

From Haunting the Code to Queer Ambiguity: Historical Shifts in Adapting Lesbian
Narratives from Paper to Film

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ABSTRACT

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From Haunting the Code to Queer Ambiguity: Historical Shifts in Adapting Lesbian
Narratives from Paper to Film

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This thesis provides a historical approach to the question of how lesbianism is made visible in Hollywood film adaptations of lesbian narratives from the 1930s to 2011. Chapter one examines Code censorship and haunting absences in *Rebecca* (1940), *These Three* (1936) and *The Children's Hour* (1961). Chapter two analyzes ambiguous lesbian representation as a type of dual marketing approach designed to appeal to both heterosexual mainstream audiences and queer audiences in *The Color Purple* (1985), *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991), and *Orlando* (1992). Chapter three culminates in an examination of the location of queerness in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2009, 2011) focusing on the character of Lisbeth Salander as a queer force aimed at destabilizing heterosexist assumption. It is through my examination of the historical shifts in the process translating lesbianism from a verbal description to a visible depiction on screen in Hollywood adaptations that the social and cultural significance and impact of these historical shifts becomes apparent.

DEDICATION

To Virginia Jayne Beresford Byam for first introducing me to the concept of adaptations.

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INTRODUCTION

LESBIAN REPRESENTATION IN FILM ADAPTATION, 1930- 2011

Queer spectatorship theory examines the ways in which representations of lesbians impact individual concepts of identity as well as social conceptions of queerness. My work addresses crucial questions around the problem of queer visual representation. By considering lesbian representation through the lens of adaptation, I investigate the ways in which the visibility and invisibility of lesbian subjects functions as a key problematic in the circulation of some cultural texts. In particular, I address the ways in which film adaptations rely on the structures of adaptation to produce ambivalent texts in which lesbian subjects are readable but not invisible.

Most of the theorists I examine focus on the ways in which queer spectators use their marginalized identity positions to see things as visible and foregrounded that other non-marginalized, uninitiated and un-invested spectators cannot or will not see. By utilizing extra-filmic materials and reading against the grain, perverse spectators read as *visible* representations of queerness or lesbianism that other spectators only perceive as *invisible*. However, Alexander Doty's concept of the already present inherent queerness in any so-called "mainstream" text presents a challenge to other theorists advocating for the utilization of the marginalized subject position. By doing this he points out the too often unacknowledged and unquestioned heterocentricity of these other approaches.

My project examines this rift between queer spectatorship practices and analyzes the historical shifts in representation strategies, shifts in the way lesbianism is made visible through the process of adapting a literary text to film. In it, I seek to examine and

understand the impact of such shifts between textual registers on ways of making lesbianism visible or readable. Trends in adaptations of lesbian characters show that films became increasingly able to visibly represent lesbian subjects since the 1940s, and that contemporary spectators using what Patricia White terms “retrospectate spectatorship” can see as visible today what would have been less visible then. I argue that approaches in adaptation theory can be used to negotiate the theoretical split among queer spectatorship approaches. This chapter will provide a brief overview of both queer spectatorship theory and adaptation theory, and situate my argument within the history of these fields.

Judith Mayne, in *Cinema and Spectatorship*, provides a useful entry into the concept of queer spectatorship. Mayne emphasizes the need for textual analysis of individual films while simultaneously recognizing the myriad identities that individual spectators can belong to and how this impacts “the hypothetical quality of any spectator imagined by film theory” (8). Of most interest to me is Mayne’s concept of “critical audiences.” One major example of this is gay and lesbian audiences who hold what Mayne terms as a “critical” position because of their capacity to be both inside and outside dominant ideology, they are inside and outside representations of dominant ideology (ie, they are both represented and not represented by its cultural productions). This concept of the critical audience of gay and lesbian viewers opens up the possibility that non-mainstream audiences can use what Janet Staiger terms, “perverse spectatorship” practices to foreground the images and representations of lesbians in film. I will explain this concept more fully in chapter one.

The invisibility of lesbian characters depends not on textual images but rather on the reading strategies of spectators themselves. Marginalized gay and lesbian spectators are, themselves, (especially historically) invisible as desiring subjects. The lack of visible markers of homosexual identity, the potentially dangerous and historically illegal nature of declaring one's "deviant" sexuality openly, all contribute to the invisibility of homosexuality in society and therefore its historical invisibility in film. Films post-Code are freer to experiment with strategies for making this invisible or marginalized identity position visible but this freedom usually manifests itself in a new kind of ambiguity that allows for such representations to be read as homosexuality (or not), depending on the approach, projection, and identity position of each individual spectator. An example of this is the female-friendship or lesbian-lovers ambiguity of the Idgie/Ruth relationship in the film adaptation of *Fried Green Tomatoes* (Avent 1991), I will discuss in chapter two.

The term "perverse spectator" comes from Janet Staiger who, in *Perverse Spectators*, provides a "historical materialist approach to audience and media reception"(1). Staiger's project is to develop a way of describing individual instances of reception and the meanings individuals make of these experiences. To achieve this, her work combines research on reception, fans, stars and cultural studies in general. Staiger makes it clear that she is not looking to pinpoint a cause for all responses to films but rather to examine a multitude of intersecting factors and how these factors may be linked to "broader dynamics of class, race and ethnicity, generation, gender, and sexual identities" (2). She explains that, coming from cultural studies, she uses "several theoretical paradigms, including psychoanalysis [to explain] events of interpretation and

experience” (2). In her willingness to move beyond psychoanalysis in her examination of film spectatorship Staiger shares much with fellow theorists Judith Mayne, Suzanna Danuta Walters and Andrea Weiss, all of whom also express a desire to move beyond the restrictions posed (especially to female spectatorship) by psychoanalytic based film theories.

This desire to move beyond psychoanalysis, or at least to include it as one among many types of theoretical approaches, is something that all of these feminist/queer film theorists I am examining share. Staiger explains that her work is theoretically mixed as she uses textual analysis as well as “psychoanalytical, cognitive psychology, and sociological theories” to enrich her interpretation (2). She acknowledges a debt to David Bordwell’s concept of the theory of cognitivism as well as other earlier theorists, but points out some major flaws in some of their assumptions about “normal” spectators. She challenges Bordwell’s claim that “spectators are primarily interested in cognitive acts—especially the act of solving a problem – and that spectators are ‘knowledgeable’ and cooperative” (3). Staiger explains that her chapter, in *Perverse Spectators*, on the film *The Silence of the Lambs*, “argues that variable readings of [Jodi Foster’s] character occurred, these variations helped over-determine the response of concern by some gay men that people might interpret the film as, once again, stereotyping deviant sexual murderers as homosexuals” (4). Here Staiger uses the concept of perverse spectatorship to point out that by deploying extra-textual materials such as Hollywood gossip about Foster’s personal sexuality, lesbians and gay male “perverse spectators” could use this

insider knowledge to support a gay positive take on a film filled with potentially negative and damaging homosexual representations.

I use the term “invisible” similarly to Weiss in that I mean that the text remains conspicuously silent or cryptically excludes certain elements regarding a specific character’s sexual identity. Only those spectators who are or have been themselves conspicuously silent or cryptically exclude(d) aspects of themselves socially will see the trace of this exclusion and will identify with the silence and will therefore see as visible what has been made invisible. This is especially true of earlier Code films since audiences were already reading to fill in the gaps about censored (hetero)sexuality, drug use, profanity, etc.

The concept of gossip as an extra-filmic tool for making lesbianism or queerness visible in film is originally articulated by Andrea Weiss. In *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians In Film*, Weiss examines the history of lesbians in film, putting particular emphasis on the function of lesbian spectatorship in developing concepts of lesbian identity in 20th century America. Weiss talks about the problem of invisibility when it comes to representations of lesbians in film, but notes that “invisibility can foster visibility as well: Each instance of invisibility seems to leave a trace, if only a trace of its absence or repression, which is also a kind of image. These faint traces and coded signs are especially visible to lesbian spectators” (1). This statement of the special sight unique to lesbian spectators is very similar to Mayne’s concept of “critical audiences” and Staiger’s concept of “perverse spectators,” all of which have to do with using

marginalized identity positions to see things as visible and foregrounded that other non-marginalized, uninitiated and un-invested spectators cannot or will not see.

Weiss focuses on “those periods in this century where the changes in the visual representation of lesbianism were the most significant, and explor[es] the meanings behind these changes in representation for lesbian spectators” (3). The emphasis Weiss places on the role of the film star and the function of gossip is also examined by Richard Dyer in his book *Stars* and by Judith Mayne in *Cinema Spectatorship*. For Weiss:

Rumor and gossip constitute the unrecorded history of gay subculture . . . It is this insistence by the dominant culture on making homosexuality invisible and unspeakable that both requires and enables us to locate gay history in rumor, innuendo, fleeting gestures and coded language – signs that should be recognized as historical sources in considering the importance of the cinema, and certain star images in particular, to the formation of lesbian identity in the 1930’s. (30-32)

Dyer argues that the location of homosexuality can be found by examining extra filmic materials such as star associations and homosexual sub-cultural references or appropriations. I, however, argue for a more discursive approach to extra-filmic materials. In chapter one I will show that lesbianism is to be found in the gaps “left over” during adaptation between source text, film version and author biography. It is the differences between each adapted version of the text that signal crucial absences. Gossip, as defined by Weiss, is another instance of an extra-filmic/ extra-textual tool used by “perverse” or “critical” audience spectators to make visible the otherwise invisible element of homosexual representations.

Weiss looks at ways in which gossip about stars' "real lives" can not be separated from their star persona and images in film. Using the specific examples of Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich, Weiss shows how rumors about their personal lives and sexuality were used by lesbian spectators to aid in their queer readings of certain scenes. Janet Staiger also contemplates the role of the personal "real lives" of the stars in her formation of the term "perverse spectatorship." Staiger sees the function of the extra-filmic material such as gossip about stars personal lives as yet another source of intertextual material that non-mainstream or marginalized spectators can use to help them create alternative readings of films, as in the case of Jodi Foster's rumored lesbianism being invoked in critiques of *The Silence of the Lambs*. This is significant when considering the process of adaptation because these extra-filmic discourses are available to savvy spectators in addition to the extra-filmic element of the source material, not to mention the gossip about the personal lives of the authors of such source material, all of which can also be used by savvy spectators. Thus, the sexual orientation of authors of the original source novels that I examine, such as Daphne du Maurier, Virginia Woolf, and Fannie Flagg, is not merely a source of biographical interest, but also a way for perverse spectators to read the film adaptations of their works.

Weiss, Staiger and Mayne are all influenced by feminist film theorists such as Marry Ann Doane. Weiss looks at how Doane's definition of the position of the female spectator draws on Freudian concepts, explaining that Doane shows that theoretical female spectators can find pleasure in "over-identification with the image" by identifying with the masculine gaze. This is achieved either by transvestism or masquerade, ie,

“adopting the masculine spectatorial position” or an “excess of femininity” which is used as a mask. Doane’s approach typifies the problems and restrictions that the psychoanalytic approach has posed for lesbian spectators.

Weiss explains that lesbian desire “confounds” Doane’s argument. She faults Doane’s reliance on the psychoanalytic approach, arguing that “alone it cannot account for the different cultural positioning of lesbians at once outside of and negotiating within the dominant patriarchal modes of identification” (40). She argues that “other, non-psychoanalytic models of identification must be called upon” to make sense of lesbian desire (40). Weiss shares her appeal to non-psychoanalytic models with Judith Mayne who also calls for a reexamining of the unquestioned dominance of psychoanalytic theory left over from 1970s approaches to the cinema. This call for moving beyond psychoanalysis is something that links these theorists to theorists in cultural studies and sociology. Staiger and Dyer both bridge the film studies/cultural studies gap and Avery F. Gordon’s sociological based work on haunting is very applicable to both fields.

In *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Avery F. Gordon defines haunting as “an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely” (xvi). She explains that she uses the term “to describe those singular yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what’s been in your blind spot comes into view” (xvi). She explains the work of haunting as a way of being, “notified that what’s been concealed is very much alive and present, interfering precisely with those always

incomplete forms of containment and repression ceaselessly directed toward us” (xvi). Finally, Gordon explains, “when people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of leaving, when disturbed feelings cannot be put away, when something else, something different from before, seems like it must be done. It is this sociopolitical-psychological state to which haunting referred” (xvi). I will apply this notion of haunting to the ways in which the Hollywood Hays Code inscribed the absence of lesbian representation. Lesbianism, I will show in chapter one, haunts the Code: it is everywhere implied but nowhere explicitly stated. It is an absent presence, a ghost hiding in the Code.

In *Homos* Leo Bersani explains: “the social project inherent in the nineteenth-century invention of ‘the homosexual’ can perhaps now be realized: visibility is a precondition of surveillance, disciplinary intervention, and, at the limit, gender cleansing” (11). An idea that connects to Jonathan Ned Katz’s argument in *The Invention of Heterosexuality*, something I examine more fully in chapter three. Katz, like Bersani, argues that the ideological purpose behind the invention of the contemporary concept of homosexuality was to create a binary opposite by which to define heterosexuality as the correct and normal expression of sexuality.

One of Weiss’s main arguments is that repression of lesbian images and desire in film has functioned as a means of ideological control on the part of the patriarchal and capitalist institution of western and American cinema. Weiss explains that the lack or repression of lesbian images in films works to maintain a heterocentric world view since it keeps the possibilities of identification out of circulation.

Building upon both feminist and queer theory's approach to the study of representations of homosexuality in the media, Suzanna Danuta Walters in *All The Rage* looks at what the spread of gay visibility means for lesbian and gay people, and for American society in the 1980s, 90s and now. Walters explains that although the token gay character of "sister, brother, friend" seemed to be popping up in lots of 90s mainstream movies, and there are many token gay characters on TV, this recent "gay explosion" of visibility has more to do with marketing ploys than with an actual desire to present diversity and social progress. Walters argues that this new brand of visibility that manifests itself in pop culture's obsessive fascination with gay life is not necessarily all for the good of lesbian and gay rights, but rather it requires close analysis and monitoring by the LGBT community to guard against the commodification and commercialization of LGBT representation. In *Homos* Leo Bersani connects the idea of visibility and surveillance to the idea of assimilation or self-censorship, what he refers to as the "de-gaying" which gays practice on themselves: "Invisibly visible, unlocatably everywhere: if the gay presence is threatened by absence, it is not only because of the secret (or not so secret) intentions of those who are fascinated by gays, or even as a result of the devastating work of AIDS, but also because gays have been de-gaying themselves in the very process of making themselves visible" (32). This idea will become central to my second chapter, where I examine works of lesbian adaptation in the 1990s.

In her own discussion of lesbian films from the 80s and 90s, Walters argues that, historically: "For many lesbians and gays, representation was something you *created*. Because gays were largely invisible (in other words, not explicitly gay or spoken of as

gay), avid filmgoers found ways to read between the lines, and – if need be – to ‘rewrite’ scripts, characters, cinematic moments to create a space for themselves” (132-133). This concept of rewriting or of “reading against the grain” is one that Walters shares with Staiger, Mayne, and Weiss.

Walters explains that “one of the most interesting aspects of the ‘explosion’ of gay films in the 90s is not the films themselves, but the varied and engaged commentary on them” (134). In addition to Staiger, Walters is one of relatively few theorists who examines this aspect of “social film commentary.” She argues that this attention by prominent news media outlets such as *Newsweek* and *Time* represents the ways society is evaluating and responding to such images, especially since much of this coverage deals with criticizing Hollywood for its lack of nuanced and developed representation and its rampant homophobia. Walters explains: “One can understand the recent ‘emergence’ of gay films not necessarily as a sign of greater ‘acceptance’ or even of the assimilation of gay life into visual culture, but rather as an aspect of the commodification of just about everything” (136). A commodification of which gay spectators are themselves also a part.

Becoming visible has a lot to do with being physically seen and read “correctly.” Richard Dyer in *The Matter of Images* posits that it is through “typification,” or stereotypical images of lesbians and gays that homosexuality has become visible in film. One of the major reasons for the necessity of typification being that there are no visual markers for gayness, unlike race or gender. Dyer argues that stereotypes are necessary and useful in order for films to make visible the invisible when there is no external marker of difference. This is especially true for non-marginalized spectators who do not

have the ability to see the invisible. In film adaptations stereotypes function as a form of transcoding of signs from the verbal descriptions to the actual physical bodies that are used in film. He sees multiple uses for typification. Political typification provides the means of visually signifying ones “outness” in society. Practical typification allows one to signal and identify to other gays, as a means of finding one’s community and potential partners. Textual typification allows a film to immediately (visually) and economically (without superfluous dialogue), convey a character’s gayness.

Dyer’s impact on the development of queer spectatorship theory is broader than simply his concept of typification. His understanding of the impact of film stars on queer visibility and figurability is also very important to understanding how the “star” persona affects spectators’ reception of representations of lesbian and gay characters in film. Similarly to Weiss, Dyer understands that the physical body of the star encapsulates all previous incarnations of characters that this specific star has played as well as all of the gossip and rumor about this star’s “personal life” outside of the movies they are associated with. Because the symbol or place holder of a specific star’s body has the potential to signify all of these extra-filmic associations as well as the character they happen to be playing in the particular film they are in. These associations can be used by perverse spectators, similarly to their use of intertextual references, as a means of validating and making visible the invisible element of homosexuality. Dyer’s work points to the significance of visual identification of bodies and what they signify in film and therefore highlights the importance of ways such bodies are read and understood, mainly through typification.

In *Flaming Classics* Alexander Doty advocates for an expanded concept of queer film readings, arguing that queerness is not something that can be used as a reading tool but instead something that is always already present in texts that are traditionally viewed as “straight.” Doty is an advocate for abolishing perverse spectatorship, calling instead for a revision of mainstream spectatorship practices to decentralize years of ingrained heterocentrism. He argues that this “straight until proven queer” assumption is just another example of the heterocentrist trap of contemporary society and that film texts should be viewed as already containing queerness, or as having a queer meaning available in them that runs alongside the “straight” meaning. Doty explains that as a film theorist and academic he chose to make a shift in his understanding of queer reading practices: from the position of “taking covert, secret, sub cultural, ‘against the grain,’ co-optive pleasures” of reading mainstream texts as queer, he shifted to a sense that his pleasure in such readings was valid because his readings “were no less valid or ‘there’ than those of people who took things straight” (2). Since Doty chooses to see queerness as present in all texts, mainstream or otherwise, by questioning the definition of normal Doty is also “normalizing” queerness. His understanding points to a new type of audience member, one ripe for the shift of decentralizing heterosexuality that I describe as taking place in the film *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* in chapter three.

Doty’s argument that it is a mistake to assume that all non-specified characters are straight or to assume sexuality by use of stereotyping is a direct attack on theorists like Dyer who claim that typification or the use of stereotypes is absolutely necessary as a means for spectators to make sense of visual signs as conveyed by the bodies of actors

and stars in film. By arguing for an abolishment of the use of stereotypes as a meaning making tool, Doty is overlooking a major aspect of film which is the way concepts such as sexual identity are coded visually in film vs. in writing. This shift between the visual and the verbal means that conveying concepts like sexual identity becomes especially apparent when studying adaptations and the shift that occurs when translating the expression of sexual identity from a novel to a film. Film requires visual signs and therefore, depends more heavily on stereotypes to function. This does not mean that films can't complicate, problematize or revise such stereotypes, but to a certain extent all films must use them in order for spectators to comprehend images and make meaning out of the visual signs. Also important in a discussion of stereotypes and how they function as visual signs is the idea that stereotypes, like adaptations and like the concept of gender as defined by Butler, can all be seen as copies of copies. The reason a stereotype works is because it is always based on a recycling of versions that have come before.

Judith Butler's definition, in *Gender Trouble*, of gender as a copy of a copy without origin is of great importance to my understanding of the connection between gender as a construct and the process of adaptation. Butler critiques the "pervasive heterosexual assumptions in feminist literary theory" (viii) by exposing how the concept of gender in feminist theory has been limited and prescribed by antiquated binaries of what constitutes masculinity and femininity. By questioning these antiquated notions of the masculine/feminine binary Butler arrives at the understanding that all expressions of gender are "copies of copies without origin." This idea of the absence of origin and the evolution of constantly recycled copies allows us to think of gender as a continuous

process of adaptation. It is also possible that this process can be reversed as a means of examining how adaptations serve to highlight formations and transformations of gender and sexual identity.

