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Gender and Force in the Media

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abstracts (April 1),
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Early Career Researchers Special Issue:
abstracts (May 1),
completed papers (August 1)

Winter Issue:
abstracts (July 1),
completed papers (October 1)

About

Gender forum is an online, peer reviewed academic journal dedicated to the discussion of gender issues. As an electronic journal, *gender forum* offers a free-of-charge platform for the discussion of gender-related topics in the fields of literary and cultural production, media and the arts as well as politics, the natural sciences, medicine, the law, religion and philosophy. Inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier in 2002, the quarterly issues of the journal have focused on a multitude of questions from different theoretical perspectives of feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies. *gender forum* also includes reviews and occasionally interviews, fictional pieces and poetry with a gender studies angle.

Opinions expressed in articles published in *gender forum* are those of individual authors and not necessarily endorsed by the editors of *gender forum*.

Submissions

Target articles should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition) and should be between 5,000 and 8,000 words in length. Please make sure to number your paragraphs and include a bio-blurb and an abstract of roughly 300 words. Files should be sent as email attachments in Word format. Please send your manuscripts to gender-forum@uni-koeln.de.

We always welcome reviews on recent releases in Gender Studies! Submitted reviews should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition), have numbered paragraphs, and should be between 750 and 1,000 words in length. Please note that the reviewed releases ought to be no older than 24 months. In most cases, we are able to secure a review copy for contributors.

Article Publishing

The journal aims to provide rapid publication of research through a continuous publication model. All submissions are subject to peer review. Articles should not be under review by any other journal when submitted to *Gender forum*.

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Editorial

1 Addressing the diverse field of gender and violence, the current issue of *gender forum* brings together aspects of gender-based violence and its traumatic repercussions as part of our everyday society. The contributors examine various themes such as sexism, rape and murder thus leading to the question of victimhood and the representation of victims in news and mass media. While men also fall victim to rape and other forms of violence, this issue is dedicated to the investigation of violence towards women and the forms of feminist narrative that empower abused women to fight not just their abuser, but a misogynist, patriarchal system at large.

2 This issue features an interview with Internet activist Anne Wizorek. Alarmed by the current debate on sexism in Germany Wizorek initiated the twitter campaign #aufschrei and has since become one of the leading figures in the fight against sex discrimination. Despite her tight schedule Anne Wizorek was kind enough to engage in a critical dialogue with us.

3 In her article “Murderous Honor Past and Present: Webster’s Duchess of Malfi and Contemporary Crimes of Honor”, Sarah Youssef looks at cases of ‘honor killings’ worldwide, discussing not only current cases of Banaz Mahmud (UK) and Arzu Ö. (Germany) which received wide media coverage, but also cases in performing arts. Here John Webster’s Jacobean play, *The Duchess of Malfi*, proves to be exceptionally relevant when looking at the relationship of ‘honor’, family, justice, and women’s rights then and now. Youssef argues that ‘honor killings’ are not limited to class, geography or gender (although the majority of the victims are women) but are a socio-political issue that needs to be addressed globally.

4 In the following contribution, Laura von Czarnowsky discusses in her article “The postmortal rape survivor and the paradox of female agency across different media: Alice Sebold’s novel *The Lovely Bones* and its 2009 film adaptation” in what ways Peter Jackson’s film adaptation diverges from Sebold’s 2002 bestseller and especially its feminist agenda. Sebold’s novel challenges the silencing process surrounding the crime of rape by paradoxically establishing a postmortal rape survivor as its narrator. In contrast, the film rewrites the story as one wherein entrapment of innocence is the dominant theme and the myth of the helpless ‘perfect victim’ finds perpetuation.

5 Johanna Schorn’s contribution “Empowerment Through Violence: Feminism and the Rape/Revenge Narrative in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*” provides a further view on the constructions of rape victims in popular as well as news media and the ways in which they are consistently denied agency. In most cases, passivity is perceived as the hallmark of a ‘true

victim', one of the only alternatives being the presentation of a rape-revenge narrative, in which the victim reclaims agency and resorts to violence to avenger her own rape, insinuating that brute physical force may be a victim's only recourse in a rape culture dominated by systemic misogyny. By using Stieg Larsson's novel *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* as an example, Johanna Schorn examines the feminist potential of the rape-revenge narrative and its application in the novel.

6 Finally, a review by Gibson Ncube of Lawrence R. Schehr's *French Post-Modern Masculinities: From Neuromatrices to Seropositivity*, rounds up this issue. Ncube values the diversity of Schehr's last monograph which examines contemporary French cultural productions including novels, essays, films and graphic novels in relation to representations and depictions of masculinity and masculine sexualities.

“Sexism is not a ‘women’s issue’”: Interview with Anne Wizorek

Anne Wizorek is a consultant for digital strategies and online communication, blogger and feminist. She is one of the initiators of the Twitter-campaign "#aufschrei" and provided an important contribution to the German debate on sexism. She regularly writes on her blog [Kleinerdrei](#) and is an avid [tweeter](#).

1 **How did #aufschrei get started?**

The beginning of #aufschrei has almost become a legend by now. It always sounds as though we read the article about Rainer Brüderle and then sat down and started sharing our stories because of it. Of course that is completely bogus. What happened on Twitter had absolutely nothing to do with that article – those two things just happened to take place at the same time. This misunderstanding about how #aufschrei started also shows what was so problematic about that debate in the beginning - the fact that a lot of people concentrated on the Brüderle-story and did not understand that it was just one small puzzle piece in the big construct of [everyday sexism](#).

2 **So, you feel that the topic was not taken seriously enough? Or to put it differently, do you think that #aufschrei would have received as much attention had it not coincided with the story on [Rainer Brüderle](#)?** (More information on the background of #aufschrei can be found [here](#).)

I don't know about that. Of course, it was a catalyst for us and got us immediate media attention outside of Twitter. But I can't say whether we would have gone completely unnoticed otherwise. In the end, it also worked so well because so many were brave and ready to share their stories. That shows that we struck a nerve.

3 **What is your impression of the debate now, looking back on it? Where are we at now in relation to the original aim?**

I am of two minds on this. In some ways, there is now a noticeable awareness about the topic and people understand that we need to be in an ongoing dialogue on this. But through the debate a lot of people also showed their real face. This is a topic where you notice quickly what makes someone tick. If you take a look around at how the media handled the topic, there were a lot of things I'd rather not have to read again. For example all of the essentialist arguments – that men are hormone-driven and can't control their behavior, or that women would rather play victim than fight back.

Another example was the reaction to our [open letter](#) to the president, Joachim Gauck. Many people accused us of only having written the letter to keep the debate active at all costs. There was also a tendency to read the letter as an attack, when we clearly signalled our intent to have a dialogue. The backlash to feminism was easy to see in the reactions – we were just the perpetually unhappy, angry women who always have something to whine about.

4 One of the problematic issues was also how the debate was framed in the media. There was a marked tendency to generalize the issue. I am thinking here of your appearance on (the German talk show) *SternTV*, where the host insisted on presenting sexual harassment as clumsy flirtations. Such generalizations preclude serious conversations about systemic oppression and abuse of positions of power.

Yes, it was extremely difficult to make it plain that we were not, in fact, talking about misunderstandings. Sexism is about clear-cut cases of harassment, where it is clear that it is not wanted – also for the person who is doing the harassing. There are studies that show that both men and women know exactly which kind of behavior is not okay.

With these attempts at trivializing the issue it was easily noticeable that the people in question did not want to understand. It appears that senior editors are still predominantly male. I saw this especially in the fact that almost all interviews I did were with female journalists, there were almost no male journalists interested in talking about this. This also served to relegate the topic to a “women’s issue”. I rarely felt that people understood that this is a human right's issue, something that concerns an entire society. That is unfortunate. Instead of talking about the core of the problem, we were often stuck explaining basic concepts – that we are not talking about flirtation here, but about harassment and abuse and systems of oppression that do not just target white, heterosexual women. I always tried to point out the ways in which transphobia, heterosexism and racism play into this, but that was often the first thing that was ignored.

5 What is your perception of the public response? Did they really grasp the core of the problem?

I am of two minds on this, as well. I received many messages that gave me a good overview of people's reactions. Aside from the many women who write, I also heard from a lot of men who were grateful for the campaign, since it also exposes and criticizes certain types of masculinity. From men who understand now what feminism is all about. #aufschrei was an eye-opener for many of them, and now they get how widespread sexism is. But of course

there were also those men who felt the need to explain to me that we should not equate sexism with sexualized violence. Many just did not see the connection – of course those terms do not mean the same thing, but they need to be discussed side by side because they are interrelated. And naturally, there was unfortunately also veritable hate-mail, from men as well as from women.

6 Do you think it is problematic that it is was not only men but also women who did not make these connections? We spoke with many acquaintances who also insisted on "just not letting it get to you" or "not taking things too seriously".

Of course it does not help at all when we have female celebrities saying things like, "if someone grabs your butt, just slap him, what's the problem?", instead of recognizing that the problem lies in him thinking he can just grab your butt in the first place. Those reactions show just how internalized sexism often is. Of course that is painful to see. But it shows us that we have to continue to work hard to raise awareness.

7 Do you feel that women in Germany are developing a different relationship with feminism as a response to #aufschrei and the sexism-debate?

Just yesterday I attended an event where I spoke to two women who did not have a positive relation to feminism. To them, feminist were those women who work in Women's Studies departments – the idea was very remote and abstract for them. Through #aufschrei, they learned what it is really about, and that it is also something that concerns them. Maybe also because it was not marked as an explicitly feminist topic. The stories that the Twitter-users shared were very emotional and personal – that touched a lot of people. You can read the statistics and be shocked, but for many that's really just abstract figures. But through these stories from people around them, they could put a face to the topic, it became tangible. That is what really drove it home for many of them.

I was particularly moved by an e-mail from a woman who expressed her gratitude because through the campaign, she was able to talk to her husband for the first time about the things that happened to her. I mean, imagine this – they are married, and she never before talked to him about what it is like for her, as a woman. That's what really shows how taboo that topic is in our society. It's omnipresent, and yet so invisible at the same time.

There was also criticism, of course – people felt that we were encouraging a victim mentality. But I don't think that's what this is about, on the contrary. You have to give a name to these things, because the issue has to be tackled by society as a whole. It's no use for any one

person to try to muddle through. And exactly that act of voicing things that usually remain unsaid is incredibly empowering. It is important to have this opportunity to realize that you are not to blame and that there is no reason to be ashamed. For many, it is exactly this self-blame and shame that make everything even worse than the violation itself.

8 That is pretty sad, considering that the feminist foremothers already discovered this in the 60s with consciousness raising events.

Yeah, it's not as though we haven't already been there before. But our generation has this mentality of, "oh, we no longer need feminism, we have already achieved everything".

9 So there is a basic lack of awareness?

Yes! My favorite example, which is still incredibly wide-spread, is that of the little boy who teases a little girl. And when she complains about it, she is told, "don't make such a fuss, he just likes you". That is where it starts. At that young age, when we have our boundaries violated and no one takes it seriously. How are we supposed to learn to be aware of our boundaries?

And when it comes to our generation, I get the impression that many women don't realize something is wrong until they enter their professional lives. And then they see men zooming past them while they have to work three times as hard. And if they then also express the wish to have a family, it gets really complicated.

10 What should our next step be? The topic is out in the open now – how can we take advantage of that moment? How do we push aside generalizations and bad jokes and enter a serious dialogue on sexism and feminism?

This is something that needs to be tackled on all levels. In a political context, I think installing a women's quota, for example, can help create a less sexist working environment.

