenstein*" *A Companion to the Gothic*, David Punter, ed. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p. 62.

psyche in search of signs of vulnerability made her the ultimate threat to a nation whose fear of the yellow peril still lingered. Landers' film on a metanarrative level allowed audiences to process postwar traumas. The painful memories of war and the nation's sacrifices become part of a mythic tale of transformation and regeneration founded on violent confrontation with an enemy that threatens to destroy civilization. The ideological theme satisfies a cultural, cathartic need. In order to purge the nation's collective consciousness, Sherman must confront the thing he abhors.

According to Sheng-Mei Ma in his examination of Orientalist stereotypes, what unsettled American audiences about Fu Manchu and Ming the Merciless was that the comic book villains "were the West's own shadow."<sup>198</sup> Landers' deliberate displacement of Tokyo Rose enables a shadow self to manifest from the recesses of the American psyche. In her absence, gender roles collapse to produce a masculine/feminine force to challenge the idea that one's identity or even sexuality are fixed.

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<sup>198</sup> Sheng-Mei Ma, *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity*, (Minneapolis & London: The University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 10.

Chung Yu (the leader of the underground resistance) and his band of fighters function as the foil to Tokyo Rose's monstrous presence in a cinematic twist.

Chung Yu is Sherman's Chingachgook, the noble savage. He knows the wilderness intimately because he is a part of that unknown realm. Chung Yu provides Sherman with direction. His presence enables the soldier to contain his hatred and see the world anew. Sherman's hatred for Tokyo Rose has prevented him from seeing the possibility of a friend in Japan. Chung Yu, like Tokyo Rose, exists in the shadows, at the margins where civilization and darkness collide. He and his men live in a cavern, deep underground, like seeds in the soil. Chung Yu and his men are the personification Japan's rebirth.

Sherman's union with the underground resistance enables him to kidnap Tokyo Rose. Her appearance at the end of the film is anticlimactic. The two men capture her in her web or lair, the broadcast booth. She doesn't struggle, nor does she say a whole lot in the confrontation. The demystification of Tokyo Rose reveals a woman without a voice. Without her broadcast booth and microphone, she becomes powerless - an evil Wizard of Oz ripped from behind her curtain, stripped of power and desexualized. In a bizarre revision of history, the bombing of Hiroshima

coincides with Tokyo Rose's kidnapping. The bombing, a literal scorching of the earth (of which Sherman is the harbinger), destroys the savage wilderness.

With America's victory, Sherman's desire for vengeance subsides. He puts Tokyo Rose on a submarine back to the U.S. to stand trial. Chung Yu and his men remain behind to create a new garden, absent of Eve.

### **She Recognized Her Voice**

According to Hollywood, Tokyo Rose's voice marked her and made her instantly recognizable. Her voice defined her, the way an ugly scar incriminates a fiend in a line-up. In *Bridge to the Sun* (1961), directed by Etienne Perier, Tokyo Rose appears in a strange cameo, dressed in traditional Japanese attire. The film, based on Gwen Terasaki's autobiography, was one of the few films released by Hollywood to depict the Japanese experience during World War II objectively, without caricature. The love affair between an American woman and a Japanese diplomat was a bold subject. Perier takes xenophobic prejudices to task in the film but, like Landers, embraces the myth of Tokyo Rose.

Loyalty is one of the underlying themes. Hidenari Terasaki (Gwen's husband) opposes his country's entry into the war. Like a true diplomat, Terasaki acts as an intermediary between the two countries. The bombing of Pearl Harbor hinders his efforts to defuse hostilities. Terasaki, along with his wife and family, are deported to Japan, where they become the subjects of political and social scrutiny. Suspicion clings to the Terasaki family. The Teraskis occupy a liminal position in Japan much like Iva Toguri herself did during the war.

In the brief scene involving Tokyo Rose, Gwen Terasaki (Carroll Baker) tries to help her husband, who has disappeared and is in hiding from the military police. In an attempt to save her husband's life, Gwen visits his childhood friend Jiro for assistance. Jiro, a high-ranking government official, resents Terasaki's political position and views him as a traitor. Jiro disapproves of Terasaki's marriage to Gwen as well. Jiro agrees to help Gwen, quid pro quo. Jiro's deviousness and coldness expose the director's slip; he becomes a caricature much like Landers' own lackey to Tokyo Rose, Colonel Suzuki. Jiro's seemingly genuine line "Perhaps there is a way to help him [Terasaki]

that will make all happy"<sup>199</sup> creates a scene in which Gwen must make a moral decision.

Perier, whose film has been meticulous in its period and cultural details up until its transformation of Jiro into a stock villain, succumbs to complete fantasy when Jiro introduces Gwen to Tokyo Rose.

Hawthorne's tale of Young Goodman Brown meeting the devil in the woods resonates in the exchange between the two women. Tokyo Rose is Perier's well-mannered devil and the mirror image of Gwen Terasaki.

Tokyo Rose assumes that she knows Gwen's secret self, when she says "Mrs. Terasaki, how nice that you married one of us. Jiro San told me all about you and I thought how lovely if you would be my guest star some evening."<sup>200</sup>

The implication that "you married one of us" has a double meaning. The Japanese and devil become one and the same in Perier's forest. Tokyo Rose's "us" functions as a denouncement. Tokyo Rose rejects her U.S. citizenship and sees herself as Japanese. To her, Gwen's union to Terasaki reflects Gwen's own crossing over.

Gwen recognizes the woman immediately and exclaims "Tokyo Rose." For Perier, Tokyo Rose relishes her celebrity

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<sup>199</sup> *Bridge to the Sun*, directed by Etienne Perier, 1961.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

like a true devil when she replies, "Aren't you sweet. You recognize my voice."<sup>201</sup> Gwen's sour response, "How could I ever forget it?" reinforces the mythic notion that Tokyo Rose is one woman (by implication Iva Toguri) with a distinct, seductive voice.

In the sequence, Gwen's political allegiance to her country and her devotion to her husband are reaffirmed. Gwen's loyalty establishes her identity as a proper white American woman.

Gwen refuses the invitation to join in a performance with her doppelganger, even after Jiro offers her ration cards as a temptation. Gwen chooses starvation rather than degradation. Gwen's brief parting speech polarizes the two women.

It is mighty tempting... All that beautiful food I could buy. But I don't believe that I could swallow it. Why, it would turn to poison quicker than you could say Benedict Arnold-San.<sup>202</sup>

Gwen's last glance as she leaves Jiro's office is not at her husband's childhood friend but is directed toward Tokyo Rose. Gwen rejects the projected mirror image before her and remains a virtuous woman.

The speech is replete with subtext. Biblical allusions to the first sin, to Snow White and the poisonous apple,

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.



combine with images of Revolutionary America that place Tokyo Rose in the pantheon of iconic traitors.

In the American imagination, Tokyo Rose was one woman, as the *New York Times* makes clear in its 1956 coverage of Toguri's release from Alderson prison. As far as the press was concerned, jail time had not rehabilitated America's famous traitor. The *Times* advised its readers that "Tokyo Rose Quits Jail; Shows No Repentance."<sup>203</sup> Toguri, like Hester Prynne, emerged from prison not as repentant sinner but a woman whose "views... had not changed."<sup>204</sup> There is a hint of puritanical scorn and judgment in the reporter's tone when recounting her demeanor. The observation that Toguri "showed no repentance for the broadcasts in which she taunted United States troops with swing music and talk of home,"<sup>205</sup> publicly chastises her for a lacking a sense of moral consciousness. The charge that she "taunted" men with music and "talk" reminds readers of her crimes, and penalizes her for silence - an opposite form of betrayal. Toguri, like Hester Prynne, exposes a sense of agency in her refusal to grant the public a confession. Toguri's only quote in the brief piece is her demand that "All I ask is a

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<sup>203</sup> *New York Times*, Jan. 29, 1956, p. 41.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid*.

50-50 chance to get back on my feet.”<sup>206</sup> The request, a truly American response, has an ideological core, anchored in one of the nation’s founding myths that America is a place where an individual can begin anew.

Two decades would pass before Toguri would receive a presidential pardon by Gerald Ford. In 1976, *The New York Times* ran a profile piece on Iva Toguri by John Leggett. Leggett’s retrospective explores Toguri’s trial, her life after prison and mounting public support for her redress. Leggett takes an introspective approach to his subject, when he ponders whether or not Toguri was a “traitor” or “scapegoat.”<sup>207</sup> Like Hawthorne, Leggett refracts the public’s gaze and puts his readers on a pedestal for examination.

Juxtaposed with photos of Toguri is a cartoon by Milton Caniff. In the cartoon, a happy G.I. fantasizes about Tokyo Rose. With his eyes closed, the soldier leans back with his hands clasped behind his head and smokes a cigarette. In Caniff’s illustration, his famous Dragon Lady and the mythical siren merge to form his “vision of the woman G.I.’s thought of when they heard ‘Tokyo Rose.’”<sup>208</sup> Caniff’s vixen reclines on a chaise lounge as she holds a

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> *New York Times*, December 5, 1976.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

microphone with the name Tokyo Rose emblazoned on it. Bare breasted women surround her as she broadcasts to the happy, smiling listener. The women around Tokyo Rose occupy a subservient position to Caniff's radio dominatrix. Each woman performs specific duty, from serving food to lighting Tokyo Rose's cigarettes.

Caniff acknowledges Tokyo Rose as a source of wartime fantasy but his well-intentioned parody only exposes old stereotypes. Unable to reconcile the fantasy of the sexualized, Asian female body, Caniff's cartoon becomes an ambiguous scarlet letter stitched to Toguri's narrative.

### ***Flags of Our Fathers* (2006)**

In 2006, Clint Eastwood directed *Flags of Our Fathers*, imbuing it with a brutality reminiscent of Sam Fuller's violent and oftentimes nightmarish visions of war. Eastwood uses his lens to explore the battle of Iwo Jima and the U.S. flag-raising on Mount Suribachi. The photograph of the flag and the U.S. marines who raised it represent a mythic moment for Eastwood. *Flags of Our Fathers* functions as a social commentary on the power of myth. The entwining of image and myth form a cultural war narrative that renews the nation's patriotic spirit. The visual representation of

the soldiers' symbolic act instills the public with a sense of hope and a belief that victory is at hand. The photograph provides a cathartic charge and an emotional release to a beleaguered nation. Eastwood wants to take the viewer beyond the borders of the photograph and rupture the myth to reveal a counter-narrative.

In one sense, however, his counter-narrative hews to the old line. For Eastwood, propaganda radio is as much a threat and just as deadly as gunfire or a grenade. In his quest for historical accuracy, Eastwood shows U.S. soldiers listening to an Orphan Ann broadcast as their convoy sails to Iwo Jima.

In a gesture toward historical authenticity, Eastwood makes a point of using the broadcast name "Orphan Ann," with which Toguri was actually identified, rather than the expected "Tokyo Rose."

Yet this very detail reveals that the myth of Toguri as a lone verbal assassin remains intact. "Toguri was called Orphan Ann, not Tokyo Rose," the film seems to proudly trumpet its accuracy. But in getting it "right," the filmmakers isolate and incriminate Toguri again.

The men sit in claustrophobic quarters and listen to the radio. Orphan Ann's broadcast fills the cramped space. The enemy voice is invasive. For Eastwood, such broadcasts

were anything but escapist activities for the men who listened.

The tension created within the frame by the tight shot and closed space is heightened by exterior shots of the convoy in route in the Pacific. The soldiers' ship, flanked on either side by others, moves steadily forward toward battle. Like the men cramped in closed quarters, the ships are enclosed in tight formation.

Eastwood's Orphan Ann is an apocalyptic prophet foreshadowing betrayal, absence and death. Her monstrous voice invades the scene. Like the young men, the viewer becomes part of her audience. Emotional excess permeates the sequence. Eastwood's Orphan Ann taunts her radio listeners with images of remorseless female infidelity. She is not playful or coy as in most other portrayals of such broadcasts, even - or especially - during the time of the war, but cold, calculating and malicious. Her propaganda broadcast is a word bomb that detonates the moment unsuspecting young men turn on the radio. Her threat exists in her ability to emasculate and undermine soldiers. Like the viewer watching Eastwood's historical reenactment, the listener within the scene is asked to imagine scenes of home.

Home becomes an imagined space that represents loss and absence. In her depiction of the American home, other men occupy the sacred space. The final absence Eastwood's Orphan Ann asks soldiers to conjure is their own funerals. The soldier as spectator and specter occupies a precarious position. The power of suggestion as a psychological weapon is explicit and functions as an ideological statement. The scene is short but Orphan Ann's power as an agent of destruction is clear. Orphan Ann emerges as a war villain.

Eastwood made one of the few American films since *Bridge to the Sun* to attempt a view of the war from the Japanese side - a companion piece to *Flags of Our Fathers* called *Letters From Iwo Jima*. It is instructive that like Perier before him, he finds the figure of Tokyo Rose impossible to reconcile or imagine with any complexity.

*Flags of Our Fathers* as a cinematic indictment ruptures one myth only to reinforce another iconic wartime image. As historical signifier, Eastwood's Orphan Ann presents viewers with an image of one woman, one voice. Iva Toguri's public image and identity after the war were entwined in a postwar war narrative of betrayal. Toguri's charge presented the public with two transgressive images of a woman. She was the unpatriotic traitor of not only her country but also her sex. Like the original image of the

soldiers raising the flag, which *Flags of Our Fathers* ironically shatters and reassembles, Eastwood's representation of Orphan Ann obscures a counter-narrative silenced by a professional mythologist.

### The Abductions of Patricia Hearst

Once she began watching the movies, she noticed a curious thing: They all seemed to be about her. Not in their design but in their narrative pattern—it was too eccentric and too consistent to be a fluke.... She sees *Thieves Like Us*.... She sees *Big Bad Mama*... She sees *The Wind and the Lion*... She sees *Sleeper*... She sees *Dog Day Afternoon*... She sees *Going Places*... She sees *The Sugarland Express*... Christopher Sorrentino, *Trance*

The boy's eyes widened in awe as he watched how deftly I could remove the ammo clip, and then ram the clip home again in the weapon. It was as though I was giving a performance... Patricia Campbell Hearst, *Every Secret Thing*

Images of Patricia Hearst as Tania wielding her carbine in the Hibernia bank robbery and the defiant photo of her poised in front of a Symbionese Liberation Army banner, gun raised and ready for action, continue to fascinate and frighten a public obsessed with a cipher. Hearst's violent kidnapping in 1974 from her Berkley apartment by the SLA and her questionable criminal activities with the group are part of American history and cultural lore.

Hearst's kidnapping, her suspect conversion to Tania, and her time spent on the lam in her lesser known guise as Pearl, function as sources of fantasy and desire, transforming Hearst into an interlocker that connects artists, writers, and audiences to a shared and imagined experience of transformation.



The machine-gun brandishing revolutionary Tania taps into the American archetypal figure of the female gangster or outlaw woman exemplified by the legends of Bonnie Parker and Ma Barker. Hearst's ability to seamlessly assume new personas links her to another archetype - that of the female trickster. Pearl, the evocatively gestative pseudonym used by Hearst in her "missing year" fittingly calls forth the image of Hester Prynne's elf-like child who was most at home in the woods.<sup>209</sup>

The artist becomes a ghost hunter looking for the remains of the real Patty Hearst (the press quickly infantilized her as "Patty," in much the same fashion that they domesticated "Lizzie" Borden). Flashes of Patricia, Patty, Tania, and Pearl emerge and fade. Depending on the particular vision, Hearst's elusive double may materialize as a transgressive force whose acts and voice work to challenge conventional gender roles, or manifest herself as a nightmarish figure who reveals the hidden monster in all women.