Butler defines gender as, “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a normal sort of being” (45). She explains that “the figure of the interior soul understood as ‘within’ the body is signified through its inscription on the body, even though its primary mode of signification is through its very absence, its potent invisibility” (184). In *Undoing Gender* Butler takes her examination further, this time looking at how gendered bodies obtain agency through committing acts of violence – something I examine in more detail in chapter three in relation to the character of Lisbeth Salander in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*.

To locate my project in adaptation theory I will look at works by Linda Hutcheon, Robert Stam, Judith Butler and Dudley Andrews. In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon attempts to develop a theory of how adaptation functions as a process and as a product. She explains that the visual medium of film requires a different way of saying what novels say through telling with words, which causes a shift in representation and expression. Stereotypes can be seen as copies of copies just as Judith Butler claims that gender is a copy of a copy without origin. This is related to what Hutcheon posits as the pleasure derived from adaptations as the pleasure an audience gets in experiencing a repetition of a story but yet also a variation on that story. This idea of repetitions with variations can sometimes produce what I describe as absences between the various

adapted versions of a story, places that can contain, according to Gordon, haunting presences.

Hutcheon notes that, “Seen from the perspective of its *process of reception*, adaptation is a form of intertextuality: we experience adaptations (*as adaptations*) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation” (8). Hutcheon and Stam both explain that there are a variety of classic ways that adaptation has been conceptualized previously, including the idea that “good” adaptations, though they might diverge considerably in terms of medium or focus, remain faithful to the “spirit” or “essence” of the original work. Hutcheon argues that a more concrete and theoretically sound way of thinking about adaptations involves looking at how the actual elements of the original story are taken from the source and implemented in the adapted version. This is achieved, as Hutcheon explains, by finding “equivalences”: “In adapting, the story-argument goes, ‘equivalences’ are sought in different sign systems for the various elements of the story: its themes, events, world, characters, motivations, points of view, consequences, contexts, symbols, imagery, and so on” (10). What gets adapted then is not the mystical essence or spirit of the source text but the actual elements or “fabula” of the story.

In *Concepts in Film Theory* Dudley Andrews posits that all cinema can to some extent be viewed as adaptation because, “Every representational film *adapts* a prior conception. Indeed the very term ‘representation’ suggests the existence of a model” (97). In this sense cinema is the “adaptation” of “real life.” Andrews’ understanding of adaptation is similar to Butler’s understating of gender. Andrews says:

The broader notion of the process of adaptation has much in common with interpretation theory, for in a strong sense adaptation is the appropriation of a meaning from a prior text. The hermeneutic circle, central to interpretation theory, preaches that an explication of a text occurs only after a prior understanding of it, yet that prior understanding is justified by the careful explication it allows. (97)

Andrews, similarly to Janet Staiger's call for a more varied theoretical approach to audience studies, argues for a "sociological turn" in contemporary adaptation studies. He argues that the social context of a work's adaptation is vital to a coherent understanding of the effects of such an adaptation. "The choices of the mode of adaptation and of prototypes," he writes, "suggest a great deal about the cinema's sense of its role and aspirations from decade to decade. Moreover, the stylistic strategies developed to achieve the proportional equivalences necessary to construct matching stories not only are symptomatic of a period's style but may crucially alter that style" (104).

The idea that adaptations can shift emphasis from one aspect of the story to another is of particular significance to me because it is in shifts like this that homosexuality is made visible or invisible. For example, as I will show in chapter one, the lesbianism in *The Children's Hour* was censored by being transformed into a heterosexual story of adultery in the William Wyler 1936 film adaptation of the story titled *These Three*. Hutcheon notes the impact that the Hollywood production code had on the freedom adaptations had in this transcoding process: "The existence of the Hollywood Production Code from the 1930's until the 1960's offers a different kind of argument regarding adaptations, cultural capital, and specifically mass audience

reception” (92). The shift in audiences and their readings of the shift in media help illuminate the places for haunting.

One of Hutcheon’s most significant additions to previous concepts in adaptation theory is the idea that adaptations, particularly when they involve a change in medium, can be viewed as translations. She explains the concept of adaptation as a form of translation:

This newer sense of translation comes closer to defining adaptation as well. In many cases, because adaptations are to a different medium, they are re-mediations, that is, specifically translations in the form of intersemiotic transpositions from one sign system (for example, words) to another (for example, images). This is translation but in a very specific sense: as transmutation or transcoding, that is, as necessarily a recoding into a new set of conventions as well as signs. (16)

In queer or lesbian adaptations of novels to film then, there is not only a translation of the representation of lesbians from words to images, but also the translation or transcoding that is done on the part of “perverse spectators” using as a reading tool or a translation device, the extra-filmic materials that they have available to them (such as gossip about the stars personal lives) and the context of their own personal marginalized social position as spectators. Hutcheon cites adaptation theorist George Bluestone’s concept of “paraphrase” as a similar idea to her more contemporary concept of adaptation as translation. She explains that, “adaptation as *adaptation* is unavoidably a kind of

intertextuality *if the receiver is acquainted with the adapted text*" (21). Intertextuality can be another extra-filmic device utilized by perverse spectators.

Citing another prominent adaptation theorist, especially in the realm of adaptations that translate novels to film, Hutcheon explains that Robert Stam conceptualizes cinema as a "composite language" of all other earlier arts and that because of this it inherits aspects of the elements of those earlier arts. Novels, in order to be adapted to film, must be, "distilled, reduced in size, and thus, inevitably, complexity" (36). But Hutcheon explains that the process of adaptation or "transcoding" between verbal and visual mediums requires not only a process of distilling and cutting but also a process of adding new elements as well: "film adaptations obviously also add bodies, voices, sound, music, props, costumes, architecture, and so on" (37). An important question to ask for my project is: What does it mean for queer visibility and lesbian visibility that the film adaptation adds actual physical bodies, often bodies presented in stereotyped ways, and often the bodies of stars who are themselves associated with a whole realm of other extra-filmic materials, such as the other films they have been in, and their personal lives/gossip about them as documented in other pop culture mass media forms?

In pointing out the multilayered element of the process of adaptation, Hutcheon explains that the final film can be seen "as the studios adaptation of the editors adaptation of the directors adaptation of the actors adaptation of the screenwriters adaptation of a novel that might itself be an adaptation of narrative or generic conventions"(83). This conceptualizing of adaptation as a constant circling and recycling aspect without definite

origin is very similar to Judith Butler's concept of gender as a copy of a copy without origin. Both the evolutions of adaptations and gender are also influenced by the personal intertexts (experiences/context) of the interpreter (individual/person/body).

Hutcheon acknowledges the significance of authorship in ways similar to Dyer. She claims that it is vital to a discussion of adaptation to be able to talk about the role of the creative process, the author, and the concept of intentionality: "Knowledge about the 'maker's mind and personality' can actually affect the audience members' interpretation: what they know about artists' desires and motivations, even about their life situations when they are creating, can influence the interpretation of any work's meaning, as well as the response to it" (109). This is similar to Weiss's concept of the element of gossip about star's personal lives, Dyer's concept of how stars function, and Staiger's concept of how "perverse spectators" uses extra-filmic elements like gossip about star's personal lives to make queerness visible, and to read films in ways favorable to them. The perceived intentionality of author's or directors etc. can be used as yet another extra-filmic element to make homosexuality visible or to back up a claim about such alleged visibility. Such as Virginia Woolf's rumored lesbianism, du Maurier's personal life or the link between queerness and feminism in contemporary Sweden.

Hutcheon explains that the pleasure audience's gain from adaptations has to do with the pleasure derived from repetition with difference. She explains that "Like classical imitation, adaptation appeals to the 'intellectual and aesthetic pleasure; of understanding the interplay between works, of opening up a text's possible meanings to intertextual echoing" (117). Hutcheon terms audiences familiar with the source material

“knowing audiences” and she explains that knowing spectators have the ability to, “fill in any gaps in the adaptation with information from the adapted text. Indeed, adapters rely on this ability to fill in the gaps when moving from the discursive expansion of telling to the performative time and space limitations of showing” (121). Knowing audiences are similar to and can be “perverse spectators,” in that they can use their extra-filmic knowledge of the source text to read the film version differently than a non-knowing spectator might. They are the ones that can perceive the haunting presence.

This thesis will trace the historical changes in processes of lesbian adaptation by examining film adaptations of lesbian texts from the 1930s to 2011. In chapter one I focus on the classical Hollywood films *These Three* (William Wyler, 1936), *The Children’s Hour* (William Wyler, 1961), and *Rebecca* (Hitchcock, 1940). Through these adaptations I examine how classical Hollywood films used censorship as a coded reading practice to convey the haunting of lesbian representation that was forced to remain formally unacknowledged due to film’s need to appeal to and not morally corrupt mass-audiences. I argue that spectators used their marginalized and knowing positions to see the haunted gaps left by what Code censorship forced to be excised.

Chapter two looks at the impact of the post-classical Hollywood “boom in visibility” of lesbians in mainstream films from the 80s and 90s such as *The Color Purple* (Spielberg, 1985), *Fried Green Tomatoes* (Avent, 1991), and *Orlando* (Potter, 1992). I show that this so called “boom in visibility” was really more of a boom in ambiguous representation, and was something that required spectators familiar with reading

censorship and haunting to be able to apply these practices to reading ambiguity to discover as visible representations of lesbians adapted from novels to film.

In chapter three I use the Swedish and American film adaptations of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (Oplev, 2009 and Fincher, 2011) to analyze how spectators familiar with reading ambiguity in films of the 80s and 90s can apply these skills to reading the ambiguity of the character Lisbeth Salander as a queer destabilizing force for heterosexuality. Both films undertake representations of violence as means of negotiating concepts of gender and agency and to create the ambiguous queerness inherent in Salander.

CHAPTER ONE

CENSORSHIP AND HAUNTING AS READING PRACTICES IN *REBECCA* AND
THE CHILDREN'S HOUR

This chapter examines the impact of the Censorship Code on lesbian visibility in film adaptations of the 1930s to the early 1960s. I focus on three key Hollywood films directed by prominent directors of the time: *These Three* (William Wyler, 1936), *The Children's Hour* (William Wyler, 1961) based on Lillian Hellman's 1934 play *The Children's Hour*, and *Rebecca* (Hitchcock, 1940) based on Daphne du Maurier's 1938 novel of the same name. Each is a film adaptation of a source work by a female author prominent in the 1930s and 40s. Crucially, the written texts all contain haunting traces of their author's links to lesbianism, and it is on the ways in which these traces are made visible in the film adaptations that I will focus.

Previous queer scholars such as Richard Dyer argue that the location of homosexuality can be found through examining extra filmic materials such as star associations and homosexual sub-cultural references or appropriations of "straight" stars, such as the gay male cult of Judy Garland, and extra filmic materials such as the sexuality of the "authors" of the source material or the film version, are what allow certain texts to be read as lesbian or gay. I, however, argue for a slightly more complicated approach to extra filmic materials. I argue that the lesbianism or homosexuality of certain films can be found not in the absences contained in a single text, but in the gaps between source text, film version and author biography. It is the differences between each adapted version of the text that signal crucial absences. These absences contain the haunting

eradicated presence of the lesbianism that has been removed or hidden. It is only through a comparison of the various versions of the story that audiences can see these absences. Audiences discover unsettled authorial presences through the multiple versions (revisions) of each work.

Censorship and Haunting as Reading practices

I take my understanding and definition of the concept of haunting from Avery F. Gordon's *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Gordon defines haunting as "an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely" (xvi). She explains that she uses the term "to describe those singular yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what's been in your blind spot comes into view" (xvi). Lesbianism in classical Hollywood films is something that exists in the center of the blind spot. She describes haunting as existing outside of normative time: "[t]hese specters or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomise is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view" (xvi) and as such, as being something that becomes potentially easier to see retrospectively, such as the absent or hidden lesbianism in classical Hollywood film. She explains the work of haunting as a way of being, "notified that what's been concealed is very much alive and present, interfering precisely with those always incomplete forms of containment and repression ceaselessly directed toward us" (xvi). Lesbianism haunts the Code and Code censorship,

it is everywhere implied but nowhere explicitly stated. It is an absent presence, a ghost hiding in the Code.

The Hays Code explicitly restricted representations of “aberrant sexuality,” including lesbianism. *Hollywood’s Censor: Joseph I. Breen and The Production Code Administration* contains a copy of the written version of the Production Code which states: “the motion picture within its own field of entertainment may be directly responsible for spiritual or moral progress, for higher types of social life, and for much correct thinking” (351). To this end the Code had strict rules about representations of sexuality which are explained as follows: “The sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home shall be upheld. Pictures shall not infer that low forms of sex relationship are the accepted or common thing” (352). The code becomes more explicit later explaining: “The exhibitor’s theatres are built for the masses, for the cultivated and the rude, the mature and the immature, the self-respecting and the criminal” (358). The code then discusses the difference in audience between films and books, and plays and films and states that film is more visually vivid and reaches wider and more morally corruptible audiences and therefore must be more closely guarded and censored. The problem of censoring sex comes up in the second section of the code provides even more detail about what, in terms of representations of sex and sexuality, must be left out of films and why, specifically what the code terms “Impure Love.” The Code says:

In the case of *impure love*, the love which society has always regarded as wrong and which has been banned by divine law, the following are important:

1. Impure love must *not* be presented as *attractive and beautiful*.

2. It must *not* be the subject of *comedy* or farce or treated as material for *laughter*.
3. It must *not* be presented in such a way as to *arouse passion* or morbid curiosity on the part of the audience.
4. It must *not* be made to seem *right and permissible*.
5. In general, it must *not* be *detailed* in method and manner. (361-362)

By reading the traces of the “absence” of sexuality due to the strictures of the Code, however, knowing spectators were able to read lesbianism, and other aberrant sexualities, in the place of their visual exclusion or Coded visual representation (haunting absences). The Hays Code restrictions forced lesbians to modify their reading practices by learning to “read-between-the-lines” in order to make the hidden lesbian content visible. In addition to learning how to read the Code these “perverse spectators” also became adept at using extra filmic materials such as source novels, star associations, intertextual references and gossip about the personal lives of the authors of the source texts to help them support their queer readings.

Authorship and Audience

Richard Dyer explains that traditionally the study of authorship “privileged the individual over the social and in practice privileged heterosexual, white, upper-/middle-class male individuals over all others” (“Believing in Fairies” 186). In, “Believing in Fairies: The Author and the Homosexual,” Dyer re-imagines authorship as “multiple authorship (with varying degrees of hierarchy and control) in specific determining

economic and technological circumstances, all those involved always working with (within and against) particular codes and conventions of film and with (within and against) particular, social ways of being lesbian or gay” (187). Dyer explains that, “In this perspective both authorship and being lesbian/gay become a kind of performance” (187-188). While the “author as performer” idea doesn’t only apply to lesbian and gay authorship “our social position tends to make us rather good at seeing authorship like that. All authorship and all sexual identities are performances, done with greater or less facility, always problematic in relation to any self separable from the realization of self in the discursive modes available” (188). Dyer argues that lesbian/gay filmmakers, and by extension their films, can “speak the language” of homosexuality and communicate this to audiences who also “speak the language.”

As touched on in chapter one, Janet Staiger explains the significance of such an audience, an audience she terms “perverse,” which she defines as one that places importance on contextual circumstance rather than simply textual analysis, one that is looking for the “secret language.” Staiger argues that previous film theory in the 1980s relied too exclusively on effects created by the text whereas theorists in the 1990s came to understand the significance of context in shaping audience interpretation. One such context is how “knowing spectators” use their knowledge about the personal lives of authors.

What does this mean for such “knowing audiences,” however, when the authors, du Maurier and Hellman, who supposedly have this “lesbian” authority, are the very ones who are afraid to admit their connection to and authority as lesbians. Dyer points out the

connection between authority and authorship: “The idea of authority implied in that of authorship, the feeling that it is a way of claiming legitimacy and power for a text’s meanings and affects, is indeed what is at issue in overtly lesbian/gay texts” (196). For “knowing spectators” at the time of production for such works it made the knowledge one that must be kept hidden. For spectators today it highlights the haunted quality of such texts. This connects to questions of compulsory homosexual disavowal whose reversal I examine in chapter 4.

The Children’s Hour

The narrative of Hellman’s 1934 play follows teachers Martha Dobie and Karen Wright, friends from college, who own and run a small private girls boarding school. The two women have just begun to get the school on its feet and Karen has set a date to marry her fiancé, Dr. Cardin, when they are accused of having a homosexual affair with each other by Mary Tilford a lying spoiled and spiteful pupil whose rich grandmother, Mrs. Tilford, is well respected in the near-by small town. Mary runs away from school and back to her grandmother’s house after being punished by Martha and Karen for lying and cutting class. To keep her grandmother from sending her back to school she makes up the story about Martha and Karen using Martha’s argument with her Aunt Lily (who also teaches at the school) and taboo information about lesbianism gleaned from a book as supporting material for the lie.

The impact of censorship on adaptations in Hollywood from 1924-1934 is examined by Richard Maltby, in his article “To Prevent the Prevalent Type of Book.” He

argues that producers of the time would have rather just paid for the title of a play and the success and following associated with it rather than considering the actual contents of the work carrying that title. This describes the position that Samuel Goldwyn found himself in when acquiring the rights to Lillian Hellman's play *The Children's Hour* in 1934— a very successful play with a problematic lesbian subtext which, due to the Code, would need to be excised for its 1936 film adaptation.

Maltby argues that because of the “mass” audiences for film, in contrast to the more specialized readers of literature, Code enforcers and producers of the time felt obligated by moral and financial pressures to follow the presumed dominant Puritan ideology of America in the 1930s and 40s – something continually referenced in the Code itself. To ensure financial success, “The studios relied on what was called ‘pre-tested’ material – novels, short stories, and plays – for something over half of their output, particularly of prestige and big budget productions” (103). These pre-tested materials already had been successful and had a built in audience.

However, built in audiences posed a problem to civic groups advocating for enforcing morality through censorship. Maltby explains these groups thought that audiences, if given the chance through certain clues, were likely to return to the original source text after seeing a film in order to discover the *real* story. He explains that by retitling adaptations and making no explicit associations between the source work and its revised film version, producers and studios were attempting to appease these groups who argued that, even if the original offending content of the source text was modified in the film adaptation readers would still be tempted to turn to the corrupt original to discover

the real story. However, despite title changes and the omission of source citations audiences, especially those searching for absent representations of themselves, still managed to sleuth out extra filmic material that would as Staiger explains, “justify the projection of a possible lesbianism into the text” (*Media Reception Studies* 155). What she later terms in her subsequent work as the practice of “perverse spectators.”

The evolution of Hellman’s script and the impact the various incarnations, stagings, adaptations and revivals had on Hellman’s own personal understanding of the themes of her work is examined by Jenny S. Spencer in “Sex, Lies, and Revisions: Historicizing Hellman’s *The Children’s Hour*.” The most problematic theme for Hellman was the lesbian relationship, be it acknowledged or unconscious, between the play’s two main characters. It is Hellman’s evolving understanding of this aspect of her play, and her shifting attitudes toward openly acknowledging it, that are of most interest to me.

Hellman wrote the original play in 1934 and it was preformed on Broadway in November of that year. The play was then purchased by Samuel Goldwyn and made into a feature film directed by William Wyler with a screenplay adapted by Hellman herself in 1936. This first film version of the story was retiled by Hellman as *These Three*, presumably for censorship reasons, and Hellman excised all of the allusions to lesbianism, changing the substance of the child’s lie to that of adultery instead. The play was revived for Broadway and directed by Hellman in 1952, and Hellman changed the script version for this revival to make the lesbianism, instead of the child’s lie, the central issue of the play. The play was then adapted to film again in 1961 by screenwriter John Hayes, who followed the revised 1952 version Hellman used in the Broadway revival ten

years earlier. The 1961 film was also directed by Wyler and maintained Hellman's 1952 shift in emphasis from the central problem of the lie to the central problem of lesbianism.

These Three (Wyler, 1936) follows the story of Karen Wright and Martha Dobie as they graduate from college and turn a farmhouse inherited by Karen into a small private girls school. During the process of renovating the property the two friends meet Joseph Cardin, a local doctor, who soon forms a romantic attachment to Karen despite Martha's obvious and equal attraction to him. Karen and Joe become engaged and Martha hides her feelings for Joe. One night, Joe stops by the school to visit Karen, but he meets Martha instead. He falls asleep and knocks over his glass of milk, startling the snooping and spying child Mary. To get attention and to persuade her grandmother to let her leave the school, Mary fabricates a story that Joe and Martha are having an adulterous affair, a lie that is accidentally corroborated by Martha's aunt Lily who claims aloud during an argument that Martha is "unnatural." This early version of the film is most significant because it changes the accusation of homosexual love on the part of Martha for Karen, as was the case in Hellman's play, to the accusation of a heterosexual adulterous affair between Martha and Joe.