Above all, though, I see this potential on a personal level. In my experience, and this was confirmed again with the feedback to #aufschrei, the situation is the way it is largely also because men keep their mouths shut. For example, when they see a friend crossing a boundary, they often do not have the courage to say, "hey, this is not okay". They are afraid such a reaction would make them look "soft". But men should become more active. Not only when they witness a situation in their circle of friends, but also for example if their favorite brand starts a sexist marketing campaign, that they'll say, "no, I won't buy this anymore". I wish that they would start to rebel, that they leave behind this comfortable status quo where

they just cross their arms and say, "this is a women's issue, there is nothing I can do, anyway". When men, especially, become visible as allies, that is a huge step in the right direction. A great example for this is the [Ring the Bell](#) campaign.

Role models, of course, are very important in this. Unfortunately, few men in positions of power in Germany really reacted in an exemplary way in this debate. On the contrary: We have a president who claims not to see the problem.

11 Awareness is also created via terminology. The term feminism has a negative connotation these days – how can we change that? How can we make feminism accessible for a new generation?

Personally, I am a great fan of media such as blogs and social networks, and of presenting information in ways that are accessible and easy to digest. You can see this working nicely with US blogs such as Feministing.com, founded by Jessica Valenti. I would also like for us to work more with German terminology and really develop a language for our feminism instead of using English terminology that feels alien to many. And most of all: We need to become visible. It was a great benefit for us that we grew closer together as a community through #aufschrei. Additionally, I would like for male allies to become more visible to show: this is something that we need to tackle together.

We also need to work on the representation of the term "feminism". I saw in many conversations that feminism is often viewed as a monolithic concept, shaped largely by Alice Schwarzer. We should show that there is not just one feminism, but that we all contribute our own thoughts and ideas and are always in an open dialogue.

Editor's Note: Some information on the debate from an academic perspective can be found [here](#).)

Empowerment Through Violence: Feminism and the Rape-Revenge Narrative in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*¹

Johanna Schorn, University of Cologne, Germany

Abstract:

One of the many problematic facets of the constructions of rape victims in popular as well as news media is the way in which they are consistently denied agency. Passivity is deemed the hallmark of a ‘true victim’ (contrasted with those women who are accused of lying about rape or having ‘asked for it’ with their behavior), and the victim remains in this passivity while a supportive male avenges her. An alternative to this is presented by the rape-revenge narrative, in which the victim reclaims agency and resorts to violence to avenge her own rape, insinuating that brute physical force may be a victim’s only recourse in a rape culture dominated by systemic misogyny. Using as an example Stieg Larsson’s novel *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*, I examine the feminist potential of the rape-revenge narrative and its application in the novel.

1 According to RAINN.org, the website of the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, about one in six American women will experience rape or attempted rape in their lifetime.² It seems unsurprising, then, that rape and sexual assault are often the subject of movies, novels or TV series, and that news reports are frequently dominated by stories of grisly, brutal rapes. However, the cases that make it across our TV screens are hardly representative of reality. Though two thirds of all rapes are committed by someone the victims knows well³, often even a partner or friend, and are accompanied by manipulation and emotional abuse, rather than physical force, the most sensationalized cases are typically those that involve highly violent stranger rape. This sort of story is epitomized by the Central Park Jogger case of 1989⁴, in which a woman in New York was raped and critically injured while out jogging.

2 This is both indicative of and a contributing factor to misconceptions about the nature and prevalence of rape. These common but often false ideas about how rape happens are called ‘rape myths’ and have little to no factual basis. Joanna Burke describes rape myths as “converting historical and geographical specificities into flaccid catchphrases that seem clear

¹ In this paper, I will focus exclusively on rapes of women by men. While men also fall victim to rape, the purpose of this paper is to explore the rape-revenge narrative and its potential as a feminist narrative that empowers abused women to fight not just their abuser, but a misogynist, patriarchal system at large. I use the definition of rape that is also employed by Joanna Burke, which is that “sexual abuse is any act called such by a participant or third party” (Burke 9).

² Statistics posted on website, accessed on 18 February 2013. For international statistics on sexual assault see the crime report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime at www.undoc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/crime/CTS12_sexual_violence.xls

³ *ibid.*

⁴ A summary of the case can be found in New York Magazine: http://nymag.com/nymetro/news/crimelaw/features/n_7836/; accessed 18 February 2013.

and self-evident, yet [...] profoundly damaging for people who suffer sexual abuse” (Burke 24). She identifies some of the most common myths, which in addition to those named above, also include the idea that it is impossible to rape a woman who fights back (24), or that women routinely fabricate false rape claims to take revenge on men (28).

3 These myths pertain not only to the identity of the rapist as a stranger and to the setting of the rape (a park, a dark alley, etc), but also to the supposed behavior of the rape victim. A rape victim, according to popular imagination, must be visibly traumatized in the immediate aftermath, and will continue to be profoundly damaged for the rest of her life. According to this 'logic', someone who appears calm, does not immediately seek help, and/or continues to interact with her rapist/victimizer cannot have been raped. We can see these dynamics at play in popular reactions to well-publicized rape allegations, such as in the cases against Dominique Strauss-Kahn or Julian Assange. Regardless of the actual events, which are known only to those involved, the media construction of the alleged victims in both cases serves to illustrate how the idea of the ‘perfect’ or ‘true’ victim influences the willingness to believe allegations of rape. The accuser in the Strauss-Kahn case, the hotel maid Nafissatou Diallo, initially claimed to have sat in the hallway in shock for half an hour immediately following the assault. Later it was revealed that she called her fiancé, and that she may have also continued cleaning another room. This, among other things, turned public opinion against her: if she was able to make phone calls and continue working, surely, she could not have been raped.⁵ Similarly, public opinion was not on the side of the two Swedish women who raised sexual assault charges against Julian Assange. They were accused of lodging false charges for political reasons, and commentators on the case made much of the fact that both women had pursued sexual relationships with him and had continued to interact with him after the alleged assaults. “What’s more, the following morning [...] the pair amicably went out to have breakfast together“, an incredulous journalist writes in a Daily Mail article at the time.⁶

4 There are, however, countless complex dynamics at play that explain why some women do not report assaults right away, or at all. In the above examples, both alleged perpetrators were white males in powerful political positions. All three of the accusing

⁵ A summary of the allegations, including links to further information, can be found here: <http://jezebel.com/5833487/prosecutors-move-to-drop-charges-against-strauss+kahn>; accessed 18 February 2013.

⁶ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1336291/Wikileaks-Julian-Assanges-2-night-stands-spark-worldwide-hunt.html#ixzz17R0oRvSC>; accessed 18 February 2013

women were accused of lying for financial gain. This shifting of blame away from the accused men and onto the accusing women, through the deployment of rape myths, are signs that we live in what is called a rape culture. A rape culture is a culture in which sexual violence is routinely normalized and excused, and in which male aggression is accepted and even rewarded. This normalization works along several axes and also works in conjunction with systemic racism, sexism and classism. Media construction of the rapist as a violent stranger hiding in a dark alley helps to throw suspicion on allegations cast against men who are popular, powerful and/or well respected in the community. Similarly, constructions of the “perfect victim” and certain expectations of behavior immediately following a rape also shifts blame away from the perpetrator and onto the victim. Additionally, the scripts for high-profile cases that receive media coverage may also influence other victims of abuse: fear of not being believed and/or having one’s past dug up for scrutiny may dissuade victims from reporting an abuse.⁷

5 These media narratives are not unique to news coverage of rape cases. Stereotypical ideas of rapists and victims also abound in fictional accounts. Crime dramas are especially guilty of this. In an exhaustive report of rape in television dramas from the mid 1970s on, Linda Cuklanz traced what she called the “basic plot”, a formula plot in rape stories where “the victim is attacked by an unseen rapist” and where she suffers “severe psychological and physical damage”. This rape is then avenged by a police officer or other supportive and “good guy”, and his righteousness is contrasted with “the rapist’s intense depravity” (6).

6 If all of these constructions of rape and its victims have one common thread, it is the passive role it relegates women to. They are the passive victims of violence that is enacted on their bodies – in the first instance through the actual rape, and in the second instance through the mechanisms of rape culture that dictate the responses (from disbelief to vilifications).

7 One narrative structure that counters this trend of passivity is that of the rape-revenge plot. Emerging from the genre of horror films, and epitomized by the crude 1977 slasher film *I Spit on your Grave*, these stories center around what Carol Clover calls the “victim-hero” (4). This character’s status, Clover writes, “has been enabled by ‘women’s liberation’. Feminism, that is, has given a language to her victimization and a new force to the anger that subsidizes her own act of horrific revenge” (4). In *I Spit on your Grave*, the victim-hero is the young writer Jennifer, who is brutally gang-raped by four young men and subsequently kills

⁷ The discussion of whether and how highly visible rape cases influence the decision of victims to report was also stoked by the case of Jörg Kachelmann in Germany in 2010. One good summary of the opinions voiced can be found here: <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/gesellschaft/kriminalitaet/justiz-dilemma-die-einzige-zeugin-11025696.html>

them off one by one. This is, in essence, the blueprint for a number of films that followed in the seventies and eighties: in these films, the victim of rape does not passively fade into the background as the good men take over to avenge her (or the public descends to denounce her). She takes matters into her own hands and avenges her rape.

8 Central to Clover's argument is her statement that "horror is far more victim-identified than the standard view would have it" (8). Contrary to standard arguments that the viewing pleasure in horror is connected to the "mastering, voyeuristic gaze" (9), she sees it in the identification with the victims of horror movies, the Final Girls (and Boys). This type of narrative, then, explicitly invites the audience to identify with, and thus side with, the rape victim. We are witness to the events from her point of view, we remain on her side when she is doubted, we sympathize with her, and we root for her when she undertakes to get her revenge. Rape-revenge scenarios, such as *I Spit on your Grave*, are "literally predicated on the assumption that *all* viewers, male and female alike, will take [the victim's] part, and via whatever set of psychosexual translations, 'feel' her violation" (Clover 159).

9 Plotlines revolving around an avenging hero are not restricted to horror films – they are, rather, extremely common in fiction and film. Revenge-plots centering specifically on rape, however, are much harder to find outside of action or horror movies and courtroom-dramas. There is, however, at least one text that takes advantage of the mechanisms of the rape-revenge narrative: Stieg Larsson's *Millenium*-series. In the series, written at least in part to raise awareness about the prevalence of violence against women, a rape-revenge narrative featuring the victim-hero Lisbeth Salander is one of the mechanisms through which Larsson engages his readership and confronts them with the topic.

10 *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* is the first book of the *Millenium*-trilogy, written by the Swedish author Stieg Larsson. The books were published posthumously after the author's death in 2004, with the first one appearing on the market in 2005. The plot of the first installment revolves around the journalist Mikael Blomkvist, who falls into public disgrace after he is convicted of having published false information on a wealthy business tycoon. He takes a hiatus from the publishing world and agrees to investigate the mysterious disappearance of a woman, Harriet Vanger, some 30 years earlier. In this he receives unexpected help from the hacker Lisbeth Salander, a complex character who becomes the unlikely heroine of the story.

11 Though the books are primarily thrillers that feature political intrigue, corruption, serial killers and a lot of violence, they also have a clear message. In the original Swedish, the first installment of the trilogy was titled "Män som hatar kvinnor" – which literally translates

to “men who hate women”. In life, Larsson was dedicated to championing the rights of women, and often made this the topic of his writing (Donaldson James 2). The origin story of the Lisbeth-character, as well as Larsson’s motivation to write the novels, sounds almost mythic: as a 15-year old, he witnessed a gang rape and felt unable to step in and protect the victim. In his work, he tried to do what he could not do as a teenager – to speak out against systemic misogyny and violence against women.