Neither subversion of her story is ever complete or fully articulated because Hearst's tale never ends. She remains a *real* woman whose continuing narrative exists in

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<sup>209</sup> "missing year" refers to Patricia Hearst's time spent on the run with Teko and Yolanda Harris in which she assumed the name Pearl as an alias.

tandem with the imaginary. Hearst survived her kidnapping, trial, and incarceration, and returned to society, where she assumed a new identity as wife and mother, the antithesis of Tania. Her image and role as survivor, homemaker and socialite, however, never fully mends the fissures created by Tania or Pearl. Hearst herself is an artist at play with her own image, as can be seen in her collaborations with John Waters and her numerous cameo appearances on TV, for example, in her role as Selma Hearst Rose on the detective series *Veronica Mars*, where she is socialite seduced by a young woman passing as a lesbian, a plotline playing on the sexual anxieties that circulated around her own kidnapping. In the episode, in fact, Hearst's character fakes her own abduction. The series is set in California, at the fictional Hearst College, named for an ancestor of the *fictional* Hearst.

The writers can tweak so many aspects of Hearst's story because they are so familiar, and so endlessly malleable. My goal is not to do an exhaustive survey of such permutations but rather to illuminate the various ways Hearst's narrative and image surface as commodities that are consumed in a variety of media. Hearst, like Hester Prynne, is a quintessential woman on display, who in her ambiguities strikes a chord in the American psyche, one

that touches on issues of becoming, passing, and authenticity, exposing our nation's deep-seated fear over the fluidity of a woman's identity - the anxiety that perhaps, beneath her mannered façade, lurks a woman with agency. Persecuted, punished, pardoned and forever contested, the real Patty Hearst remains at large.

### **Paul Schrader's *Freak Show*: The Patty Hearst Experience**

The VHS cover of Paul Schrader's 1988 film *Patty Hearst* is slightly altered from the original theatrical poster. The image of Hearst's ghostly white face shrouded in darkness remains, as does her defiant stare. As on the poster, it is left to the viewer's imagination to decide whether Hearst's mouth is gagged, slashed, or torn like a piece of storybook paper from her face. The image is unsettling regardless of the reading. What sets the VHS cover apart from the original theatrical poster is that Hearst's name is branded across her forehead in bold scarlet letters. Even before the movie starts, Hearst is transformed into a spectacle, with the caption that invites the viewer to step right up and see the "HEIRESS, VICTIM, CRIMINAL, [and witness] THE ASTONISHING REAL-LIFE ORDEAL," of Patty Hearst.

The plot description on the back cover turns Paul Schrader's adaptation of Hearst's tale into a memetic device capable of transference, as well as a ticket to a sideshow. The lure is the promise of access to Hearst's secrets and the chance to witness her "transformation" (the spectacle of metamorphosis):

"People still don't know what actually happened," says Patty Hearst. Now you can. This spellbinding film explores the biggest crime/political/media story of the '70's: the kidnapping and mental torture of newspaper heiress Patty Hearst by the Symbionese Liberation Army and her subsequent transformation into a gun-wielding revolutionary called Tania.<sup>210</sup>

The exploitation of the female body is couched in the guise of a biopic and exposé, allowing the viewer to transgress social boundaries and witness the violation and torture of a woman without leaving the comforts of the home. The film's claim that "Hearst's real-life" ordeal will be revealed, insulates the viewer from the role of deviant because the act of voyeurism is displaced by the illusion of dispassionate historicism.

Elements of exoticism - the chance to visit and experience strange locales and see the other in its natural habitat - surface in the film's promotional claim that the movie takes you on a "fascinating odyssey through the

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<sup>210</sup> *Patty Hearst* (1988), directed by Paul Schrader, promotional packaging.

revolutionary underworld"<sup>211</sup> - an underworld in which Natasha Richardson as Hearst becomes a vessel that enables "you [to] experience Patty's fear and confusion every step of the way."<sup>212</sup> The possibility for cinematic excess lies in the promo copy's claim that audiences can "experience Hearst's traumas."<sup>213</sup> The words "odyssey" and "underworld" act as verbal cues to emphasize that Hearst's journey is an epic one.

Schrader opens the film with a high-angle long shot of an empty concrete walkway. A young, unidentified woman walks into the frame. The extreme camera angle prevents the viewer from seeing her face. An omniscient female voice penetrates the scene. The narrator begins her story as a reflection on her "normal childhood":

My four sisters and I weren't raised like rich kids. We were privileged, even over privileged, not spoiled.<sup>214</sup>

The displaced narrator and image are schematically at odds, each one seemingly too distant from the other to align neatly into a temporal match. Memories lifted from Patricia Hearst's autobiography are paraphrased as the camera seamlessly pans down into a continuous tracking shot that subtly shifts from a long to a medium. Schrader's tight

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> *Patty Hearst*.

focus pulls the viewer into the scene but the schism between voiceover and image remains.

The phantasmal voice clashes with the image of the non-threatening college student wandering around Berkeley. In the sequence, body and voice are disconnected, split in half: an active imagined body versus Richardson's passive material one. Richardson's movement encapsulates a female body without direction, purpose, or voice. Schrader and his screenwriter Nicholas Kazan unconsciously cobble together an auditory manifestation of a monstrous woman. Female agency surfaces as the undesirable element in the soliloquy:

I knew best what was right and wrong for me. Most things came easily to me, sports, social relationships, schoolwork, life. I grew up in a sheltered environment supremely self-confident. I knew, or I thought I knew, who I was. More a doer than a thinker, athlete than a student, a social being than a loner. I was ever practical. I could see people and situations plainly without frills, and never doubted my ability to handle myself well in any circumstance.<sup>215</sup>

In the first chapter of *Every Secret Thing* Hearst presents herself as normal, confident, talented, average, and upper class. These characteristics are verbalized but the internal conflicts that creep out in Hearst's autobiography are eclipsed by Kazan's tweaking of the

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<sup>215</sup> *Patty Hearst.*

material. Distilled fragments reveal a fractured image of Hearst. Hearst's "I thought that I knew what was best for me..." becomes Kazan's "I knew what was right or wrong for me." Hearst's more ambivalent "I thought I could see people and situations plainly" receives a similarly subtle but telling twist.<sup>216</sup> The edited phrases change the tone of the voiceover. Kazan's scripted testimony presents a woman who may be a wee bit too self-confident.

Omitted from Kazan's soliloquy are the self-doubt and personal criticisms that briefly surface in the early section of Hearst's autobiography:

On the downside, however, I always considered myself too short in comparison with my girlfriends. Throughout my teenage years, I was chagrined to be only five feet two and practiced standing up and trying to look five feet seven.<sup>217</sup>

Schrader and Kazan selectively silence Hearst's voice and appropriate her experience to produce an uncanny doppelganger. The sequence ends in a medium close-up of the young woman's face in a sudden freeze frame. She stares at the camera and the audience as the narrator offers a cautionary aside "there is little one can do to prepare for the unknown."<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Patricia Hearst with Alvin Moscow, *Every Secret Thing* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1982), p. 4.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>218</sup> *Patty Hearst.*

The university, with its buildings, quad and open green spaces that safely contain the woman, no longer holds her as the screen goes black. The disembodied voice and material body are conjoined. The violent union and subsequent fade-out symbolically foreshadows the young woman's fall.

From the darkness, Patty Hearst's name explodes on screen in large white letters. Flashes from Hearst's life, images from childhood, adolescence, and private family moments, interspersed with newspaper clippings of her abduction, saturate the screen. The montage sequence, punctuated by Scott Johnson's militaristic minimalist score, assails the spectator on a visual and auditory level.

Schrader continues with a high angle shot and slow pan that slowly draws the viewer into Hearst's dimly lit apartment. The fluid camera work creates the visceral sensation of descent. The tightly framed sequence showcase's Hearst domestic realm through a peepshow lens as the spectator spies on her in her bathrobe as she gossips and giggles on the phone about a nun. The subtly placed motif portrays Hearst as a scandalmonger - a womanly clichéd trait. Surefootedness and shallowness in a woman are the stumbling blocks that lead to a fall.



After the prologue and credit sequence, Schrader breaks the film into three sections, each employing a strikingly different stylistic choice. Of the three, the first section is both the longest and the most elaborately cinematic. The expressionistic lighting, camera techniques, and music work to mirror Hearst's inner terror and trauma, as well as provide the viewer with well established cues straight from the visual language of the horror film - crooked angles, silhouettes and shadows, ominous shafts of light stabbing through fields of darkness - emphasizing the bizarre world of the fringe guerilla group. After his early foray into expressionism, Schrader moves on in subsequent sections to a visual pastiche of formalism, realism, and cinema verite. Duncan Webster, in his analysis of Schrader's visual style, points out that

Film and viewer travel from darkness to light, almost a metaphor for the uncovering of the truth, but that reading of the trajectory is denied. Instead each section has its own style of truth (the truth of dreams, of experience, of facts). Schrader thus manages the tricky ethical and esthetic question of seeing the events through Patty Hearst's perspective without necessarily endorsing her account.<sup>219</sup>

While I agree with Webster's perceptive observation on Schrader's use of visual metaphor, that each section of the film has "its own style," I disagree that a sense of

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<sup>219</sup> Duncan Webster, " 'Nobody's Patsy': Versions of Patty Hearst," *Critical Quarterly* 32 (1990): 20.

"truth" emerges or that Schrader manages any sort of cinematic empathy with Hearst or her way of seeing. If there is a truth revealed, it is Schrader's fascination with the sexual activities of the SLA, and Hearst's sexual encounters, forced or otherwise.

It is no coincidence that the pacing of the film picks up after Teko Harris approaches Hearst to have comradely sex. We are not privy to whether she accepts or declines his offer. Either way - consent or rape - Teko's act liberates both Hearst and the film. The viewer, like Patty, is taken out of the confined space of the hideout and placed in daylight, en route to a bank robbery. The transition, metaphorically, represents a transformation of the docile female body into a sexualized one. The fear of the sexualized woman is a theme that continually surfaces in Schrader's work, for example, *Cat People* (1982), *Hardcore* (1979) and, before he turned to directing, his script for Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976).

The violated/seduced woman becomes the seducer. The cultural anxiety over where promiscuous sexual activities lead manifests itself in one of the most bizarre scenes in the film, when Hearst spontaneously kisses a kidnapped teenage boy on the lips and laughs uncontrollably afterwards. The kiss springs from Schrader's imagination

rather than from Hearst's memoir, where the boy is fascinated by Hearst's expertise with firearms, not her body, and there is no physical contact implied.

The kiss and early girlie gossip scene are Schrader's added touches. The seemingly small narrative infractions distort Hearst's voice and experience. The distortion creates friction between the screenplay and the autobiography upon which it is nominally based. The image of a woman clearing the dinner table (as Hearst is doing prior to her abduction in *Every Secret Thing*) is worlds away from one who gossips and giggles on the phone.

Fear of the monstrous woman undermines Schrader and Kazan's adaptation. Schrader's genuine attempt to understand and tell Hearst's story is overshadowed by his underlying anxiety, which prevents the agency Hearst manifests in her autobiography from surfacing onscreen. As the SLA confined the real Patricia Hearst in a closet, Schrader confines her image within the cinematic frame. Hearst's autobiography reveals a woman who realizes the fluidity of her identity and ability to perform or become "an adept actress."<sup>220</sup> Hearst performed in order to survive.

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<sup>220</sup> Hearst, p. 257.

Hal Hinson, in his scathing review of the film for the *Washington Post*, picks up on Schrader's abduction of Hearst's agency when he observes how,

sitting in her closet, Patty never struggles to hold on to herself; she is compliant, vapid, victimized but unsympathetic. And because Schrader is repulsed by her, we feel ourselves shrink away as well, in disgust.<sup>221</sup>

The passive woman in the closet is Schrader's creation, symbolically positioned right from the beginning for an inevitable fall.

Schrader turns Hearst into a curiosity the moment the film starts. The body (not just Hearst's) and its acts become a source of fear and revulsion - the captive/violated body, revolutionary body, the sexual body, the depraved body. Schrader create a mise en scene where bodies perform in a Dantesque environment. His tour of guerilla flophouses reveals (and revels in) a labyrinthine den of vice where interracial couples drink wine, smoke cigarettes, and copulate in an almost nineteenth-century middleclass vision of hell. The SLA and their underworld prove too strong for Schrader's Hearst to resist. In the end, her transformation hinges not on trauma, fear, or brainwashing, but seduction. Hearst is seduced by the devil

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<sup>221</sup> Hal Hinson, review of *Patty Hearst*, directed by Paul Schrader, *Washington Post* (originally published September 28, 1988), [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/pattyhearstrhinson\\_a0c8cb.htm](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/pattyhearstrhinson_a0c8cb.htm) (March 29, 2010).

that lurks in the urban garden. Hearst becomes Tania, the lascivious woman, out of control, with the power to seduce and corrupt young America in the back of a van.

Schrader's obsession with the fallen woman undercuts his ability to get the story across. Schrader cannot reconcile Hearst's liminal position with his rigidly constructed and subdivided hell. The final sequence ends with Hearst in a medium close-up in prison. Schrader's Hearst delivers a defiant speech to her father but the audience is the real focus of her wrath. Hearst's speech functions in the same way as an early American criminal confession - as a direct message to the community from which the outsider has been severed:

I want to confront people's prejudices about me. I'm a woman and I had se... I was forced to have sex with my captors, so they think I'm a whore. See, people fantasized about me so long they thought they knew me. When I finally surfaced, real person, real story, I was inconvenient. But I'm here and I'll let them know it too... I made a mistake hiding from the press. I let people keep their fantasies. I hope to let people see the real me, to demystify myself.<sup>222</sup>

The confession is Schrader's, not Hearst's. The speech becomes a way for Schrader to cinch an ending for himself and audiences. For Schrader, Hearst's odyssey ends behind bars; the sexualized outlaw remains safely contained for the moment. Schrader's speech endows his vision of Hearst

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<sup>222</sup> *Patty Hearst.*

with agency and subverts it. Richardson as Hearst becomes the whore who has to explain herself in a way that justifies Schrader's vision.

### **Raymond Pettibon and the Perversion of Patty**

In 1989, a year after Paul Schrader's Hollywood adaptation of Patricia Hearst's autobiography, independent filmmaker Raymond Pettibon released his underground film *Citizen Tania*. The film, produced, written, and directed by Pettibon and co-director Dave Markey, presents a radically different vision of Patricia Hearst as Tania. The film's satirical and sleazy pulp tone reflects Pettibon's affinity for pop art and his appreciation for the early seventies Los Angeles punk movement.

The movie's vulgarity and subculture positioning mark it as an object of low-culture or trash cinema, a punk rock endeavor aimed at challenging mainstream Hollywood and the standards of good taste. The filmmakers, like all true revolutionaries, have a manifesto. Their ideological communiqué appears on the back of the VHS cover.