In Wyler's second adaptation of Hellman's play, titled *The Children's Hour* and produced in 1961, the story follows the original play much more faithfully and keeps the accusation of homosexuality intact. This version of the film begins after Martha and Karen have already successfully opened their school, and Karen and Joe are already engaged. The naughty child Mary seeks revenge for being punished for telling lies and formulates the story that Martha and Karen are lovers after witnessing them fighting

about what will happen to the school after Karen and Joe get married. Mary is shown reading a scandalous book which presumably describes a lesbian affair, thus giving her the initial idea of lesbianism. She then hears the other students describe an argument between aunt Lily and Martha in which aunt Lily calls Martha unnatural and accuses her of being too close to Karen, all of which come together in Mary's lie.

Although in Wyler's first version of the adaptation the story was revised to exclude any allusion to homosexuality, and the title was changed to *These Three* so as not to incur the radical and homosexual associations that audiences familiar with the notoriety of the play and its plotline would make, the film's opening credits do cite Lillian Hellman as providing the original story and screenplay. This information would allow knowing audiences or audiences familiar with Hellman's work to discover the source text and the lesbianism present in that work. In this sense, the absence of the lesbian plot is made "readable" to audiences who are alerted to it by these filmic marginalia.

Mary Titus examines Hellman's problematic personal relationship to lesbianism in "Murdering the Lesbian: Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour*." Titus argues that Hellman kills off not only the lesbian character of Martha in *The Children's Hour*, but also the lesbian character of Julia in her own memoir, *Pentimento*. This memoir chronicles, in part, the life story of Hellman's childhood friend, Muriel Gardiner (aka "Julia"), who later became a prominent psychoanalyst. By radically changing the real life events of Gardiner's life, namely in killing her off at the end when in reality she did not die until much later in her life. This extreme alteration of supposed real life events leaves

Hellman open to accusations of homophobia, both directed toward others and toward herself. Hellman writes Gardiner as a lesbian character (“Julia”) in her own work, thus writing lesbianism into her own biography, then erasing it by killing Gardiner off. This act of killing off Gardiner in the memoir is Hellman’s way of symbolically killing the lesbianism in herself and the potential associations readers might make about her sexual preference. This symbolic killing off is unsuccessful because Hellman’s work and personal biography continue to be haunted by the repressed lesbianism, both her own personal repressed sexuality and the lesbian characters she repressed in her writing.

While this biographical information about Hellman is apparent and easily accessible for contemporary audiences of her work, it is hard to tell how much of this was known to audiences who saw the films *These Three* in 1936 and *The Children’s Hour* in 1961. Hellman’s memoir, *An Unfinished Woman*, was not published until 1969 and the second installment of her memoirs, *Penimento*, was published in 1974. However, even if audiences of the time were not familiar with Hellman’s autobiographical accounts of her personal links to lesbianism, those audiences looking for signs of excised lesbianism would have at their disposal their own knowledge of the social climate for women’s expression of lesbian sexuality at that time.

Titus points out that Hellman came of age during a rapid shift in society’s expectations for the lives of women. Born in 1905, Hellman, was too late to be swept up in the movement for liberation that marked the era of the New Woman, though she was influenced by the era of the flapper with its emphasis of freely chosen and actively sought sexual encounters to validate one’s independence and personhood as a woman. Because

of this, Titus argues that instead of gravitating toward a circle of supportive female acquaintances, and the potentially fulfilling lesbian relationships that could emerge from that, Hellman was of the era where women had to pursue sex with men aggressively to prove their independence and yet also search for the ideal “companionate marriage” which alone could recuperate them as citizens of American society.

Similarly, Lillian Faderman argues that the 19th century saw a shift away from the unquestioned notion of close female friendships toward the medicalization and condemnation of female same-sex desire. It is at this historical moment that Hellman comes of age, and these shifts in ideology and socially acceptable behavior shape her writing of the multiple versions of the play and her understanding of female sexuality and desire. As I have been arguing, this historical moment is readable not in any single version of the play, but in the changes that the text undergoes as Hellman revises it, increasing the centrality of the lesbian theme.

The biographical evidence of Hellman’s life suggests that two primary reasons for Hellman’s decision to kill off the lesbian character in *These Three*, as it was in *Julia*, are to refute her associations with lesbianism and to punish non-sanctioned sexuality in her writing. However, as Spencer notes, it becomes clear that Hellman’s understanding and relationship to female sexuality, specifically lesbianism, has changed. By the end of her work with *The Children’s Hour* Hellman is no longer killing Martha off as a means of punishing and eradicating the lesbianism prevalent in the work, but rather as a means of highlighting it and bringing the question of female sexuality and same-sex desire to the forefront. This shift is readable through the character of Karen, originally presumed to be

straight, who by witnessing Martha's confession and subsequent suicide must now come to terms with her reactions to these events and her own sexuality and potential lesbian desire.

Examining the first versions of Hellman's play Spencer notes that the "play is based on William Roughead's 'true story' of a scandalous 1810 Edinburgh libel case in which the charge of lesbianism, 'whispered' by a child to her grandmother, result[ed] in the closing of the boarding school" (45). In addition to using the framework of a true story, Hellman also borrowed elements from her own childhood to create the character of the evil lying child, Mary. This move is even more significant because Hellman, in her personal notes, associated Mary with "abnormality," which functions in Hellman's notes as a code word for lesbianism.¹ She also associates Mary with her own personal childhood experiences, thereby associating herself with lesbian sexuality.

The shift away from the character of Mary to the theme of lesbianism in the 1952 revival results in the emergence of "the possibility that Karen, too, may have 'unconscious' sexual feelings for Martha that are cut short by Martha's suicide and never fully recognized. As a result, the tragedy of the later version of the play [and the film] is more directly connected to Karen's loss of Martha than to Martha's loss of life" (Spencer 53-54). Hellman's own personal understanding of herself and society had obviously evolved and shifted by 1952, and in response to this so too had her understanding of her

¹ Mary Titus explains in "Murdering the Lesbian: Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour*," that Hellman describes the character of Mary as, "'abnormal, slightly, unable to adjust,' possessing a 'confused purpose' and a 'mixed, half grown mind'" (219). This is similar to how Hellman describes herself in *An Unfinished Woman* as growing up half in New Orleans and Half in New York, as being both advanced and behind other children, and as being "dangerously rebellious."

earlier works. To make this explicit Hellman chose to make Martha more explicitly lesbian. “By indicating the lesbian identity of Martha early on, Hellman shifts the questions of sexual orientation from Martha to Karen” (Spencer 54).

This is also true of the shift in focus from the first film to the second. Shirley MacLaine, who plays Martha Dobie in the second film, is made more “obviously” lesbian through script changes and through costume choices, as discussed below. Wyler uses film technique to ambiguously expand on the lesbian themes in the film. Wyler’s specific directing style brings to the forefront the question of Karen’s sexuality and her reaction to Martha’s confession. “Far more interesting (as well as psychologically sound) is the time Wyler devotes to the camera work following Karen’s apparently bemused walk in a cold spring garden, not yet in bloom” (Spencer 58). This is a scene that does not exist in the play. In it Karen goes for a walk alone in the garden while Martha is presumably taking a bath. Martha has just confessed her love for Karen in the previous scene and in this scene of Karen alone in the garden is Wyler’s way of following Hellman’s lead in transferring the focus of the story from the impact a lie can have on innocent people to the question of female same-sex desire and its potential as a threatening/accepted aspect of contemporary society. I perceive Audrey Hepburn’s contemplative and loving look in the close up shots in this sequence as though the character, Karen, was thinking about Martha while she walked and was mentally coming to terms with a new understanding of herself and her romantic attraction to Martha and her acceptance of Martha’s attraction to her, something that does not happen in Hellman’s play.

Post 1961 alterations in the Code “allowed for the depiction of homosexuality – if treated in a tasteful manner and not shown to be a positive or valid life choice. From then until 1968, when the Code was abandoned in favor of the age rating system, ‘sexual aberration could be suggested but not actually spelled out’” (Cox 44). One way for films to suggest “sexual aberration” was through coded costuming. In “Closet Cases: Costuming, Lesbian Identities and Desire, Hollywood Cinema and the Motion Picture Production Code,” Fiona Cox explains the significance of costume for constructing, for knowing audiences, visible or readable lesbians in film. Her ideas are similar to those of Judith Halberstam in *Female Masculinity*, except that Cox is working with the framework of older films in which the lesbianism had to be hidden, whereas Halberstam’s lesbianism in film is much more directly visible.

Containment and repression become (hauntingly) visible in classical Hollywood films through strategic costuming and other visual or sonic cues such as lighting and musical score. As Gordon explains, “specters or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view” (xvi). The work of haunting produces “notifi[cation] that what’s been concealed is very much alive and present, interfering precisely with those always incomplete forms of containment and repression ceaselessly directed toward us” (xvi). Shirley MacLaine, playing Martha, (as discussed below) is costumed to convey disheveled femininity/ vague masculinity, especially in contrast to the hyper-femininity of Audrey Hepburn, playing Karen.

Expanding on the various theories about female homosexuality of the time and how they manifested themselves in film costuming, Cox explains that one of the most visually significant of these was that female homosexuals are really men trapped in women's bodies or overly masculine women. Such ideas can be and were represented clearly and visually through overtly masculine costuming. These ideas are similar to the significance that Richard Dyer places, in his work *Stars* and *The Matter of Images*, on the physical bodies of actors, stars and the stereotypes they convey. Cox notes this similarity herself, stating that "Dyer's arguments about stereotypical lesbian costuming apply here, with the 'hard, precise lines, never disguising the female form, but presenting it conspicuously without frills of fussiness or any sort of softness – in a word, without 'femininity'" (48). These ideas about "masculine" costuming stem from prominent and widely circulated concepts about human sexuality popularized at the time by sexologists such as Havelock Ellis.

Cox describes the medical and psychological concepts of Havelock Ellis which were influential to societal understandings and film depictions of lesbianism at that time. For example, "Martha's clothing, while projecting a traditional image of heterosexual femininity, is shown to be an inadvertent signifier of her true desires, which are unknown even to herself for many years" (50). Martha's latent homosexuality is expressed "in hints of 'otherness' in her outfits when compared with that of Karen" (50). Cox points out the conversation that Martha has with Karen about finally having enough money to buy Karen new clothes saying that Martha's overall appearance and look is "less glamorous" than Karen's:

Martha characterizes Karen as a ‘Fifth Avenue’ type who must be ‘kept up’ in fashionable clothing, but refers to herself as ‘a skirt-and-blouse character’ who is ‘always in style’ by virtue of never being fashionable. Karen is thus placed firmly in the conventionally feminine sphere of conspicuous consumption of fashion and display through clothes. (51)

The contrast in costuming between hyper-feminine Hepburn and anit-feminine McClaine and the diagetic acknowledgement of this contrast through the conversation about appearance and style within the film itself all serves to highlight the significance of costuming as a visual means of signaling the absent yet hauntingly present lesbianism in this scene and in the film as a whole.

Rebecca

It is through this discussion of the significance of cinema’s privileging of the visual that I am able to even more clearly see the significance of the translation of lesbianism from the medium of print to the medium of film. The process of adaptation is significant because it visually shows how the concepts of lesbianism, lesbians, and lesbian desire are made visual and physically represented in film and through the influence of film in society as a whole. As much as this is a translation across different types of media, it is also a translation across different types of audiences. The significance of film adaptation lies in the way the physical embodiment of lesbianism is conveyed and translated because this process on film mirrors and influences the process of physically representing lesbians in real life. Hitchcock, with his roots in early pre-

sound cinema, and his emphasis on strong visual representations through framing and lighting is an especially appropriate filmmaker to examine tackling this process of physical representation. It is through Hitchcock's emphasis on the visual over the verbal that allows the lesbianism to escape censorship and reach visual representation in *Rebecca*. This visual emphasis also allows for the haunting and diffuse quality of the lesbianism throughout the film. It is through the visual representation of clues that allude to lesbianism that cannot be spoken that the haunting by this unspeakable subtext takes place.

In *Rebecca* (Hitchcock, 1941) a young girl, played by Joan Fontaine, falls in love with a rich but disturbed older man, Maxim de Winter (Laurence Olivier), while accompanying a wealthy old woman on holiday in Monte Carlo. The couple abruptly get married and travel back to England to the mysterious and gloomy mansion, Manderly, owned by Mr. de Winter. The young bride is immediately intimidated by her new position as the head of a large house full of servants and is domineeringly controlled by the housekeeper, Mrs. Danvers. She comes to feel haunted by the ghost-like presence of the previous Mrs. de Winter, Rebecca, to whom Mrs. Danvers remains utterly devoted. The film follows the mysterious unveiling of how Rebecca died and why her presence seems to haunt the house.

Haunting in the novel and film *Rebecca* is not only an indicator of the continuing influence of Rebecca, but also an index of the work's lesbian subtext. In both the novel and the film the character of Rebecca de Winter haunts Manderley, Mrs. Danvers, the narrator and to a lesser extent her husband, Maxim. Hitchcock visually depicts this

haunting through camera movement, blocking, lighting and by cultivating specific styles of performance from his actors. In *Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability* Patricia White examines the connection between the act of haunting and the “unspeakable” lesbian subtext in classical Hollywood films. She makes the connection between haunting and the invisible representations of lesbianism and the genre of horror, saying: “Horror can be seen to have an affinity with homosexuality beyond its queer cast of characters or its insistent thematic elaboration of difference in the representation of predatory or sterile desires. For horror puts into question the reliability of perception” (63). She expands on this idea by looking at the other end of the spectrum of the visible: invisibility.

White says: “The ghost, or somewhat more abstractly, the haunting, seems to be particularly suited to exploit such questions of visibility. Why is it a disembodied variant of horror that is so frequently associated with femininity (and hence with the epistemology of lesbianism)?” (*Uninvited* 63). Gordon would argue that lesbianism, especially as perceived in classical Hollywood film considerably after the time of its production, is an example of a haunting presence that appears, “when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view” (*Ghostly Matters* xvi). With the progress of gay and lesbian rights and the post 1980s boom in lesbian visibility, the enforcement of the repression of lesbian representation is no longer achieved through outright exclusion. White points out that *Rebecca* is a “key example of the female gothic” and that the female gothic is “a genre that as a whole is concerned with heterosexuality as an institution of terror for women”

(*Uninvited* 64). She argues that it is this very problem of representability that *Rebecca* contemplates, which is the reason for the intense and persistent interest queer theory has for this film. She explains “That *Rebecca* is a lesbian film – and invisible as such – is the condition of its almost uncanny recurrence in a critical discourse” (*Uninvited* 67). White links the concepts of invisibility and lesbianism just as Gordon links ideas of haunting to things that are known but cannot always be seen.

Daphne du Maurier, author of the novel *Rebecca* on which the Hitchcock film of the same name is based, has, like Hellman, been linked to rumors of lesbianism. In the novel du Maurier subtly works in subversions of gender roles and gender expression, especially when she describes the character Rebecca and the nameless narrator. These descriptions incorporate allusions to boyishness, school boys, acting like a boy, wanting to be a boy and looking boyish, especially when she describes Rebecca towards the end of her life and when she has the narrator describe her feelings towards Maxim and her feelings about herself. In the film the narrator is very child-like but the underlying references and repetitions of boyishness are dropped. du Maurier herself often wished she had been born a boy according to her biographer, Margaret Forster. In addition to her own personal wishes she and her sisters were constantly reminded of how much her father had longed for a son. She often dressed as a boy and pretended to be her alter ego, Eric Avon. Forster explains, “Daphne actually convinced herself she *was* a boy. Her outward form was a mistake: inside she was a boy, with a boy’s mind and heart and ambitions” (*Daphne du Maurier* 14).

The gender disruptions and the lesbian undertones are quieter in the film and an unspecific uneasiness (what other scholars often refer to as the diffuse lesbianism) is created by Hitchcock's camera movement and the placement or blocking of actors in a scene. Two significant scenes between Mrs. Danvers and the narrator (Joan Fontaine) illustrate the way Hitchcock translates the unspeakable, hidden and haunting lesbian undertone from the novel to the film. The first is the scene in which Mrs. Danvers comes to the new Mrs. de Winter in her bedroom on the first night she spends at Manderley. The most significant aspect of this scene is the way Hitchcock positions the two women, blocking them so that the new Mrs. de Winter is seated at her vanity, combing her hair, when Mrs. Danvers approaches and looms over her. Because of this positioning the new Mrs. de Winter's eye line is matched to Mrs. Danvers uncomfortably close chest. The new Mrs. de Winter attempts to relieve her discomfort in this too-close proximity by going down to dinner, but Mrs. Danvers refuses to let her escape and follows her down the hall. Hitchcock's camera is placed behind Mrs. Danvers' stalking figure, and George Barnes' use of lighting throws looming and "menacing" shadows down the hall, after the timid and escaping Mrs. de Winter. It is in this scene that the new Mrs. de Winter, and the spectator, first glimpse the closed doors of the west wing, Rebecca's old rooms. This scene is significant because it connects the menacing and looming lesbian figure of Mrs. Danvers to the menacing, looming and haunting absence of Rebecca and her lesbian associations.

A second, and even more elaborately constructed scene containing the unspeakable lesbian subtext is cited by Susie Bright in *The Celluloid Closet* (1995)

documentary. In this scene, Mrs. Danvers shows the new young bride Rebecca's immaculately preserved rooms in the west wing. Mrs. Danvers enters the bedroom from behind the gauzy curtain, like a ghost. Her shadow follows her across the wall as she crosses to the window to throw open the large heavy drapes. She accosts the new Mrs. de Winter and demands her attention as she takes her on an intimate tour of Rebecca's preserved possessions. Danvers opens the closet full of expensive furs, rubs her face with one, and then rubs the fur against the face of the new Mrs. de Winter. Throughout the entire scene Mrs. Danvers places the new wife in the position of Rebecca. She walks her through the room, forces her to sit at Rebecca's vanity, and mimics brushing her hair with Rebecca's brush, as she says she used to do with Rebecca. In this sense, the new wife is momentarily placed by Danvers into the role of Rebecca, as she guides the new wife to inhabit the places and gestures haunted by Rebecca's ghostly presence. After brushing her hair, Mrs. Danvers leads the new wife to Rebecca's bed, where she shows her Rebecca's see-through black lace nightgown. Danvers emphasizes the see-through nature of the gown by placing her hand beneath it and saying, with a tone of reverential awe, "Did you ever see anything so delicate? Look, you can see my hand through it!" The see-through quality being emphasized here implies that Mrs. Danvers could have seen Rebecca's naked body through it as well. Mrs. Danvers stares at the gown, mesmerized by her memories of Rebecca while the new bride looks away in horror and the music, Rebecca's "haunting" theme, swells.

The new bride, greatly disturbed by her tour of the creepily preserved rooms of the dead Rebecca, attempts to leave Danvers to her reverie, but Danvers stops her by

saying: “You wouldn’t think she’d been gone for so long, would you?” The new bride freezes, facing Mrs. Danvers, with her back to the bedroom doors and Danvers approaches her, saying lines which may be the most evocatively haunting dialogue of the whole film: “Sometimes when I walk along the corridor, I fancy I hear her just behind me. That quick light step, I couldn’t mistake it anywhere. Not only in this room, its in all the rooms in the house. I can almost hear it now – ” Danvers cocks her head peculiarly, as though listening to Rebecca’s footsteps, and looking at the new bride who is cringing in fright against the doors, says: “Do you think the dead come back and watch the living?” The new bride answers, sobbing, “I don’t believe it!” To which Danvers, closing the distance between them, responds: “Sometimes, I wonder if she doesn’t come back here to Manderley and watch you and Mr. de Winter together...” The new bride shudders and Danvers says with out a note of empathy but with a touch of malice, “You look tired. Why don’t you stay here a while and rest – listen to the sea, so soothing.” She tilts her head up and away, as though listening, “listen to it, listen – listen to the sea...” she says as she walks away as though in a trance and the new bride takes this opportunity to bolt through the doors.