12 In *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, Larsson’s female protagonist has the chance to recover her agency and strike back. Much of the first half of the book is given over to a classic rape-revenge plot. Lisbeth Salander is molested and raped by her court-appointed guardian, the lawyer Bjurman. Knowing that her history (institutionalizations as well as an impressive police file) would make her an unreliable witness at best, and having learned to mistrust the police through her dealings with them, she takes matters into her own hands. She attacks Bjurman with a taser, ties him up on his own bed where he had kept her in handcuffs for hours, subjects him to anal penetration with his own toys, and finally tattoos the words “I am a sadistic pig, a pervert, and a rapist” (Larsson loc 3708) across his chest. With these actions, she not only literally asserts her power over him, but she also figuratively takes back control over her own life. As her guardian, Bjurman had denied her access to her bank accounts, and thus made her dependent on him. Now that she holds power over him by virtue of a recording of his sexual assault on her, she can blackmail him into relinquishing control over her bank account, and thus her life.

13 But Lisbeth not only wages battle against the sadistic lawyer Bjurman. In a number of flashbacks on Lisbeth’s life, the reader repeatedly sees her retaliating against attacks with violence. When groped in a subway station, for example, she “kicked [her assailant] in the head” (loc 2218). There are also numerous references to “All the Evil”, something that happened when Lisbeth was about 13 years old. In the second installment of the *Millenium*-series, *The Girl Who Played with Fire* (2006), we learn that she set fire to a car in which her father was sitting, a violent man who trafficked in women and beat her mother to the point of a brain haemorrhage.

13 At the climax of the novel Lisbeth barges into the serial killer Martin Vanger's torture chamber, and charges him with a golf club: “Her teeth were bared like a beast of prey. 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” (loc 6448-6455). This time she is not fighting against someone who has personally victimized her, but it is easy to read Martin Vanger, with his veneer of the successful and amicable businessman and with his torture

chamber hidden beneath his house, as the epitome of the “man who hates women”. The methodological way in which he went about finding, torturing and disposing of his female victims, all the while keeping up his appearance as loving boyfriend and friendly member of the island community, showcases the insidious way in which systemic misogyny runs rampant in society. All the more so when taking into account that Martin was initiated into serial killing by his own father at a young age. This can be read as a simile for the ways in which one is born and socialized into a misogynistic culture. In beating Vanger and pursuing him in a car chase that finally leads to his death, Lisbeth is not only avenging Vanger's victims. She is also symbolically avenging herself, as well as every woman who has been victimized by the misogyny of an entire society.

15 On the surface, then, this text seems to be affirmative of female agency and willing to portray a female character that defies many stereotypes of femininity. Furthermore, the text deals extensively with the topics of rape and sexual abuse and is careful to leave no room for ambiguity when it comes to allocating the blame for this violence. So is Lisbeth Salander a feminist hero? Does the book have a feminist message? Different readings of the text offer up different answers to these questions.

16 In the novel, Lisbeth is established as an independent, resourceful and strong woman. Aside from her physical strength, which she proves beyond doubt in her many encounters with violent men, she also displays an impressive emotional strength. Though she is undoubtedly affected by her difficult past, she is determined to keep going and capable of taking care of herself. She lives on her own, works a relatively high-paying job she enjoys, has an occasional lover named Miriam Wu and some friends in the hacker community, as well as a circle of punk friends in Stockholm. She is also portrayed as unusually gifted: “She is a world-class computer hacker, extraordinarily good at chess and mathematics, and has a photographic memory” (Lorber). She develops an elaborate scheme to wrest control over her life from Bjurman, and conceives of a ploy towards the end of the novel to steal some of the money embezzled by a tycoon. The plan involves several fake bank accounts, an intricate knowledge of the banking system as well as their computer and security programs, and the creation of an alter-ego.

17 Aside from the resourceful and smart female protagonist, Larsson included at least two other powerful female characters: Blomkvist's lover and business partner, the resolute Erika Berger, as well as Blomkvist's sister, who is a self-proclaimed feminist and, as a lawyer, specializes in helping women.

18 In addition to this inclusion of strong, feminist characters, Larsson made an effort to realistically portray the pervasiveness of violence against women, and the failure of the state to protect against it. The different sections of the novels begin with statistics on violence against women (“46% of the women in Sweden have been subjected to violence by a man”, loc 1786). This is juxtaposed with Lisbeth’s lengthy explanation as to why she does not report Bjurman to the police, providing a chillingly disillusioned picture of the support a rape victim can hope for:

Bjurman had touched her breasts. Any officer would take one look at her and conclude that with her miniature boobs, that was highly unlikely. And if it had happened, she should be proud that someone had even bothered. And the part about sucking his dick – it was, as [Bjurman] had warned her, her word against his, and generally in her experience the words of other people weighed more heavily than hers. (loc 3192-3198)

19 Larsson also succeeds in contextualizing sexual abuse and situating it within the hierarchical power structures that make sexual abuse possible. As stated, one of rape cultures main tenets is the fostering and rewarding of male aggression. This often happens within organizations or institutions that are hierarchically structured, such as corporations, governments, political parties and even families. All of these groups are featured in the text, and their often positive or benevolent intentions and effects are contrasted sharply with their negative and harmful effects, which are caused by ignorance as often as by intentional malice.

20 The main aggressor of the first novel is Martin Vanger. He is introduced to the reader as the CEO of the vast Vanger-corporation and one of the numerous members of the Vanger family. Through his research, the journalist Blomkvist discovers that Martin is also a serial killer who has been murdering women for years, undiscovered by anyone. His killings were both initiated and supported by his position within the family and the corporation: it was his father Gottfried, himself a serial killer, who taught Martin to hate and kill. After his father’s death, Martin perfected his killing method, using his considerable wealth to build his secret torture chamber and ‘buy’ trafficked women from other countries whom no one would miss. Gottfried Vanger was also involved in Swedish Neo-Nazi groups. In this, he followed in the footsteps of his uncle Harald Vanger, who was a member of the Nazi party and published a book advocating for euthanasia. The church finds mention in the book, as well: Gottfried Vanger chose as his victims women whom he deemed to have committed sins. He killed them as a punishment and arranged their bodies to symbolize the corresponding passages in the Bible. Larsson thus draws parallels between bigotry, misogyny and hierarchical power structures, and exposes the culture of violence that is at the root of it all.

21 Despite this successful realization of Larsson's stated intent to raise awareness about systemic misogyny on many levels of the text, there are several aspects that render the novel potentially less empowering or feminist than it appears at first glance. Though Lisbeth is described throughout as a strong woman, there are problematic aspects to her characterization as well as to the author's choice of the types of violence she is subjected to. Though Larsson wants to raise awareness, he tends to resort to clichés in his portrayal of both rape and its effect on the victims. As stated before, most rapists are not sadistic serial killers like Martin Vanger and his father and most rape survivors have not been systematically abused by a variety of different men over most of their lifetime. [1] The events described in the novel are extreme, and though probably chosen for their shock value, the author misses out on the opportunity to educate his readership about the realities of rape for most victims. Readers can close the book(s) with their belief in the myth of violent stranger-rape safely intact.

22 In his depiction of Lisbeth's character, Larsson also resorts to many stereotypes about the behavior of rape victims. Again and again he reminds us that, despite her strength, she is also a broken woman whose "attitude encouraged neither trust nor friendship" (loc 524), as she has "serious emotional problems" (loc 558). Her very appearance and behavior spell out troubled in a clichéd way: she dresses in a dark Goth get-up, has many piercings and tattoos, and associates primarily with the former members of a punk band. Additionally, she seems to seek refuge in alcohol ("twice she was so intoxicated that she ended up in the emergency room", loc 2218) and drugs.

23 Most problematic, however, is Larsson's description of her sexuality. The two most pervasive stereotypes about female rape victims are that they either become scared of male sexuality and turn to women, or become sexually promiscuous and indiscriminately seek out partners for casual sex with no emotional connection. Larsson includes both of these stereotypes in his description of Salander. Though she is said to have "never thought of herself as a lesbian" (loc 4589), Salander's ongoing relationship in this novel, as well as in the sequels, is with the lesbian Miriam Wu. While it is perhaps commendable that Larsson includes a same-sex relationship in the novel without making a big deal about it, the depiction of Lisbeth's history and characterization make it problematic nonetheless.

24 While she is seeing Miriam, the two are not exclusive, and Lisbeth also seeks out sex with the journalist Mikael. They are working together on the investigation and have not developed any personal rapport beyond their professional relationship, when she initiates sex with him.

Blomkvist was reading a novel by Sara Paretsky when he heard the door handle turn and he looked up to see Salander. She had a sheet wrapped round her body [...] She went over to his bed, took the book and put it on the bedside table. Then she bent down and kissed him on the mouth. She quickly got into his bed and sat looking at him, searching him. (loc 5619)

Blomkvist is initially reluctant, but she assures him that their professional relationship will not be damaged, and so he goes along. Afterward, Lisbeth remains emotionally detached and though they continue to have sex from time to time, they never develop a close personal relationship. And again, while it could be construed as positive that Larsson writes a female character with a high level of sexual agency, he also clearly links her inability to trust and forge personal bonds with her difficult past, thus turning her promiscuity into a pathology.

25 Another strike against the otherwise feminist sensibilities of the novel is the very structure of the rape-revenge narrative. As Clover points out in her analysis of *I Spit on Your Grave*, the initial critique of this genre is its graphic display of, and inherent reliance on, brutal violence, especially of a sexual nature (115). While Clover makes a potent argument for a feminist reading of this narrative, and while this feminist reading is also not only possible but intentional with regard to *Dragon Tattoo*, the fact remains that these narratives give ample screen-time to rapes that are gut-wrenchingly uncomfortable to watch. The *Dragon Tattoo* movies [2], of course, are more graphically explicit than the book, but even so, a large part of both texts is devoted to inflictions of violence. Accordingly, many critics, like Melanie Newman writing for the UK-based blog F-Word, have castigated the misogyny of the novel's "explicit descriptions of sexual violence". Comparing Larsson's novel with thrillers by other authors which also feature rape, Newman concludes: "Kick-arse babes don't change the facts and neither do stats on violence against women. Face it, Stieg Larsson, James Patterson, Dean Koontz: only misogynists make money from rape".

26 Furthermore, the narrative trope presented in this text (as well as all rape-revenge texts) of the victimized woman who turns to violence is itself in line with some rape myths. The texts perpetuate the idea that women are deeply affected and irreversibly damaged by being raped, to the extent that the experience enables previously non-violent women to take a gun, torture and kill the rapist. This reinforces the idea of a 'right' kind of post-rape behavior (if you are not completely hysterical, you cannot have been raped), while at the same time fostering the impression that rape is a fairly rare occurrence. If rape victims can be picked out of a crowd based on their behavior (depending on the narrative, either traumatized and withdrawn or aggressive and promiscuous), and if most women don't obviously exhibit that kind of behavior, then rape cannot be that common.

27 As a narrative structure, the rape-revenge plot certainly has some feminist potential. Texts following this structure have a strong female lead that viewers are geared to identify with. Moreover, the story is told from the point of view of a rape survivor, and presented as the authoritative version. This is in sharp contrast to the passive role rape victims are routinely forced into in the media, where news reporters and other commentators sit in judgment over whether or not her account is credible, and whether she behaved appropriately before and/or after the alleged rape. These features make the rape-revenge plot a potentially powerful tool for constructions of feminist narratives.

28 However, Larsson's *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* falls short of its feminist intent despite employing this tool. In addition to the problems inherent in the genre, with its reliance on a graphic display of sexual violence, Larsson makes use of a number of damaging rape myths in the construction of his protagonist and her story. In her strength and defiance, Lisbeth may well serve as a role-model, but the world of Larsson's novels reproduces at least as many misconceptions about rape culture and its patriarchal foundations as it dispels.