The Human Wave Series was begun ... for the purpose of presenting distinctive films shot and edited in home format video technology. The economic ease with which this medium is used allows artist to bypass the economically-and ultimately aesthetically-inefficient

high capitalization media of standard film production. Provisional [Pettibon's company] intends to continue to release important works in this most essential medium.<sup>223</sup>

The anti-capitalist proclamation is an object of parody. The bawdy ink illustration on the VHS cover humorously mimics the famous photo of Hearst as Tania standing in front of the SLA banner. Pettibon sexualizes both Tania and the revolutionary symbol, coiling the SLA's emblematic seven-headed cobra around Hearst's naked body and posing her seductively for admirers. In the lower right-hand corner of the illustration, Pettibon toys with the notion of transformation and identity by placing "Patty Hearst: 1954-?" over the name Tania: "1974-1975(?)." The drawing resembles a homemade band flyer or cartoonish obituary more than a movie poster. Tania is transformed into a racy revolutionary pinup girl and sex symbol for adolescent boys.

The film gamely tackles the twin fears of interracial sex and female sexual agency. The image of the monstrous woman does not haunt Pettibon or Markey the way it does Schrader. The filmmakers make no attempt to confine their vision (as we witness at the conclusion of *Patty Hearst*)

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<sup>223</sup> *Citizen Tania*, directed by Raymond Pettibon and Dave Markey, 1989.

but rather release "A free, sexy, right on Tanya (sic)." <sup>224</sup>

The humbug statement on the back cover that Pettibon and Markey "present the SLA/Patty Hearst drama of the early seventies as the final detonation of the sixties counterculture premise" <sup>225</sup> reveals the artifice of the film: although satirical detonation is indeed on full display, at no point do Pettibon and Markey pretend with Schrader to present anything historical or real. The film deals with Hearst's image as an icon. Shannon Smith as Tania sports a black beret, wears Ray Bans, and has a tattoo of the SLA symbol on her fanny. Pettibon and Markey's familiarity with the Patty Hearst saga is evident but the filmmakers purposely stray from any verisimilitude.

A Warholesque sensibility surrounds the movie. The filmmakers and their cast of nonprofessional actors participate in group collaborations. Pettibon and his crew - like Warhol and his Factory before them - are members of the same underground art and music scene. The film's audience consists of fans or practitioners of the same social movement.

On a visual level, *Citizen Tania* resembles a dysfunctional family's home movie with its rough edges and

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<sup>224</sup> *Citizen Tania*, VHS cover.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*



awkward comic moments. *Citizen Tania's* playfulness exposes how the very act of extremism reveals the absurd. Tania and the SLA are rogues in a Rabelaisian world. The clownish figures fling their foul words and revel in their own bad behavior.

The useful character of the rogue has long been associated with early folk traditions, literature, and the stage. The rogue's role is to expose hypocrisies and falsehoods that parade as truth in the official culture and language of any moralizing group. As with the fool and clown, the rogue, as Bakhtin points out, has the same uncanny ability as his counterparts do to "see the underside and the falseness of every situation. Therefore, they can exploit any position they choose, but only as a mask."<sup>226</sup>

Smith as Tania is revolutionary scamp; she wears a mask of deception in a game of peek-a-boo. She sputters profanities with a happy smile and makes the familiar seem suddenly unreal. Her utter disregard for all authority transforms her into a figure of resistance. For Pettibon, Tania is the ultimate outsider; she belongs to no one, neither the SLA nor mainstream America.

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<sup>226</sup> *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, trans. and ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 159.

Pettibon's Tania enjoys booze, sex, rebellion, violence, and her newfound power. She talks back to her captors, freely discusses her sexual encounters in SLA communiqués, and ranks (belittles) her male comrades by lining them up in the nude to judge their manly parts. Smith as Tania is the hellion and nightmare incarnate that Schrader struggles to disavow in *Patty Hearst*.

In this upside down reality, Tania dominates the SLA as an unstoppable force with the potential for unlimited regeneration: Pettibon's film ends with Tania free, pregnant, and cradling a coffee canister of Cinque's sperm on her swollen belly, as she plots with Teko and Yolanda on ways to spread the seed of the SLA. Tania reigns over a carnivalesque realm where a case of the crabs becomes a badge of honor uniting her with the common people. Pettibon and Markey's parody of Hearst's saga lampoons the extremism of ideologues like the SLA as well as a white middle-class still haunted by fears of miscegenation, the fallen woman, and youth culture. *Citizen Tania* inverts dominant cultural narratives that circulate beneath the surface of Hearst's epic tale. As Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson point out in their analysis of Mikhail Bakhtin's work on Rabelais, the carnivalesque world

usually involves mockery of all serious, "closed" attitudes about the world, and it celebrates "discrowning," that is, inverting top and bottom in any given structure. Discrowning points symbolically to the unstable and temporary nature of any hierarchy. Bakhtin generalizes these two actions into one ambivalent gesture: "debasement" or "casting-down."<sup>227</sup>

For Bakhtin, the act of "discrowning" ruptures closed systems and opens up possibilities for new interpretations and growth.

Pettibon's discrowned (or crowned) Tania is pure fantasy, with no relation to the real Patricia Hearst. His treatment of her as a character acknowledges his inability to define her. Where Schrader leans on the historical record to prop up his speculations, Pettibon mocks such speculations, such sober judgment and assurance, by distorting them in a funhouse mirror.

The comic situations in *Citizen Tania* draw the audience into a cinematic burlesque. Tania shaves her legs to the horror of her comrades. She reads a fashion magazine addressed to her at the safehouse. Hearst's real-life boyfriend Steve Weed (played by Joe Cole) wears a drooping mustache and deadpan expression in the great clowning tradition as he reveals his private fantasies about Tania to the press. Tania and the SLA burst into a spontaneous

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<sup>227</sup> Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, eds., *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 442.

dance number and jam session. Each vaudevillian turn works to provoke the same result - laughter. As Bakhtin points out in his examination of carnival laughter, its power resides in its ability to make

an object come up close, of drawing it into a zone of crude contact where one can... turn it upside down, inside out, peer at it from above and below, break open its external shell, look into its center, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare, expose it, examine freely and experiment with it.<sup>228</sup>

The temporal and historical distance that separates Hearst from the spectator collapses. Pettibon and Markey dislodge Hearst's iconic image and tale from its mythic niche and invite audiences to participate in the revolution. The filmmakers open up Hearst's narrative, spotlight the cultural anxieties and fears her tale contains, and laugh. Laughter becomes the transgressive act that ruptures cultural norms and standards of good taste and turns spectators into an active participants in Pettibon's riotous world, as they cringe and squirm in their seats out of awkward nervousness or sheer delight.

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<sup>228</sup> Bakhtin, p. 23.

### John Waters: Cecil B. Demented & the Revolutionary Diva

John Waters, like Raymond Pettibon, began his career on the lowest rungs of underground, guerilla-style filmmaking. He made his mark with *Pink Flamingos*, which was released to general shock and revulsion - and eventual cult acceptance - in 1972. That film, with its excess (a man lip-syncs with his sphincter; a chicken is killed onscreen during a sex scene; the obese transvestite protagonist consumes dog feces at the film's climax) is an obvious forerunner of *Citizen Tania*. Waters was working in film, while Pettibon's cheaper video allowed quicker, easier production and better access.

But Waters, as a filmmaker, needed money and recognition. By 1989, when Pettibon's video was produced, America had caught up with Waters's camp sensibility, appreciation of bad taste, and ironic fascination with tragedy and crime.<sup>229</sup> He began to tone down the

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<sup>229</sup> Christopher Castiglia's chapter "That Was Not My Idea of Independence: The Captivity of Patty Hearst," from his book, *Bound and Determined: Captivity, Culture-Crossing, and White Womanhood from Mary Rowlands to Patty Hearst*, posits Patty Hearst's abduction and the media construction of the event as a captivity narrative. Hester Prynne appears in Castiglia's introduction:

"Hester Prynne realized the paradox of freedom in *The Scarlet Letter* when she attempts to escape Puritan society in the freedom of the untamed forest, only to discover that she cannot leave behind the scarlet A attached to her bosom. If bodies are interpellated into language and hence cultural value, then all citizens must bear the letter of the law-the letter of identity-on their bodies, as Hester does, and recognize freedom as a tormenting illusion." (10)

Castiglia's work has been informative, especially his insights on the liminal position of female captives, and the subversive elements that appear in captivity narratives, which work to destabilize fixed notions of

sensationalism and command bigger budgets. The mainstream had moved to his side of the tracks. His latter day films *Cry Baby* (1990), *Serial Mom* (1994), and *Cecil B. Demented* (2000) shared a common cast member: Patricia Hearst.

By teaming with Waters, Hearst violently refuses to surrender control of her own image and resists categorization as either reformed socialite, damaged goods, or secret terrorist.

Hearst, John Waters' friend, muse and obvious inspiration, playfully haunts *Cecil B. Demented*, the film of his that owes the most to Waters's fascination with the Hearst saga.

The eponymous character Cecil B. Demented and his gang the Sprocket Holes form a dedicated band of "cinema terrorists" (a la Pettibon and Markey) determined to overthrow corporate Hollywood, first of all by kidnapping Hollywood diva Honey Whitlock (Melanie Griffith) to star in *Raving Beauty*, their cinematic manifesto.

Waters saturates the movie with visual and verbal cues that resonate with Hearst's narrative. Whitlock's film

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gender and race. Castiglia's analysis of Paul Schrader's film *Patty Hearst* (1988), adapted from Hearst's autobiography *Every Secret Thing*, both of which have been previously discussed in this chapter, is brief and limited in scope. However, Castiglia's insights on the image of Patty Hearst as a symbol of camp has been useful to me in thinking about spectacle and notions of performance in John Waters' films, and of the image of Patty Hearst as a commodity, and an object of consumption. Although he only spends a limited amount of time on Hearst's association with Waters, Castiglia nonetheless illuminates the subversive qualities of camp as a force that destabilizes gender roles, identity, and narrative.

*Forced Entry* works not only as a parody of Hollywood thriller titles, it is also an obvious reference to the break-in of Hearst's apartment and her subsequent sexual violation. The wanted poster of Whitlock tacked to the ticket booth wall at the drive-in movie calls forth images of Hearst's own FBI wanted photos and positions the drive-in movie as a double reference point for Waters. Not only was the drive-in a secret meeting place for the SLA, it is the tabernacle for Waters's beloved trash cinema.

Demented's communiqués, with their zealous decrees, echo those of the SLA. But most of all, Honey Whitlock's over-the-top transformation into a counterculture true believer teasingly mirrors Hearst's transition to Tania.

The cues are campish signposts, inside jokes for savvy viewers, and totems of homage to an icon. Waters' most obvious piece of tribute is the casting of Hearst as the mother of a revolutionary scalawag named Fidget. Hearst's televised pleas for her son to come home echo those of her own parents, who pleaded for her release in the press two decades before. At first glance, Waters appears to hollowly play with Hearst's predicament and trauma but such a simplistic reading misses Waters' critical gaze. What surfaces in the film is empathy for outsiders. The revolutionary, the satanist, the repressed heterosexual,

and the drug fiend (all members of the Sprocket Holes) are just as flawed and fragile in their struggle to find a sense of place and voice as are the dominant cultural groups in their quest to maintain their hierarchical position as the social arbitrators of taste, morality and sexual propriety. Waters approaches his subjects with tenderness and love. As Susan Songtag points out, camp

is a kind of love, love for human nature. It relishes, rather than judges, the little triumphs and awkward intensities of "character,"... camp taste identifies with what it is enjoying. People who share this sensibility are not laughing at the thing they label as "a camp," they're enjoying it. Camp is tender feeling.<sup>230</sup>

Arbitrary lines of demarcation and the absurdity of polarized positions are the social and cultural issues that Waters takes to task in *Cecil B. Demented*. Like Raymond Pettibon, Waters satirizes the dogmatic rhetoric and slogans of extremists when the Sprockets yell "power to the people who punish bad cinema" and "celibate for celluloid." Honey Whitlock (like Hearst herself) becomes an object on display and symbol for the Sprockets' cause. *Demented* and the Sprocket Holes (like the SLA) seize Whitlock for her material value and class status.

Honey's image, like that of Hearst as Tania, oscillates between two extreme poles in the public's

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<sup>230</sup> Susan Songtag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 1961), pp. 291-292.



imagination; she is either an object of fantasy or revulsion. Unlike Schrader, Waters doesn't fear the monstrous but rather embraces the image to weave a tale of survival and empowerment. *Cecil B. Demented*, beneath the burlesque façade, is a commentary on ways of seeing and on corporeality. Waters invites the viewer on a journey of self-discovery and becoming, and uses Honey Whitlock as his agent provocateur. Likewise, Hearst uses Waters to transform her scaffold into a platform. Like Hester Prynne, she subverts the site of her public shaming and turns it into a vehicle for self-affirmation.

Whitlock presents a mask to the public. In her role of celebrity, she appears warm and understanding. When the cameras turn off, Honey is darker; a more hateful and closed-off self emerges. She is a confidence woman, fleecing the public for their money and adoration. Honey Whitlock's appearance becomes more grotesque as her involvement with the group deepens. Honey's over-processed, platinum blonde hair, exaggerated make-up, and all-black attire outwardly mark her physical transformation from Hollywood diva to outlaw woman - Waters' vamped-up version of Elsa Lanchester's character from *Bride of Frankenstein*.

Honey's personal sacrifices - setting her head aflame for the final shot of *Raving Beauty* and her subsequent

arrest - reflect Honey's inner crossover to outsider. No longer confined by the studio system (convention) Honey becomes an open vessel. The symbolic act of setting her hair on fire signifies the death and cremation of Honey's old identity, the real monster.

With her head ablaze, Whitlock stands atop a drive-in movie screen and becomes Waters' phoenix, the ultimate image of transformation. Though Honey ends up in the paddy wagon, she's not the real prisoner or monster in Waters's vision. She is free, freer than the tightly laced society on the outside that tries to contain her or the misfits who tried to claim her. Gloriously grotesque, Whitlock become Waters' symbol of possibility. Her transformation endows her with a sense of double vision, one that allows her to see and move beyond the polarity of both worlds. In Waters' lens, we are all monsters, frightened by the nightmare that a torch-bearing mob awaits us in the darkness.

### **Ballads of Patty Hearst**

Poets Pamela White Hadas and Nicole Cooley and songwriter Sammy Walker weave complicated narratives from the threads of Hearst's legend. Each artist's work is infused with folkloric elements. In Hadas' poem "Patty

Hearst: Versions of Her Story," Hearst emerges as an American princess who falls through the looking glass; in Cooley's "Patty Hearst: A Love Poem," Hearst arises from her captors' closet like a female Lazarus. Hadas and Cooley take Hearst as their muse and use her to explore issues of gender. While Walker, in his "Song for Patty," is concerned with gender as well, he is more interested in class.

"Patty Hearst: Versions of Her Story," is intended to be read aloud as a polyphonic play with six different female voices competing to be heard. Each woman's voice is intimately linked to a story that has no end. Hadas approaches Hearst's tale as a fable complete with a fairy godmother, a queen, and a lady-in-waiting. Hadas casts Hearst as "the Girlfriend: (Tania-in-waiting)." Elizabeth Cummins, in her otherwise insightful reading of Hadas's poem, sees the Girlfriend's voice as that of Trish Tobin, Hearst's best friend before the kidnapping. But Hadas obviously has the future Tania in mind, the seed of the outlaw that lay dormant in Hearst even before her transformation. Hadas plays with the notion of the double or spilt personality throughout her poem, hinting that the Girlfriend and Patty were always together and in each other's presence from the beginning, each one nonexistent without the other because:

...between them; the princess and her best friend were closer than sisters, close as crossed fingers, brave as Nancy Drew, bright as Musketeers, at home in a game of Let's Pretend.<sup>231</sup>

Cummins herself touches on the theme of split identity in her observation that

It is difficult to summarize the picture of these women drawn by the voices. In all there is a sense of split identity, hidden desires they were allowed to fulfill, hidden guilt for being who they are. These ambiguities have been brought out by their involvement in and contemplation of the events of Patty Hearst's life.<sup>232</sup>

Childhood rituals of play create a space of self-fashioning transformation. For a brief moment young girls can become anyone, a savvy detective, veterinarian, or perhaps a street-smart urchin, Jo from *Little Women*, maybe even "the first woman to discover a comet, like Maria Mitchell."<sup>233</sup> Being seen as unique, the desire to feel alive, and the double meanings of being "wanted" bind Hadas's players, from the female reporter caught up in the swirl of the media event to young Emily, who gazes in the mirror and sees her revolutionary twin Yolanda, to the "Housewife" who finds a new sense of power, and perhaps a new identity, while serving on Hearst's jury.