This first encounter in Rebecca’s rooms foreshadows another scene that occurs later in the film, after the new Mrs. de Winter makes the horrible mistake, due to Danvers’ bad-intentioned advice, of wearing the same costume as Rebecca wore to a costume ball. The new Mrs. de Winter chases Mrs. Danvers into the west wing to demand an explanation for the trick being played on her. Mrs. Danvers hypnotizes the new Mrs. de Winter and tries to convince her to jump to her death from the bedroom window by

evoking the memory of Rebecca and the power of the sea. Both the sea and the memory of Rebecca are elements that, for knowledgeable spectators informed by the source novel, and its author, to look for these kinds of clues, stand in for the unspeakable element of lesbian subtext. The sea is connected, throughout the novel, with Rebecca, but is also mythically associated with the feminine and lesbianism. Danvers makes the new wife hysterical by comparing her to Rebecca and pointing out how much happier Maxim would be, alone with his memories of Rebecca. The haunting specter of Rebecca is so strongly evoked by Mrs. Danvers that it is at this exact moment that the ship on the coast runs aground, setting in motion the discovery of Rebecca's boat, and her dead, buried body, within.

In *The Genius of the System* Thomas Shatz describes Selznick's process of adaptation, saying: "His governing precept was that when adapting so successful a novel, fidelity to the original was essential. 'We bought *Rebecca* and we intend to make *Rebecca*,' he asserted. 'I don't hold at all with the theory that the different medium [of cinema] necessitates a difference in storytelling, or even a difference in scenes.'" However, Selznick himself advocated specific and significant changes to the story when they positively affected the budget for the film. One such instance was the cutting of the extravagant costume ball scene which allowed Selznick to save a lot of money by not having to create extravagant costumes and sets. Kyle Dawson Edwards, in "Brand-Name Literature: Film Adaptation and Selznick International Pictures' *Rebecca*," comments on the significance of altering this scene, saying, "In the novel, du Maurier dresses Giles and Beatrice Lacy, the brother-in-law and sister of Maxim de Winter, in Middle Eastern garb,

one of the many allusions to England's colonial past and decaying aristocracy." However, Edwards explains, the film alters the costume of these two characters and in doing so changes "the thematic trajectory" of the adaptation. Edwards explains that in the film Giles Lacy is costumed as a strong man: "This scene demonstrates that subtle variations between a film adaptation and its literary source emerge from motives and economic imperatives specific to the filmmaking corporation" (42). In addition to "altering the thematic trajectory" of the story, this specific change in costume allows Hitchcock to subtly comment on concepts of masculinity and gender roles, something that is of more interest to Hitchcock and his translation of *Rebecca* than the novel's central theme of colonialism. The strongman costume turns Giles Lacy into a buffoon-like character because the irony of the representation is that despite his position in the aristocracy, and in the patriarchal society of the film, he is not a "strongman," but is ruled by his wife, who in several instances in the film tells him what to do. This minor deviation from the novel allows Hitchcock to recuperate some of the original exploration of concepts of gender which is lost in the translation from paper to screen by the omitting of minor characters and scenarios of the novel.

Hitchcock, because of his early exposure to the wild Berlin club scene of the 1920s and his subsequent post-*Rebecca* fascination with psychology (according to Truffaut), could "read" the unspoken lesbian subtext in the novel and because of this he was an ideal candidate for translating this unspeakable subtext visually to the screen. François Truffaut argues that Hitchcock is an "artist of anxiety" like Kafka and Poe: "In the light of their own doubts these artists of anxiety can hardly be expected to show us

how to live; their mission is simply to share with us the anxieties that haunt them” (*Hitchcock* 20). Interestingly for Hitchcock, and for much of his contemporary society, one major aspect of life that produced such a haunting anxiety at the turn of the century, and indeed for much of the first few decades of the 20th century, was the anxiety of what was rapidly becoming a whole redefined concept of human sexuality both “normal” and aberrant. Truffaut examines Hitchcock’s early exposure to and subsequent fascination with these anxieties.

Hitchcock recounts to Truffaut a story of his experience of a night on the town in Berlin, where he was an assistant director, during which he wound up in “a night club where men danced with each other. There were also female couples.” Indeed Hitchcock describes that, later on that same night, in a hotel room he witnessed the two women having sex, to his astonishment (39). Through such questions and personal accounts it is apparent that Hitchcock was exposed to and became fascinated with lesbianism and as Truffaut terms it, “the abnormal” areas of human sexuality.

Weiss explains how Hitchcock’s specific authorial style worked to heighten the lesbian subtext in his film adaptation: “film noir lighting styles and other cinematic processes contribute to casting a shadow of sexual deviance over the entire film” (53). This shadow of sexual deviance functions as an aggressive and metastasizing cancer which was impossible for censors to locate and remove – much like Rebecca’s terminal “deep rooted” illness in the novel and the film. Indeed, Rebecca’s cancer (which serves as a metaphor for sexual perversion/ lesbianism) is seen as having the capacity to infect others, as Jack Favell worries about in the novel after they visit Dr. Baker and get the

diagnosis and suicide motive. “ ‘This cancer business,’ he said, ‘does anybody know if it’s contagious?’ ” (375). Unfortunately this interesting line is cut from the film. Weiss explains that censors, like anxious surgeons, wanted to cut scenes “ ‘in which we get the quite definite suggestion that the first Mrs. de Winter [Rebecca] was a sex pervert.’ For example, these lines by Maxim de Winter were considered offensive: ‘She was incapable of love . . . She wasn’t even normal!’ and ‘She . . . told me things I could never repeat to a living soul.’ ” Excising the lesbianism was difficult to do, however, since the lesbianism that haunts the story is, like Rebecca herself, everywhere and yet un-locatable. Weiss concedes that “Hitchcock made a few minor changes but Rebecca’s ‘perversion’ persisted nonetheless” (54). This was due, in no small part, to Hitchcock’s undeclared but persistent fascination with homosexuality and sexual “perversion.”

In “Between Identification and Desire: Rereading Rebecca” Janet Harbord also comments on the way in which Rebecca haunts the other characters in the novel as well as the grand estate of Manderley. Harbord explains: “The memory of Rebecca certainly haunts the characters and dominates the text as a sort of absent center of desire” (100). What Gordon refers to as the blind spot that suddenly comes into view, “those singular yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what’s been in your blind spot comes into view” (xvi). Lesbianism in *Rebecca* exists in the center of the blind spot, functioning as the film’s “absent center of desire.” As an absent presence, Rebecca is, “Recalled through others’ memories, never in flashback as perceptual evidence” (Harbord 100). This complete lack of visual representation of Rebecca allows Hitchcock

to be more inventive and ambiguous with his subtle manipulation of sexuality throughout the film. It is through the “passionate evocations” of Mrs. Danvers that Hitchcock conveys some of his most effective and subversive manipulations of sexuality.

Judith Anderson (Mrs. Danvers) physically conveys lesbian desire through her performance and this is something the censors, not being “perverse spectators” and not being able to “speak the language,” cannot read or see and therefore do not cut. Weiss explains how Hitchcock culls specific actions and movements from his actors – in addition to highlighting these things with his camera work, lighting and set design. “Assuming her role, Hitchcock showed Anderson how her eyes should reveal memories of dressing and undressing her mistress. ‘I knew I was in the presence of a master,’ Anderson concluded. ‘I had utter trust and faith in him.’ Though no one mentioned the underlying lesbianism of the Rebecca-Danvers relationship, Hitchcock sensed it” (Leff, 70). Leff explains that sexual aberrance intrigued the director and that the attachment of servant to mistress awaited only his touch (70). As documented by Leff and Weiss, Hitchcock carefully orchestrated Judith Anderson’s performance so that it would contain and convey these aspects of unspeakable lesbian subtext which Hitchcock was able to glean from the original novel and to translate as subtext to the adapted film.

Patricia White, examining the supporting character of Mrs. Danvers in *Rebecca*, comments that supporting characters play a role in reinforcing the compulsory heterosexuality and heterosexual romance of the main characters in classical Hollywood films. She asks, “What is it that supporting characters are meant to ‘support’ if not the imbricated ideologies of heterosexual romance and white American hegemony

permeating Hollywood cinema?” (142). White sees the character of Mrs. Danvers as a perfect example of how this type of supporting character can be used to subvert the heteronormative romance. Her very presence disrupts and casts shadows on the happiness of the new Mrs. de Winter and causes her to question the success of her marriage. White explains: “For example, the discourse of lesbian desire introduced by housekeeper Mrs. Danvers in Hitchcock’s *Rebecca* significantly undercuts the film’s conventional ‘resolution’; insofar as the heroine or the spectator falls under her thrall, Danvers has exceeded her role in the plot” (144). And in doing so, it effectively disrupts the heterosexual marriage between the narrator and Maxim.

Indeed, Desley Deacon comments in the article, “Celebrity Sexuality: Judith Anderson, Mrs. Danvers, Sexuality and ‘Truthfulness’ in Biography,” that the actress Judith Anderson, and the role she played as Mrs. Danvers, nearly steals the show: “Although the initial publicity for the film concentrated on the romantic couple of Laurence Olivier and Joan Fontaine, photographs of Anderson ‘menacing’ Fontaine soon rivaled those with Olivier. Contemporaries agreed that what made Anderson’s role as Mrs. Danvers memorable was its ‘dark hypnotic charm’ and its ‘sinister menace.’ ‘Menace,’ indeed, seems to act as a code word for ‘lesbian’” (48). More an example of the diffusion of lesbianism throughout the film than an absence, Anderson’s powerful and subtle performance is one of the main elements in the film that Hitchcock uses to convey the unspeakable lesbian subtext originally present in the novel and located around the disturbing character of Mrs. Danvers.

In *Rebecca* the lesbianism is presented through its invisible trace, just as Rebecca's lesbianism also remains invisible yet present in the text. The trace of Rebecca, and its transformation in the work of adaptation, is shown in the scene where Maxim tells his new wife the story of how he killed Rebecca. In the novel Maxim deliberately kills Rebecca by shooting her with a shotgun and then disposing of her body by sinking it in her boat. In the film, according to Leonard J. Leff, due to Code restrictions, this piece of the story is changed to a slightly different scenario in which Rebecca, knowing she is terminally ill but not telling anyone, goads Maxim into arguing with her and attempts to make him so angry that he will kill her, but before he gets the chance she trips and hits her head, dying accidentally. Maxim, knowing no one will believe the truth of the accident, proceeds to dispose of her body by sinking it in her boat at sea. Hitchcock uses Maxim's retelling of the night of Rebecca's death to insinuate Rebecca's absent presence, by having his camera show the audience her perspective on that night. Hitchcock's camera pans the walls and decorations of the interior of the cottage slowly as Maxim tells the story of Rebecca's death to his new wife in the cottage by the sea. The camera stands in place of Rebecca instead of giving the audience the expected flashback sequence and this makes the sense of haunting and disturbance stronger, because, through the movements of the camera, the absent presence, the trace, the ghost of Rebecca is there with the two main characters listening to Maxim tell his story.

In *Hitchcock and Selznick: The Rich and Strange Collaboration* Leonard J. Leff explains that after many treatments and versions of the script had been written, Selznick finally hired Robert E. Sherwood. It was Sherwood who "devised an amended

‘confession scene’ that Hitchcock liked and Selznick eventually approved” (53).

Sherwood solved the problem of Maxim’s confession about the night Rebecca died by “Shifting the sequence to Rebecca’s boat house cottage, where the murder/accident occurred” (53). By shifting the action to the boat house and “using a subjective camera to etch in film the geography of the first wife’s death” Hitchcock and Sherwood were able to avoid using the typical flashback sequence and therefore maintain the ultimate enigmatic quality of the never visually represented Rebecca. It also provided an instance for Hitchcock to reinforce the specter-like qualities, the haunting, of Rebecca.

In reference to the significance of authorship which I begin this chapter with it is also interesting to note that the three major “authors” behind the *Rebecca* adaptation who presumably had no or relatively little investment in preserving the lesbian subtext, beyond Hitchcock’s own personal fascination with “sexual perversion” and the perverse pleasure he took in unsettling audiences, which the lesbian subtext, even if it could not be read by audiences, certainly subconsciously unsettled them. Of the other two major figures behind the adaptation, Selznick was probably the most subtext illiterate. Numerous quoted comments found in memos written by Selznick link his interest in the picture to the huge financial success of the novel and the likelihood of its appeal to female audiences, an audience he prided himself on having the unique position of being able to predict and understand.

du Maurier as the original author of the novel, is the third and perhaps most important figure behind the adaptation and is possibly the most complicated figure, especially in regards to her position to the unspeakable lesbian subtext. As a homophobic

aristocrat and author with personal repressed lesbian tendencies, du Maurier had a strange, conflicted, and unacknowledged (at least publically) relationship to the lesbian subtext present in her work. Unlike the “authors” of *The Children’s Hour*, none of these “authors” openly acknowledged the lesbian subtext present in the original, or in the adaptation and yet this unspeakable subtext still managed to be successfully translated to the screen, and is still recognized today as an important site of the invisible presence of lesbianism in a classical Hollywood film.

The impact of du Maurier and Hellman as lesbian authors on marginalized spectators in the 30s, 40s and 60s is significant to the understanding of how such audiences learned to receive hidden or unspoken instances of lesbian representation in films during the Code era in classical Hollywood. Gaps between each adapted version of the story and each author’s unacknowledged but present lesbianism, function as sites for haunting to occur. This haunting presence of lesbianism was active during the time of the films original release and only became stronger as social attitudes toward the acceptance of lesbianism increased. The practice of haunting and of being able to see “ghosts” historically evolved into a form of ambiguous representation through which producers of films could take advantage of the marketability of lesbianism to those eager or willing to see it and yet simultaneously easily disavow such representation via the same ambiguity. This commodification strategy through ambiguous representation is the topic addressed in chapter two.

CHAPTER TWO

TRANSLATING LESBIANISM TO THE SCREEN: POST CLASSICAL

HOLLYWOOD'S AMBIGUITY BOOM

In this chapter I will argue that the absence of Hays Code restrictions in post 1960s Hollywood film necessitated different approaches in making lesbianism and female queerness ambiguously visible in film adaptations such as *Fried Green Tomatoes*, *The Color Purple*, and *Orlando*. By ambiguous I mean something that is visible to those who know how to see but equally capable of being unperceived or ignored by those who are not looking or do not know how to see. In chapter one I argue that the code was not just a list of taboo topics, but was also used to “write into the text” culturally repressed representations. The absence of the code both seemed to make these representations more visible, and necessitated new reading strategies. Instead of “reading-between-the-lines,” lesbians (and other marginalized) spectators turned to reading the haunting absences that opened up between different versions of a single work in order to unearth the marginal content of these films. Just as in previous eras these “perverse spectators” used extra filmic materials such as the source novels, star associations, intertextual references and gossip about the personal lives of the authors of the source texts to help them support their queer readings so, too did contemporary spectators of these films.

As part of the shift from the Hays Code reading practices to ambiguity as a reading practice, the 1980s and 1990s also saw an “explosion” in lesbian and gay visibility in mainstream cultural contexts such as film, TV and news media. In *Homos* Leo Bersani explains that one of the main components of the increased visibility of

lesbians and gays in the 80s and 90s was the AIDS crisis: “The heightened visibility conferred on gay men by AIDS is the visibility of imminent death, of a promised invisibility” (21). This visibility which signals imminent invisibility is connected to the idea that visibility is required for surveillance and surveillance can lead to persecution and elimination. In order to get rid of something undesirable you first must be able to see it, find it, or locate it.

Bersani explains: “the social project inherent in the nineteenth-century invention of ‘the homosexual’ can perhaps now be realized: visibility is a precondition of surveillance, disciplinary intervention, and, at the limit, gender cleansing” (11). This is an idea that connects to Jonathan Ned Katz’s argument in *The Invention of Heterosexuality*. Katz, like Bersani, argues that the ideological purpose behind the invention of the contemporary concept of homosexuality was to create a binary opposite by which to define heterosexuality as the correct and normal expression of sexuality. I will expand on the significance of Katz’s argument for lesbian visibility in film in chapter three. Bersani connects the idea of visibility and surveillance to the idea of assimilation or self-censorship, what he refers to as the “de-gaying” which gays practice on themselves: “Invisibly visible, unlocatably everywhere: if the gay presence is threatened by absence, it is not only because of the secret (or not so secret) intentions of those who are fascinated by gays, or even as a result of the devastating work of AIDS, but also because gays have been de-gaying themselves in the very process of making themselves visible” (32). He explains the tactic as, “I can’t be oppressed if I can’t be found,” (32) and in this sense Bersani allows for an element of subversion and self preservation to undercut what could

otherwise be a quite negative assessment of assimilationist practices at the expense of identity.

The stakes of visibility as explained by Leo Bersani are important to remember in considerations of how the process of adaptation makes lesbian representation visible, or not visible, to different spectators. Since lesbian representation is present in these films, the most important question to ask is not whether or not lesbians are culturally visible, but rather: who can see the lesbians being represented, what power does their seeing grant them, and how does the process of adaptation impact this seeing and representation? The work of adaptation, the process of making lesbians bodily or physically represented produces certain meanings for certain audiences depending on how they read these bodies.

In order to examine how adaptation impacts the process of making lesbianism “unlocatably present” in these films, I borrow from Judith Butler’s understanding of gender as a possible template for examining film adaptations. I move against traditionally favored understandings of filmic adaptations as following the original source material of the novel.² Instead of looking at adaptations as copies of an original text, I treat them as parallel works. By examining the process of adaptation in this way I am able to show how the adaptation process highlights textual shifts in representing gender and sexual identity, especially lesbian sexual identity and representations of female queerness. These shifts are necessary because although I do believe that one can use the source text as a means of examining how the lesbian content is translated from the medium of print to the

² What Linda Hutcheon and Robert Stam refer to as “fidelity” to the novel.

medium of film, I do not want to proscribe to the idea that the source text is necessarily superior or that it should in any way have priority in interpretation simply because chronologically it came before. I wish to view both works as coexisting side by side and having the ability to influence the reading of the other intertextually. Just as in the previous chapter I viewed the spaces between each adaptation, the absences, as productive sites of haunting, in films post Code these sites become less haunted and more open for “ambiguous” interpretation or intertextual allusion.

As Linda Hutcheon explains in *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hollywood adaptations traditionally rely heavily on their literary origins, especially for financial success. David O. Selznick, as discussed in chapter one, is typical in having privileged the “faithful” adaptation of contemporary best selling novels, his devotion to faithful representation having to do mostly with what he recognized as guaranteed profitability from the already built in fan base of the novels. Indeed, he is the man responsible for two of the 20th century’s most prominent and lavish contemporary adaptations, Hitchcock’s *Rebecca* (1940) and the multi-director project of *Gone With The Wind* (1939).

Post 1960s Hollywood’s freedom from Code restrictions allowed adaptations both a new sort of freedom and also imposed a new kind of self-censorship. This new self-censorship becomes especially apparent after the advent of the MPAA system when films aimed to receive milder ratings. The absence of the Hays Code allowed adaptations, as it did all films, more leniency in showing “aberrant” sexuality and identity, but it also signaled the loss of a reading tool. In the absence of the Code, it became harder to “read-between-the-lines,” since there were no longer definite lines to read between. Though it

made previously invisible lesbian representation now explicitly representable, the switch from the Hays Code to the MPAA rating system gave rise to a new invisibility produced through self-censorship and careful ambiguity. Although explicit lesbian representation in film was no longer forbidden, producers and directors remained conscious of public expectations of what could and could not be shown in a film in order to have that film be received successfully by mass audiences.

In *A Cinema of Loneliness* Robert Kolker argues that post-1960s, post-classical Hollywood films almost always follow ideologically dominant themes instead of risking confrontation. Even though these filmmakers were learning how to make films outside of the historical confines of the studio system, which would seem to offer them unprecedented freedom, they were and are still confined by the necessity of economics. Post-classical Hollywood film had the new need of reaching mass-market audience to be economically viable. To accomplish this films had to both cater to spectators seeking visible representations of queerness, and to audiences turned off by these same representations. This is especially true since at this time each film was treated as its own individual economic and artistic unit rather than one of many goods produced by a major studio corporation.

The Color Purple

One of the most controversial of the lesbian adaptations in the late 20th century, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, was directed by Steven Spielberg. A major figure in his analysis and in post-1960s American film, Kolker examines how Spielberg became

successful by being able to navigate both the economic aspects of movie making as well as its ideological aspects, especially the availability of funds and the financial success of the film:

Spielberg has thrived on the big-budget, special effects film; but he is able to spend huge sums because the narrative structure and ideological energy of his films bring large audiences who are moved by them. Ideological assent generates money, not the other way around. What Spielberg has to say . . . is indeed determined by the economic necessities of filmmaking, but it is determined as well by the very different ways these filmmakers perceive and respond to the culture, the ways film has delineated that culture, and the response of the culture to film. (8)

Kolker explains that assent to dominant ideology equals money in the form of a successfully profitable film that then equals the capacity for the director to make yet more films that assent to dominant ideology.