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The postmortal rape survivor and the paradox of female agency across different media: Alice Sebold's novel *The Lovely Bones* and its 2009 film adaptation

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Abstract:

Alice's Sebold's 2002 bestseller, *The Lovely Bones*, challenges the silencing process surrounding the crime of rape by paradoxically establishing a postmortal rape survivor as its narrator. The paper traces how the narrator's voice and agency are negotiated and supported, and how and where the 2009 film adaptation diverges from the novel's feminist agenda. While both film and novel seek to condemn violence against women, the film sets out to do it by casting female characters in the role of helpless victims, whereas the original medium establishes them as canny survivors.

1 In a *New York Times* article from 1989, entitled "Hers: Speaking of the Unspeakable", the at the time unknown writer Alice Sebold argues: "the wall of silence and assumptions that surround the crime are one of the most painful results of rape". Thirteen years later, her first novel,¹ *The Lovely Bones*, topped the bestseller list, and directly challenged this silencing process.² What sets *The Lovely Bones* apart from other fiction and non-fiction about sexual crimes against women is the unusual narrative setting employed by Sebold: Susie Salmon, aged 14, brutally raped and murdered on December 6th, 1973 in a cornfield near her home, relates the events leading up to and following her murder at the hands of a neighbour in suburban Pennsylvania from her own personal heaven.³

2 The novel seeks to redefine Susie as a 'survivor' rather than a 'victim', in line with antirape discourse about the use of the term 'survivor' "to emphasize women's agency in response to their victimization and to address the complexity of the women's *post*-rape experience" (Projansky 9). This is achieved by means of a postmortal⁴ narrative style,

¹ While *The Lovely Bones* was Sebold's first novel, her first book was her 1999 memoir *Lucky*, in which she details her own rape as an 18 year-old college freshman at Syracuse University and the trial that followed. Sebold firmly rejects the notion of *The Lovely Bones* being a fictionalised therapy to come to terms with her own rape: "First of all, therapy is for therapy. Leave it there. Second, because you're a rape victim, everyone wants to turn everything you do into something 'therapeutic' - oh, I understand, going to the bathroom must be so therapeutic for you! After I'd started *The Lovely Bones*, I decided to break off and write *Lucky*, to make sure that Susie wasn't saying everything that I wanted to say about violent crime and rape" (Viner 2002).

² *The Guardian's* literary critic Ali Smith suggests that the huge commercial success of the book in the United States is due to the traumatic events of 9/11, providing the "reassurance and satisfaction of being able to hear the voice of the gone and to piece together the future after cataclysm".

³ Heaven in *The Lovely Bones* is a construct without a deity, but with several levels. To move from the first level, called the 'inbetween' in the film, to the second level of heaven, the characters have to come to terms with their death and work through their unresolved issues. Both book and film chronicle Susie's transcendence from life to the first level and from the first to the second.

⁴ The term postmortal was first connected with *The Lovely Bones* in Tallent's 2005 article, wherein Tallent notices a rise of postmortal narrators in general. Whitney, writing in 2010, uses posthumous.

wherein a fully silenced character regains her voice and thus paradoxically, despite having been killed, turns into a survivor. Uneasily perched between the living whom she observes and the dead to whom she belongs, Susie epitomises what for Caruth lies at the core of all trauma stories, namely “the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival” (*Unclaimed Experience* 7). Analysing the novel from a postfeminist perspective, Whitney argues that “the act of naming oneself a survivor symbolically places the subject’s trauma in the past and denies the event the ability to define her” (355).⁵ Thus Susie is allowed to define her trauma rather than being defined by it. She remains a person with desires and hopes, wishes and feelings, and power and agency in her own right (cf. Heinze 289).⁶ Her ghostly but strangely uplifting narration and her few but significant interactions with the world of the living provide her with precisely the sort of freedom her rapist, Mr. Harvey, sought to take from her. Meanwhile, Whitney astutely observes, her family on Earth is not granted any psychological reprieve (cf. 355). It seems that Susie’s safety from the overwhelming impact of trauma comes at the price of her family. By creating a detached serenity in Susie’s narrative, the novel relocates Susie’s trauma and victimhood and places it in her parents and sister instead.

3 This is where the 2009 film adaptation, directed by Peter Jackson, differs. Even though “most of the key events of the novel are transposed to the film and it ends on the same note, with Susie’s blessing from heaven” (McFarlane 47), the main character – like most female characters in the film adaptation – is equipped with less agency and complexity than in the book. Jackson’s Susie is not located beyond the trauma, but in the middle of it, effectively rendering her “the wound that speaks” (Caruth 8). As trauma embodied, she addresses the audience

in an attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language. (4)

4 While Susie in the novel is an omniscient narrator who knows exactly what happened in the underground lair Mr. Harvey specifically built to capture her, the character in the film does not. The reduction of Susie’s narrative omniscience in the film serves not only to create

⁵ Whitney goes on to say that “*The Lovely Bones* would seem to present a dilemma for postfeminist analysis as the victimization of the deceased narrator cannot be denied or easily translated into survivorship” (355). While the translation is not easily done, the interpretation of Susie’s interferences in earthly events will show it is nevertheless accomplished.

⁶ Heinze also raises another interesting point concerning the reliability of the narrative. He argues that had Susie lived and told her tale, her trauma would have made her an unreliable narrator. By narrating from the great beyond, her detachedness once more makes her reliable (cf. 289).

suspense, but has the added effect of keeping Susie childlike, and thus establishes her as the 'perfect' victim in all her innocence and helplessness. In order to get closer to omniscience, she needs to regain her memories and spend time in the intermediary stage of afterlife.⁷ This is hindered by Susie's attempted avoidance of said memories; she prefers to focus on watching her family or enjoying the questionable perks of heaven with another dead girl she meets there. When Susie finally does confront her memories (symbolically located in a dark Gothic house in her otherwise colourful heaven), she learns two important things. For one, that she is one of many victims of Mr. Harvey's, a fact which supports Sebold's view that "rape is not a craze but a constant" (1989). The other element she uncovers is that her rapist and murderer keeps her remains in an old safe in his cellar. He often sits in a lawn chair in front it, playing with a charm from a bracelet of hers and fetishizing the dead girl, subjecting her to his gaze even after her death. Only in the climax of the film is the safe eventually disposed of in a sinkhole, a final burial for the final minutes. This is clearly designed to give Susie as well as the audience a sense of closure. By contrast, in the novel the same scene takes place much earlier (in chapter four), and Susie's closure is not tied to the disposal of her bodily remains. The symbolic burial is not constructed as the key that leads her from her own heaven into the wider one she wishes to be received into.

5 The novel describes a maturation and recovery process, which differs from the film's trauma-driven narrative. The book carefully sets up a contrast between the living and the dead Susie, the latter of which, even though she does not age, matures considerably to the point where she (re-) discovers and (re-)claims her own sexuality. What the filmic version yearns for is a chaste kiss from the boy she liked while she was alive, Ray Singh, insinuating that a teenaged girl cannot be a victim of sexual violence, if she simultaneously harbours sexual desires of her own. In the book, Susie has been kissed while still alive, and in the eight years after her death, begins to yearn for more. In one of the book's most controversial passages,⁸ called "a finale of magical realism" by Whitney (361), her spirit inhabits the body of a psychic girl, Ruth Connors, and while in that body, consummates her old relationship with Ray "so that she may experience life on Earth as an adult" (ibid). Susie's previous sexual experience was at the hands of her rapist Mr. Harvey, resulting in Susie telling the

⁷ The exuberant visual design of the afterlife has been met with much criticism given the serious subject matter. For examples of this criticism, see Ebert, Harris, and Brooks.

⁸ Cf. Hensher, whose disdain of the passage is particularly strong: "Particularly hard to take is a morbid episode in which Susie falls to Earth and inhabits the body of a living girl, and makes love to the boy she liked best. He recognises her immediately, being Indian and therefore mystic (it is very much that sort of book). The revolted reader finds something familiar in all of this, and for me, that was the moment it all fell into place. What, actually, is one reading here? Ah yes, of course; the Demi Moore spiritualist extravaganza, *Ghost*."

readers that “in the walls of my sex there was horror and blood” (142). But with Ray, the experience is different: “I held that part of him that Mr. Harvey had forced inside me. Inside my head I said the word *gentle*, and then I said the word *man*” (349) and finally “we made love” (350). By directly contrasting the two sexual experiences, Sebald highlights both the atrocity of the crime and Susie’s recovery process. In her few moments on Earth, Susie deliberately re-claims not only her sexuality, but her sexual agency, and thus leaves her rape trauma behind in order to move on to the second level of heaven. She is thus shedding the constraints of being a victim and fully inhabiting the mode of a survivor. For Susie, ‘life’ does not go on, but the ‘afterlife’ does.

6 One difficulty that the film grapples with is the time span of the events of the book, which cover eight years and thus make Ray 23 and Susie 22 at the time of the body swap. In the film, this is compressed into two to three years. As the actors are not aged up, Susie (played by then 15 year old Saoirse Ronan) still looks like a 14 year old, thus making the full sexual consummation of the relationship a problem. While the book makes a point of Susie slipping into Ruth’s body (thereby looking for all intents and purposes just like the medium, who has been aged normally and is therefore well past any age of consent), the film shows how Ruth faints and upon waking, suddenly looks like Susie. Blonde hair fanned out behind her like a halo, cheeks rosy, Susie is still a girl, more child than woman. Thus, Jackson has to compromise on the nature of Ray’s and Susie’s coming together. For the purpose of the film (cementing Susie as innocence embodied), she needs to remain a child in body *and* spirit, forbidding the path to sexual discovery and absolution that her book counterpart is allowed to claim.

7 Susie’s visualised purity in the film is not only maintained with regards to her self-chosen sexual activity, but also with regards to that enforced on her. In *Writing Rape, Reading Rape*, Milionis posits that “the novel shows what the film does not” (177), as Susie’s rape is never explicitly mentioned in the film, but rather “inferred or accepted [...] as if, ‘of course’ a young girl that was murdered was obviously raped as well” (175). The book on the other hand does not shy away from revealing details to condemn the crime. Within the first chapter, Susie shares with the reader how Mr. Harvey attacked her, forcing himself “on top of [her], panting and sweating” (14). When Susie pleads with him, he shoves her knitted hat in her mouth to quiet her. This moment constitutes a first act of silencing (while her murder is the second): trapped in the underground lair, her rapist robs her of both her freedom and her voice. In a swift crescendo of violence, Mr. Harvey proceeds to rip off Susie’s “pants, not having found the invisible zipper my mother had artfully sewn into their side” (15). Susie

narrates that he “began to shove his hands up under my shirt” and “was inside me. He was grunting. [...] I was the mortar, he was the pestle” (15). After the rape, Susie is still trapped under her rapist and confronted with the knowledge of her impending death.

I knew he was going to kill me. I didn't know I was an animal already dying. [...] He leaned to the side and felt, over his head, across the ledge where his razor and shaving cream sat. He brought back a knife. Unsheathed, it smiled at me, curving up into a grin. He took the hat from my mouth. ‘Tell me you love me,’ he said. Gently, I did. The end came anyway. (16)

The film keeps these gruesome details not only from the audience, but also from Susie herself. Instead, we see Susie escaping from the underground lair in the cornfield, running past Ruth Connors whom she accidentally touches and into her own house, where she sees her family but remains unseen by them. Walking through the house, still unaware of her own death, she opens the door to the bathroom, only to find Mr. Harvey, soaking in the tub, a wet towel over his face. Blood and dirt on the floor, as well as a bloody shaving knife by the sink, hint at the crime she thought she had escaped. Milionis argues that “close ups of Mr. Harvey’s breath, so alive, sucking the facecloth over his face in and out with each breath he takes, [are] so grotesque and overwhelming for everyone watching that Susie’s silent scream may provide a catharsis for the viewers, too” (175). In contradistinction to Milionis, I argue that Susie’s scream is not silent at all, but shrill, enduring, and otherworldly. It is a marker of her torturous understanding of her own death, even more piercing and poignant since everything in between her flight scene and the bathroom scene is left to the imagination of the viewer. Milionis suggests that this is rooted in the filmmaker’s fear or repelling the audience (cf. 175) by showing the sexual abuse of a teenager. In fact, Susie walks through the whole film without so much as a scratch on her face. Furthermore, one of the most gruesome details of the book, namely what exactly Harvey does to his victim’s remains, is edited out of the screenplay. The film shows Mr. Harvey dragging a heavy and wet cloth sack through his cellar and shoving it into the safe, and while the audience can infer that sack and safe hold Susie’s remains, not so much as a finger is shown. Instead, her sister later finds a lock of her sister’s hair taped into a notebook hidden under the floorboards of Mr. Harvey’s bedroom.