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<sup>231</sup> Pamela White Hadas, "Patty Hearst: Versions of Her Story," *Beside Herself Pocahontas to Patty Hearst* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), p. 183.

<sup>232</sup> Elizabeth Cummins, "The PHairy Tales: Pamela Hadas and Patty Hearst," *Missouri Philological Association*, 16 (1991): 89.

<sup>233</sup> Hadas, p. 187.

The trial creates a space of possibility for the "perfectly ordinary housewife"<sup>234</sup> that enables her to experience a sense of corporeal unity as she gazes at the stranger on the stand. Throughout the poem, Hadas subtly investigates the bonds that connect women and the fissures that divide them.

The fear of losing a child, physically or through the loss of recognition is the nightmarish tale told by the queen. The anxiety that her daughter's smile is no longer recognizable after her journey to "a nether world,"<sup>235</sup> fosters the fearful question about her daughter's smile: "had it ever been false before?"<sup>236</sup> Visceral terrors are couched in a gilded bedtime story. The fear that a monster or diabolical fiend lurks beneath a loved one's mask is nothing new in American literature. One only needs to peek between the page of Herman Melville's *Confidence Man*, Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" or Louisa May Alcott's thrillers to glean America's anxiety over the charlatan or corrupted individual.

Hadas tries to tap into a collective consciousness about the fluidity of womanhood and dispel deeply entrenched cultural fallacies that a woman's identity is

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<sup>234</sup> Hadas, p. 181.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

fixed. Hearst is a kaleidoscope for Hadas, one that allows her to explore how different American women access Hearst's narrative and struggle to define themselves against a woman who appears to become wholly other, marked like Hawthorne's Hester. Like Hester's A, Hearst's mark can become any number of signifiers.

In a Fredrick Jackson Turner move, Hadas equates Hearst's tale with a frontier fable. Hadas begins her bedtime story in California, with its iconographic images of goldmines, movie stars, orange groves, and hillside mansions - a lullaby for a nation raised on dreams of promise, wealth, possibility and equality.

The image of William Randolph Hearst surfaces as the quintessential man on the make in a land of opportunity, a man

with a knack of turning paper into bullion because he knew what people wanted more than anything was story after story after all about what they might be or become...<sup>237</sup>

Unlike Schrader, who struggles to control Hearst's image and contain the monstrous outlaw woman in the confines of the cinematic frame and time, Hadas's multifarious protagonist exists in a twilight time in the American imagination - what we usually call history.

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

The Girlfriend begins her tale with images of cowboys and Indians, childhood fantasies of

the wild wild West,  
a never-never land of stars and violence  
and wishes, where the very strangest  
things could happen, and where there lived, once  
upon a time, a princess and her best  
friend, There was almost no difference...<sup>238</sup>

America, like Hearst, imagines for itself a harmonious stable identity, but each time it looks in the mirror, a thousand fractured images stare back.

The image of the outlaw woman that Schrader wrestles with and tries to evade emerges in Hadas' poem as a woman with agency. Tania-in-waiting stands in stark contrast to Schrader's vision of Patty huddled in a closet, an empty vessel in her victimhood, who's acted upon and passive rather than an agent of her own survival. In one short stanza, Hadas reveals the complexity of Hearst's inner conflict. The Girlfriend sees her double reflected in static images on TV and on the cover of magazines, newspapers and on TV:

There she is, smiling, more famous than  
Miss America behind her clumsy gun...  
She has chosen, made choice live for me;  
I become Tania-in-Waiting a Red Riding Hood  
Perfectly at home in the wolf's belly,  
a Sherwood Forest maverick, inverting good and bad.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

Hearst's choice to join the SLA transforms her into an enigma. The Girlfriend and Tania-in-waiting are Hearst's alter egos. The former, keeper of secrets, represents Hearst's inner confidant. Tania-in-waiting, as she passes through the prismatic lenses of popular culture, emerges as the trickster, a defiant figure of female agency and power. She is the outlaw/warrior woman.

The fluidity of Hearst's identity caused a nation to flounder as it struggled to piece together the real Patty Hearst. Daughter, heiress, fiancé, student, kidnap victim, terrorist, a ghost on the lam able to shed her identity as Tania, to become Pearl, then Pat, and then Patty, presented the public with too many competing images of one woman. In Hadas's conceptualization of Hearst's story as an American fairy tale of abduction, the princess saves herself and doesn't wait for the prince. Patty Hearst, the princess with the spontaneous gift to shape-shift to survive, returns home as a figure of social angst. The ability to assume such a contrasting identities, to be the outlaw comfortable on the fringes, contrasted with the narrative of her life before Tania. Tania, the polar opposite of Patty, skews the boundaries of a woman's fixed identity.



The princess with many masks is a dangerous force. In the courtroom, she is a mirror.<sup>240</sup> The ordinary housewife, who passes judgment in the jury box, catches glimpses of her own illusive double in the woman on display. As the courtroom drama unfolds, the housewife allows herself to cross a threshold when she dares to imagine:

What does it feel like to be so special? The housewife had no idea... What does it feel like to walk right into a bank with a gun? A thrill too I'd say...<sup>241</sup>

Imagining the possibility of a fluid self turns the ordinary housewife into a visionary and for a brief moment, she breaks the boundaries of her everyday existence and escapes her role as wife and good citizen. She seamlessly transgresses her social role as wife in her temporary guise as juror.

The experience of the trial transforms the housewife in a radical way. The housewife doesn't turn into a revolutionary, but *is* revolutionized when she connects to another woman's tale and recognizes a version of her own story in the process. The housewife, no longer a

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<sup>240</sup> Nancy Isenberg's article "Not 'Anyone's Daughter': Patty Hearst and the Postmodern Legal Subject" (*American Quarterly*, vol. 52, no. 4, 2000) has been useful to me in terms of conceptualizing how the jury on the Patty Hearst trial was informed and influenced by the media's coverage of the event, and by their own preconceived notions of gender roles. Isenberg's focus is mainly on television and the jury's perceptions. Her research reveals how "Hearst remained a 'cipher' throughout the trial to the jury (667)." She touches on notions of performance and the fluidity of Patty Hearst's identity: how jurors were not only *reading* the images of Hearst in the media but also Hearst's body language in the courtroom. Isenberg explores the competing narratives about Patty Hearst, by Hearst herself, the journalists, the attorneys, the Hearst family (through the release of family photographs and interviews), and the SLA.

<sup>241</sup> Hadas, 213.

sleepwalker, awakens to the knowledge that "this feeling will never be over, this feeling that it happened to me."<sup>242</sup> She follows the princess's life in the pages of the tabloids and sees herself in the former outlaw - the older Patricia Hearst, turned mother herself, now seemingly trapped in the everyday.

The prison of routine, of "casseroles and laundry,"<sup>243</sup> the domestic duties that define a woman's role are the invisible bars that confine the poem's "ordinary housewife." For Hadas, confinement, the feeling of being trapped, held hostage by one's place or perceived role is "the dark closet"<sup>244</sup> and silenced space. The housewife's declaration "She will know how I feel"<sup>245</sup> becomes the rallying cry for women to hear each other's stories, to smash the enchanted mirror and see all the fractured images in the fragments and shards that cannot be contained in a frame.

In 1974, Sammy Walker, a folk singer and songwriter from Norcross, Georgia, wrote "Song for Patty." As an artist and musician, Walker's ballad style and Dylanesque vocals reflect his deep appreciation for American folk music and the revival movement that flourished in 1950's

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>243</sup> Hadas, 240.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

and 60's. Walker moved to New York in the early 70's where he met and collaborated with Phil Ochs at Broadside, thus directly linking him with many of the movement's practitioners.

Walker chastises the American public for shunning Patty Hearst and turning the kidnap victim into to an object of scorn. He envisions the young Hillsborough princess as a symbol of possibility for an ailing America. For Walker, Hearst's abduction is the catalyst that transforms her into a conscious social being. Her metamorphosis into a fugitive on the lam elevates her into the pantheon of American folk heroes.

The use of fairy-tale conventions allows Walker to comment on social hypocrisies without appearing didactic. The thinly veiled critique tackles issues of domesticity, gender, and class, and subverts the ideal image of the passive woman content with her place in the home. The image of the home as a safe space is problematized in first and second stanzas.

In a mansion out in Hillsborough, California /  
There lived and grew a young girl by the sea, /  
She always did just what's she's supposed to / To  
carry forth and please her family. / And the luxury of  
youth could never question, / Is there any way of life

except this way? / So she rode a lovely horse down  
through the mornin' / Contented for an hour and a  
day.<sup>246</sup>

The home is a paradox. The beautiful mansion in Hillsborough, California represents a prison, one that confines women and keeps them closed off to other realities.

Walker slowly creates a sense of tension as the narrative unfolds. The ballad captures the counterculture movement's disillusionment with the establishment and is a direct comment on the generation gap. The artist appeals to his audience indirectly in the line: "Is there any way of life except this way?"<sup>247</sup>

In the second stanza a more dynamic and complex image emerges, inverting the static figure introduced at the beginning of the ballad.

Now the wealthy strings of life were always pleasin' /  
When a courtship of her young days come to call /  
Though the neighbors and her friends were always  
teasin' / How she never liked to speak of it all. /  
Occasionally she'd wander on the outside / Of the big  
iron gates that protected her within / But her parents  
and relations quickly scolded / There's nothing out  
there but sickness, hate, and sin.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Sammy Walker, "Song for Patty," *The Best of the Broadside [sound recording]: 1962-1988: anthems of the American underground from the pages of Broadside magazine*, Produced, compiled, & annotated by Jeff Place and Ronald D. Cohen, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 2000), 68. First appeared in *Broadside Ballads* Vol. 8, Published in B'side #127, 1974. "Song for Patty" was recorded by Walker in June 1975.

<sup>247</sup> Walker.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

Patty's curiosity about the world around her and her desire to move beyond the gates that contain her function as verbal cues to action and rebellion. The mansion on the hill and the iron gates described in Walker's seemingly innocuous lyrics reveal a society marred by class stratification and symbols of demarcation. Fear of the poor, contamination, and the threat of boundary-crossing are the nightmares that haunt Walker's vision of America's well-to-do. The iron gates and the mansion on the hill function as visual markers to illuminate the mythic stature of the Hearst dynasty in American history and popular culture. The images with their cinematic overtones are a direct visual reference to Hollywood's mythmaking factory and Orson Welles's fictional excoriation of the Hearst dynasty and mindset, *Citizen Kane*.

Walker returns to Hollywood again and again, dredging up images that personify mainstream America's social and cultural fears. As Hearst's tale reaches its climax, the fear of the out of control teenager emerges as another source of anxiety. Images from *Rebel Without a Cause* and *West Side Story* permeate the lyrics. Love and rebellion become the emotional agents that transform Patty into a combustible force. For Walker, Patty Hearst was a rebel before her abduction by the SLA:

Now the girl from out in Hillsborough, California /  
 Fell in love with a young man by the sea / In  
 rebellion she quickly stood beside him / With  
 disregard for wealth and family / So they moved  
 through the night and lived together / Out into a  
 world she'd never known / And the talk about town was  
 surely soundin' / "My how this young girl sure has  
 grown."<sup>249</sup>

In a symbolic act of transgression, Patty flees the safety and sanctity of her family home.

Walker's Patty Hearst, like Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, oscillates between two competing images, the martyr and the outlaw. For Walker, Patty's class background and social status mark her as a target and a scapegoat for the disenfranchised, the "misled and the forgotten,"<sup>250</sup> that dwell beyond the iron gates of the Hillsborough mansion. Hearst's unfortunate abduction is a form of misguided retribution for the follies of wealth and class stratification.

Like Hester Prynne, punished by her community for Reverend Dimmesdale's silence and transgressions, Hearst pays the price for class apathy, another form of silence. The transformed Hearst awakens to a vision of her participation in a patriarchal dynasty and social hierarchy that dehumanizes individuals and transforms them into disposable objects.

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<sup>249</sup> Walker.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

For another's crime, she would have to pay. / But she  
 opened up her eyes and looked around her / And saw how  
 often money takes the place of men / Now she's runnin'  
 from a world that doesn't want her / Hidden in the  
 silence of the wind.<sup>251</sup>

The ballad is a blatant criticism of American capitalism. Although the songs heralds social change, it ends on a fatalistic note with Hearst on the run. Patty becomes a specter, the eternal outsider and liminal figure, forced to live on the fringes of the society like Hester Prynne, a symbol of rebellion and possibility whose secrets are hushed by the social forces that surround her.

Nicole Cooley, in "Patty Hearst: A Love Poem," also positions Hearst as an abducted princess but unlike Hadas and Walker, who steep their fables in images from old world fairy tales and American mythology, Cooley refrains from the temptation of trying to speak in universal archetypes, instead creating a vision of a singular Hearst, isolated and engulfed by darkness. For Cooley, Hearst's story is about slowly dying and as the title of her collection hints, *Resurrection*.

Hearst struggles in her isolation to hold on to her sense of self, to her memories of home and her sister, "of sleeping the sleep of safe children."<sup>252</sup> But rape, isolation

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Nicole Cooley, "Patty Hearst: A Love Poem," *Resurrection* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), p.14.

and the act of renunciation are the painful contractions that force Tania out of closet covered in an afterbirth of shame.

Cooley's poem is not a celebration of Tania or a cautionary tale about the outlaw woman but a probing piece about sadness, manifested physically as the violation of the body.

Behind the blindfold the world has stopped, a darkened movie screen. It's only a closet. I curl my knees to my chest. It's only the trunk of a car.

It's a trashcan with two holes the sizes of dimes cut out for me to breathe. I asked my body for safety and safety meant nothing.<sup>253</sup>

The spaces of terror that Patty occupies, the nightmare of her everyday existence, the vulnerability she feels in the darkness, call forth the body as a site of struggle and recognition. Cooley unites Hearst's mind and body and makes her whole in a way that Schrader, Waters, and Pettibon do not.

Cooley refuses to treat Hearst's tale as a source of spectacle. Her shrewd denial of sensationalism as a literary ploy acknowledges Hearst as a sentient being, not a malleable symbol. Cooley ruptures Hearst's image as icon

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<sup>253</sup> Cooley, p. 14.



and confidence woman. Unlike Tania, the revolutionary woman whose image saturated the media and captured the public's imagination, Cooley's Patty prays for invisibility. The pitiful plea "*Don't look at me*"<sup>254</sup> subverts the good-girl-goes-bad-and-likes-it narrative linked to Hearst's lore.

If grief is a contest, Sister, I am winning.  
In the lit up house on the hill you know that I am dead.  
But you don't know what *surrender* means.