Although Spielberg is quite limited with his risk taking in terms of going against dominant ideology, his adaptation of *The Color Purple* uses ambiguity to allude to the lesbian relationship between main character Celie and the object of her affection, Shug. However, as I will show in the rest of the chapter, this is more muted than in other adaptations of lesbian texts at the time. There is only one scene in the film that alludes to the fact that Celie and Shug have any sort of romantic relationship whatsoever and it is the scene after Shug sings at Harpo's juke joint. Celie and Shug sit on a bed and talk about Mr. and sex. Shug confesses that she has a passion for Albert (Celie's husband who

she refers to as Mr.) and Celie can't understand how this could be since her experience of having sex with him is something to be endured and never enjoyable. Discovering this, Shug says that Celie must then still be a virgin, since she has never had a satisfying sexual experience, and then Shug strokes Celie's arm and kisses her. Celie smiles and is obviously embarrassed.

This scene is vastly different than the version of the same scene in the novel. The film version condenses several separate encounters between Shug and Celie but while it could be argued that this scene condenses the "essence" of these scenes, the desire and awe that Celie has for Shug, it also omits what in the book is a much more explicit conversation about sex and Celie's discovery of herself as a sexual and desiring person. For example, in the book Shug and Celie have a conversation about sexual pleasure and women's anatomy. Shug explains to Celie: "Listen, she say, right down there in your pussy is a little button that gits real hot when you do you know what with somebody. It git hotter and hotter and then it melt. That the good part. But other parts good too, she say. Lot of sucking go on, here and there, she say. Lot of finger work and tongue work" (78). In both the novel and the film Shug functions as Celie's initiator into the realm of sex and desire but in the novel Shug and Celie are explicitly described as engaging in sex acts with each other, whereas in the film Shug is merely cast as the more experienced guide- like figure who introduces Celie to the concept of sex as pleasurable but does not actually have sex with her, or even explicitly sexual conversations.

The implication of this shift in representation from the explicitly lesbian scenes in the novel to the much more ambiguous "female friendship/ mentor" scenes in the film is

that it is much less ideologically risky and therefore more financially secure to represent a barely ambiguous “female friendship” scene between two women than it is to represent explicitly lesbian scenarios and dialogue. Yet, by including just a tiny level of ambiguity in this scene Spielberg and others can argue that the film leaves open the possibility of a lesbian reading. In so doing, he protects himself against accusations of disempowering or betraying the “essence” of the original novel.

Spielberg is a prime example of a prominent American filmmaker whose films continually refuse to challenge dominant ideology. Kolker explains the transition from pre-1960s filmmaking to post-1960s, arguing that: “the initial period of transition during the late 1950s and early 1960s created an opening for a certain freedom of inquiry beginning in the late sixties, which, no matter how compromised, continues to leave a small mark on most of the filmmakers that concern us here” (8). Writing about Spielberg, Kolker says: “Although [his] films sometimes carry on an ideological debate with the culture that breeds them, they rarely confront that culture with strong alternative ideas, with social and political possibilities that are new or challenging” (10). Indeed Kolker explains how Spielberg’s film adaptation goes against the radical feminist impulses of the novel and offers instead a re-patriarchization of the story. For Linda Hutcheon, problems such as these stem from adaptations that attempt to adapt across cultures. In Spielberg’s case he is a white heterosexual Jewish man adapting the novel of a black queer feminist author.

Spielberg’s adaptation of *The Color Purple* is an example of a film that attempts to adapt across cultures and fails to account for cultural contexts in the process by editing

out too much of the essential original cultural context. One of Spielberg's major failures in this cross cultural adaptation is his clumsy handling of representations of black identity, black lesbian sexuality and black sexuality in general, representations that each have a complicated history on screen. This failure on the part of Spielberg to maintain the radical feminist themes present in the book and most directly conveyed through the lesbian story line between Shug and Celie is significant especially because of the way film functions socially through the process of spectator perception.

In *The Color Purple* the translation of the lesbian content from the novel to the film is so minimal that it barely constitutes an example of the way lesbian spectators can use their reading of ambiguity to make the lesbian content visible. Knowing spectators, those familiar with the source novel and its context, Alice Walker's position in the women's movement of the late 70s, would be able to read more into this brief scene, but this example requires spectators to have a lot more background knowledge, context and intertextual references than other examples, such as *Fried Green Tomatoes* or *Orlando*.

Fried Green Tomatoes

Fried Green Tomatoes is perhaps the prime example of mainstream film's use of careful ambiguity as a means of self-censorship in order to make lesbianism invisible to the mainstream viewers of the film, yet easily accessible to the marginalized spectators who had the reading tools to see it. Directed by John Avent in 1991 for Universal Studios, *Fried Green* specifically states in its opening credit sequence that it is "based on the novel *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café* by Fannie Flagg." The problem

of representing while hiding the lesbian content is not the only problem of figurability that this film deals with. There is also the historical revisionist aspect of the film which seeks to make racism and segregation in the deep south in the 1920s and 30s seem not really all that bad after all, sort of an anomalous event solely perpetrated by unenlightened patriarchal males. In the film the main character Idgie is shown to have close personal relationships with many of the black characters. Big George, her family's hired hand and the son of their beloved housekeeper Sipsey, sits with her by the river after her brother Buddy dies, and she is shown sleeping in Sipsey's house and talking to her like a surrogate mother. Local sheriff Grady Killgore chastises her for letting the "coloreds" eat in her restaurant and Idgie accuses him of belonging to the local branch of the Klu Klux Klan saying: "I don't know why you boys, when you dress up in them sheets and go parading around, don't have sense enough to change your shoes! Why I'd know those size fourteen clodhoppers you got anywhere." Grady is shown acting tough and putting on a racist front but he is described later by Idgie, in a conversation with Sipsey, as having spent, "three days crying, drunk as a skunk, down by the river cause that old colored man that had raised him had died."

In this way the film and the novel present Grady as a well meaning if blind follower of the dominant southern ideology of the day. To further emphasize this point he is contrasted with the real "mean and evil racists" Frank Bennet, Ruth's husband, and his "Georgia Klan posse" who show up in town to teach Idgie a lesson after she has taken Ruth to live with her. These men are the only ones shown in the film wearing the Klan regalia of white sheets and hooded masks, and they are depicted as terrorizing the local

blacks with torches and whipping Big George until Grady and Idgie make them stop. The film makes a clear distinction between these racists and the other character's in the film who are characterized as *really* liking black people. When they happen to exhibit any slightly racist behavior, it is rendered simply as an accident of the time and not a malicious intention.

This revisionist approach to the problem of race in the American South of the 1920s is not the only aspect of problematic representation in the film. There is also, significantly for my project, the visual representation of lesbianism. Some specific instances where the film hides the lesbian content in ambiguous representations include the first scene of "grown up Idgie" where she meets Ruth again for the first time after her brother Buddy's death. Ruth is staying with the Threadgoode family for the summer at Idgie's mother's request. Idgie walks past the porch barefoot, in men's clothing, looking wild and unkempt and blatantly ignoring the presence of Ruth. Ruth turns to Idgie's Mother and says, "Maybe this wasn't such a good idea?" and the mother replies, "it's got to work, someone's got to help her, I can't." This scene is confusing and ambiguous because it is never explicitly explained what Ruth is supposed to help Idgie with, help her get over her grief? Help her learn to act like a lady and be "civilized"? Help her come to terms with her sexuality? In the end Ruth ends up accomplishing almost all of these things. This narrative ambiguity accomplishes what Bersani refers to as the "unlocatably everywhere" feeling of the lesbian presence in this film and novel. It is ambiguous because it is not explicitly stated, but it can be seen if spectators are looking for it and know how to see it.

Idgie and Ruth become close friends, in the film and the novel, by going on a series of “dates.” The first is when Idgie dares Ruth to accompany her on her late night train ride through the shanty town by the river where she throws cans of food, cargo that doesn’t belong to her, to the poor. The second is the scene where Idgie and Ruth go for a drive in the country and take a picnic by an old tree that is serving as a bee hive. Idgie gets honey from the hive for Ruth and Ruth labels her a “bee charmer” which could be read by knowing spectators as a euphemism for exotic or lesbian.³ This reading is supported especially because right after this scene the film cuts to the modern day story of Evelyn Couch at her “women’s meeting,” where the guest speaker tries to encourage the women to embrace their separate female power by looking at their vaginas with hand held mirrors. Evelyn is appalled and embarrassed by this suggestion and eventually flees the scene. Interesting to observe about this scene is that the room full of women with mirrors is a very masculine space. It looks like a man’s den: wood paneling, taxidermied animal heads and a dartboard adorn the walls. The guest speaker, noticing Evelyn’s reluctance, asks her if she has a problem with her sexuality and she answers, “No ma’am, but I do have a problem with my girdle” introducing the idea of sexuality as something that can be a “problem” in this film and something that the film is obviously considering and choosing to highlight thematically. This scene can be read by lesbians and feminists and their sympathizers as Flagg making an inside joke to lesbians and as evidence of the impact of the women’s movement on Hollywood. Fannie Flagg has been rumored to be a

³ Female sex-organs are often referred to in slang terms as “the honey-pot.” A significant usage of this term can be found in the early 90s New Queer Cinema film *Go Fish* (Troche 1994).

lesbianism and to have had romantic involvement with popular novelist and noted lesbian, Rita Mae Brown, who was involved with prominent Gay Liberation Front groups of the late 1960s such as the Lavender Menace.

Another scene where lesbian visibility is hidden by ambiguous representation is one where Idgie goes to visit Ruth after she marries. Ruth asks Idgie if she has a “fella yet” and gives her a knowing look. Idgie, who is dressed like a man, is embarrassed and shrugs saying “a couple.” She is more interested in getting a better look at Ruth, who she then discovers has a black eye and is being beaten by her husband. Ruth tells Idgie, “If you care for me, if you really do, you’ll turn around and leave right now,” which Idgie does. The scene then cuts to the River Club which is Idgie’s local hang out where she goes to drink and play poker with the boys. Grady Killgore, who obviously has a crush on her, tries to get her to dance and exaggeratedly gets down on one knee to ask her. She says no, she won’t dance with him and she won’t marry him either. He grabs her, holding her over his shoulders and spins her around calling her a “goofy girl.” The narrating voice of Mrs. Threadgoode says, “Grady finally got tired and give up. Try as they might, none of the boys at the River Club ever could tame Idgie.” This idea of “taming” is an explicit yet unnamed way for the film to allude to sexually conquering her. Later in the film Ruth is said to have tamed her. Ruth’s Mother dies and she sends Idgie a copy of the obituary with a coded message from the bible, from the book of Ruth, in which she asks Idgie to come get her and bring her to live in Whistle Stop. Idgie and Ruth become business partners and co-owners of the café. Ruth has her baby and he is named Buddy Threadgoode Jr. and is raised by Idgie and Ruth who live together. Idgie is cast as the

father figure despite the fact that she is called Aunt Idgie by the child, she protects him and teaches him to play baseball.

A final significant ambiguously lesbian scene is the courtroom scene where Idgie is on trial for the murder of Ruth's husband. Ruth is being questioned as a witness by the prosecution and the lawyer asks, "Why would a respectable Christian woman go anywhere with Miss Idgie Threadgoode?" The camera slowly zooms in for an even tighter close-up of Ruth's face smiling and looking nervous and the lawyer asks, "Why did you leave with Idgie Threadgoode that day?" The close-up tightens and Ruth looks at the judge as if she is unsure she should say what she is about to. She says, "Because she's the best friend I ever had – and I love her." The shot cuts to Idgie's face, her expression is surprised and unsure, then the shot cuts back to Ruth who makes a slight shrugging movement and an embarrassed but slightly defiant smile which is body language that is generally interpreted as the equivalent of saying, "Well it's true."

Jennifer Ross Church also comments on the ambiguity of the representation of the lesbian relationship in *Fried Green*. She too examines how these sites of "ambiguous looks" between the women in the film can be used by lesbian spectators as moments that allow for lesbian readings. In her article, "The Balancing Act of *Fried Green Tomatoes*," Church argues that Hollywood always tones down any elements of an original story which would be perceived as potentially controversial, especially lesbian representation. Church explains:

Flagg's novel also leaves the relationship between Idgie and Ruth undefined. A crucial difference between the two versions, nevertheless, lies in their respective

characterizations of that central relationship. The novel relies on stereotypes of the masculinized woman and on youthful outbursts of emotion to establish its intensity; the film depends upon looks between the two women that can be interpreted in very different ways and upon a more mature, public proclamation of their love. (194)

I think that the “looks between the two women” are not so open to interpretation, especially not if the reader is a spectator with a marginalized identity who knows how to read this new “code” of ambiguity.

Along with the “unlocatable” yet permeating presence of lesbianism in the novel and the film, one of the largest secrets of the story is the murder and cannibalization of the villain, Frank Bennett. Jeff Berglund argues that the depiction of cannibalization is the key moment for analyzing the ambiguities of both texts. He explains the power of naming both the act of cannibalism and the presence of lesbianism: “In this context the presence of cannibalism and a concomitant refusal to name it, bear uncanny parallels to the refusal to ‘name’ lesbian desire, to ‘name’ racism, to ‘name’ putative heterosexuality, or normative whiteness” (“The Secrets in the Sauce,” 130). The refusal to name is a means of secreting information. Berglund points out, however, that “one interesting component of secrets is their pronounced status as absence: what is not known openly must signal its own concealment in order to publicly exist. It must be present as a marked absence” (130). This is similar to Gordon’s understanding of the work of haunting and is another example of how marginalized spectators learn to read post-Code ambiguity.

This idea of presence as absence, especially as it relates to depictions of queerness or homosexuality in films is another key instance of the “usefulness” of the old Hollywood Production Code where non-hetero audiences were alerted to the between-the-lines content by reading reviews that often hinted at the more explicitly gay content in the source materials. Judith Halberstam explains this concept: “From 1932-1962, the Hays Hollywood Production Code banned the representation of ‘sex perversion’ and insisted that ‘no picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it’” (*Female Masculinity*, 177). Halberstam explains that one way that filmmakers got around this strict censorship was by creatively utilizing printed press materials which promoted the films: “the same kind of censorship did not apply to the printed word, and therefore when a film was adapted from a book or play with an explicitly homosexual theme, the reviewers could restore the homosexual content in their critical summations of the films” (177). 1991, the year *Fried Green Tomatoes* was released, is a significantly post-Code date, yet *Fried Green* still relies on these between-the-lines reading practices that marginalized spectators learned during Code era days. This suggests that Code, i.e. homophobia, has been so internalized by mainstream spectators, that even when the walls come down these spectators still refuse to step outside the foundation the Code has left.

Despite the fact that Fannie Flagg refuses to name the relationship between Idgie and Ruth as “lesbian,” she writes about the power of names in a chapter later in the novel where Evelyn Couch is considering her relationship to the power of naming, “Raped by words. Stripped of everything. She had always tried to keep this from happening to her,

always been terrified of displeasing men, terrified of the names she would be called if she did . . . What was this power, this insidious threat, this invisible gun to her head that controlled her life . . . *this terror of being called names?*” (second ellipses in the text, 238). The narrator then recounts the specific names that Evelyn has feared: “She had stayed a virgin so she wouldn’t be called a tramp or a slut; had married so she wouldn’t be called an old maid; faked orgasms so she wouldn’t be called frigid; had children so she wouldn’t be called barren; had not been a feminist because she didn’t want to be called queer and a man hater; never had nagged or raised her voice so she wouldn’t be called a bitch” (238-239). This passage is about the subversive power of names and it is clear that Flagg is aware of this power yet in her descriptions of the relationship between Idgie and Ruth, in promotional interviews for the film, she blatantly refuses to name them for what they are, yet she obviously knows and can define the term queer.

This refusal to name increases the ambiguity present in the adaptation and this ambiguity both allows for complete disavowal of the lesbian content by heterosexual audiences or audiences that do not want to read the lesbian content and simultaneously allows for gay rights organizations like GLAAD to award the film for its positive representations of lesbians in a mainstream film. Bersani would consider it an example of Flagg’s de-gayng of herself and her work, a process of making her own personal lesbianism and the lesbianism in her novel “unlocatably everywhere” which is a survival technique of self-censorship in order to achieve covert self-expression.

Judith Halberstam’s work on butch representation in film is very useful to my examination of the visibility and invisibility of lesbians in adaptation. In *Female*

Masculinity she argues that lesbianism is made visible, and name-able, in film through stereotypical images of butchness. She, “explore[s] the history of butch women on film to reclaim a tradition of cinematic female masculinity that lesbians have tended to disavow within a discourse of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ images” (175). Halberstam explains her aversion to identity labels as being linked to the concept of the stereotype which is:

[An] image that announces identity in excess, [and] is necessarily troublesome to an articulation of lesbian identity, but also foundational; the butch stereotype, furthermore, both makes lesbianism visible and yet seems to make it visible in nonlesbian terms: that is to say, the butch makes lesbianism readable in the register of masculinity, and it actually collaborates with the mainstream notion that lesbians cannot be feminine. (177)

This is similar to Dyer’s argument on the necessity of stereotypes in making lesbianism visible on screen.

Both Halberstam and Dyer point out the historical emphasis placed on calling for positive images in gay and lesbian film criticism, and Halberstam explains that “the desire for ‘positive images’ places the onus of queering cinema squarely on the production rather than the reception of images” (179). This idea is in opposition to Alexander Doty’s argument, as explained in the introduction, that films always have the potential to be read as queer if one purposely denies heterosexist assumption. Halberstam looks at Dyer’s understanding of the role of stereotypes in gay and lesbian representation in film and explains that according to her reading of Dyer, “Stereotypes, then, are not in and of themselves right or wrong. Rather, they represent a particularly economic way of

identifying members of a particular social group in relation to a set of quickly recognizable characteristics” (180). Both Halberstam and Dyer recognize stereotypes as “a useful ideological tool” with the potential to be abused by those deploying them.

Halberstam explains:

Queer stereotypes are supposed to render visible what has been represented as invisible. The damage they do lies less in the way they depict homosexuality in relation to pathology and more in the way they render ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ as coherent terms. The opposite of the stereotype has long been thought of as ‘the positive image,’ and yet it may well be that positive images also deal in stereotypes and with far more disastrous effects. (184)

Here Halberstam points to two significant problems. One is the rendering (and naming) of gay and lesbian as “coherent” terms, a move that works to unify through labeling, identities that become meaningful and connected specifically through their shared instances of diversity. The second is the unexamined problem of how “positive” images also deal in potentially detrimental stereotypes.

Fried Green Tomatoes is one film that Halberstam cites as being noted for its positive representation of lesbians: “*Fried Green Tomatoes* earns its appellation of positive at the expense of the butchness of its main character. In the course of converting the Fannie Flagg novel into a mainstream film, the director completely makes over the butch mannish Idgie into a straight-looking feminine heroine” (185). Halberstam argues that although the film received a GLAAD award for “outstanding depictions of lesbians in a film” it was “quite possible to watch the film without recognizing the sexual nature

of the relationship between Idgie and Ruth” (185). Halberstam is keen to elaborate differences between the novel and film which illustrate the toning down of the masculinity expressed by Idgie, “In the novel, Idgie is often mistaken for a boy; the film erases all of Idgie’s fundamental masculinity and does so precisely because her butchness would have suggested the lesbian nature of the relationship” (185). Lesbians, according to Halberstam, are made invisible in film through the ambiguity of their gender presentation. Only butchness or masculinity is readable visually as lesbianism. This insistence on female masculinity as the only means of making lesbianism visible in film is somewhat tempered by her call for spectators to be “more creative in our interpretations, more willing to use Hollywood, and quicker to ‘queer’ supposedly hegemonic and traditional depictions of masculinity and femininity” (185). In this instance Halberstam shares a similar goal to that of Alexander Doty, as both advocate for reading films as always potentially queer instead of falling into the heterocentric “straight until proven queer” assumption.

Halberstam explains that “before the emergence of an independent lesbian cinema, the butch was the only way of registering sexual variance in the repressive environment of Hollywood cinema” (186). Code era Hollywood films use the figure of the butch woman to provide, “a window onto the sexual variance that the camera could not reveal. In independent features of the 1980s, conversely, the butch character has been almost completely excised to rid lesbian cinema of what was thought to be a hated stereotype” (187).