8 By contrast, the novel provides a detailed description of what precisely happened to Susie. Having been cut to pieces by Mr. Harvey, the only part of her body ever to be recovered is Susie’s elbow – so much more gruesome and less innocent than a lock of hair.⁹ In the novel, Susie thus suffers a double fragmentation through the ripping apart of body and

⁹ Grotesquely, the body part is recovered by a neighbour’s dog and brought “home with a telling corn husk attached to it” (11), thus alerting the police to the crime scene.

soul in death, as well as through the killer's mutilation of her body. When the book shows Mr. Harvey in the tub, commentary dips into his thoughts as easily as if they were her own:

As he scoured his body in the hot water of his suburban bathroom – one with the identical layout to the one Lindsey, Buckley, and I shared – his movements were slow, not anxious. He kept the lights out in the bathroom and felt the warm water wash me away and *I felt his thoughts of me then* [emphasis added]. My muffled scream in his ear. My delicious death moan. The glorious white flesh that had never seen the sun, like an infant's, and then split, so perfectly, with the blade of his knife. He shivered under the heat, a prickling pleasure creating goose bumps up and down his legs. (56)

What remains unclear is whether Susie was still alive at the time of her dismemberment, but even so, the different and differing levels of detailed information about the crime available both to the central character and to the audience of the novel are as significant as the film's effort to keep Susie visually as whole and untouched as possible. In the adaptation, her body and soul are presented as purified, the nastiness and the horror of her experiences as well as any desires that seem to contradict her angelic image are edited out to make for a more smoother and more palatable narrative. This however traps the film version of Susie in a limiting over-virginisation, reducing the scope and damaging the power of her postmortal experiences and thus defeating the anti-silence and pro-agency stance Sebold set out to foreground in the first place. Sebold has said that “when people discover you're a rape victim, they decide that's all you are” (in Viner 2002). This is precisely what happens to Susie in the filmic adaptation process.

9 Another element lost in the translation from page to screen is Susie's possible involvement in Mr. Harvey's demise. Her revenge on her rapist and murderer is subtly hinted at in the novel (cf. Whitney 356f.). Early on, she expresses her most ardent wish: “I could not have what I wanted most. Mr. Harvey dead and me living” (21). Susie is to remain dead, and not even her temporary body swap with Ruth can reduce the finality of this fact. Mr. Harvey's death, however, located near the end of the novel, coincides with Susie's advancement to the second level of heaven: “Now I am in the place I call this wide wide heaven because it includes all my simplest desires but also the most humble and grand” (369). One of her most grand desires then is the death of her murderer, who is killed by a falling icicle. The cause of death is the key clue in linking it back to Susie: earlier in the novel, she muses over the perfect way to commit a murder, nonchalantly mentioning that “‘How to Commit the Perfect Murder’ was an old game in heaven” and that she “always chose the icicle: the weapon melts away” (142). The placement of Mr. Harvey's demise *after* Susie's ascension to wider heaven (and the granting of wishes it entails) taken together with

this not-so-harmless game strongly hint at Susie's involvement. Significantly, however, her wish is only granted when she has already moved on: it cannot be its precondition.

10 While the revenge narrative of Susie's possible part in Harvey's death is not mentioned or hinted at in the film (presumably because it would not fit into the angelic mould Susie is cast in), she does manage to make contact with her father while he is in Harvey's presence.¹⁰ Jack Salmon helps the killer to build a bridal tent in his backyard. The men talk, tension mounts, and while the omniscient but far from omnipotent Susie in the book fruitlessly wishes she could make a wilted flower¹¹ bloom, as a sign to let her father know the other man killed his daughter, the Susie in the film is successful. This act of magic alerts Jack to Mr. Harvey's guilt and prompts a violent outburst, thus channelling her rage into a vessel (i.e. her father) that is not limited to the notions of innocence, purity, and helplessness. Mr. Harvey is forced to flee inside his house while Jack bangs on the door until the wood splinters. The blooming flower is the catalyst that leads to her father going after Mr. Harvey, and while no such incentive is given in the book, where Jack's ventures after Mr. Harvey based on his own suspicions instead of heavenly signals, the stories progress in the same vein. Following Mr. Harvey into the cornfield, the scene of the murder, Jack Salmon hopes to enact his revenge. But he is not successful and is instead beaten up by a teenaged boy who has used the cornfield as a secret and inappropriate rendezvous place. In conjunction with the film's hesitance to show Susie's victimised body, the attack on her father assumes new meaning. The camera, as well as Susie's gaze, is firmly fastened on Jack while he is almost beaten to death with his own baseball bat. The male body can be shown to suffer violence, implying an audience's acceptance thereof, whereas the sexualised violence against the girl must be hidden from view. This filmic strategy further casts Susie in a victim rather than survivor mould and adds to the silencing of rape victims, while simultaneously and conventionally casting a parental figure in the role of avenger. In her reading of the novel, Whitney argues that "lacerating rage is not present in *The Lovely Bones*; it has been replaced by melancholy" (354). Based on the evidence outlined above, namely Susie's involvement in Mr. Harvey's demise and Jack's experience in the cornfield, I come to a different conclusion. In film and novel rage is channelled differently. The film version needs a raging paternal

¹⁰ There are other instances in the book when Susie manages to communicate with her family or make her presence known. At one point, her father smashes the ships in bottles he built with his daughter and Susie casts her face "in every piece of glass, in every shard and sliver" (52). Following Susie's transcension into wider heaven, she makes her little brother's garden bloom (368), thus mirroring and resolving her impotency in the novel's geranium scene.

¹¹ The flower is metaphor for deceased girl: around her father (and her family at large), she was vibrant, alive, in bloom, whereas around Mr. Harvey, she is wilted and dead.

avenger, while the novel primarily negotiates rage in its female heroine. The melancholy however is firmly and singularly located in her mother in both novel and film.

11 Unlike her husband, Susie's mother Abigail does not respond with rage, violence or the all-consuming wish of seeing her daughter's murderer brought to justice. Instead, she retreats into herself, and is continuously haunted by what happened to her family. Whether it is her husband's growing obsession with Mr. Harvey, or Susie's omnipresent school picture used for both search and commemoration, the truth of her daughter's death is one she cannot escape.¹² Bliss, who reads Abigail through the lens of Caruth's work on trauma, argues that

the novel explores Susie's mother's struggle with her maternal role. Her daughter's violent death results in Abigail examining and questioning not the, perhaps, expected topic of her failure to protect her daughter, but rather the unresolved conflict that results from Abigail admitting that she has never fully embraced motherhood. Abigail's individuality and sense of selfhood has all but disappeared beneath the persona of Mother and Susie's death is the unlikely catalyst for the reemergence of Abigail's sense of self. (861)

Going even further, Whitney proposes that Abigail sees Susie's death as "divine retribution for her undesired maternity" (360), a reading which can be linked back again to Caruth, who proposes that those suffering from trauma "carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess" (*Trauma* 5). Abigail searches for a way out of her own history, which to her mind casts her as the giver and taker of her daughter's life. Whitney comments on "Abigail's untapped intellectual potential", arguing that it connects to "larger issues of secondwave feminism" (360). Having desired an academic career, she instead lives a suburban life as a housewife and mother of three children. The punishment for resenting this life is, to her mind, her daughter's death. Trying to escape this overwhelming guilt, she temporarily finds distraction in the arms of the detective who is in charge of her daughter's case.

12 The level of desperation that clings to Abigail keeps her from ever appearing callous, but when the affair does not help to escape that which she wishes to repress, Abigail chooses a direct, not a metaphorical flight: she leaves her husband and her two living children and makes for California, thus literally leaving the site of the trauma. Her eventual return is propelled by Jack's suffering a heart attack. Bliss argues that this return signifies that "Abigail is finally able to acknowledge that she never wanted to be a mother and implicitly rejects the maternal role: she returns for her husband, not for her children" (879). However,

¹² For an excellent analysis of the use of photographs in *The Lovely Bones*, see Bliss' *Share Moments, Share Life: the Domestic Photograph as a Symbol of Disruption and Trauma in The Lovely Bones*. Bliss argues that the school photograph "has a dual purpose: it functions as her memorial and it also substitutes for her absent body" (875).

Bliss further argues that “by the novel’s conclusion, Abigail has reassumed the maternal role” (863), but Abigail’s son refuses her, and her living daughter does not trust her. I would argue that the avenue open to her, first by her own choice, now by that of her children, is assuming a marital, not a maternal role. Buckley in particular, three years old when Susie died and four when his mother left, has grown into a teenager without her, relying on his sister, his father, and other family members. But the key point is that Abigail’s affair and departure (as well as her return) mark her agency: even though she is bound by social rules, Abigail knows how to break them before they break her.

13 The film portrays her character differently. Rachel Weisz plays Abigail as the novel’s beautiful and somewhat distant woman, but the affair is deleted from the film version and her time in California is reduced considerably. Her growing estrangement from her family is not connected to her quest of re-defining (or perhaps finally defining) her identity as a woman outside the maternal role. A brief montage in the beginning of the film shows the stacks of books on her bedside table change from Camus, Woolf and Hesse to editions of *Working with Nature* and *Baby and Child Care*. It is a blink and you will miss it moment, whereas the novel continually reinforces the point of Abigail’s unfilled intellectual desire. Her tenuous grasp on her family and self find no representation on the screen, as McFarlane’s criticism of the adaptation makes clear:

When Abigail leaves home and fetches up in a Californian vineyard, there is no adequate sense of what has provoked this departure. Sebald led into this via a clear distinction between how she and Jack have coped with the rupture of their family life, and there is vestigial but palpable sexual attraction between Abigail and the investigating cop, Len Fenerman (Michael Imperioli). The film doesn’t make nearly potent enough her sense of how Susie’s death has affected her. (49)

But what so ultimately traumatises Abigail is not her daughter’s death, but her fear of having contributed to it by un-desiring motherhood. Just as Susie’s sexual re-discovery from the novel is lost in the editing room, so are Abigail’s feminist desires and the way she feels she is being punished for them.

14 A more successful feminist presence can be found in Ruth, the girl who allows Susie to use her body. A social outsider at school, “Ruth is a black-clad, angsty-poetry-writing lesbian feminist cliché. More importantly, she has a political function in the novel. Her willingness to bear the burden of rage and retribution fulfills the reader’s desire for justice while leaving Susie forever childlike, innocent, and untainted by anger” (359). Whitney makes an excellent point of highlighting the feminist undertones of Ruth’s character, but I would nevertheless argue that Ruth is not the vessel for Susie’s anger. As outlined previously,

it is her father who goes after Mr. Harvey. Likewise, it is her sister who confronts the police over their ineptitude and passivity and breaks into Mr. Harvey's house to collect the necessary evidence to connect him to the crime. Instead, what the character of Ruth offers is another means of communication for the deceased. It is Susie's touch that endows Ruth with her special powers, but Susie did not specifically select her because of a previous connection:

I could not help but graze her. Once released from life, having lost it in such violence, I couldn't calculate my steps. In violence, it is the getting away that you focus on. When you begin to go over the edge, life receding from you as a boat inevitably receding from the shore, you hold on to death tightly, like a rope that will transport you, and you swing out on it, hoping only to land far away from where you are. (41)

Susie's accidental touch allows Ruth to see spirits and retrace their steps. She begins to write down their stories, their fates, and thus – very much like Susie's postmortal narrative itself – gives the silenced a voice. She becomes the chronicler of their violent endings.