In the safehouse, there are no refusals.  
You don't know the forgiving of the body  
as each man enters me again and again.<sup>255</sup>

Death dwells behind the doors of the "safehouse" (safe for whom?) where Hearst's body slowly disintegrates under the weight of repeated violations. Hearst's body becomes an object of consumption in a de facto charnel house. With each surrender, Patty yields to death only to return again and again as a Lazarus figure. The symbolic contrast between darkness and light, of life and death, materializes in the imagery of the "lit up house on the hill"<sup>256</sup> in which Hearst's family lives, where death is imagined as a distant reality, intangible in its displacement outside the boundaries of the home.

The knowledge that the body can survive and endure is Hearst's secret. She mourns for her self and the loved ones

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<sup>254</sup> Cooley, p. 14.

<sup>255</sup> Cooley, p. 15.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid. Unlike Lizzie Borden's defiantly lit up house on the hill, purchased after her acquittal, Hearst's family home is not a haven, not even in the complicated way of Hester's isolated cabin.

she leaves behind, who seek her return in hollow prayers. As she passes over to the other side, Patty bears witness to her family's death. The painful recognition that her family must become other to her is loaded with religious symbolism. Patty becomes apostate to the old ways, the member of a new religion that springs from the darkness of her isolation.

Mother at the altar, cupping the communion wafer in her hands. Does she know that she is the enemy? The priest's blessing sticks in my mouth like a gag.

I am the dutiful one, the princess taking directions.  
I am crossing over without you.  
Don't look at me.<sup>257</sup>

In the new ecclesiastical hierarchy, her parents are the sinners, the wrongdoers against whom she must make a stand. On the threshold of her conversion, Patty has a moment of grace and clarity. The realization that daily life is a performance becomes her true salvation and sacred word.

In Patty's mind her act of renunciation creates a schism between two dialectically opposed forces, the privileged idolaters pitted against the soldiers of revolution. In the new scripture, the bonds of that bind a family have no place. The religious significance surrounding Patty's desire for her sister's understanding touches on themes of communion.

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

I imagine you here, wearing the gas mask,  
preparing for the storming of the safehouse.

In the new story, Father's army will blow the house down.  
You will not be afraid. You divide the combat rations,  
carefully, practice one hundred push-ups to make your body  
strong.

You hold my face in your hands to line the inside of my  
eyes.

Show me how to become someone else-<sup>258</sup>

Spiritual death and rebirth from the belly of such a  
traumatic experience are transcendental elements that  
cannot be communicated across the divide.

Patty negotiates intangible sites, the in-between  
spaces of life and death, body and mind, innocence and  
loss. These emotional spaces are private and deeply  
personal, yet Cooley draws the reader into zones of contact  
without a sense of violation to either her subject or the  
reader. This accomplishment stems from Cooley's vision of  
Patty's interiority. And it is this inner consciousness  
that separates Cooley's vision of Patty from so many other  
artists, who use her, like her captors, as an empty vessel.

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

### **From Homemaker to Heretic: The Domestic Interloper and the Marketplace**

*She has a corner office at 58<sup>th</sup> and Park. She works 5 to 9. She makes six figures a year and they call her the Tiger Lady.*

*Baby Boom*

*All of a sudden, you remember you're a mother.*

*Torch Singer*

The image of the working woman in literature and film is contested and ambivalent. Like Hester Prynne, she takes the proverbial fall when she displays a sense of agency. She also resembles Hester in that she assumes a marketplace identity. She catches the public eye and becomes a figure of scrutiny because of her ability to cross thresholds. Like Hawthorne's protagonist, she navigates socially constructed boundaries that define gender mores. Her passage marks her like Hester's scarlet letter and similarly has "the effect of a spell," one that removes her (like Hester) from "the ordinary relations with humanity and [encloses] her in a sphere by herself."<sup>259</sup>

The working woman and Hester breach boundaries that separate the home from the workplace. The act of penetration reveals the unstable nature of hierarchal borders and emphasizes the outsider status of women as they straddle the line between two worlds. Hester Prynne's

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<sup>259</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 48.

scarlet letter may have branded her as the town's adulteress but as Hawthorne makes clear, the context and meaning of the letter was dependent upon the imagination of the beholders, whose gaze oftentimes revealed more about their own interiority and fear of the monstrous than the subject before them.

Hester emerged from the recesses of prison and confronted the judgmental crowd with the tokens of her sin, little Pearl and her badge. The puritans gazed at Hester and saw a sinner but as Hawthorne implies, she challenged her neighbors' perceptions in more than one way. Hester not only ruptured the virgin/whore dichotomy but presented townfolk with another social quandary, one that inverted the boundaries of a woman's work. Hester's ornate badge may have symbolized her crime but it also revealed her skill with the needle. The needle, as domestic signpost, symbolized a woman's innate femininity, not her labor.

Thus, Hester erred twice. She sullied the marital bed and then desecrated the hearth when she blurred the boundaries of women's work and boldly carried the sacred rites of domesticity into the profane space of the market. When Hawthorne's Hester emerged from prison, she stepped out of the darkness into the daylight and into the market square.

Hawthorne intentionally problematizes the prison, the marketplace and the home as fixed spaces. He contests each site and destabilizes its meaning, making each one as ambiguous and mysterious as Hester's fabled letter. It is no coincidence that the deliberately short first chapter "The Prison-Door" self-consciously draws attention to the site as a "threshold" and "inauspicious portal,"<sup>260</sup> or that the author swiftly leads his readers into the next chapter, entitled "The Market-Place," in which he situates his anti-heroine on display. Tellingly, the scaffold lies in the heart of the town's business center.

Hester's connection to the domestic arts and the letter's significance as a sign of transaction in the market is clear. As Hester makes her way through the crowd, a scornful woman bitterly chastises her: "She hath good skill at her needle, that's certain... but did ever a woman, before this brazen hussy, contrive such a way of showing it!"<sup>261</sup> Her statement reveals social tension and cultural anxieties regarding a woman's duty, sexuality and ability.

Hester's struggle to support and maintain her home alone disrupted gender norms and exposed tiny tears in the puritan social fabric, a fabric stitched and held together

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

by the threads of an ideology that worked to reinforce notions of female dependency and invisibility. Thus, Hester's letter "fantastically embroidered and illuminated on her bosom"<sup>262</sup> in the context of "Market-Place" transactions, transforms the "A" into an advertisement for Hester's work.

An examination of all the complexities the figure of the working woman represents in popular culture is beyond the scope of this chapter. Therefore, I will limit my focus to the image of the working woman as a domestic transgressor and explore cinematic representations of women who taint their sacred role as homemaker when they allow domesticity and their marketplace ambitions to merge.

As a domestic exploiter and marketplace interloper, the working woman complicates idealized visions of a woman's place. The subject has provided writers and filmmakers with a rich source of material. *Torch Singer*, *Imitation of Life*, *The Thrill of it All*, and *Baby Boom* are Hollywood films that deal with domesticity and the public sphere.

I use Martha Stewart as a springboard because she epitomizes the image of the savvy homemaker turned entrepreneur. Martha Stewart has used her domestic skills

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

to carve out a niche for herself as the crafty practitioner of do-it-yourself domesticity for the masses. Her recipes, advice, and elegant and accessible how-to tips on transforming the home have turned her into a household name and commodity. Stewart's legend places her in the pantheon of business moguls whose rags-to-riches tales reinforce the myth of the protestant work ethic. As an American success story, Martha represents the individual who pulled herself up by the apron strings, as she went from baking pies and cakes in the home to becoming one of the wealthiest women in the nation. Unlike our previous subjects (with the possible exception, in some circles, of Patricia Hearst), Stewart was well-known before her brush with the law. But like all the women in the previous chapters, it was scandal that embellished and to some extent ended up defining her myth.

Stewart's white-collar crime, trial, and five-month stint in Alderson, West Virginia (where Iva Toguri served her sentence), and her subsequent house arrest, carried out on her palatial, 153-acre Bedford estate, turned the famous Wall Street deviant into a public spectacle. Stewart's movements, her electronic ankle bracelet, four-wheeler rides and social activities were sources of curiosity for a public eager to monitor her conduct. Like Hester on the



forest's edge in her lonely cabin by the ocean and Lizzie Borden on the hill in Maplecroft, Stewart was a public prisoner.

Emily Jane Cohen, in her examination of Martha Stewart trial lore, sees reflections of Hawthorne's Hester in Stewart's public conviction:

The anti-Martha campaign has left its mark, overturning Martha's accomplishments and branding her with an upside-down M. as surely as Hester Prynne's judges forced her to wear the scarlet letter. For now the evidence has been submitted, Martha is on trial, and because public justice currently takes the form of a notorious procedure from our country's dark Puritanical past... it is appropriate that, give or take a consonant, Martha is accused of being a witch.<sup>263</sup>

The public knew Stewart's story before it happened, forcing her into a role with a well-established pattern: the woman who dares to sully the inviolate home with commerce, in the process revealing it to be a craft or performance that even an insincere "witch" could mimic and mock. That, and not insider trading, was her real crime. Even before her fall, Stewart was the subject of debate for a public who either deified her or passionately loathed her.

Stewart's celebrity status as the matriarch of home economics has inspired satirists, journalists, and

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<sup>263</sup> Emily Jane Cohen, "Kitschen Witches: Martha Stewart: Gothic Housewife, Corporate CEO," *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 38, No. 4, 2005, p. 651. Cohen uses a gothic lens to her explore her subject and sees Stewart's backlash and unauthorized biographies as contemporary constructions of a witchcraft narrative.

moviemakers alike. Her television show *Martha Stewart Living*, for instance, has provided the writers and comics of *Saturday Night Live* with an abundant amount of source material over the years. One of the most famous *Saturday Night Live* skits, "Martha Stewart's Home For The Holidays: Topless Christmas Special," aired in 1996. In the skit, comedian Ana Gasteyer lampoons Stewart's image as the perfect hostess, portraying the holiday homemaker as a nudist with nothing to hide from her television viewers. It is the humor of reversal: nothing could be more alien to the public's image of Martha Stewart than such openness.

The public's anxiety over Martha Stewart's apparent lack of transparency and the idea that she wears a façade because she has something to hide (a cold heart or missing soul) is clear in how TV-movie directors have portrayed her. The made-for-TV movies *Martha, Inc.: The Martha Stewart Story* (2003) and *Martha Behind Bars* (2005) both star Cybill Shepherd and open with sequences that call Stewart's authenticity and character into question.

*Martha Behind Bars* opens with a slowly widening, tight close-up of bloodshot eyes, a face without make-up, a deadpan expression: Shepherd's mask-like interpretation of Stewart stripped of her façade by imprisonment.

*Martha, Inc.* likewise begins with the stripping of a mask. Shepherd, as Stewart, terrorizes the crew on the set of *Martha Stewart Living*, only to assume a disturbingly warm and amiable guise the moment the cameras begin to roll. Both openings create the same accusatory framework, in which Stewart is chastised for coldly performing, rather than genuinely enjoying, her virtuous tasks.

The scenes mirror classic Hollywood horror moments in which the monster suddenly reveals itself to be something other than human, as when the robot from *The Terminator* slowly turns its head, its subtly mechanical actions betraying the cold metallic machine hidden beneath blood and tissue.

### **Martha Stewart and the Death of Domesticity**

*Martha, Inc.: The Story of Martha Stewart*, based on the book by Christopher M. Bryon and directed by Jason Ensler, traces Martha Stewart's rise and public disgrace. Ensler takes Martha Stewart's story and uses it to illustrate what happens to a woman who exploits her home, family, marriage, and femininity for profit and fame. Ensler's movie is tinged with shades of James. M. Cain's hardboiled domestic novel *Mildred Pierce*, which explores the burden of class shame and resentment. Like Cain's Veda,

Stewart struggles to escape her working-class background and longs to be embraced by an upper-class circle that appreciates beauty, refinement, and good taste.

Stewart may share Veda's class prejudices, her coldness and desire to disavow the past but it is Mildred Pierce's unflinching work ethic that links Stewart more solidly to Cain.

Stewart is Mildred and Veda in one. It is worth noting that, like Hester Prynne and Mildred Pierce, Martha Stewart is a woman with a daughter - as are all of her filmic forerunners discussed in this chapter. Why are the domestic transgressors inevitably paired with daughters? A question arises of what sort of warped offspring their commercially polluted motherhood is producing - female aberrations in their image, expressed in the "arrogant, erect haughtiness"<sup>264</sup> that Veda displays already at age 11 and the "freakish, elfish cast"<sup>265</sup> of little Pearl's eyes.

Mildred's domestic talents and ability to bake tasty pies and cakes for a public eager to consume them, an economic success founded on her exploitation of the kitchen, binds the two women's narratives closely together. Their unbridled ambitions expose a pathological nature and

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<sup>264</sup> James M. Cain, *Mildred Pierce: Tower Books Motion Picture Edition* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Word Publishing Company, 1945), p. 18.

<sup>265</sup> Hawthorne, p. 87.

monstrous hidden inner core, blighted by unhealthy aspirations that make them something other than womanly, a dark vision of motherhood without meaning.

The need to explain or unravel the source of Stewart's malady for the TV audience turns the director into a cinematic psychologist and armchair historian. Stewart's home life, her Polish immigrant working-class roots and maiden name (Kostyra) are the thorns that cause her to bristle and threaten to dislodge the mask she has trained herself to wear.

In high school, Martha reads business magazines instead of *Seventeen*. She does not fit in with the other kids or connect with the fashionable girls, who constantly judge her, whose clothes she admires and creepily goes home to imitate at her sewing machine. The word lesbian, whispered in the high school hallways, marks Stewart as a predator - in same way that rumors of Lizzie Borden's lesbianism still form a dubious cultural puzzle piece to explain her heinous act.

Stewart's rocky marriage and divorce hint at her inability to participate in a heterosexual union. Her strained relationships with her mother and her lack of devotion to her daughter connect to create a disturbing profile. Part of Stewart's problem, as the movie's

psychoanalytic narrative implies, stems from her dysfunctional childhood relationship with her father.

Stewart's father, a working class stiff, runs his home in a similar fashion to Lizzie Borden's father in Angela Carter's nightmarish tale or Pat Conroy's Great Santini, as he pressures his children to perform all tasks with fanatical precision. The Freudian undertones resonate. Stewart is her father's favorite child (another similarity to Lizzie Borden). Her father pushes her the most, as she seeks to both reject and please him.

As Freud's biographer Peter Gay summarizes his subject's view, children

having begun by wanting to *have* their parents... end up wanting to *be* like them. But not precisely like them - they construct their identifications, as Freud put it, "not on the model of their parents but on that of the parental superego." In this way, the superego becomes "the vehicle of tradition, of all the time-resistant valuations that have thus propagated themselves across generations." Hence the superego, at once preserving cultural values and attacking the individual it inhabits, becomes the agent of life and death alike.<sup>266</sup>

The fear of being trapped or rejected by the upper class echelon whose standards of sophistication and beauty she constantly emulates propels Stewart forward as she strives to break with the past.

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<sup>266</sup> Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time* (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), p. 415.

In Eric Bross's *Martha Behind Bars*, the director, like Ensler, uses Shepherd as a medium to explore Stewart's psyche. Both filmmakers mine Stewart's past and her relationship with her father for material to explain their subject. In the later film, she wrestles with the memory of her father when the government's investigation blackens her corporate name. Her inability to control the public's trust and the realization that her falling stock value reflects the people's scorn is what sends her over the edge. Anger and fear cause Stewart to go on a manic cleaning frenzy in which she sequesters herself away from her employees.