Idgie can be read as the 1991 incarnation of the Annie Hall type figure created by Diane Keaton in Woody Allen's film of the same name. Halberstam classifies Idgie as an unsuccessful representation of a "Transvestite Butch," explaining that she defines this category to encompass "gender theatricality, gender dysphoria, androgyny, and butch masquerade" all of which, "produce very different narratives" (206). The figure of Annie Hall represents a parody of women's lib being made palatable through "comedic drag." Suzanna Danuta Walters considers the "cuddly cross-dresser" figure prominent in a host of 80s and 90s movies (though her examples are all male drag queens such as the enormously popular RuPaul) to be the most approachable and non-threatening representation of queerness for straight consumption. Idgie, a possible female incarnation of Walters' "cuddly cross-dresser" is played as a comedic character, for example in the scene where Idgie drives to Valdosta Georgia to get Ruth and bring her back to live in Whistle Stop where her confrontation with Ruth's husband, Frank Bennet, is played as slightly comedic. The scene takes place at Ruth's home. Idgie, Big George and Idgie's brother Julian are packing up Ruth's things in preparation to move her back to Whistle Stop. Frank angrily enters the house yelling at Idgie and demanding to know what is going on. As he lunges at Ruth, Idgie jumps onto his back hitting him with her fists. Frank spins around with Idgie latched onto his back and the camera, focused on the two of them, spins with them. The scene only really turns serious and dark when Frank, manipulated by the threat of Idgie's brother Julian and Big George and his knife, gives up and sends Ruth on her way by kicking her down a flight of stairs.

There is also the comedic element to the Evelyn Couch (Kathy Bates) scenes in the supermarket parking lot when Evelyn, out of pent up frustration, repeatedly rear ends a little red convertible owned by two bitchy and skinny twenty something women who steal her parking spot and call her old and slow. This scene is also a parody of women's lib as it turns Evelyn's new found sense of power comedic, "hysterical," and therefore undercutting what would otherwise be a depiction of female strength. This scene could also be read as subversively lesbian, however, because it is the beginning of Evelyn's awakening into becoming a "Woman Identified Woman." She connects to this consciousness through the stories Ninny tells her about the "mythic Idgie" who in these stories, functions much like Esther Newton's concept of the "Mythic Mannish Lesbian."

Orlando

Sally Potter's *Orlando* (1994), like *Fried Green Tomatoes*, is another example of a film for which "perverse spectators" could use the intertextuality of extra-filmic materials such as gossip about Virginia Woolf's personal life as well as previous roles the star Tilda Swinton is associated with as evidence to support lesbian (or queer female) readings of the film.

As explained in chapter one, "Perverse Spectators" often use extra-filmic materials such as source novels, film reviews, Hollywood gossip about the personal lives of the movie stars in a certain film, other roles those stars have played and the like to help them read a particular film more queerly. All of these extra-filmic materials are examples of intertextuality. With a film like Sally Potter's *Orlando* (1992), an adaptation of

Virginia Woolf's original novel published in 1928, readers of the film have the additional intertextual or extra-filmic resources of the original novel as well, for example, the other works published by Virginia Woolf and gossip about her personal life. This is true of all novels but what makes *Orlando* a unique example is the fact that the novel is a sort of fantasy-biography of Virginia Woolf's close friend and sometimes lover, Vita Sackville-West. In its role as a fantasy-biography the novel also becomes a broad survey of the history of the English aristocracy from 1600 to the 1920's. Potter's adaptation then is drawing extra-filmic intertextual references from a large variety of sources, and viewers of the film can take this into account. These intertextual references are important for queer readings of the novel and the film because it is through the use of them and other extra filmic tools that the lesbianism can be made visible.

Additionally, there are the film's own intertextual references outside of those it shares with the original novel. One especially significant reference comes in the form of Potter's casting of notorious queer icon Quentin Crisp as Queen Elizabeth I. Another significant casting choice is Tilda Swinton playing the sexual chameleon title role of Orlando. Swinton's association with queer avant garde filmmaker Derek Jarman is of special significance here.

In *Perverse Spectators* Janet Staiger comments on the uses and functions of intertextuality according to Julia Kristeva's interpretation of Mikhail Bakhtin. She writes that "intertextuality is the 'transposition of one or more systems of signs into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciative and denotative position'" (185). Staiger points out that although useful, Kristeva's interpretation does not take into

account “functions of cognition or affect for the reading subject who experiences or creates the transposition” (185). Staiger points out that there is a need for research to move beyond examining various types of intertextuality and to look instead at “the functions of intertextuality for the reader or why a reader might be primed or cued to take up a particular function” (185). I would argue that lesbian and gay readers of films are primed to read and interpret coded subtext in order to find lesbian and gay content which they are searching for as a means of identification and personal representation. As such this particular group of readers search for intertextual references that legitimate these readings and claims.

Linda Hutcheon explains the significance of the variations between the film and the novel versions of *Orlando*:

Sally Potter’s ideological motivation for doing a film version of Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*, as articulated in the introduction to the published screenplay, is different from Woolf’s feminist aim, but equally political: Potter wanted to adapt – and therefore inevitably to alter – the text not only to tell a story she loved but also to permit ‘a more biting and satirical view of the English class system and the colonial attitudes arising from it.’ (94)

Hutcheon explains that, “This kind of political and historical intentionality is now of great interest in academic circles, despite a half-century of critical dismissal of the relevance of artistic intention to interpretation by formalists, New Critics, structuralists, and poststructuralists and the like” (94). Authorship and authorial intent are being reconsidered and taken more seriously now as an element worthy of theoretical critique,

especially in the field of adaptation studies, and in queer spectatorship theory, because authorial intent and perceived authorial intent point to the social impact of spectator reception as a means of challenging and transforming dominant ideology to be less unquestioningly heterosexist. As I mention in chapter one, Richard Dyer points to the authority implied in authorship as “a way of claiming legitimacy and power for a text’s meanings and affects” (196), something that has been historically withheld and therefore is most desired by both lesbian spectators and lesbian authors.

Hutcheon explains that one area particularly impacted by the reconsideration of the validity of studying intentionality and authorship is the process of spectator reception. “In the process [of viewing the film] we inevitably fill in any gaps in the adaptation with information from the adapted text. Indeed, adapters rely on this ability to fill in the gaps when moving from the discursive expansion of telling to the performative time and space limitations of showing” (121). This works in the adaptation of *Orlando* as Hutcheon explains, because:

[A]udiences that are well versed in British cinema might argue that Sally Potter’s *Orlando* (1994) was adapting *that* tradition – the films of Derek Jarman, Peter Greenaway, and David Lean – as much as Virginia Woolf’s literary work. Potter self-reflexively – and yet still realistically – suggests as much by having Orlando’s daughter (not a son, as in the book) take a film camera in hand at the end and become both subject and object. There is yet another way of reading this scene: this female child may not possess any property (the purpose of having a son in the novel), but she, like Potter and her generation of female filmmakers,

does possess the power of the male gaze that women were said to have lost with the medium of film. (126)

By recasting the role of Orlando's progeny from a son to a daughter, a daughter, moreover, with a video camera, Potter is commenting on the difference between the impact of her authorial intention for the film versus Woolf's authorial intention for the novel.

If cinema is a "composite language" of all other earlier arts, as Hutcheon has explained Stam's conceptualization of it, then it inherits aspects of the elements of those earlier arts. Therefore novels, in order to be adapted to film, must be, "distilled, reduced in size, and thus, inevitably, complexity" (36). However, Hutcheon explains that the process of adaptation or "transcoding" between verbal and visual mediums requires not only a process of distilling and cutting but also one of adding new elements. As noted in my introduction, one of the most important questions to ask for my project is: What does it mean for queer visibility and lesbian visibility that the film adaptation adds actual physical bodies, often bodies presented in stereotyped ways, and often the bodies of stars who are themselves associated with a whole realm of other extra-filmic materials, such as the other films they have been in, and their personal lives/gossip about them as documented in other pop culture mass media forms?

Halberstam also examines the significance of the bodies of female actors and stars playing these lesbian roles in a way similar to Richard Dyer's analysis in *Stars*. Dyer argues that the element of celebrity and star status impacts the way in which stars function as figurable characters in certain films as well as in "real" life. Halberstam is

more concerned with how the bodies of these actors and stars figure as more feminine in appearance than their textual counterparts are described in the source novels. Halberstam explains that Orlando, like Idgie is also an example of a “cross-dressing transvestite butch.” “Orlando is hardly butch in his masculine form; the perfect androgyne, Tilda Swinton captures to perfection an in-betweenness of gender” (213). Halberstam complains that this in-betweenness “looks more like the eradication of gender than its staging” (213) but later she accuses the film of not being queer. This seems contradictory to me. Halberstam asks, “how queer is Potter’s Orlando? When we are not being seduced by the visual opulence of Potter’s scenery, we suddenly notice that Tilda Swinton’s cross-dressing androgyny has distinctly unqueer limits” (214). She concedes that:

The androgyny of Orlando means that we cannot forget that we are looking at a woman in drag, and therefore the love affair between Orlando and [Sasha] has serious lesbian overtones. This also makes sense if you recall that Woolf wrote the novel *Orlando* for her lover Vita Sackville-West, who often wore male drag. But Potter completely refuses to capitalize on the queer sexuality invoked by this love affair, and she refuses to screen the lesbian scene that the romance demands.

(214)

This might simply be because of Potter’s wish, as part of the text of adaptation and to align herself with Virginia Woolf, to link herself to the authorial lineage of Woolf and feminism, to remain faithful to the novel. However, even though Orlando’s love for Sasha is presented as immature and adolescent in the film, Potter also does not include a scene from much later in the novel where Orlando, having transformed into a woman at

this point, seeks adventure and escape from the confines of her class status and inhibiting female sexuality by wearing men's clothing and associating, and Woolf alludes to, having sex with street walkers/ prostitutes.

In the novel Virginia Woolf describes the now female Orlando's sexual escapades: "Now she opened the cupboard in which hung still many of the clothes she had worn as a young man of fashion, and from among them she chose a black velvet suit richly trimmed with Venetian lace. It was a little out of fashion, indeed, but it fitted her to perfection and dressed in it she looked the very figure of a noble Lord" (215). In this transvestite or butch attire Orlando ventures out into the night in April of 1712 and walks through Leicester Square where she encounters a beautiful woman sitting "dejectedly" on a bench:

Orlando swept her hat off to her in the manner of a gallant paying his addresses to a lady of fashion in a public place. The young woman raised her head. It was of the most exquisite shapeliness. The young woman raised her eyes. Orlando saw them to be of a lustre such as is sometimes seen on teapots but rarely in a human face. Through this silver glaze the girl looked up at him (for a man he was to her) appealing, hoping, trembling, fearing. She rose; she accepted his arm. For – need we stress the point? – she was of the tribe which nightly burnishes their wares, and sets them in order on the common counter to wait the highest bidder. (216)

Orlando goes with the woman to her room in Gerrard Street. Woolf describes their interaction as a dance of performing genders, which Orlando, having been both male and female, can read both sides of. Orlando reveals her true female identity to Nell, the

prostitute, and they drink and talk. Woolf explains that during this time Orlando frequently masquerades as a man and “enjoyed the love of both sexes equally” (221). A brief comment which seems to be Woolf’s way of both admitting to Orlando’s lesbianism (or bisexuality) and yet attempting to hide its power by making the declaration seem like a brief afterthought of no real significance.

This instance of Halberstam pointing out the fact of Virginia Woolf’s biographically alluded to lesbianism is another example of how Potter’s film works to force spectators to privilege the extra-textual references to Woolf’s personal life over the textual instances of actual potentially lesbian scenes depicted in the novel but omitted from Potter’s film adaptation.

Halberstam indignantly comments on this omission by Potter of explicit representation of lesbian sexuality saying:

[I]n fact, [Potter] saves the film’s sex scene for a rather conventional encounter between a female Orlando and an all too male young American called Shelmerdine (Billy Zane). Because each section of the film is introduced by titles such as ‘Death,’ ‘Poetry,’ ‘Politics,’ and ‘Love,’ Potter only adds insult to injury when she places the encounter with Shelmerdine under the heading of ‘Sex.’

Chris Staayer also finds *Orlando* to be less than a queer film because Swinton’s androgyne ultimately emphasizes the feminine over the masculine. (215)

This assertion, that *Orlando* is not a queer film because the character of Orlando cannot be read as a lesbian since she does not exhibit the female masculinity required, the butchness that would make her visible as queer, does not hold up if one considers

Halberstam's earlier admonition that spectators be more quick to read queerly films that would otherwise seem to function under the heterocentrist assumption of straight until proven queer.

Halberstam explains: "Wherever a novel has been turned in to a film (*Fried Green Tomatoes*, *Desert of the Heart*), the characters in the novels who were coded as butch have been noticeably softened into femmey butches or soft butches. This 'positive' cinema works only at the expense of masculine women" (217). One of the reasons Halberstam posits for this butch erasure is the shifting ideological environment in attitudes toward representation due to the backlash against increased visibility in the 80s and 90s:

the butch is a *type* of lesbian as well as a lesbian stereotype; the butch, moreover, makes dyke desire and dyke sexuality visible and exemplifies a dyke variation on hetero-normative gender roles . . . the 1980s was a time of considerable backlash within white lesbian feminist communities against butch-femme imagery. The rejection of so-called role-playing lesbians was duplicated in lesbian cinema by the depiction of lesbian desire through the modality of sameness. (217)

Leo Bersani also comments on the increased visibility backlash saying, "Homophobic virulence in America has increased in direct proportion to the wider acceptance of homosexuals. The principal target of the religious right has been displaced from abortion to homosexuals" (15).

It is important to remember Bersani's explanation of the stakes of visibility when considering how the process of adaptation makes lesbian representation visible, or not

visible, to different spectators on the marginalized identity to normalized identity spectrum. By framing my exploration of the impact that the process of adaptation has on the question of who can see the lesbians being represented and what power their seeing grants them I discover that ambiguity in adaptations or rather Bersani's term of the homosexuality that is "unlocatably everywhere" is both a self-censorship technique and a subversive means of self preservation in addition to functioning as a new technique for making lesbianism visible to those who are looking and who know how to see.

The films I discuss in this chapter show how spectators learned to use ambiguity as an evolved version of the previously developed reading practice of reading censorship or haunted absences for the (invisible) representations of lesbians which they contained. Spectators of post-1960s Hollywood films took their knowledge of reading censorship and haunted absences and learned to apply these skills to reading ambiguous representations. This is a process that historically will shift one step further as spectators apply their knowledge of reading censorship, haunted absences and ambiguity to learning to read queerness as a force for destabilizing "normative" heterosexuality, which is the focus of chapter three.

CHAPTER THREE

LISBETH SALANDER AS A QUEER DESTABILIZING FORCE FOR HETEROSEXUALITY IN MAINSTREAM FILM

In this chapter I will examine the character Lisbeth Salander from *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* as she has been created and translated in the novel and in the Swedish and American film adaptations of Larrson's novel. In all of these versions of the story she is presented at times as both a masculinized "post-feminist" and a "neo-feminist" vengeance seeking, aggressive, non-victim and as a woman who has been abused by men and by invasive corporate and governmental patriarchy. This ambivalence of character presentation is central to my analysis of Salander's role as a queer character, in analyzing each text's treatment of sexuality and in understanding how the process of adaptation functions in making her queerness visible to both main stream and marginalized audiences. Queerness is more diffused in the novel and it is through the translations of the novel to the medium of film that the queerness becomes more focused and located in the character of Salander herself.

In his book, *The Invention of Heterosexuality*, Jonathan Ned Katz examines how heterosexuality has come to function as an unquestioned "norm" in the 20th and 21st centuries, relegating homosexuality to the realm of deviance. As I show in chapters One and Two, films from the 80s and 90s contained increasingly visible representations of lesbians, due to the enormous impact of the AIDS epidemic arriving on the tail end of the Women's Movement, the Civil Rights movement, and the Gay Liberation Movement. Katz argues that, because of this increased visibility of homosexuality, in both films and

discourse, concepts like heterosexuality, which had before appeared natural began to be historicized.

The film adaptations of Swedish author Stieg Larrson's *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* (*Dragon Tattoo*) allow for a particularly clear example of the visibility, in an extremely public discourse, of the troubling of concepts like heterosexuality, masculinity and femininity that were previously considered eternal and fixed. These films, through the development of the characters and their treatment of sex and violence, are a prominent and mainstream example of how the concept of queerness, linked to this troubling of presumably fixed definitions, is made visible and central to social discussions of identity, sexuality, and sexual desire.

Patricia White, in *Uninvited*, writes about the ways in which most supporting characters in classical Hollywood films can be seen as 'supporting' the "imbricated ideologies of heterosexual romance and white American hegemony permeating Hollywood cinema" (142). Mrs. Danvers, from Hitchcock's adaptation of *Rebecca*, is one such example that White utilizes, as I've discussed in chapter one. White explains that although these supporting characters are supposed to help bolster this heterosexual ideal prevalent in classical Hollywood films, these characters also provide the possibility of other readings. The presence of "abnormal" or "lesser" examples of male and female characters serve to reinforce the idea that the main character is "normal" or "correctly" male or female. However, in *Dragon Tattoo* this is exactly what Lisbeth Salander does, as I explain below.

The Narrative Structure of *Dragon Tattoo*

This idea of supporting characters as bolstering “normal” (hetero)sexuality through their “less than/ abnormal” presence is interestingly complicated in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* through the presumably “supporting” character of Lisbeth Salander. Salander originally appears in the story as a supporting character (side-kick/love interest) to main character Mikael Blomkvist; however, she soon begins to destabilize this idea of him as the hero of the story and, by extension, the underlying assumption of heterosexuality as an unquestionable given. Although she starts out as a supporting character, Salander quickly becomes a rival for main character status and is a queer/destabilizing force for heterosexuality in the story.

Mikael Blomkvist, an investigative journalist working for a major Swedish magazine called Millennium, gets into trouble for libel when he goes after corporate crook Hans-Erik Wennerström. Through this scandal he comes to the attention of aging business tycoon Henrik Vanger. Vanger hires him to investigate the unsolved forty-year old presumed murder case of his niece, Harriet, who mysteriously disappeared in 1966. Before deciding to hire him, however, Vanger has him investigated by Lisbeth Salander, a 24 year-old goth/punk attired antisocial computer hacker with her own mysterious back story, who works for Milton Security, a large private investigative and private security company in Stockholm. When Mikael’s investigation of the Harriet murder case begins to heat up he discovers and hires Lisbeth to be his research assistant (she also eventually becomes his sex partner) in uncovering the series of brutal murders of young women which are all somehow connected to Harriet Vanger’s disappearance. In the process

author Steig Larrson reveals that it is Lisbeth, not Mikael who is the real main character of the story and the series.

Lisbeth's mysterious background and story line get developed parallel to the main story line. She is and has been under state guardianship since she was declared mentally incompetent and violent as a child. When her kind, long-term guardian has a stroke she is placed under the guardianship of a new one, the lawyer Advokat Bjurman. Bjurman also happens to be a sadistic rapist and he takes advantage of his situation with Salander, forcing her to give him a blowjob before he will allow her access to her money. She decides to alleviate this problem herself and attempts to covertly videotape him forcing her to do this when she goes to his house to get her money which he now has control of. Instead of a forced blowjob he tackles her, handcuffs her to the bed and anally rapes her for two hours. Surviving this violent attack she eventually returns to his apartment with a Taser which she uses to knock him out. She then ties him up, naked, and forces him to watch the video she made of his attack on her. She uses the video as a means to blackmail him into setting up the eventual release of her declaration of incompetence, explaining that she will make the video viral and public if anything should ever happen to her. She also anally rapes him with a dildo and tattoos a warning to other women on his chest which reads (with slight variations between each version) "I am a sadistic pig and a rapist."

Another parallel storyline is the Harriet disappearance and its connection to the violent and sexually abusive murders of women over a 40 plus year time span. These

connected mysteries that all contain elements of violence perpetrated against women are investigated and solved by Salander and Blomkvist.

To contextualize my definitions of lesbianism and “aberrant” sexuality, I refer back to earlier citations of Lillian Faderman’s definition of the term lesbian and its meaning for a contemporary 20th and 21st century audience. Faderman’s understanding of the shift in concepts of lesbianism and homosexuality in general are similar to other queer theorists who seek to explain homosexuality through a social constructionist lens, such as Katz’s explanation by way of Foucault: “Our own day’s scientized ‘sexuality,’ he points out, is substantially different from the ancient Greeks’ ‘aphrodisia’ (and, for that matter, different from the early-American Puritans’ ‘carnal lust,’ and the Enlightenment’s erotic ‘tastes’)” (172). Katz shows in this abbreviated quotation from Foucault, how he reads Foucault’s argument of how concepts of accepted and “normal” sexuality have continuously been shifting through history, including our current understanding of queerness. Providing specific cultural and time based definitions for these terms, such as lesbian and queer, is especially important when it comes to questions of understanding the identity and the significance of that identity, for lesbian or queer authors and lesbian or queer spectators.