15 Ruth's second involvement in lending a voice to the silenced (i.e. giving her body to Susie) is often seen critically by reviewers. Tallent writes

The particular body borrowed by Susie in order to experience the loss of virginity has been carefully constructed as lesbian. [...] Why detail Ruth's emergent – yet so far unconsummated – sexuality only to have her abandon her body so that her friend can use it? Is a lesbian body, by virtue of not "belonging" to any male, more available for appropriation? A lesbian's virginity less important to her than a straight girl's to her? At the very least, this lesbian character loses the experience of devirginization, as Susie did; we're supposed to accept that in the case of Ruth, this is all right, because she's cheerfully volunteered to have her body occupied by another. (8)

Like Tallent, Whitney argues that "her actions make the lesbian Ruth into a "straightened" sacred feminine vessel" (361). For one, I would argue that Ruth fancying her female teachers and drawing female nudes in art class does not necessarily make her lesbian. Ruth is an advocate for women, the wounded especially, but as far as her sexuality is concerned, textual evidence suggests that she has been constructed more ambivalently. The only person Ruth is romantically involved with is Ray, with whom she bonds over their shared loss of Susie and their outsider position at school. Eventually, Ruth suggests that Ray could kiss her:

'I thought you liked girls,' Ray said. 'I'll make you a deal,' Ruth said. 'You can pretend I'm Susie and I will too.' 'You are so entirely screwed up,' Ray said, smiling. 'Are you saying that you don't want to?' Ruth teased. (227)

Later, Ruth admits to Ray that the experiment has taken an unexpected turn: when kissing him, she has begun to "feel something" (230). Ruth defies labels, and instead allows herself to feel, be it for the dead girl or for the boy they both like. This of course does not take away from Tallent's point about Ruth giving up her virginity so that Susie can experience it

instead. However, a more complicated picture appears when one considers that the boy Ruth and Susie share this experience with is one that Ruth herself has been sexually linked to and whom she considers a friend. Furthermore, it is Ruth who instigates the body swap in the novel, showing her willingness to grant Susie this last wish. As Susie puts it, Ruth is “a smart girl breaking all the rules” (341). It is Ruth’s agency and Ruth who is in control of the events. In contrast, the film constructs different power relations: Ruth is passive, her body indeed taken over by Susie, who appears out of nowhere. Susie’s spirit merges with Ruth’s body while Ruth witnesses Mr. Harvey dispose of the safe with Susie’s remains in the sinkhole. This is of course highly problematic because if Ruth did not vacate her body herself, what happens to her is – strictly speaking – a rape in and of itself, so the scene negates the very point it was trying to resolve.

16 While Ruth is one of the few living people Susie is able to directly interact with, her heaven is by no means devoid of companions. The novel populates heaven, both the intermediary and the final stage, with a multitude of people, among them Frannie, her “intake counsellor” (20), whom Bliss interprets (connecting her to Abigail) as performing “a heavenly maternal role” (863). Frannie helps Susie to settle in, and provides both advice and comfort in this new world. In a way, Frannie assumes the function of a rape crisis centre. Projansky outlines the work of rape crisis centres as “helping women understand common post-rape experiences, such as a constant feeling of being dirty and wanting to shower, uncomfortableness with sex or even physical touch, a sense of being responsible for the attack, or guilt over accusing a loved one” (9). Susie shares Frannie with Holly, another deceased girl who inhabits her heaven. The film does not feature Frannie at all and instead establishes Holly in the advisory role, while simultaneously recasting her as another victim of Mr. Harvey’s. The screenplay thus creates a ‘Mr. Harvey victim heaven’ only, a sort of exclusive and horrifying girls club. By comparison, the heaven(s) in the book offer the comfort of other people, be it old neighbours, deceased family members or supportive strangers such as Frannie and Holly. Sebold’s heaven is used to work away from limiting Susie to being a rape victim, while Jackson’s version – by installing Holly as another of Mr. Harvey’s victims and as Susie’s only companion – defines her as such. This effectively makes the film version of heaven a restrictive, even claustrophobic place.

17 Just as the filmic presentation of Susie’s heaven is restricted, so is its central character. This restriction is at the core of the film’s and novel’s difference. As Brooks aptly sums up, “gone is the dismembered body part that alerts the family to Susie's fate. Gone is her anguished mother's adulterous affair with the detective who leads the case. Gone is all

mention of what really transpired in that lonely 1970s cornfield”. Gone, in short, are the gritty aspects of the recovery process. The film adaptation needs a prettier heaven, a safer environment, an ultimately more black and white take on the story to highlight the abhorrence of the crime.

18 Continuously cast as the perfect ‘victim’, Susie becomes passive and is transformed from agent to object, as the film places her (after)life in the hands of men. She cannot take revenge herself; she needs her father to do it for her. Similarly, she cannot transcend to heaven until Mr. Harvey lets go of her remains. Completely dependent on the actions of male agents, Susie is trapped until the very end. The more complex usages of Susie’s postmortal agency such as her desire to sleep with Ray or her possible involvement in Mr. Harvey’s death fall victim in the cutting room: they are signifiers of an older, more mature, more influential Susie, who is outgrowing her victimhood in ways not suitable for a ‘perfect victim’. Only when it comes to the body swap is her agency in the film re-established, albeit at the price of another female character’s freedom, namely Ruth’s. Turned from active medium to overwhelmed vessel, Ruth becomes an object and is as such as silenced as Susie is by her murder. In the same vein, the film never dares to picture Abigail’s abandonment of the parental role. The novel’s threefold presentation of female self-determination (Susie’s revenge, Ruth’s vacation of her body, and Abigail’s flight to California) is too daring for a film that seeks to show the helplessness of a victimised girl and establishes her as an object of pity, which leads to the crux of the matter.

19 While Sebold has “in her employment of a posthumous voice [...] created a unique form of literary survivorship for the heroine” (Whitney 355), one that “restores some dignity and agency to those silenced by violence” (356), the film falls short of this goal with regards to the agency. Seeking to restore Susie’s dignity, shielding and protecting her and the audience from the details of her end, her agency is limited to the point where little is left. As Caruth argues, “the story of a trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality – the escape from a death, or from its referential force – rather attests to its endless impact on a life” Caruth (*Unclaimed Experience* 7). In the film adaptation of *The Lovely Bones*, the trauma’s “endless impact” on the (after)life is maintained and “the story of a trauma” takes the place of what is, in the novel, essentially a story of recovery. Jackson provides a PG-13 rated condensing of the source material, that, rather than showing a complex, multi-faceted survivor watching her family come to terms with the trauma of her loss, focuses on the central character’s continuing traumatic victimisation. This rewrites the story as one wherein entrapment of innocence is the dominant theme and the

myth of the 'perfect victim' finds perpetuation, thus keeping the "wall of silence" surrounding the crime of rape, albeit not that of murder, firmly in place.

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Murderous Honor Past and Present: Webster's Duchess of Malfi and Contemporary Crimes of Honor

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Abstract:

The United Nations estimate around 5000 yearly cases of 'honor killings' worldwide, numerous NGOs and human rights activists guess that the numbers of crimes committed in the name of 'honor' is closer to 10 000. 'Honor killings' are not limited to class, geography or gender (although the majority of the victims are women) but a socio-political issue that needs to be addressed globally. Current cases of Banaz Mahmod (UK) and Arzu Ö. (Germany) received wide media coverage. One of the finest Jacobean plays, John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, becomes exceptionally relevant when looking at the relationship of 'honor', family, justice and women's rights then and now.

1 The freedom to determine your own life is a human right. Violence against women encompasses crimes allegedly committed in the name of 'honor', such as 'honor killings',

assault, confinement and imprisonment, and interference of marriage, where the publicly articulated 'justification' is attributed to a social order claimed to require the preservation of a concept of 'honour' vested in male (family and/ or conjugal) control of women and specifically women's sexual conduct: actual, suspected or potential. (Welchman and Hossain 4)

In communities where the concept of woman as property is supported, male honor is defined through the female body. This implies that murders committed in the name of 'honor' are not perceived as crimes, and therefore a judicial issue, but as a family issue. The term 'honor killing' is frequently attributed to murders committed within minority communities of the Middle East and Asia (Welchman and Hossain 9). But crimes committed with the "mitigating value" 'honor' are not exclusively committed within these, dominantly Muslim, communities (ibid.). According to Welchman and Hossain the terminology regarding those crimes is connected to stereotypical assumptions. Therefore the same crime committed within western cultures is referred to as a 'crime of passion' (13). This difference in terminology is closely linked to defense strategies, since crimes committed in the name of 'honor' are premeditated and crimes of 'passion' are not. Regardless of this terminology, in 2000 the United Nations included both 'crimes of passion' and 'crimes of honor' in resolutions on violence against women (Welchman and Hossain 10), hence underlining the fact that terminology does not absolve the crime.

2 In recent years ‘honor killings’ have gained increased attention from the public, media and politicians. According to the Iranian and Kurdish Women’s Right Organisation (IKWRO), based in the UK, there is a yearly average of twelve reported murders committed in the name of ‘honor’ in the UK. The case of Banaz Mahmud, a 20 year old woman of Kurdish origin, who was tortured and killed by her own family in 2006, gained a lot of public attention and led to a heightened awareness towards crimes of ‘honor’ in the UK. The numbers in Germany are similarly shocking. According to the Bundeskriminalamt, the criminal police of the federation, 125 cases were reported between 1996 and 2005 with increasing numbers. On November 21, 2007 Aylin Korkmaz was attacked by her husband in southern Germany with two knives and stabbed 26 times in her upper body and face. In the following trial her husband stated that she had ‘dishonored’ him by divorcing him five months prior to the deed. The court ruled 13 years for attempted murder. Instead of hiding her 260 stiches that will always document the wounds inflicted upon her body, Korkmaz went public: she wrote a book, attended numerous interviews and is still frequently seen advocating for women’s rights. Recently another case, the trial against the murderers of Arzu Ö. has drawn increased media attention and has once again led to a greater public interest in ‘honor-based’ violence against women in the Western Hemisphere. The 18 years old Arzu was abducted by her brothers and shot because the family disapproved of her German boyfriend. However, a recurrent problem is that many women are taken abroad to be killed, and thus just disappear (Brandon and Hafez 52). The cases of Aylin and Arzu are only two of the United Nations’ estimate of around 5000 yearly cases of ‘honor killings’ worldwide.