In a domestic montage, Stewart dusts, polishes and reorganizes the *Martha Stewart Living* prop room. The giant warehouse space contains row upon row of shelves that are stacked with hundred of items. The room is overwhelming, the project too much for one person to handle. The self-assigned task functions as a form of cathartic release and provides Stewart with a temporary sense of control. The need to maintain control through a repetitive act functions as the telltale sign that both directors use to dissect Stewart's behavior whenever she is confronted with a situation that challenges or threatens her.

In the prop room scene, Bross creates the perfect cinematic scenario for a public confession when Stewart's

assistant enters the room to relay a message to the secluded workaholic. The startled employee and audience become Stewart's temporary confidante. The strain of the investigation causes Stewart to experience uncomfortable emotions. The Freudian peepshow allows the audience to witness what Peter Gay describes as the "strenuous operation" of repression.

The act of repression, according to Freud, "requires a continuous expenditure of energy," because (as Gay paraphrases) "what has been repressed has not been wiped out... The old saying is wrong; out of sight is not out of mind. Repressed material has only been stored in the inaccessible attic of the unconscious..."<sup>267</sup> The large space with its dizzy array of aisles, stacked boxes, and props represents Stewart's unconscious.

Surrounded by her domestic fetishes Stewart recalls how she sometimes spent whole weekends as a teenager organizing the family basement alone, and how she would not emerge until everything was completed properly. She explains that father entrusted her with the job because he knew that she understood the order of things and how every object had its place. In her private confession, she compares her father to Willie Loman in *Death of a Salesman*.

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<sup>267</sup> Gay, p. 366.



As a child, the cinematic Stewart internalized her class shame and anger. Her inner conflict endowed her with a sense of double vision. She may have appreciated her father's eye for detail and his need for perfection but she also saw him as stagnant, a man unable to overcome his blue-collar environment. She describes him as "defeated"<sup>268</sup> but also as "a man who endured."<sup>269</sup> Her father haunts her. He represents the nightmarish image of someone who experienced a living death. She sees the burden of the past in him. Her father become Freud's "vehicle of tradition" whose path she intends to avoid. She may embody her father's legacy of endurance but she fears his failures.

As her speech makes clear, she intends to overcome her public failure. For Jonathan Cobb and Richard Sennett,

The fear of failure is the most uncomfortable phenomenon in American life. There is no room for failure in schemes of respect, unless failure is found to result from some cataclysmic event like the Great Depression. There is, as well, indifference to those who do not move ahead. Failure and static people—the nobodies Sammy Glick so feared—are seen as having underdeveloped personalities; the uncomfortable feelings of about those who do "not make something of themselves" when they have the chance, comes out of an assumption that men can be respected only as they become in some way distinctive, as they stand out from the mass.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> *Martha Behind Bars*, directed by Eric Bross, 2005.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>270</sup> Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), p. 183.

Stewart's name and image, packaged and commodified for the masses, separate her from the "static people." Unlike her father, she demands respect in public spaces and stands out. She is not invisible like the consumers who buy her products and most importantly, she has cultural collateral and value in the marketplace.

Ambition separates her not only from her father but also from her family. In the cultural imagination, home, family, and feminine virtue are the essences of domesticity. Stewart's class ambitions and sense of agency are the corrosive forces that pollute her connections to the domestic space and for this she is punished.

In *Martha Behind Bars*, Stewart's fall (her conviction and jail time) provides the necessary catalyst for her symbolic redemption. Only through her imprisonment and reconnection with the common people (women), can Stewart overcome the legacy of the past and reenter the market as a readjusted member of the community. In prison, Stewart rediscovers the purity of simple domestic acts. She is deprived of the material goods she once took for granted and used without sentimentality. The brown betty made from contraband eggs, apples and sugar packets is a simple joy, a dainty taboo that she makes not for profit but to relish.

In the big house, Stewart has a new audience. The women who surround her and watch her every move are the disenfranchised, uneducated lower class, as opposed to the middleclass suburban demographic she courted as a free woman. In her new role, she becomes a domestic herald. Before Stewart's arrival, the inmates were unaccustomed to eating with utensils or wiping their mouths with a napkin, or so the filmmakers would have us understand. Bross's fantasy about the lower class is a familiar example of what Patricia Hill Collins refers to as a "controlling image." Until Stewart's tutelage, the women lack fundamental qualities that proper society deems necessary for ladies to have, such as table manners and an appreciation for good cooking. The notion of lower class women as childlike mirrors images constructed by nineteenth-century social reformers, who depicted the urban poor as uncivilized and in desperate need of proper instruction and moral guidance.

When Stewart sits in the dining hall and eats her first meal, the women raptly and silently marvel at her grace and etiquette. The hush of silence turns her performance into a sacred moment and rite of passage. When Stewart pushes her tray of slop aside as a sign of culinary defiance, she earns the respect of the women around her and begins her transcendent journey as prison guru.

Behind bars, Stewart learns to help others, like the gruff woman who struggles with her chain stitch and the ragtag group who plead with her to join their clique because they want win the Christmas decorating contest. Stewart resists the women's pleas at first but when she overhears their uninspired attempt at brainstorming she yields and assumes the role of home economics instructor, teaching her followers origami and how to construct Christmas swans to hang from the ceiling. What Stewart demonstrates in the sequence is a newfound patience and tolerance for her pupils. The group loses the contest but the real reward comes from the sense of shared experience that binds the women together and humbles Stewart.

The pious practitioner of the domestic arts walks out of prison not in a pair of sandals and robe but in a drab rustic poncho made by her knitting protégé. Like Hester, Stewart emerges from prison to confront a community eager to judge her. While Hester's long process of lonely salvation is just beginning when she emerges from her cell, Martha Stewart stands tall in her prison poncho, already redeemed. She wears it proudly, for like Hester's A, it is her badge of endurance.

***Imitation of Life* (1934)**

*Imitation of Life* (1934, John M. Stahl, based on the novel by Fannie Hurst) opens with the scene of a mother giving her daughter a bath, a symbolic act and apparently essential dramatic shorthand that recurs in a remarkably insistent fashion throughout all the remaining films to be discussed. The mother, played by Claudette Colbert, pleads with her daughter to "please be good,"<sup>271</sup> and not ask for Quack-Quack, the rubber ducky. Colbert subverts the idealized ritual when she exclaims, "Mommy's so late. She's got so much to do."<sup>272</sup> The tension between mother and child stems from Colbert's desire to rush the maternal process.

Colbert explains to her daughter (and the viewer) that bath time is just one of the many tasks that mommy must accomplish before baby goes to day nursery. Simply dressing her child and making breakfast represent inappropriately strenuous chores. Each action paves the way for Colbert's retreat from the home and symbolizes the tragic separation of mother and child. The child's urgent declaration, "Don't want to go to day nursery, want to stay home with mommy,"<sup>273</sup> functions as a sentimental, socially charged critique against inattentive mothers.

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<sup>271</sup> *Imitation of Life*, directed by John M. Stahl, 1934.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*

Colbert, as Bea Pullman, leaves the domestic space "to go out and sell"<sup>274</sup> canned maple syrup. Her wistful comment that she works in order to "buy lots of nice things for baby"<sup>275</sup> reveals an unwholesome contamination of the maternal instinct with consumerist desires. The demands of running a home and her late husband's syrup business pull Bea Pullman in too many directions. Her divided interests create a fissure, one that prevents her from performing any job, domestic or professional, with any sort of precision. When the phone rings, Bea leaves her daughter, Jessie, half dressed, to run downstairs and answer the call. The coffee burns on the stove as Bea promises her client a maple syrup delivery within the hour.

Bea assumes the identity of a working woman, but not by choice. She is forced into it by her husband's death. Bea's dual nature is a social ill that must be reconciled. Mr. Pullman's death and Bea's newfound profession create a double absence in the home, a vacuum that must be filled. Adrift like a mercantile pilgrim, Bea lacks direction and guidance. Her new social position leaves her vulnerable to distractions and unfocused as a mother.

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

The solution to Bea's domestic woes and multi-tasking reside not her in her abilities but rather in another woman. An unexpected knock at the back door by Louise Beavers reveals fate's intervention once again into Bea's life. Beavers plays Delilah Johnson, an out-of-work domestic and single mother, who misreads the address on a want ad for "cook, laundress, housemaid, colored, not afraid of hard work, moderate wages..."<sup>276</sup> Delilah's magical appearance signals Stahl's participation in a long Hollywood tradition of exploitation and racial stereotyping.

*The Legend of Bagger Vance* (2000) and *The Green Mile* (1999) are contemporary examples of Hollywood films that present audiences with the African American as magical familiar. As a transformative agent and symbolic child of nature, the black stereotype represents folk wisdom and innocence, and functions as a foil whose sole purpose is to empower and guide the spiritually lost white character in need of salvation.

The chaos that surrounds Bea diminishes the moment Delilah crosses the threshold into the Pullman kitchen. Delilah's domestic knowledge and maternalism allow her to recognize her place as a woman. The mammy figure resonates

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

in Stahl's vision of Delilah. The moment she is left alone in the kitchen, she immediately cooks, cleans, and sets the table. With breakfast made and order restored, Delilah transforms the Pullman house into a home. Delilah fills the void created by Bea's absences. Her presence in the home provides the feminine element needed to balance Bea's new masculine position as breadwinner. They are, in E. Ann Kaplan's phrase, "reconstituting as 'normal' a nuclear family as is possible in the circumstances,"<sup>277</sup> an inadequate substitute doomed to failure, "as if" (Kaplan goes on) "to remind spectators that the traditional way is the better one."<sup>278</sup>

The dichotomy between public knowledge versus private knowledge, and the value (or lack thereof) of literacy as a signpost of status, is a reoccurring motif. For example, Bea reads the correct street address from the newspaper to Delilah. Her class status and race allow her to navigate the streets of the city and read signs but this public knowledge lacks domestic value.

Bea is the worst kind of illiterate, because she has lost the ability to read the domestic space. Delilah, unlike Bea, reads the home. The food burning on the stove,

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<sup>277</sup> E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 167.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*



the child left alone upstairs, who falls in the tub, all signify trouble, which Delilah, unlike Bea, moves to correct, immediately confirming her station as "wife" in this unusual coupling.

It is Delilah's domestic knowledge as embodied in her recipe for pancakes that makes Bea a financial success. The commodification of the domestic space as a social taboo is implicit. Bea rises to success by misreading Delilah. The pancake recipe that Delilah shares with Bea is a family secret, a gift of love and devotion. As a businesswoman, Bea is blind to the significance of such a sacred and personal inheritance. To her, the recipe means stability, a home, cars, and the ability to take vacations.

Delilah, as helpmate, has no objections to her "husband's" appropriation, preferring to perform the role of wife and mother; she rubs Bea's feet after long days at work and after parties. She is the compassionate listener, angel, and friend, all the things a woman should be to a man. Delilah has no desires or aspirations. She values only the home, her role as caretaker to the Pullman women.

When Bea encourages Delilah to sign the legal documents for the incorporation of Aunt Delilah's Pancakes, Delilah, unlike Bea, sees the opportunity as a threat to her home, rather than a source of advancement and means to

personal independence. When Bea asks Delilah, "Don't you want your own home?"<sup>279</sup> she misreads Delilah's response: "No, how am I going to take care of you and Miss Jessie, if I ain't here? ... I was your cook and want to stay your cook."<sup>280</sup> Delilah appears foolish and naïve to Bea and her male business partner but it is Bea who is blind to Delilah's sacrifices as a woman.

Bea as head of the household vows to shield Delilah from the business world and keep things the way they are, and like a husband, promises to continue to watch their personal finances and keep Delilah's money safe. The hierarchal parallels between husband and paternal plantation master reinforce dual notions of dependency in the scene. The two women live together for ten years with Bea as the dominant narrative, whose inspirational rise is an American success story to the business community and cultural elite in the film.

Yet in montage and quick cuts it is Delilah's face, plastered on pancake boxes and billboards, that idealizes the American home. Delilah's commodified black body as a source white fantasy stabilizes the troublesome image of Bea as a working woman. In transitional moments, Delilah's

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<sup>279</sup> *Imitation of Life*.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*

commercialized image appears as Stahl's herald. Delilah, in blinking neon, smiles and flips pancakes, on a scaffold created by Bea's blurring of the home and the marketplace.

The commodification of the domestic space comes with a price. Bea's participation in the male-oriented business realm threatens to estrange her from Jessie and her own maternal nature. By witnessing Delilah's death and listening to Delilah's own daughter Piola's mournful cry that her mother "worked" and "slaved" for her, and "never thought of herself,"<sup>281</sup> Bea finally learns to read with a domestic eye, and understand the importance of a mother's sacrifice.

The neon Delilah smiles down approvingly as Bea stands on the rooftop terrace and rejects her own happiness. Delilah's death enables Bea to become a devoted mother to Jessie and surrogate mother to Piola. Through Delilah Bea learns the satisfaction of place, and the dangers of wanting a different identity.

Beneath the blinking neon, Bea and Jessie are reunited as mother and daughter, unlike Delilah and Piola.

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

***Torch Singer* (1933)**

A year prior to her role as Bea Pullman, Colbert played Sally Trent in Alexander Hall's *Torch Singer*. The melodrama presented viewers with a morality tale and a depression-era vision of the fallen woman. Hall opens the film with an emotionally charged cab ride in which he puts Colbert in a mobile prison. From the back seat, she anxiously watches the meter rise. She emerges from the taxi shamefaced and unable to pay the fare. The driver scolds her but suddenly changes his tune when realizes that he has taken his passenger to Saint Anne's Hospital, a free clinic for the poor.

The camera pans to the hospital entrance as group of expectant mothers file in with their suitcases. The brief scene is Hall's scaffold moment. Like Hester, Sally Trent stands alone as a source of spectacle, for she too is a scarlet woman, as the cab driver and audience now understand. Like Hester, Trent refuses to name the father of her child and keeps his identity a secret. Her denial, however, comes not from pride and devotion (as in Hester's case) but from shame. The doctors and nurses, unlike the Puritan community, pity Trent as she endures a difficult childbirth and an uncertain future. They know the hardships

single mothers face for their beds are filled with women just like Sally. They whisper to one another that what she needs is a stronger body and Mike, the absent father, whose name she calls out in delirium after delivery. The social criticism against philandering men who seduce vulnerable women and then recklessly abandon them is clear, as is the film's message that premarital sex comes with consequences for a woman. Sally Trent pays the price for illicit romance and has her own little pearl, a bastard child she names after herself.

The film's scandalous subject matter was not unusual for filmmakers in pre-Breen-code Hollywood, who often used sex, violence and substance abuse as lures to draw audiences. Promises of shock and titillation, couched in storylines that purported to expose the realities of urban life and the disenfranchised, enabled audiences to become tourists. Shielded by the darkness of the theater, viewers safely assumed a voyeuristic gaze without feeling guilty because they were performing their civic duty as social critics.

As cultural historian Robert Sklar has noted, 1933 and 1934 comprised

a watershed period in mid-Depression American society and culture. The New Deal Administration was seeking to boost the morals of a confused and anxious people

by fostering the spirit of patriotism, unity and commitment to national values, a political goal that coincided with similar tendencies within the movie industry.<sup>282</sup>

Thus, Hollywood assumed the self-assigned position of concerned ally and moral watchdog in an attempt to curry favor with an administration eager to lift the American spirit. With the ability to craft ideological message films, Hollywood "directed its enormous power of persuasion to [not rocking the boat but to] preserving the basic moral, social and economic tenets of traditional American culture."<sup>283</sup> As Sklar points out the maneuver was also a strategic attempt by the industry to appease the League of Decency's anxious "prods" to sanitize and contain content.