Audience Identity and Authorship

Janet Staiger, in *Perverse Spectators* and *Media Reception Studies*, examines the significance of identity in spectator reception. As I explain in the introduction, Staiger notes the significance of an audience’s contextual circumstance. In *Perverse Spectators*,

she provides a “historical materialist approach to audience and media reception”(1). Staiger’s project is to develop a way of describing individual instances of reception and the meanings individuals make of these experiences. To achieve this, her work combines research on reception, fans, stars and cultural studies in general. Staiger examines a multitude of intersecting factors and how these factors may be linked to “broader dynamics of class, race and ethnicity, generation, gender, and sexual identities” (2). Not only is the shift in medium from novel to film, and the parallel shift this creates in audiences, significant but it is also important for me to examine in this chapter the cultural shift from Swedish “authors” and audiences to American “authors” and audiences.

As I address in chapter one, Richard Dyer, and Linda Hutcheon both acknowledge the significance of authorship for queer spectatorship and for adaptation theory. Dyer’s understanding of the special significance of authorship as it connects to homosexual identity is important to my current project because, as Dyer explains, authorship allows for “socially specific forms of cultural perception.” In his article, “Believing in Fairies: The Author and the Homosexual,” Dyer addresses authorship as “multiple authorship (with varying degrees of hierarchy and control) in specific determining economic and technological circumstances, all those involved always working with (within and against) particular codes and conventions of film and with (within and against) particular, social ways of being lesbian or gay” (187). The “multiple authorship” of *Dragon Tattoo* consists of the original Swedish author of the novel, Steig Larrson, the “authors” of the Swedish film adaptation, the screenwriter of the Swedish film script and the director

Niels Arden Oplev and company, the translator of the American version of the novel, the American screenwriter, and American director David Fincher and company.

In contrast to films of the 1940s through the 1960s, mentioned in chapter one as having to uphold “morality” for the “mass” audience of American films, post 1990s Hollywood films are designed to play to both the mainstream audience and to niche audiences due to the commodification of counter-culture and the marketing of exoticism. This also has to do with the sometimes willingness of film spectators and filmmakers in the twenty-first century to address ideas of the de-centralizing of previously unacknowledged heterocentricity.⁴

In the concluding chapter to *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader*, Michele Aaron examines the effects of the late 1980s early 1990s movement, termed New Queer Cinema, on cinema spectatorship as a whole. Aaron explains that classical Hollywood films depended on a range of “disavowing techniques to implicate yet contain any homosexual possibility, demanding its denial yet exploiting its appeal” (188). Aaron argues that because of the impact of New Queer Cinema and the explosion of LGBT visibility in American mainstream media in the 80s and 90s, “Contemporary cinema, and the contemporary spectator, can be seen to willingly avow homosexuality rather than disavow it”(188). Aaron sees this as happening in two different ways. One, in a revision of the cross-dressing film and two, the way in which “New Queer Spectatorship” is instrumental to the “undoing of the heteronormativity of the gaze” (188). This is similar to the way Danae Clark explains the problem with lesbians as consumers in “Comodity

⁴ For my understanding of theorists approach to post-1990s Hollywood film I cite Michele Aaron, Suzanna Walters and Larry Gross.

Lesbianism,” as one of containing too many possible identities since lesbians “exist across race, income, and age (three determinants used by advertisers to segment and distinguish target groups within the female population). To the extent that lesbians are not identifiable or accessible, they are not measurable and, therefore, not profitable” (187). This idea of course extends to the film industry and is interestingly complicated in the realm of queerness. Since queerness extends across a multitude of identities it can be very ambiguous – so ambiguous as to be both visible and invisible, an ideal situation marketing-wise since sex sells and ambiguous sex has the potential to sell to *everyone*.

This leads to the idea of queerness as a new kind of closet since it is a blanket term that lends itself to the possibility of multiple interpretations and it is also somewhat capable of being ignored and/or being read through heterocentrist assumption as just heterosexuality.⁵

Clark describes the “dual marketing approach” that some advertisers utilize to appeal covertly to homosexuals: “advertisers are increasingly striving to create a dual marketing approach that will ‘speak to the homosexual consumer in a way that the straight consumer will not notice’” (“Commodity Lesbianism” 187). In the contemporary marketing of Hollywood film this tactic is still in use, but has been updated a bit. Now lesbians and gays are marketed to in a way that emphasizes their “normalcy” as “heterosexuality with a small twist” to borrow a phrase from Suzanna Walters. This newer version of hetero-with-a-twist marketing is meant to appeal not only to lesbians

⁵ Annamarie Jagose explains in *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, the term queer has come to be used as “an umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications” (1)

and gays but also to heteros who are “cool” or “down with the gays.” Queerness is utilized in this way in the American film of *Dragon Tattoo*. Salander is “cool” because she is queer. Her queerness is normalized because Larrson describes her in the novel as, “quite normal woman, with the same desires and sex drive as every other woman,” even if she happens to occasionally have sex with women (396).

The adaptations, especially the American film, attempt to market to everyone by including all of these contradictions and making them fit together under the culturally hip category of “queerness.” This gives the audience a film that is both following heterocentric tradition while appearing to break from it. A film that leaves itself open to multiple appropriations which Dudley Andrews would explain as constituting another understanding of the concept of adaptation.

The American version of the film *Dragon Tattoo* and the marketing strategy used by it falls under this more direct category of marketing described by Clark as the dual marketing strategy known as ‘gay window advertizing.’ Clark explains, “gay window ads avoid explicit references to heterosexuality by depicting only one individual or same-sexed individuals within the representational frame”(“Commodity Lesbianism” 188). In this type of dual marketing, “gays and lesbians can read into an ad certain subtextual elements that correspond to experiences with or representations of gay/lesbian subculture”(“Commodity Lesbianism” 188). Clark explains: “If heterosexual consumers do not notice these subtexts or subcultural codes, then advertisers are able to reach the homosexual market along with the heterosexual market without even revealing their aim” (“Commodity Lesbianism” 188). Clark describes previous heterosexist feminist concepts

of the effects of media on female spectators as being “based on a conspiracy theory that placed ultimate power in the hands of corporate patriarchy and relegated no power or sense of agency to the female spectator” (“Commodity Lesbianism” 195). Clark is obviously alluding to Laura Mulvey’s concept of the male gaze developed in her groundbreaking essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” and the enormous impact this concept has had, and continues to have, on film theory and feminist media spectator theory. Clark explains that: “In our desire and haste to attribute agency to the spectator and as a means of empowerment for marginal or oppressed social groups, we risk losing sight of the interrelation between reading practices and the political economy of media institutions” (“Commodity Lesbianism” 195).

Another aspect of these marketing strategies is the way queerness is understood in Sweden versus in America. In *Queer in Europe* the chapter *Queer in the Nordic Region: Telling Queer (Feminist) Stories*, Ulrika Dahl examines the links in Sweden between Feminism and Queer Theory. Dahl explains that in Sweden queer theory and queer studies are considered to be contained within the framework of feminism and have not really been able to branch out as their own discipline or realm of thought due in part to the scarcity of gay males in academia in Sweden. Indeed, when searching the internet for “queer Sweden” on Google, I found the Swedish tourist web site, www.visitsweden.com, the main page of which featured an article about how feminism is the Swedish masculine contemporary ideal. Both this web site and the chapter about queer/feminist Sweden in *Queer in Europe* provide contemporary evidence of the concept of queerness and its association with feminism function in contemporary Swedish culture, ideas that are at

play in the book and the films of *Dragon Tattoo* and how this functions in my argument about destabilizing heteronormativity through supporting characters/ main characters that are queer.

Salander as Queer Author

The scene where Salander and Blomkvist meet for the first time is one of particular significance because it is in this scene, in both the novel and the films, that the first hints of Salander's sexual identity, her "genderqueer" status, are revealed. In the novel the scene begins with Salander waking up with a hangover, knowing that Mimmi, her friend and sometimes sex-partner, has already left for work. In the novel Mimmi's scent, "still lingered in the stuffy air of the bedroom" (327). Musing on the scent of Mimmi the novel then explains how Salander identifies her sexuality:

Salander – unlike Mimmi – had never thought of herself as a lesbian. She had never brooded over whether she was straight, gay, or even bisexual. She did not give a damn about labels, did not see that it was anyone else's business whom she spent her nights with. If she had to choose, she preferred guys – and they were in the lead, statistically speaking. The only problem was finding a guy who was not a jerk and one who was also good in bed; Mimmi was a sweet compromise, and she turned Salander on. (*Dragon Tattoo* 327)

This passage is an example of how author Stieg Larsson underplays Salander's queerness by stating that she "doesn't like labels," and that "guys are in the lead." This is important

to my analysis because even though Larrson might be underplaying the queerness audiences of the novel and the film adaptations are not necessarily receiving it this way.

In the Swedish film the scene that introduces the fact that Salander sleeps with women occurs right after she has emailed Blomkvist a tantalizing and cryptic clue about the nature of the mysterious numbers and names in Harriet's diary. In the novel and in the American film the bible quotes clue is delivered not by Salander, but by Blomkvist's teenaged daughter, Pernilla, when she visits him on her way to bible camp. However, the Swedish film eliminates the character of Blomkvist's daughter and instead has Salander notice the connection as she trolls through the hacked contents of his computer files. Blomkvist shows up at Salander's door in the novel and the American film because Frode, Henrik Vanger's lawyer, has revealed her to be a prime candidate as a research companion.

This scene in both films is very similar. Both open with a shot revealing a messy bed and the outline of Salander's naked, sleeping body. Blomkvist's loud knock wakes her up and as she rises from the bed the other naked sleeping female figure is revealed. This figure is not identified as Mimmi until the second film in the Swedish trilogy and not at all in the American film. The book not only identifies the character specifically as Mimmi, but Salander is described as having a very nonchalant relationship with her, and this description is very similar to Larrson's description of Blomkvist's approach to sex and dating. By dealing with sex in this nonchalant way Larsson implies that Salander and Blomkvist are very similar individuals and by doing so he also minimizes the importance of their gender and sexual identity. Blomkvist's sexuality can be seen as a "phantom" or

unreadable secret in the book and movies. Blomkvist, beyond just serving as a counterpoint for Salander's character, also functions as a queer presence himself in the narrative. The films function to assuage his own anxiety about his potential queerness and the anxiety he produces about homosexual desire as a character in the text.

Blomkvist asks permission to enter and before Salander can reply he walks right in, bringing breakfast with him. In the Swedish film she opens the door but leaves the chain on so that she remains in control of the situation when she finally decides to allow him to enter. In the American film she opens the door a crack and he throws it open and barges in, to her astonishment. In the novel he barges in and proceeds to begin making coffee in her kitchen and when she protests, saying, "We don't even know each other," he replies, "Wrong! You know me better than anyone else does." Referring to her hacking of his computer and researching his background as part of her assignment at Milton Security to investigate him for clients, Dirch Frode and Henrick Vanger. In the American film and the novel versions of this scene Salander shows a lack of control. One of the most significant differences between this scene in the book and the scene in the both films is that in the films Blomkvist meets "Mimmi" briefly as she comes to see if Salander needs help and then leaves when she decides the situation is awkward but not threatening.

Since, in the novel, Mimmi has already left by the time Blomkvist arrives, the only person who receives the information about Salander's same-sex affair is the reader, and this information is heavily mediated through Larsson's evaluative narration, which I quoted above. In the Swedish film, Salander's personal concept of her sexual identity is never explained and the backstory on her previous sexual encounters, with Mimmi or

otherwise, is never elaborated upon. Except for her sexual abuse and rape by Bjurman, her one night with Mimmi and her graphic sex scene with Bolmkvist are all that are revealed about her sexual identity/ experience in the film. Since less about Salander's sexuality is revealed and qualified in the Swedish film, the film version of her character is more readily readable as queer, according to Jagose's definition of queer as an "umbrella term." Salander is also more readable as queer in the American film, which includes a sequence of Salander in what appears to be a gay bar, or at least a dark techno pumping bar filled with punk/tattooed and pierced clientele, being pursued by "Mimmi" and making out with her against a wall.

While Blomkvist makes coffee in her kitchen, the novel describes Salander as "passively obeying" his command that she take a shower, dress, and then come talk to him. She returns from her shower dressed and with a loaded Taser gun in the pocket of her jeans, in case Blomkvist should become a problem. Her guard is up having recently suffered through the most brutal rape by Bjurman. As they have breakfast together she decides he has "kind eyes" and therefore is not a "malicious person." She decides to trust him because "She reminded herself that *she* was the one who knew everything. *Knowledge is power*" (331). The instances of italicizing in the novel indicate Salander's internal dialogue. After a little strange flirting they get down to business and Blomkvist explains that he is there to ask her to help him continue his work on the mysterious murders and their intersection with the Harriet Vanger mystery. This scene is fairly similar in the American film, minus the shower.

In the Swedish film, this description of their first meeting is slightly different. In the film Salander remains in control of the situation and after deciding that Blomkvist is not a threat she lets him in and watches coldly from the doorway as he fumbles around her messy kitchen trying to find coffee and mistakenly drinking some out of an obviously old and disgusting carafe. She only concedes to interacting with him after he says, “You contacted me! With an easily traceable email,” and thereby implies that despite her surprise and her chilly reception, she obviously initiated contact and therefore must, on some level, have wanted Blomkvist to meet her and have wanted to help him solve the old murder cases. Because Salander is the initiator of this contact and remains in control of this situation in the Swedish film, she is coded as more masculine and less childlike/girlish than in the novel and in the American film. Also, the strange paternal dynamic between Salander and Blomkvist is much less apparent in the Swedish film. Leaving out the character of Pernilla, Blomkvist’s daughter, from this version makes Blomkvist’s father figure role less prominent. Also, since Salander remains in control of every one of their interactions in this film, especially at their first meeting, and later their first sexual interaction, she is presented as a more masculine and sexual aggressor type.

Minor Points of Queerness /Queer reception strategies

Some minor points of queerness apparent in the novel which are left out of the films can be used by “knowing spectators” in much the same way as previously discussed in chapter one. In addition to the genderqueer figure of Lisbeth Salander in the novel, for example, there is the unconventional sexual relationship of Erika Berger (Co-owner with

Blomkvist of *Millennium Magazine*) and Michael Blomkvist. This is hinted at in the film but the aspect of Erika Berger's husband being bisexual and Berger herself having fantasies about threesomes with two men is never touched on in the films. Since both film adaptations of *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* are successful major mainstream films, albeit in the different economic contexts of the nationally funded and produced Swedish film and the privately funded and produced Hollywood film. Yet, both also contain a strongly identifiable "genderqueer" character they are interesting social phenomenon to examine and point to an increased social acceptance of the presence of obviously queer elements in popular film.

Other instances of characters in the novel with "perverse sexualities" are Gottfried and Martin Vanger, who are both rapists, serial killers, and committers of incest. The inclusion of Salander's bisexuality or genderqueer status, in both the novel and the film, could be seen as a means of trying to counter the instances of rape and incest, by showing that unconventional sexuality is not always "deviant" or bad. In other words, homosexuality or queer sexuality is qualified as "fine," especially as compared to incest and rape.

As I previously noted, Patricia White's understanding of the traditional role for supporting characters, as one of helping to bolster the heterosexual ideal prevalent in classical Hollywood films is also relevant to reiterate here. White explains that supporting characters prop up the "normalcy" of queer identity, and thus shore up the anxiety of the viewer (or, possibly, the projected anxiety of Blomkvist about his own sexuality).

Destabilizing Heterocentrism

In “The Girl Who Turned the Tables: A Queer Reading of Lisbeth Salander,” Kim Surkan argues strongly that contemporary audiences easily read Salander as a genderqueer character, and that it is due to this radical/deviant presentation that she is such a popular and compelling character. Salander strikes a chord with contemporary audiences who wish to see visual evidence of the decentralizing or destabilizing of heterosexuality in mainstream film. This questioning of the previously unquestionable idea that heterosexuality was the norm is an argument society is more receptive to right now than it has been in the past, especially since gender, sexuality and gay marriage are hot topics in the news currently. The role of queer spectators and the ways they have learned to read lesbianism and queerness as visible in film, especially in this contemporary scenario, is of major significance here. Judith Butler explains the problem of gay marriage and the normalizing function it serves, “The recent efforts to promote lesbian and gay marriage also promote a norm that threatens to render illegitimate and abject those sexual arrangements that do not comply with the marriage norm in either its existing or its revisable form” (*Undoing Gender* 5).

Surkan argues that Salander is not a traditional feminist or easily identified as lesbian, bisexual or queer but, instead, “figures as a more complex, deconstructionist character whose defiance of norms and gender roles keeps troubling our reading of her both as ‘woman’ and as a feminist” (35). Here, Surkan fails to acknowledge differences in how feminism and queerness are conceptualized in non-American contexts, such as in

Sweden. Surkan points to Salander's androgynous visual description and her punk-Goth aesthetic. She explains that her lack of feminine appearance "destabilizes the normalized heterosexuality of men such as [her boss,] Armansky who desire her, and by implication she 'queers' Larsson's readers as well" (36).

Precisely because Salander's queerness produces anxiety, it needs to be inscribed within a structure of heterosexual norms – ie, it needed to be normalized. This is the importance of Foucault's analysis for my argument. The narrative of the films and the novel play constantly with this normal/deviant ambivalence. The judge who uses violence within the context of the law rapes Salander anally, something that is both a violation of her through using his position of power and something which queers him (he can be read as treating her sexually as a boy.) Salander responds to this violation by assuming an active position. Blomkvist who uses her as a sexual partner can be read as warding off anxiety about his own homosexuality, and she acts as the sexual initiator/aggressor in their sex scene. Each adaptation serves a different function in its attempt to deal with this anxiety about sexual ambivalence.

Part of the appeal of the character of Lisbeth Salander is her refusal to be read as a victim. "Salander's aversion to being cast as a victim – which she expresses through revenge and violence – can also be seen in her resistance to conventional femininity. To be read as a feminine female is to be subject to harassment, stalking, violence, and rape at the hands of men" (Surkan 37). It becomes significant then that each version of the story has a subtly different take on the way it conveys Salander's sexual and gender identity status. Salander is also appealing to a mass American audience because of her insistence

on her individuality, “Her vigilante response to sexual violence is the response of an individual who has been wronged, rather than of a crusader on behalf of a social class” (Surkan 38). In this context, it is informative to compare reviews of the American film with reviews of the Swedish film. For example, the British film magazine *Sight and Sound* reviewed both films when they opened and the two reviews from the same source shed interesting insight on American audience expectations versus European audience expectations.

The Swedish film review claims that fans of the book will find the Swedish adaptation “reassuringly faithful” (*Sight and Sound*). The reviewer claims, “Perhaps surprisingly, there has been no attempt to smooth over the peculiarities of a plot which, as well as operating as a highly effective thriller, centers on the odd, almost non-verbal relationship between middle-aged investigative reporter Mikael Blomkvist (Michael Nyquist) and Lisbeth Salander (Noomi Rapace) a young *lesbian* computer hacker with Asberger-type socialization problems” (*Sight and Sound*, italics mine). This review immediately points out two very significant things about the Swedish film adaptation, one is the “strange” relationship between Bolmkvist and Salander and the other is the fact that this review concretely names her as a lesbian. Both of these things impact audience response and point to sites of queerness audiences might perceive when viewing the film, not to mention audiences who happen to have read this review in conjunction with their film viewing.

This review continues to illuminate the way the film leaves itself open to queer reception strategies stating: “the tiny Salander herself . . . is vulnerable to victimization

by those who are tempted to see her as a defenseless waif. . . . Waif, however, she is not: resourceful and fiercely motivated by self-preservation, she is capable of matching and exceeding the brutality of anyone” (*Sight and Sound*). Not only is this review explaining potential sites of queer reception, but in this quotation it is actually providing a queer reading of Salander to help corroborate such audience responses. The review explains that the Blomkvist/Salander relationship in the Swedish film “has an accidental quality that’s a refreshing antidote to the constraints of boy-meets-girl convention, yet perhaps carries a faint whiff of the kind of male wish-fulfillment the narrative elsewhere seeks to expose as exploitation” (*Sight and Sound*).