3 The rising number of so-called ‘honor killings’ necessitates that governments and human rights activists have to look beyond Muslim and minority communities and address this violence as a socio-political issue on a global scale. Consequently, crimes committed in the name of ‘honor’ have been addressed by the United Nations for the better part of the past three decades. Jane Connors states that the United Nations approach to violence against women “has transformed from one centered purely on the advancement of women, crime control and criminal justice and addressed predominately within the UN entities concerned with those issues, to one which incorporates a human rights perspective” (22). In 1975 the World Plan of Action adopted by the First World Conference on Women, which was held in Mexico, did not explicitly refer to violence against women but rather addressed the issue in terms of “dignity, equality” or “security” of women (22). Five years later at the Copenhagen Conference a resolution on “battered women and the family” was included into the final report of the conference (ibid). But it was not until 1985 that violence against women was

truly addressed as an international issue. The “Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace” states:

Violence against women exists in various forms in everyday life in all societies. Women are beaten, mutilated, burned, sexually abused and raped. Such violence is a major obstacle to the achievement of peace and the other objectives of the Decade and should be given special attention. Women victims of violence should be given particular attention and comprehensive assistance. To this end, legal measures should be formulated to prevent violence and to assist women victims. National machinery should be established in order to deal with the question of violence against women within the family and society. Preventive policies should be elaborated, and institutionalized forms of assistance to women victims provided. (Paragraph 258)

Hence the subject of ‘honor’ crimes has emerged as an international concern beyond its initial address a decade earlier. Crimes against women in the name of ‘honor’ are recognized as a violation of human rights. Additionally the UN and non-governmental institutions are particularly interested in renegotiating terminology, since the use of the term ‘honor’ functions as a justification and absolution of the crime.

4 According to the Human Rights Watch Oral Intervention at the 57th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, ‘honor’ crimes “are acts of violence, usually murder, committed by male family members against female family members who are perceived to have brought dishonor upon the family” (Item 12, HRW). Welchman and Hossain state that there is no agreement on the definition of ‘honor killing’, yet there are aspects that assist in clearly differentiating domestic violence and femicide from ‘honor-based’ violence (HBV). ‘Honor-based’ violence is a very specific case of gender-based violence against women, where the term honor needs to be seen as a symbolic term pointing to a legal defense strategy of the perpetrators and encompassing specific social and cultural markers of the community in which the crime was committed. In this context man's honor is defined through the female body, hence any transgression from the gendered norm is regarded as dishonoring the male representative of said norm. Honor here is regarded in terms of a value-system and a tradition to be protected and reinstated if needed. Joanne Payton, information and research officer at the Iranian and Kurdish Women’s Rights Organisation (IKWRO), describes how the word ‘honor’ is defined differently for men and women of Arab and South Asian communities, stating

‘Honour’ in its more feminine aspect is located in the negative, passive characteristic: stoicism, endurance, obedience, chastity, domesticity, servitude. In its more masculine form it features active and positive qualities: dynamism, generosity, confidence, dominance and violence. Female ‘honour’ is static: it can neither be increased nor

regained, and once lost is lost forever. [...] The positive, autonomous male 'honour' of any man, family or tribe is built upon the foundation of the negative, dependent female 'honour' of female relatives and tribeswomen, just as a trader's reputation is based on merchandise. (69)

Hence male honor is defined through activism, and confidence, as well as through the degree of passivity among the women in the family.

5 Historically, violent abuses of human and civil rights especially against women are issues that have existed for a long time. Gender-based violence is also a recurring theme in literary and dramatic traditions. In fact, theater and cinema, among the arts, offer a great opportunity for the exploration, analysis and reflection on the complex phenomenon of 'honor killing'. In Western dramatic history, we can find numerous examples of literary texts that deal with gender-related issues of 'honor' and violence. The Early modern period has been a particularly prolific time in this respect, with tragedies like Shakespeare's *Othello* (1604), Middleton's *The Changeling* (1622), and Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612).

6 John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* is a tragedy about the murder of the Duchess of Malfi, in revenge of her alleged sexual transgression and secret marriage to the subordinate household steward Antonio. The play is especially interesting in comparison to contemporary cases of 'honor killing' and the perception of femininity. More than any other Jacobean play *The Duchess of Malfi* addresses issues of gender norms, social mobility, madness and revenge in a unique and hybrid form. The eruption of violence is continuous, vibrating through the play from early on, reaching its crescendo with the death of the Duchess in Act 4. By marrying Antonio and bearing his children without her brother's consent and after numerous initial warnings not to stray from the social norms and political expectations of the time, the Duchess has 'dishonored' the family represented by her brothers, and thus her social as well as political position. The plot structure builds on the aftermath of her choice, the discovery of her pregnancy and finally her brother Ferdinand's order to have her psychologically tortured and eventually killed, elevating her to the position of a martyr. The persistent stereotype of the "lusty widow" (1.2.259) within early modern English culture, repeatedly used by her brothers to describe the Duchess, functions as a catalyst for the ensuing violence. Male honor during the seventeenth-century was a commodity well worth fighting for. In Shakespeare's *Richard II*, Richard exclaims in the very first act "take honor from me, and my life is done". In this patriarchal society, gender norms implied that men were the head of the households and the women, being the 'inferior sex', were limited in their possibilities beyond bearing children. Women with a high visibility such as queen Elisabeth

had to emphasize their exceptionality in order to counter rising gender anxieties. Thus, *The Duchess of Malfi* as a woman of high social standing, who acts according to her own desires and marries behind her brothers' back, trespasses each and every social and gendered norm of the period. In addressing the issue of the Duchess' widowhood Jennifer Panek suggests that Jacobean men, "when faced with the threat of a woman who was legally, economically, and sexually independent [...] constructed and deployed the notion of the sexually rapacious widow as a kind of ideological substitute for the official male control from which she had slipped free" (324). Panek states that a "man's conquest of a wealthy widow" was a male fantasy enacted on the Jacobean stage (325). Honor, wealth and general status of a man were translated into sexual subordination of women and their gendered role in the family. In *The Duchess of Malfi* these household power relations are at the center of the conflict between the Duchess and her brothers, the Cardinal and Ferdinand.

7 The story of the Duchess is about love and corruption, power and submission, cruelty and passion and most of all the status of women. The Jacobean play can be analyzed in terms of a sociological or psychoanalytical inquiry regarding the motivations of the two brothers taking revenge on their sister's secret marriage. Yet, at the same time the play can also be read as the documentation of an 'honor killing'. In the context of the rising number of 'crimes of honor' today, the considerable renewed interest in the play does not come as a surprise. Contemporary transnational migration has reintroduced patriarchal notions of honor. Living under globalized conditions there are groups of minorities who justify crimes of 'honor' with reference to the necessity of upholding cultural traditions. However, as Webster's play shows, these practices are not limited to minority groups, but have been prevalent across Europe for centuries. The renewed interest in Webster's play in recent stage productions, starring Judi Dench (1971), Helen Mirren (1980) and Eve Best (2012) in the title role, thus sheds light on the continuity of gendered norms across historical and cultural differences.

8 'Honor-based' violence characteristically not only occurs within the family structure but also in the wider community. In the first act of *The Duchess of Malfi* Ferdinand orders Bosola to

live i'the' court here and observe the Duchess,
To note all the particulars of her haviour:
What suitors do solicit her for marriage
And whom she best affects. (1.1. 245-248)

Ferdinand, seeing his sister as his property, concludes his address to Bosola by stating that he would "not have her marry again" (1.1. 249). Critical readings of the play have explained this

behavior sociologically by dynastic considerations as well as psychoanalytically by Ferdinand's supposedly incestuous feelings for his sister. But more important than the latter speculations seems the fact that the widowed Duchess is not to choose who and if she would like to marry again. This 'law of honor' is emphasized by the exchange between the Duchess and her brothers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal, who attempt to regulate her behavior during their absence (1.1.285-298):

Ferdinand Marry? They are most luxurious/ Will wed twice. [...]

Duchess Diamonds are most value/ They say, that have passed through most jewellers' hands.

Ferdinand Whores, by that rule, are precious.

Duchess Will you hear me?/ I'll never marry.

Cardinal So most widows say, / But commonly that motion lasts no longer/ Than the turning of an hourglass: the funeral sermon,/ And it, end both together.

The idea of female promiscuity and changeability necessitating male surveillance seems uncannily close to current cases of 'honor killings'.

9 Similar to the Duchess, Banaz Mahmod also knew "what man is" (1.1. 286) Although Banaz was not a widow, she was married and therefore sexually active. Marriage, similar to the Jacobean era, has to be seen here as a passage from youth and innocence to womanhood. Banaz' case gained wide media attention, not only because it took four years to bring the perpetrators before the court, but also because of the documentary film *Banaz: A Love Story* (2012) by Deeyah, international music artist and activist turned filmmaker, who has been subjected to 'honor'-related abuse and threats herself during her music career that led to her early retirement from the music industry. Banaz Mahmod was a Kurdish born, young woman, raised in the UK from the age of 10 onwards and married at the age of 16 to a man from her clan. In her marriage, she was abused and raped until she left her husband after three years hoping to find shelter and safety in her parents' home. That in itself brought 'dishonor' to the family. When Banaz then fell in love with Rahman, a boy from another Kurdish clan, she was killed by her father and a hired group of men.

10 Status, gender, family and clan affiliation play a crucial role in 'honor-based' violence. Lawrence Stone states that "in the sixteenth century, kin groupings remained powerful in politics [and] much of the political in-fighting of the century revolved around certain kinship rivalries [...] In local affairs, kin ties undoubtedly continue to be important well into the eighteenth century" (126). Thus Ferdinand's desire for his sister is primarily politically motivated. Family ties did not only ensure the kin's wealth, but also underlined belonging in terms of moral and traditional values. The same can be claimed for current

reasons of 'honor-based' violence. In 2008 the Centre for Social Cohesion published the book *Crimes of the Community: Honour-based violence in the UK*. Here, James Brandon and Salem Hafez address all aspects of 'honor-based' violence, such as 'honor' killings, forced marriages, 'honor-based' domestic violence and female genital mutilations. One of the consequences of losing one's 'honor', be it that of the male head of the household or of the whole family, is ostracism by family and community, stating that "families whose honour has been damaged can be ignored and ostracized by other members of the community. Their children may also be rejected at school by fellow members of their cultural, ethnic or religious group" (8). The predominately male fear to lose face in front of the community by losing control over the female family members is the catalyst to committing horrendous 'crimes of honor'.

11 The status of women of immigrant families, such as Banaz Mahmod, is clear to all members of the family. 'Honor-based' violence is not defined by class, but by the role assigned to women in the community. Often women are 'imported' from abroad, kept illiterate and alienated from the new culture so as to be sexually submissive and fulfill household duties. Banaz Mahmod said in one of the found recordings, which were made by her boyfriend at the hospital after her father's first failed attempt to kill her, that "when he [her husband] raped me it was like I was his shoe that he could wear whenever he wanted to. I didn't know if this was normal in my culture, or here. I was 17" (as quoted in Tracy McVeigh). [1] Banaz was forced into a marriage within her own group and class. Considering that the vast majority of 'honor-based' violence can be found in families with migration background, usually from socially disadvantaged classes, one could come to the false conclusion that 'honor killings' are class-based. However, the first case of 'honor killing' that made international headlines was the murder of the Saudi Princess Misha'al Bint Bin Mohammed in 1977, showing that the crime is not limited to minority groups or a class. In 1980 the documentary *Death of a Princess* by British documentary filmmaker Anthony Thomas was aired, which led to severe diplomatic problems between Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom. The film documents the life and death of Princess Misha'al and tries to shed light on her life and her death. More than thirty years later the circumstances surrounding her death are still unclear. As the film shows, there are claims that she and her lover were murdered on a car park in Jeddah, while others insist that she was killed at the airport in Saudi Arabia visiting home during her term break from Lebanon (where she did or did not attend University), and still others maintain that she was taken in front of a judge, where she repeated three times the phrase "I have committed adultery" and was then publicly

executed. Allegedly there are images of her execution. Considering that in all footage her face is covered, it is hard to confirm whether she was killed or, as suggested by still another reading, sent to a mental institution in Switzerland.¹

12 Towards the end of the first act of *The Duchess of Malfi*, shortly after the brothers have left, the Duchess proposes to Antonio, thus - much like Banaz - choosing the man to love - and, in the case of the Duchess, to marry. In a hidden ceremony behind closed curtains the Duchess and Antonio are wed and consummate their marriage. The second act of the play revolves around the discovery of the Duchess' pregnancy. Suspecting that "the young springal cutting the caper in her belly" (2.1. 155) the brothers' spy, Bosola, puts her to the test by offering her apricots which were said to induce labor. After her "greedy" consumption she breaks out in cold sweat calling out to her husband: "Oh, good Antonio, I fear I am undone" (2.1. 162). Ferdinand's earlier threat has come true: "yet, believe't,/ Your darkest actions, nay your privat'st thoughts,/ Will come to light" (1.1.307-9). Ferdinand has asserted his belief in his right to know everything about his sister, to own her, Consequently, Bosola's knowledge of the Duchess' secret marriage, her overstepping the boundaries of female passivity, marks the death sentence of the woman who has brought dishonor to the family.