*Torch Singer* is Hall's message movie but as I will illustrate later, there are ruptures within the film's narrative that expose a fragile patriarchal society's nightmare over a woman's sense of agency - or in Sally's case, anger. As with all the women examined in this chapter, containment and resocialization are central to reestablishing a world turned upside down by a woman's perceived misconduct.

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<sup>282</sup> Robert Sklar, *Movie Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 171.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

In the 1930s Sally was the fallen woman Americans sympathized with as she struggled to pay the rent and feed her child. It was a situation that was all too familiar to theatergoers as jobs declined and people's savings shrank. Sally represents the national body in crisis. Like the nation, she has fallen, but has the capacity within her to be a good and loving mother. Sally performs her domestic duties with sincere conviction and devotion, bathing her daughter (that recurring trope) as she sings to her and to her widowed roommate's little boy.

Economic hardship, eviction and the humiliation of rejection by her lover's wealthy aunt cause Sally's earnestness and hope to wither. Without assistance or opportunity, she is forced to give up her daughter for adoption. Sally's maternal sacrifice creates a cancer in her that festers. With the loss of her daughter, Sally's innocence is destroyed. Out of spite, she embraces her outsider status and aggressively rejects her domesticity.

Without her daughter, Sally loses not only her virtue but also her sense of self. Hall's melodrama takes a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde turn when Sally assumes a new identity. Her transformation occurs after a failed audition in which a club owner rejects her because he believes that her voice lacks an artistic essence, one that comes from life

experience and suffering. With a kind of gallows humor, and in sardonic acceptance of the idea that she has not suffered, Sally becomes the wanton Mimi Benton, shedding her scruples and her past when she assumes her new persona. The disavowal of her name, which is also her daughter's, turns absence and denial of a mother's longing into a form of pathology. In Hollywood's social scientific cause-and-effect scenario, severing the symbiotic relationship between mother and child destroys a woman's rectitude and psyche.

What is subversive about Hall's plot twist is that he presents viewers with a woman who actively creates a new narrative for herself, one in which she controls the details of her life. Mimi Benton is the embodiment of female independence. With her cigarettes, cocktails, lavish apartment, and flippant double entendres to men, she challenges the precepts of True Womanhood that continued to resonate in the cultural imagination.

In contrast to Sally, who felt shame over her seduction and loss of innocence, Mimi embraces her sexuality and takes delight in the embellishment of her notorious reputation. If Sally Trent signifies the national body in crisis, then Mimi Benton is its unwholesome spawn, the product of poverty, civic malaise and moral decline.



Anger and maternal loss split Sally in half and expose cultural anxieties over a woman's place and potential duality. Mimi Benton presented audiences with a frightening image of the New Woman disconnected from the domestic sphere.

Anger and pain enable Mimi to rise out of poverty and achieve financial success, a seemingly impossible task for her mirror image. In her radio persona of the sweetly domestic Aunt Jenny (a third personality), Mimi tells stories to children and encourages them to buy and eat Oateena. In her broadcasts, Mimi cynically performs her domesticity for profit and out of vanity.

Unlike Roosevelt's intimate and paternal fireside chats, Mimi's performance lacks sincerity, for she masquerades and enters the domestic space as a female trickster. Mimi invades the home as a threat and a contagion, not as a friend but a fiend. With her false sentimentality, she jeopardizes the purity and virtue of the nation's future, its children.

Aunt Jenny's broadcasts predate Tokyo Rose's debut, and although the fictionalized broadcasts and personae differ, each woman possesses the same powers of persuasion and uses her disembodied voice as a tool of enchantment. In both narratives, the radio functions as a symbol of female

duplicity. The fear of the confidence woman on the radio is encapsulated in the scene in which Mimi broadcasts as Aunt Jenny from her apartment as she entertains friends over cocktails. The disreputable group laughs and winks at one another as their hostess hoodwinks her gullible listeners.

Like the jailhouse apple brown betty and origami swans in *Martha Stewart Behind Bars*, the reenactment of domesticity becomes a ritual of redemption, one that rekindles Sally Trent's virtuous nature. The revelation that *her* daughter may be a listener changes her performance from an ironic act to a genuine labor of love. The reenactment of domesticity functions as a form of maternal socialization and leads to the containment of Sally's shadow self.

When her friend and radio producer Tony exclaims, "All of a sudden you remember you're a mother,"<sup>284</sup> Hall puts his heroine on the scaffold a second time. When she confesses, "I've never forgotten,"<sup>285</sup> her statement is meant to soothe the audience's anxiety over her deviancy. As she makes clear in her response, the act of self-sacrifice was a

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<sup>284</sup> *Torch Singer*, directed by Alexander Hall, 1933.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*

prison sentence with "conditions," a self-imposed exile that she "honored" and endured.

I gave her up four years ago completely and forever. Those were the conditions and I've lived up to them. Now, I've got to do something about it. Tony, I didn't realize it at first but every time I broadcast, maybe I'm talking to my own kid.<sup>286</sup>

With her virtue restored, Sally refutes the orphanage's terms and uses the radio to reconnect with her daughter, even after she is told that it "can't be done" and that "business is business."<sup>287</sup>

In the end, Sally not only redeems herself but the marketplace, which she uses to find her daughter. But the two cannot stay mingled. The separation of public and private spheres occurs when Tony literally leaves Sally behind after discovering that the address to which he has driven his star contains not only her daughter but Mike, young Sally's father and one of the city's leading citizens, now miraculously reformed. The film's message is clear: Sally Trent is home. With the family restored and Sally in her place, the nation's hegemonic order is once again reaffirmed.

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<sup>286</sup> *Torch Singer*.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*

***The Thrill Of It All* (1963)**

In Norman Jewison's *The Thrill Of It All*, motherhood and a woman's desire for a career again provide the fodder for narrative conflict. Though the subject remains thorny and many of the implicit attitudes strikingly unchanged after three decades, Jewison and his screenwriter Carl Reiner are allowed to forgo the melodrama and treat the troubled home as a source of farce.

Doris Day plays Beverly Boyer, a housewife married to a successful obstetrician played by James Garner. Dr. Boyer's rise to the top and reputation stem from his uncanny ability to help even the most unlikely couples conceive.

*The Thrill of It All* provides the audience with a morality tale couched in comedy. The virtue of motherhood and the home as a site of retreat for the working man is not an unusual template, but it conceals a meta-narrative of cultural anxieties over the working woman that Americans have grappled with since the mid-nineteenth-century, when women began to enter the workforce as mill workers, shop girls, or as in the Theodore Dreiser's morally ambiguous tale *Sister Carrie*, actresses in the theater. Beverly Boyer is a wholesome Carrie, and even more disruptive and

sinister because of it, using her unspoiled domestic persona to play "herself" in soap commercials - a counterfeit cleanliness that calls the reality of the status quo into question.

The working woman with her own purse-money and sense of autonomy has always clashed with the static fantasy of the ideal middle-class woman dependent on her husband or father, longing only for the happiness of her family. As the ideal caretaker, she devoted her self completely to needs of others without out any sense of personal desire or want of her own.

*Godey's Lady's Book* helped facilitate idealized images of Victorian womanhood. The editors of the popular magazine kept readers abreast of the latest fashions and schooled men and women on proper etiquette and form. Female readers in the 1850s, for instance, were advised that one of the "highest and holiest" positions for a woman was attained when her husband placed her at the head of his household. In *Godey's* translation of "The Sphere of Woman" by Goethe, the ideal wife is depicted as

"...dependent on nothing, save the love and attachment of her husband, for whom she procures true independence - that which is internal and domestic. That which his labor has acquired, he sees properly secured and employed. Thus in the spirit of true independence, he can devote his energies to great objects - and become to the state (by promoting its

prosperity) what his wife is to the household over which she presides.”<sup>288</sup>

As an empty vessel void of agency, the wife lacks subjectivity. In the mirror there is no “I” or “me” reflected back, only “he.” She “procures” or acts but not for herself. Unlike his wife, the husband “sees” and experiences a sense of self and autonomy in both the public and private sphere.

The husband’s labor links him to the marketplace as well as the nation and empowers him as a citizen. Thus, he actively participates not only in the construction of the nation’s market economy but acts as one of its architects as he defines the boundaries of his wife’s sphere. The husband’s ability to delegate and dole out capital reinforces power relationships in the home and his wife’s dependency. Civic-minded participation in the marketplace reinforces notions of manhood and masculinity and positions female activity as an extension of male privilege.

The wife’s emotional fulfillment, like her money, comes from her husband. The wife’s body and the home represent interchangeable spaces in the male imagination. The gender dualisms in which men act and women tranquilly wait provided Victorian men with a comforting sense of

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<sup>288</sup> *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, “The Sphere of Woman, Translated From The German Of Goethe” (Philadelphia March, 1850) <http://www.history.rochester.edu/godeys/03-50/tsow.htm> (April 5, 2010).

stability, and created a domestic ideology that worked to assuage anxieties spurred by a rapidly changing nation.

James Garner as Dr. Boyer in *The Thrill of It All*, like the imagined Victorian man in "The Sphere of Woman," represents the upwardly mobile, middle-class professional. As an obstetrician, Dr. Boyer actively participates in the act of nation building. Like the factory foreman overseeing the line, Dr. Boyer supervises the means of middle-class reproduction, in terms of supply and demand in the market of baby making. His labor ensures the continuation of a white middle-class hegemony in which womanhood and motherhood function as interchangeable signifiers.

Jewison establishes the film's allegorical tone in the opening sequence in which the camera follows a wealthy white woman as she makes her way through the city to her husband's office. The woman laughs and bubbles with joy. The source of her happiness is unclear and provides the scene with an element of mystery. Her uncontrolled joy as she hugs herself and spins around transforms her into a spectacle.

In the cramped elevator of a high-rise, the woman's laughter becomes contagious. The men who surround her in the tight space one by one begin to laugh with her, not because they are privy to her secret but from their

automatic willingness to accept her. The men read her behavior based on her appearance. Her age, clothes, and class signify her insider status to them. She has achieved success. Her literal ascent enables her take her place in the privileged realm of a hegemonic group.

As Jewison makes clear, the woman's destination and secret link her to a social hierarchy based on wealth, privilege and social expectation. What fills the woman with such blissful emotion is the news that she is pregnant. The pregnancy symbolically affirms the older couple's union and supports Jewison's gendered notion that motherhood provides the ultimate emotional experience for a woman. The survival of the nuclear family in *The Thrill of it All* is contingent upon gendered divisions of labor in which the middle-class woman willingly assumes the role of fertility factory and rejects the demands of the marketplace in favor of the private sphere where she performs the "holiest" of duties like a true angel in waiting.

Doris Day represents Hollywood's idealized image of the all-American woman and perfect suburban housewife. Her first appearance onscreen is in a domestic sequence similar to Colbert's in *Imitation of Life*. Day struggles to multitask, attempting to bathe her daughter while directing her son to answer the phone ringing in the hallway.



The chaos functions as a form of comedic relief. The slapstick moments only reinforce the social criticism and finger pointing. The scene invites female viewers to identify with Day as the hurried housewife, as they simultaneously acknowledge her failure. Day's inability to perform her domestic duties with any real sense of grace or ease exposes a home in jeopardy. Day's lack of focus stems from her refusal to commit wholeheartedly to her caretaker role. Unlike Bea Pullman, Beverly is not a widow, nor is she forced to pursue a career in order to take care of her family. The threat to the Boyer home is something more dire when Beverly, without the necessary motivation of spousal death, actively pursues a job for her own gratification. Female desire unchecked leads to disaster, as the film makes clear.

Beverly's fall from domestic grace occurs when she becomes the spokesperson for Happy Soap. The company hires Beverly to charm viewers with her tales of motherhood and personal experiences using their product. Beverly commits two transgressive acts at once when she takes the job. When she leaves the home, yet uses her sacred experiences there to peddle soap, she crosses a literal line.

Before her sensational rise to celebrity status as the Happy Soap girl, Beverly has satisfied her need for

recognition through a domestic ritual in which she bottles homemade ketchup in the basement of her suburban home. Her hobby, however, masks a pathological urge. The numerous shelves in the Boyer basement lined with rows of ketchup bottles, too many for a family of four to consume, at first glance appears comical, but the underlying implication serves as a subtle hint that Beverly has a problem. As in the prop room scene in *Martha Behind Bars*, a grotesquely exaggerated warehouse of domesticity represents dangerous feelings not entirely successfully repressed. The basement, the space in which Beverly obsessively transforms bushel after bushel of tomatoes, is a popular psychological symbol of unspoken and unknown desire. In his autobiography, Jung recounts the moment he realized the importance of his dream of a house: "It was plain to me that the house represented a kind of image of the psyche - that is to say, of my then state of consciousness, with hitherto unconscious additions... The deeper I went, the more alien and the darker the scene became."<sup>289</sup>

The basement ketchup factory represents Beverly's unconscious desire to crush and transform, to produce rather than reproduce. As long as the activity takes place safely underground, it is sanctioned. But when Beverly

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<sup>289</sup> C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), p 160.

enters the marketplace, the boundaries between home and work blur as she turns the private space in to a consumable commodity for marketers and an eager public.

Jewison depicts Beverly's need for autonomy and quest for a career as foolhardy. Her career choice exposes her ignorance of the public sphere. Her job lacks value in terms of middle-class respectability. Her position as spokeswoman depends not on her talent or skill but appearance. Her labor links her not with a profession or trade but with consumerism, a leisure activity and pastime performed by women. Beverly's failure to recognize and appreciate the value of her husband's labor is another flaw in need of correction.

In order for Beverly to be redeemed, she must reject the public sphere and completely embrace her position as mother and housewife. Her transformation occurs when she is forced to act as midwife to Mrs. Fraleigh, the expectant mother introduced at the beginning of the film. Mrs. Fraleigh sees motherhood as a cherished gift and blissfully endures her labor pains without any sign of discomfort as she sits in the backseat of a Rolls Royce stuck in traffic. Dr. Boyer arrives literally on horseback, dressed in his scrubs, and delivers the baby with Beverly by his side. Dr.

Boyer enables Mrs. Fraleigh to complete her rite of passage and take her place in the sanctum of motherhood.

Beverly's conversion and rejection of the public sphere is contingent upon her role as witness. She witnesses not only the miracle of birth but her husband's hand in the sacred act of delivery. In a weepy, excessively sentimental moment, Beverly confesses her newfound faith to her husband as the two stand in the hospital hallway. Dr. Boyer holds his wife as she bears witness to him and the audience, when she declares

Darling, do you know, when I helped you back there in the car, and I held that new life in my arms... I knew, I knew, what you must feel every single day and I felt so close to you... I love you so much and I want to be a doctor's wife again.<sup>290</sup>

In a bizarre gender twist Dr. Boyer receives the credit for bringing "that new life" in to the world rather than Mrs. Fraleigh. His experience supersedes the mother's role and renders her literal labor invisible. Beverly's confession becomes a disavowal of not only her own experience of motherhood but every woman's corporeal reality. It is worth noting that in another Day vehicle, *Pillow Talk* (in which Day plays another mixer of domestic and commercial spheres, an interior decorator), a running joke involves an

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<sup>290</sup> *The Thrill of it All*, directed by Norman Jewison, 1964.

obstetrician under the farcical impression that the male lead, Rock Hudson, has somehow become pregnant.