The review of the American adaptation of the film in this same magazine describes the Fincher adaptation as “a subtle softening of the Swedish original.” One way the “softening” occurs, according to this review, is through Fincher’s alterations of the Lisbeth Salander character. The review describes the American film version of Salander as: “Tattooed, pierced, hoodie-wearing, *bisexual*, tiny, dark, rebarbative, abused, determined, sly, vengeful, [and] a genius-level computer hacker” (*Sight and Sound* italics mine). Significantly different here in the American review, as opposed to the Swedish review, is the fact that this reviewer reads Salander not as a lesbian but as a bisexual. Whether this has more to do with the position of the reviewers or the way each film represents the character is hard to definitively say but it is significant to note that neither review reads Salander as straight. This review notes that one of the taglines for the American adaptation was, “What is hidden in Snow, comes forth in the thaw” and this is an appropriate reading of the character of Harriet who functions similarly to the way

lesbian ghosts “haunt” earlier films I have described, particularly in chapter one. Harriet is not a lesbian, but her mysterious disappearance does haunt the films and the novel, her absent presence is conveyed through photographs and flashback scenes and it functions to represent the historically absent and unspoken crimes against and abuses of women, especially the serial killer murder victims her disappearance is associated with and also more generally the violence against women historically and contemporarily perpetrated but formally unacknowledged in supposedly progressive European countries like Sweden.

The article explains Harriet’s ghostly presence saying she, “disappeared from the island owned by her extended family in 1966, leaving ghosts in the form of many photographs, documents, and memories pored over throughout the film” (*Sight and Sound*). It is through Harriet’s haunting, via photograph, that the film (here I am referring specifically to the American adaptation, but this is also true of the Swedish film) delivers a large part of its meditation on the problems of unquestioned patriarchy and heterosexual hegemony. The fact that this is a major thematic element in the story is also significant when coupled with the large audience the book and film(s) reached. This review touches on this fact as well, saying, “Larsson’s books . . . were read by everybody including – indeed especially – your parents” (*Sight and Sound*). This means that this questioning of heterosexual hegemony as a practice that often harms women has also reached quite a large audience.

The original Swedish title of the novel was *Men Who Hate Women*, “a title that highlights the story’s content: the interlinked circles of male persecutors who abuse

Harriet Vanger and Lisbeth Salander in ways that force them to become resourceful yet near-psychotic” (*Sight and Sound*). This review explains that, “renaming the novel and the film *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* turns a potentially depressing story about male villains into an uplifting story about a woman who opposes them” (*Sight and Sound*). It is also sexier, and far less accusatory, less anti-masculine, less anti-heterosexual and because of this more marketable. In order to soften the film and make it more marketable and less violent, Fincher also softens the character of Salander. The article compares the Noomi Rapace version of Salander to the Rooney Mara version saying, “Mara’s version of Salander is shown writhing naked on top of [Daniel] Craig and - in a manner that Rapace’s more genuinely alien . . . Salander would scorn – splashes out on a final Christmas gift (which will be binned un-given) with a neediness that highlights Blomkvist’s shadowy role as father-lover-mentor” (*Sight and Sound*). This significant difference between the American and the Swedish versions of Salander, her neediness, is especially interesting to note in the context of the differences between audiences for American and Swedish films, and the ways in which American heterosexist ideology is tightly bound to economic concerns in filmmaking. The American film can hint at what the Swedish film does, and it can point to and reference the Swedish film for “knowing spectators” who are interested to see what might be being left out, but it cannot be quite as radical or progressive as the Swedish film can.

Surkan notes that though Salander is responding as an individual, “Larsson complicates our reading of Salander by placing her story within the framework of a series of Swedish crime statistics about sexual violence against women” (38). There is no

framework of Swedish crime statistics in the film but the images of brutalized and murdered women which are shown on screen as part of Salander and Blomkvist's online and police archival investigations could be seen as taking on a similar framing function visually in the film. These visual images, delivered in the mise-en-scene as photos and web page frames, function as part of the recuperation of female bodies that the film performs in light of Salander's masculinization and refusal to be read as feminine or weak. Another subtle gesture of recuperation of female bodies performed by the Swedish film is the inclusion of the very pregnant female journalist who attempts to interview Mikael Blomkvist after his trial at the beginning of the film.

In using the term "the recuperation of female bodies" I want to draw attention to the way female bodies are visually presented in the films in a way that is equivalent to the way female bodies are "absently present" in the novel. In the novel the crime statistics about women preface each chapter and function to point continually to the absent female bodies that have been victimized in Sweden but not formally acknowledged or accounted for. These recuperated female bodies which are visually presented in the film function as what Dudley Andrews would call a "visually corollary" for the crime statistics.

The American film accomplishes a similar recuperation through Salander's same-sex sex scene and the Harriet flashbacks. By visually representing two women making out with each other, Salander's same-sex "sex" scene, the American film is representing two female bodies enacting agency without any male presence. In the Harriet flashbacks the American film also conveys images of female agency in action,

most notably when Harriet fights back against her violent and abusive father and kills him in self-defense.

Judith Butler on Violence as a means of obtaining Agency

In each version of the story violence inscribes Lisbeth's sexual representation. She experiences violence in the films and in the novel both casually and vindictively. An example of casual violence would be the scene in which she is accosted in the subway station and gets her laptop broken. In the Swedish film version of this scene Salander is shown racing through a subway station when she comes up on a drunken and unruly group of men. She accidentally bumps into one of the men causing him to jump her and choke her, then fling her against the wall, the blow cracks her computer and cuts her cheek. She retaliates by biting his arm and kicking another man who pours beer all over her head. Another man in the group spits on her and she springs away from the wall and slams him in the face with her elbow. He retaliates with a kick to her groin and as she is down on the ground trying to recover she instinctively grabs a broken glass bottle springing up once again to defend herself she screams and waves the bottle wildly, slicing one guy in the arm and effectively running them off.

In the American version Salander is running down an escalator on her way to catch a subway train when a man runs up and snatches her bag containing her laptop. She chases after him up the other escalator and grabbing her bag back, when he refuses to let it go she shoves him in the face, kicks him down and screams at him, although the scream cannot be heard over the other noises in the tube station. She succeeds in wrestling it

away from him, flings it down the median between the up and down escalators and jumps over to the down escalator, running to catch her bag before it reaches the ground and racing into the almost closing doors of the subway car.

A more vindictive example of violence inflicted on Salander would be the scene in which she is raped by Bjurman. In all of the versions of the story she is sexually violated multiple times by her guardian, Advokat Bjurman. In *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler examines how violence intersects with gender as a social construction. She argues that agency is bound to the performance of gender and to the social receptions of such performances. Butler explains the significance of bodies and the significance of the social reception of bodies that convey a performed gender: “it is through the body that gender and sexuality become exposed to others, implicated in social processes, inscribed by cultural norms, and apprehended in their social meanings. In a sense, to be a body is to be given over to others even as a body is, emphatically, ‘one’s own,’ that over which we must claim rights of autonomy” (20). Butler explains that violence is both an attack on a body’s agency and autonomy and also sometimes the means through which one can exert one’s agency and autonomy. She explains that “To the extent that we commit violence, we are acting upon another, putting others at risk, causing damage to others. In a way, we all live with this particular vulnerability, a vulnerability to the other that is part of bodily life, but this vulnerability becomes highly exacerbated under certain social and political conditions” (*Undoing Gender* 22). Specifically in reference to women, Butler says, “There is the possibility of appearing impermeable, of repudiating vulnerability itself. There is the possibility of becoming violent” (*Undoing Gender* 231). In this sense it is

possible to read Lisbeth's violence against Advokat Bjurman as an attempt to counter and balance the violence perpetrated against her and against the other women in the film, especially Harriet and the murder victims.

The films attempt to present Salander as both a masculinized "post-feminist" or "neo-feminist" vengeance seeking, aggressive, non-victim and as a woman who has been abused by men and by invasive corporate and governmental patriarchy. In the scene where Salander chooses to sleep with Bolmkvist this vulnerability, present in the novel but not in the films, is especially apparent. In the novel, Larsson describes her as standing restlessly and indecisively in the dark, trying to make up her mind to go into Blomkvist's room and initiate sex: "The hardest thing for her was to show herself naked to another person for the first time. She was convinced that her skinny body was repulsive. Her breasts were pathetic. She had no hips to speak of. She did not have much to offer. Apart from that she was a quite normal woman, with the same desires and sex drive as every other woman" (396). Apart from looking like a child or even a little boy, Salander, Larsson concedes, has "natural" female desires. When she initiates sex with Blomkvist, he is sitting in bed reading and she comes into his room, sits on his bed and leans over and bites his nipple. He is described as "flabbergasted," and his initial response is to question the idea of them having sex as a bad one for their working relationship. They proceed and the scene segues into the next morning where they interact politely with each other but the only acknowledgement of their sexual interaction is "a hint of a smile" which Salander is described as having. This scene is fairly similar in both films except

that in the films she isn't shown as hesitating to have sex, instead she is shown as being sexually confident and acting on her impulse.

Salander's Violence as a Recuperation of (Female) Agency

In the films and in the novel there are two major scenes that depict Salander's capability for violent means of self-defense or revenge. The first is her revenge rape of Burjman and the other is the scene where she attacks Martin Vanger as he is about to abuse and kill Mikael in his torture chamber basement. In both films Salander's revenge rape of Advokat Burjman are very similar. Both scenes begin with Salander surprising Burjman at his apartment and taking advantage of his surprise to tase him in the neck and knock him unconscious. Both scenes involve her tying him up, striping him naked and shoving a dildo up his ass. In the Swedish version she finds his own dildo, in the American version she removes a large silver one from her bag, implying that she brought it and that it does not belong to him. Another difference between the two versions is the length of time Salander forces Burjman to watch the hidden camera video she made of his initial rape of her. In the Swedish version she forces Burjman to watch the entire two-hour video. In the American version she just plays a little bit of it to give him the idea. The significance of this subtle difference is to make the Swedish film seem that much more violent. Salander spares Burjman nothing, forcing him to experience again in real time the violence he inflicted on her. What makes the Swedish film appear initially to be more violent than the American film is not this scene itself but the slow accumulation of scenes showing Salander being both the target of violence and the perpetrator.

In the Swedish film the broken laptop/subway scene, which I discuss above, is a scene that does not really exist in either the novel or the American film. This event of the broken laptop becomes the catalyst for Bjurman's rape of Salander, since it is because she needs access to her money to buy a new laptop that she devises the hidden camera plan in the first place. This scene is very different in the American film and much less violent. In comparison with the Swedish version of this scene the American scene is barely violent at all.

Another scene which shows Salander becoming more violent and obtaining agency through this violence is the scene where Salander saves Mikael from Martin Vanger. Near the end of the film Salander discovers that not only is Martin Vanger a serial killer but he also has Blomkvist trapped in his torture chamber basement and intends to kill him. She goes to his house to save Blomkvist, armed with a golf club which she uses to fight Martin off and chase him away long enough to cut Blomkvist free. The scene is described in the novel from Blomkvist's point of view:

Her voice was like sandpaper. As long as Blomkvist lived, he would never forget her face as she went on the attack. Her teeth were bared like a beast of prey. Her eyes were glittering, black as coal. She moved with the lightning speed of a tarantula and seemed totally focused on her prey as she swung the club again, striking Martin in the ribs. (456)

Salander hits Martin four times with the golf club, breaking his collarbone and significantly injuring him before he flees his basement and attempts to escape in his car. After cutting Blomkvist loose she grabs Martin's gun and chases after him shouting to

Blomkvist as she leaves, “I’m going to take him” (458). This scene is very similar to the depiction of the scene in the Swedish film version but in the American film version Salander hits Martin once with the golf club, visibly shattering some teeth and unhinging his jaw. In this version she also asks Blomkvist’s permission saying, “Can I kill him?” before racing after him on her motorcycle. In the Swedish film and in the novel she asks no one’s permission. In the novel she chases Martin’s car on her motorcycle and is in hot pursuit when both Salander and Martin see an oncoming semi truck. Martin swerves right into the oncoming truck and his car explodes in flames, killing him instantly.

In the Swedish film version of this scene Martin swerves to avoid the semi and flips his car over a ravine. Salander follows the wreck and sees him trapped in his car begging for help. She does nothing and the car sparks and bursts into flames, killing him. Blomkvist asks her in the next scene if she could have saved him and she says yes. He says he wouldn’t have done what she did but he understands. In the American film version of this scene Salander chases Martin on her bike, causes him to swerve to avoid the semi and therefore crash his car, then she gets off her bike, approaching the smoking wreck and close up shots of her hand show her holding a gun and flicking the safety off. She is prepared to finish Martin herself, but before she can do so the car catches fire and explodes, killing Martin instantly.

The subtle differences between each version of this scene highlight aspects of Salander’s depiction that each work wishes to emphasize. In the American film she asks and is granted permission to kill Martin. This alleviates some of her responsibility and some of her control. In the Swedish film she causes Martin’s death by default, forcing

him to flip and crash his car and allowing him to die trapped in the wreckage, refusing to save him. In the novel Martin chooses to kill himself rather than let her kill him.

In her essay, “Women Warriors,” Yvonne Tasker examines the figure of the female action heroine as it evolved in cinema, especially in reaction to the feminist movement of the 1970s and the shift past passivity in these representations of active females in films during the 1990s. Tasker explains that the original role of women in action films was to counteract the masculine spectacle: “If the male body is to be a point of security, the hero a figure who can be relied on, then bodily integrity and heterosexuality in particular, need to be maintained within the action narrative” (269). The female figure in action films was responsible for protecting this masculine integrity: “She both offers a point of differentiation from the hero and deflects attention from the homoeroticism surrounding male buddy relationships” (269). However, in the film *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, there are no male buddy relationships (except the queer one between Salander and Blomkvist). In this film the “woman warrior character,” Lisbeth Salander, functions as a “deflection” of the idea of woman as victim and as a decentralization of heterosexuality. Her violent revenge and her genderqueer sexuality allow Larsson to examine aspects of sexual violence against women while deflecting accusations of perpetuating this type of violence or deploying it negligently. Larsson is free to describe gruesome rapes and violent murders, incest and other crimes against women because Salander’s violent revenge is seen as absolving these negative depictions.

Tasker’s idea of portraying the female “side kick” as a victim as being essential to bolstering the heterosexuality of the male hero is very similar to White’s concept of the

queer supporting character as “supporting” heterosexuality. Both of these ideas are interesting to note in relation to Judith Halberstam’s idea of masculinity in film as being measured by how much abuse the male body can absorb. Halberstam’s argument inverts Butler’s argument. Butler argues that bodies obtain agency through violent behavior against other bodies, Halberstam argues that (male bodies in film) obtain agency predominantly by being able to withstand violence enacted upon them, to a tremendous extent, and only after withstanding this trial can they then enact the brief bout of violence which eliminates the threat of the other body that has committed so much violence against them. Halberstam explains in *Female Masculinity*, that the masculinity of the boxer in a male boxing film like *Rocky* or *Raging Bull* “is determined not by how quickly he can knock the other guy out but by how many punches the boxer can take without going down himself. In these films, the boxing is a trial in which the male body withstands physical assault” (274). To reconcile Butler’s argument with Halberstam’s argument then, one can see that the same bodies that obtain agency through enacting violence on other bodies must also be able to withstand violence and triumph over it. In *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* films and novel it is the body of Lisbeth Salander which is repeatedly shown as withstanding physical and sexual assault, especially most violently and graphically in the Swedish film version.

By repeatedly withstanding sexual and physical assault, Salander usurps the traditional masculine position of hero/main character. What is at stake, in this contemporary and queered twist on the rape revenge movie, is not the fact that Salander is subjected to numerous assaults but rather that she appears to become active in relation

to these assaults. Her physical ability to withstand repeated attacks causes her to be read as masculine, as does her role as Mikael's savior when he is about to be physically (and possibly sexually) violated by the psychotic serial murderer, Martin Vanger. The fact that this same body, Salander's physical body, is also shown being sexually violated makes her unmistakably read as feminine as does her consensual sex with both Blomkvist and Mimmi.

Salander is both a nonconformist hero and a subjected victim. The narrative as it is delivered in the novel and the films positions her as such by dealing with topics such as the normalization of queerness, the relationship between gender, the body, and violence, and the ways in which all these themes are treated in both adaptations and the novel and how these themes are received by audiences of these works.

CONCLUSION

UNDERSTANDING THE CULTURAL RAMIFICATIONS OF VISIBILITY

Joining the fields of cultural studies and film studies as Staiger and Dyer have advocated for allows for a much greater consideration of cultural and social context of film and the impact film has on this. In this thesis I have argued that lesbian representations are most often represented as “invisible traces” readable in the differences between two texts. Using historical analysis I have approached these changes by examining film adaptations at crucial moments from the 1930s through 2011 and charting the ways in which the processes and structures of adaptation enable different strategies for the representation and reading of lesbian subjects. I focus on the rift between queer spectator theorists who advocate for perverse spectatorship and intertextuality and those queer spectatorship theorists who reject, as heterosexist, the assumption that texts are “straight until proven queer” and who advocate for reading all so-called mainstream texts as already containing an inherent queerness.

In each of my three chapters I have utilized this split in approaches to queer spectatorship to analyze the historical changes in representational strategies of lesbian subjects. In chapter one I show that the Hollywood Hays Code, with its strict rules of what can and cannot be shown, allows for what I have called “haunted texts.” These texts did not explicitly show lesbian subjects, but the very visibility of their absence, the well-known code barring their textual visibility, was used by some filmmakers to insert marked elisions in a film and by some spectators to read these elisions as denoting the readable place of lesbian subjectivity.

In chapter two the post-Code “leniency” of Hollywood after 1960s was shown to generate different approaches for making lesbianism and female queerness ambiguously visible in film adaptations. Due to new strategies of multiple appeals to different audiences with a single film, post-1960s Hollywood film still shied from explicit lesbian representation in major productions. To appeal to multiple audiences, these films had to both cater to spectators seeking visible representations of queerness, and to audiences turned off by these same representations. This was achieved by formally appealing to heterosexual audiences by making the lesbianism ambiguous and therefore invisible to them while simultaneously covertly appealing to lesbian audiences by making the lesbianism ambiguous and therefore visible to those with the skills to see it. I analyzed these approaches to lesbian visibility through what Danae Clark terms “gay window advertizing” and through ambiguous representations of characters through costume and mannerisms that signaled to “knowing spectators” that something significant was being left out.

Chapter three argues that the film adaptations of Steig Larrson’s novel *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* illuminate the queerness of the book’s central character, Lisbeth Salander, in opposition to the novel, by seeking to normalize queerness and re-inscribe it into the realm of heterosexuality. Spectators of the Swedish and American film adaptations of that novel can use modes of reading the marks of censorship, haunting absences and textual ambiguity, to see a supporting character such as Lisbeth become a destabilizing queer force, breaking out of mere ambiguity into full-blown queerness to destabilize heterosexist assumption.

In this sense Salander achieves what Doty advocates for, the abolishing of perverse spectatorship. However, rather than abolishing perverse spectatorship entirely, the figure of Salander becomes representative of the ways in which the inherent potential for queerness in mainstream film coexists with and has developed out of perverse spectatorship practices among all spectators, and not exclusively with spectators who have marginalized identities. The post 80s and 90s boom in queer visibility in popular media has also coincided with the “commodification of absolutely everything,” namely the counter culture of lesbians and gays. Part of the work of this commodification is to make all spectators into perverse spectators.

Perversity is made available to mainstream audiences through a retrospective learning process. Contemporary spectators become alerted to the way ambiguity, censorship and haunting have functioned in the past as covert means of expressing historically socially taboo subjects such as homosexuality. Spectators become alerted to the impact of ambiguity, censorship and haunting through the context of the contemporary social and cultural moment in which they live. Through social progress such as the gay rights movement, AIDS protests and increased visibility of lesbians and gays in mainstream media dialogues about historically socially taboo subjects, such as homosexuality, become things that are contemporarily discussed and reevaluated in mainstream media and in contemporary culture. This is especially significant in regards to our contemporary moment marked by many significant legal advances in LGBT rights, such as the repeal of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell and the slow increase of states that allow civil unions or “gay marriage.”

Much of the previous queer film scholarship has been devoted to analyzing the occurrence and ramification of lesbian or gay visibility in film. This thesis seeks to both add to this history and also break away from it. By looking at the way that a variety of repetitions of a work transform verbal description into visual representation, I show not only how each instance of a representation is made visible or not, but also the gaps between different versions. These gaps provide key points of entry into further areas of enquiry. The social, economic and psychological reasons for these differences seem to me to be a much greater and richer area for further enquiry than previous theorists who have focused on evaluating visible representations for their positive social impact has been.

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