Beverly Boyer makes the public confession that Hester Prynne resists and is rewarded with the public embrace denied to Hester. She is therefore allowed to reconnect to her home and to her children as a redeemed mother. Through her tears, Beverly renounces the ultimate sin - a woman's desire for self-actualization. Beverly's heartfelt plea "I want to be a doctor's wife again" signifies her redeemed status. The image of the working woman and threat of the middle-class mother with personal ambition recedes into the darkness as Beverly embraces her subordinate position. Her identification as a "doctor's wife" reestablishes her husband's dominant position and reaffirms his connection to the marketplace. The containment of female agency restores the family unit and relegates female desire to the act of reproduction rather than production.

### ***Baby Boom* (1987)**

Charles Shyer's *Baby Boom*, starring Diane Keaton as J.C. Wiatt, shows audiences that the key to a woman's success in the late 1980s hinges not on her MBA or networking skills but rather on the mastery of domesticity.

Like all of the movies examined thus far, *Baby Boom* wrestles with the theme of female containment and the separation of public and private spheres.

At first glance, *Baby Boom* seems to celebrate women's liberation. In the opening montage, women dominate the urban landscape. They wear power suits, sport slick leather briefcases and walk with determination to corporate jobs. As the early morning rush hour scene unfolds, a voice-over provides viewers with a brief historical overview of women's accomplishments. The authoritative announcer however, turns sideshow huckster when she invites audiences to examine the image of the working woman not as a historical fact but as a modern marvel and freak, pointing out, "Sociologists say the new working woman is a phenomenon of our time."<sup>291</sup>

"Phenomenon of our time," coupled with an ethnographic description of the sexlessly named J.C Wiatt, emphasizes the career woman's independence and otherness:

She has a corner office at 58<sup>th</sup> and Park. She works 5 to 9. She makes six figures a year and they call her the Tiger Lady. Married to her job, she lives with an investment banker married to his. They collect African art. They co-own their co-op and have separate but equal IRA accounts. One would take it for granted that a woman like this has it all. One must never take anything for granted.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> *Baby Boom*, directed by Charles Shyer, 1987.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*

The working woman emerges once more as a mystery to unravel. The claim that "one would take it for granted that a woman like this has it all,"<sup>293</sup> hints at J.C.'s hidden flaws. On the surface, she appears complete with her IRA, corner office, six figures and career-minded boyfriend but as the passage above implies, something is missing.

*Baby Boom* presents the modern woman as a paradoxical byproduct of the marketplace and the women's movement. The career woman's evolution, gleaned through Hollywood's socio-ethnographic lens, reflects the image of a woman with too much animus, who mimics masculinity. The underlying fear that gender distinctions are slowly eroding is evident when J.C.'s boss Fritz approaches her for the position of partner and gingerly confesses to her "You know, normally, I don't think of you as a woman but in this case, I do. I have to look at you as a woman-slash-partner."<sup>294</sup> The comment self-consciously critiques patriarchal prejudices and workplace discrimination as the film's underlying meta-narrative encourages women to retreat from the public sphere.

The image of the corporate uber-woman stands in stark contrast to idealized notions of womanhood. In the

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

workplace, "partner" and woman stand in opposition. J.C.'s sex, in Fritz's essentialist equation, predetermines her corporate weakness. Her promotion relies on her complete rejection of her identity as a woman, an identity anchored in gender dualisms that link femininity with sacrifice and passivity, as Fritz makes clear when he asks J.C.,

Do you understand the sacrifices that you're going to have to make? A man can be a success and still have a full personal life. My wife is there for me whenever I need her. She raises the kids. She decorates... I don't know what the hell she does but she takes care of things... I guess what I am saying is I'm lucky. I can have it all.<sup>295</sup>

In the patriarchal cosmology of the marketplace, manhood rests on the devaluation of the feminine and denial of female subjectivity. As Michael A. Kimmel aptly notes, it is "anti-femininity [that] lies at the heart of contemporary and historical conceptions of manhood, so that masculinity is defined more by what one is not rather than who one is."<sup>296</sup> Fritz represents what Michael Kimmel refers to as the "Marketplace Man." According to Kimmel, this model of manhood replaced the symbiotic images of the "Genteel Patriarch" and "Heroic Artisan" that circulated in American culture in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>295</sup> *Baby Boom*.

<sup>296</sup> Michael S. Kimmel, "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity," from *Theorizing Masculinities*, Harry Brod and Michael Kimmel, eds., pp. 119-141. Copyright © 1994. Reprinted by Sage Publications, Inc., selected from *Race, Class and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study*, Paula S. Rothenberg, ed. (New York: Worth Publishers, 2007), p. 85.



The new man on the make "derived his identity entirely from his success in the capitalist marketplace, as he accumulated wealth, power and status. He was the urban entrepreneur, the businessman."<sup>297</sup> In the competitive and precarious public sphere, American manhood represented status which "required proof," and that "required the acquisition of tangible goods as evidence of success."<sup>298</sup> Marketplace man and Fritz are interchangeable signifiers in a narrative of male dominance and subordination. For as Fritz's description of his wife clearly illustrates, she "takes care" of him and she "is there for [him]" putting his needs first.

As the film's narrative implies, the intrusion of femininity in the marketplace confuses traditional gender roles and subverts compulsory heterosexuality. The competition between the sexes and the demand for equal partnerships work to emasculate men and destabilize their hierarchical place in both public and private spheres. Fritz's manhood is secure not because he is a member of the board and runs a Fortune 500 company but because his traditional "partner" (his wife) resides not in the office but at home.

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<sup>297</sup> Kimmel, p. 83.

<sup>298</sup> Kimmel, 83-84.

The emasculated man who falls victim to women's liberation is depicted in Harold Ramis's character, Steven Buchner. Unlike Fritz's masculinity, Steven's is suspect. The intrusion of the career woman into the home turns the marketplace man into a fop who wears creamy cosmetic facemasks as a nightly ritual, and whose virility (and power) has waned to the point that the act of sex functions as a pause rather than a source of pleasure.

The restoration of manhood depends on J.C.'s rejection of Steven and her role in the marketplace as the Tiger Lady - as fierce a totemic image as Iva Toguri's Dragon Lady. Though unlike Toguri, Wiatt is assumedly on the right side of the American dream, her nickname suggests the same kind of fear of female power.

Once again, domesticity functions as the catalyst that propels a woman's retreat from the public sphere. What tames J.C. is a crash-course education in motherhood. Just as in *Imitation of Life*, fate intervenes and provides the career woman with a domestic guide. Unlike Bea Pullman, however, who learns the value of motherhood from her mystical self-sacrificing housekeeper and surrogate domestic partner, J.C.'s instruction comes from the unexpected inheritance of baby named Elizabeth and their flight to the pastoral.

J.C.'s newfound motherhood produces a discord that creates tension between maternal desire and marketplace performance based on domestic disavowal. J.C.'s maternalistict union with Elizabeth establishes her connection to the domestic sphere. Each diaper change, feeding, baby bath (again) and gentle cradling produces a cathartic release of domestic fulfillment. Her domestic cathexis marks her as the office-place transgressor and leads to her demotion. The male view of her role as caretaker is crystallized when Fritz informs her that she has "changed... lost her concentration" and gone "soft."

The pastoral - to which J.C. flees after her humiliation - functions as a regenerative space that connects J.C. not only to the home and the land but also to virile manhood in the guise of Sam Shepard's character Dr. Jeff Cooper, the town's good-natured veterinarian. Her farmhouse fixer-upper with its rusted pipes, leaky roof and dilapidated steam heaters is a domestic challenge that forces J.C. to adapt to her new environment. The gentrification project enables her to transform the neglected space (reflecting her neglected femininity) into an ideal home. Her kitchen becomes a culinary laboratory, a gendered space where she practices domesticity and develops her talents as a homemaker.

After being snowed in during a New England blizzard, she learns to make her own organic baby food from the apples she has picked and stored. Domestic confinement is a symbolic gestation period, the apples a symbol of health and healthy impulses, in contrast to Doris Day's hoarded and nightmarishly sublimated tomatoes. J.C. emerges from her winter cocoon as a worker who produces for the nation's future, her child, and turns her hobby into a small business.

"Country Baby" becomes a marketplace sensation. Jars of baby food line grocery store shelves across the country and turn J.C. into an instant commodity who attracts the attention of big business (her former employer and their client, Food Chain), who want to merge with her small company. The merger, another form of partnership, presents J.C. with the opportunity to "have it all." As film scholar Jack Boozer points out in his analysis,

the text humorously enshrines the supermom who can both reject and then finally take advantage of corporate economics. By growing her own independent business in baby food after first leaving the corporate security, the protagonist proves that resourceful-middle class mothers don't need corporate salaries to survive.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Jack Boozer, *Career Movies: American Business and the Success Mystique*, (Austin; University of Texas Press, 2002), p. 76.

While I agree with Boozer's reading that the film overtly champions the image of "resourceful middle-class mothers," I also believe a counter-narrative runs parallel to Boozer's contention that the film "demonstrates how adopted motherhood can be made to function alongside the demands of gainful employment."<sup>300</sup> For me, it is the *performance* of domesticity, as in *Torch Singer* and *Martha Behind Bars*, that acclimates and restores J.C to her proper womanly place in the domestic realm.

The resocialization of the career woman reestablishes the separation of public and private spheres and reassigns women to the role of domestic production. When she tells her former bosses and Food Chain, "I'm not the Tiger Lady anymore... I have a crib in my office and there's a mobile over my desk... I really like that..."<sup>301</sup> she openly embraces her new identity and draws attention to the objects that identify her as a mother. To focus on J.C's claim that she can take Country Baby just as far on her own without corporate America misses the point of the film's final image, which is not of J.C running her own business from her quaint Vermont town, but of her sitting alone, cradling Elizabeth in a rocking chair next to a window as a golden

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> *Baby Boom*.

haze of sunlight penetrates the pale curtains that conceal and reject the outside world. It is her role as mother that is illuminated and sanctified.

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## Filmography

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- Big Bad Mama II* (1987), dir. Jim Wynorski. Concorde Pictures.
- The Big Red One* (1980), dir. Sam Fuller. Lorac Productions.
- Bloody Mama* (1970), dir. Roger Corman. American International Pictures.
- Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), dir. Arthur Penn. Warner Brothers/Seven Arts.
- Bridge to the Sun* (1961), dir. Etienne Perier. Cite Films.
- Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), dir. James Whale. Universal Pictures.
- Cat People* (1942), dir. Jacques Tourneur. RKO.
- Cat People* (1982), dir. Paul Schaefer. Universal Pictures.
- Cecil B. DeMented* (2000), dir. John Waters. Canal+/Ice Cap Productions.
- Citizen Kane* (1941), dir. Orson Welles. RKO.
- Citizen Tania* (1989), dir. Raymond Pettibon and Dave Markey. Provisional.
- The Crucible* (1957), dir. Raymond Rouleau. CICC/DEFA-Studio fur Spielfilme.
- The Crucible* (1996), dir. Nicholas Hytner. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox.
- Cry Baby* (1990), dir. John Waters. Universal Pictures.
- Disclosure* (1994), dir. Barry Levinson. Warner Bros.
- Dog Day Afternoon* (1975), dir. Sidney Lumet. Warner Bros.

*Dracula's Daughter* (1936), dir. Lambert Hillyer. Universal Pictures.

*Flags of Our Fathers* (2006), dir. Clint Eastwood. Dreamworks.

*Going Places* (1974), dir. Bertrand Blier. Universal Pictures France.

*Gone With the Wind* (1939), dir. Victor Fleming. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

*The Green Mile* (1999), dir. Frank Darabont. Castle Rock Entertainment.

*Guerilla: The Taking of Patty Hearst* (2005), dir. Robert Stone. Magnolia Pictures.

*Hardcore* (1979), dir. Paul Schaefer. Columbia Pictures.

*Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959), dir. Alain Resnais. Argos Films.

*The Hunger* (1983), dir. Tony Scott. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

*I Married a Witch* (1942), dir. Rene Clair. Cinema Guild/Rene Clair Productions.

*Imitation of Life* (1934), dir. John M. Stahl. Universal.

*Irma La Deuce* (1963), dir. Billy Wilder. Phalanx Productions/The Mirsch Corporation.

*Kiss Me, Stupid* (1964), dir. Billy Wilder. The Mirsch Corporation.

*The Legend of Bagger Vance* (2000), dir. Robert Redford. Twentieth Century Fox.

*The Legend of Lizzie Borden* (1975), dir. Paul Windkos. George LeMaire Productions/Paramount Television. ABC.

*Letters From Iwo Jima* (2006), dir. Clint Eastwood. Dreamworks.

*Martha Behind Bars* (2005), dir. Eric Bross. CBS.

- Martha, Inc.: The Story of Martha Stewart* (2003), dir. Jason Ensler. Jaffe/Braunstein Films Ltd. NBC.
- Mildred Pierce* (1945), dir. Michael Curtiz. Warner Bros.
- Nadja* (1994), dir. Michael Almereyda. Kino.
- Network* (1976), dir. Sidney Lumet. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer/United Artists.
- Patty Hearst* (1988), dir. Paul Schrader. Zenith Entertainment Ltd.
- Pillow Talk* (1959), dir. Michael Gordon, Universal.
- Pink Flamingos* (1972), dir. John Waters. Saliva Films.
- Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), dir. Nicholas Ray. Warner Bros.
- The Scarlet Letter* (1913), dir. David Miles. Kinemacolor.
- The Scarlet Letter* (1926), dir. Victor Sjöström. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.
- The Scarlet Letter* (1934), dir. Robert G. Vignola. Larry Darmour Productions/Majestic Picture Inc.
- The Scarlet Letter* (1973), dir. Wim Wenders. Elias Querejeta Producciones Cinematograficas S.L./ Filmverlag der Autoren.
- The Scarlet Letter* (1995), dir. Roland Joffe. Allied Stars Ltd./Cinergi Pictures Entertainment Inc.
- Serial Mom* (1994), dir. John Waters. Polar Entertainment Corporation.
- Sleeper* (1973), dir. Woody Allen. United Artists.
- So I Married an Axe Murderer* (1993), dir. Thomas Schlamme. Fried/Woods Films and TriStar Pictures.
- The Steel Helmet* (1951), dir. Sam Fuller. Deputy Corporation.

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Lester Cowan Productions.

*Strait-Jacket* (1964), dir. William Castle. William Castle  
Productions.

*The Sugarland Express* (1974), dir. Steven Spielberg.  
Universal Pictures.

*Taxi Driver* (1976), dir. Martin Scorsese. Columbia  
Pictures.

*Thieves Like Us* (1974), dir. Robert Altman. United Artists.

*The Thrill of it All* (1963), dir. Norman Jewison.  
Universal.

*Tokyo Rose* (1946), dir. Lew Landers. Pine-Thomas  
Productions.

*Torch Singer* (1933), dir. Alexander Hall and George Somnes.  
Paramount.

*Two Family House* (2000), dir. Raymond De Felitta. Filbert  
Steps Productions.

*West Side Story* (1961), dir. Robert Wise and Jerome  
Robbins. United Artists.

*White Heat* (1949), dir. Raoul Walsh. Warner Bros.

*The Wind and the Lion* (1975), dir. John Milius. Metro-  
Goldwyn-Mayer.

*With Lee in Virginia* (1913), dir. William J. Bauman. Kay-  
Bee Pictures.

*The Wizard of Oz* (1939), dir. Victor Fleming. Metro-  
Goldwyn-Mayer.

*Young Man With a Horn* (1950), dir. Michael Curtiz. Warner  
Bros.