13 The belief in the men's right to choose the sexual partners of the women in the family, and hence to own and control their bodies is a decisive marker of 'honor-based' violence. According to Baker et al. in "Family Killing Fields: Honor Rationales in the Murder of Women" the concept of 'honor' implies that "the behavior of another becomes an essential component in one's self-esteem and community regard. This understanding is distinct from the notion that 'honor' rests solely on the individual's own behavior" (165). Banaz knew her death was coming. In some of her recordings she predicts that they (her father and her uncle) will kill her. In 2006 Banaz disappeared. She was only found four months later, tortured, strangled, dismembered and stuffed in a suitcase.

14 According to Valerie Plant "each family that chooses to act on that perceived obligation [to reinstate the family honor] approaches the situation differently, and there are many reported variations [of how women are killed]" (112).² In an online search one will find numerous videos of stonings that have been recorded on mobile phones by onlookers and participants. To the extent that the 'dishonor' becomes public, the reinstatement of the family

¹ During my research in 2009 Anthony Thomas sent me a personal copy of the documentary, since it cannot be purchased. Yet, a full transcript of the docu-drama can be found on the PBS Frontline webpage: www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/princess/etc/script.html

² Hence, as seen in the case of Banaz, by slaughtering her, she was dehumanized and thus eradicated from the family tree in order to reinstate the family 'honor'.

'honor' has to become public as well. In the 2008 motion picture *The Stoning of Soraya M.* the cruel theatricality of the event is foregrounded. Soraya is deliberately wrongly accused of adultery by her husband, since she refuses to divorce him. She is brought into town, half buried in a public place, and then stoned to death in a painfully long sequence. Since she 'dishonored' all males of her family, the first stone is offered to her father, followed by her sons, her husband, until finally the rest of the community is permitted to take part in her murder. Her aunt is not allowed to bury her, as the body of an adulteress does not deserve to be buried. Nevertheless in defiance, her aunt is able to save bones and parts of her body from the dogs and to bury them. Reports of stonings claim that the victim sometimes has to endure the stoning for almost half an hour before death occurs. The way in which the film shows the stoning scene in agonizing length is reminiscent of the footage found of the Yezidi girl Du'a Khalil Aswad.³

15 One of the recurrent problems of bringing justice to victims of 'honor killings' are the penal systems, where the defense often relies on colonial Laws, such as the French Penal Code of 1810 which is still part of numerous Arab states' legislation, that seem to absolve the committed crime (Welchman and Hossain 16). As stated before, in Europe a frequent defense strategy is to either call it a 'crime of passion', thus not premeditated, or, as in the case of Arzu Ö. take the 'cultural' background into consideration. Although in both cases the murderer is prosecuted the crime itself is thus presented as justified or is not addressed as a violation of human rights. In this context Jane Connors refers to Article 4 of the United Nations Declaration on Violence Against Women, which states that

states should not invoke any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to the elimination of gender-based violence against women, and should exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and, in accordance with national legislation, punish acts of violence against women, whether those acts are perpetrated by the state or private persons. (25)

In countries where laws derived from nineteenth-century British colonial law are still in use (Warraich 79), or in Arab countries like Jordan which use the French penal law, the line between right and wrong is blurred for those committing the crime. Ayse Onal's book *Honour Killing: Stories of Men Who Killed* (2009) holds ten stories based on interviews Onal conducted in prisons with men who killed in the name of 'honor'. The majority of the interviews end without any display of remorse from the murderers, since the deed is seen as just and even lawful. The same can be seen in the corruption of justice in *The Duchess of*

³ CNN airs portions of Du'a Khalil Aswad's stoning. www.youtube.com/watch. [last accessed 15.03.2013]

Malfi. Already in Act 1 Delio foreshadows the perversion of justice by stating about Ferdinand: “Then the law to him/ Is like a foul black cobweb to a spider:/ He makes it his dwelling, and a prison/ To entangle those shall feed him (1.1. 169-72). Ferdinand uses the law for his own benefit and becomes a victim of his own corruption. In Act 4, after the Duchess' murder, he admits this by stating “Did any ceremonial form of law/ Doom her to not-being?” (4.3. 292-3). But it is Bosola who viciously tries to justify the murder by stating “the common bellman/That usually is sent to condemned persons” (4.2.164-5), appointing himself to an executioner sanctioned by the law and not hired by the “thief” (4.3.299) as he refers to Ferdinand shortly after. The motivations today are similar to those Ferdinand names: “To bring her to despair” (4.1.113). Ferdinand draws a sadistic pleasure from the torture of the Duchess, but rather than succumbing to the pain, she insists: “I am Duchess of Malfi still” (4.2.134). It is said that the Saudi Princess was the beloved granddaughter of the King. In the documentary film about her, one of the witnesses states that the King was begging his granddaughter not to repeat the confession of adultery three times, but that she would not comply. The princess did not bow her head and deny her lover, and thus had to die. She displayed the same passion as the Duchess in remaining faithful to her choices.

16 The brothers in *The Duchess of Malfi* literally and figuratively unleash hell on earth in the fourth act. Ferdinand, in particular, attempts to rationalize his mad rage to which we are already introduced in Act 2.4 after he has learned about the Duchess' transgression:

Ferdinand [...] I could kill her now/ In you [Cardinal], or in myself, for I do think/ It is some sin in us heaven doth revenge/ By her.

Cardinal Are you stark mad?

Ferdinand I would have their [children] bodies/ Burnt in coal pit with the ventage stopped,/ That their cursed smoke might not ascend to heaven;/ Or dip the sheets they lie in, in pitch and sulphur,/ Wrap them in't and then light them like a match;/ Or else to boil their bastard to a cullis/ And giev't his lecherous father to renew/ The sin of his back. (2.4. 63-73)

Ferdinand's vivid imagining of how to take revenge and punish the Duchess and her children, seems horrifyingly close to actions used in 'crimes of honor'. Victims of 'honor killings' have been known to have been buried alive, burned alive or, as was the case of Banaz Mahmod, raped for two hours and then strangled and beaten to death. One of the few survivors of an 'honor killing' is Souad, who describes her ordeal of being a victim of her family's wrath in her memoirs *Burned Alive*. In the book Souad tells the harrowing story of how she was set on fire by her brother-in-law after her family learned about her pregnancy. In Webster's play the brother meets his sister in darkness before the execution of the vicious act, which he terms “[...] the honorabl'st revenge,/ Where I may kill, to pardon” (4.1. 33-4).

Ferdinand's alleged objective is the preservation of the family bloodline. Balizet states that "ideals of masculine and feminine honor were articulated in terms of blood purity and the shame of social dishonor met its 'cure' through the purging of diseased, impure blood" (24). Thus, only the deaths of the Duchess, her husband Antonio, and their children can reinstate the family 'honor'. Ferdinand is determined to make the Duchess suffer by presenting her with the horrifying spectacles of a dead man's hand (4.1. 44) and her seemingly dead husband and child. Torture is one of the methods used in 'honor-based' violence. When the Duchess is faced with the murder of her family she yearns to join them, but Bosola tells her that she has to endure the pain to which she replies "that's the greatest torture souls feel in hell,/ In hell: that they must live, and cannot die" (4.1.68-9).

17 'Honor killings' are frequently located in communities with minority groups. Islam is often associated with violence against women, since the perpetrators of 'honor killings' often call upon the Quran to justify their actions. During a recent visit to the Saladin Citadel of Cairo I was almost ambushed by a woman who gave me numerous free Islamic books published by the Conveying Islamic Message Society (CIMS). One of these books was *Women in Islam: The Myth and the Reality*. The chapter on adultery opens with the following text: "Adultery is considered a sin in all religions. The Bible decrees the death sentence for both adulterer and adulteress (Lev. 20:10). Islam also equally punishes both the adulterer and the adulteress (Quran 24: 2). The short chapter then continues with a quotation from Deuteronomy 22:22: "If man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel". This is followed by a quotation from Leviathan 20:10: "If a man commits adultery with another man's wife both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death". Interestingly enough no direct quotes from the Quran are used, but to underline that the Quran "never considers any woman to be the possession of any man" (28) Azeem quotes Quran 30:21 "and among his signs is this, that he created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and he has put love and mercy between your hearts: truly in that are signs for those who reflect". In fact the Quran does not speak of a death sentence but "the woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication,- flog each of them with a hundred stripes" (Quran 24: 1-2). Welchman and Hossain state that a number of "renowned Islamic leaders and scholars have publicly condemned this practice ['honor' killing] and clarified that it has no religious basis" (13), thus directly contradicting the stereotype of a violent and oppressive attitude of Islam towards women.

18 *The Duchess of Malfi* is a play about an ‘honor killing’. The honour-terminology here is significantly linked to Ferdinand’s continuous address of the Duchess as his property, and his subsequent control over her sexuality. The honor of the brothers and their family is thus defined through the Duchess’ body. When the Duchess is pregnant Ferdinand does not recognize the female body as nurturing and loving but as a formal disgrace of the family. Banaz left her husband and chose a man of her own, the Saudi princess committed adultery by falling in love with another man. The alleged transgression from gender roles is not the sole reason for violence against women. Numerous abuse and rape victims commit suicide, being aware of the ‘honor’ concept in their families and communities. This is often referred to as ‘honor suicide’, when the family members (especially of rape victims) give the woman the option of killing herself. This enforced ‘honor killing’ enables them to remain ‘innocent’ of the murder. Ferdinand offers the Duchess a knife, giving her the opportunity to kill herself, yet she denies. ‘Honor-based’ violence is a violation of human rights. It has to be addressed openly in a socio-political context, in which awareness can be raised and help can be offered. According to the United Nations there are about 5000 premeditated murders committed in the name of honor yearly. At least ten percent happen in the Western Hemisphere.

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***French Post-Modern Masculinities: From Neuromatrices to Seropositivity* by
Lawrence R. Schehr. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009.**

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1 When he died in 2011, Lawrence R. Schehr left behind a peerless interdisciplinary body of work. His monographs and journal articles were in areas as diverse as gender and queer studies, literature from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as French language, culture and civilization. Although the title *French Post-Modern Masculinities* gives the impression that the monograph will address the entire post-modern period, Schehr concentrates on the last twenty years. As he explains *French Post-Modern Masculinities*, his latest monograph, sets out to examine the “changes in the representations and depictions of masculinity and masculine sexualities in the contemporary era of France” (1).

2 In the first chapter, “The Work of Literature in an Age of Queer Reproduction”, Schehr puts into conversation the literary works of Guillaume Dustan and Erik Rémès, analyzing the impact of bareback or unsafe sex on subject formation. Through an incisive reading of the literary works of these two authors, he argues that “the pursuit of sexual pleasure has to take precedence over everything else, and, indeed, that the definition of self comes only from one’s body, from that of another (or others), from the sexualization of masculinity as the be-all and end-all of being” (29). “Neuromatrices and Networks” is the second chapter and it examines French graphic novels which are involved in reorienting the post-modern masculine condition. His interpretation of the attacks against the World Trade Center in the book *Villa Vortex* by Maurice Dantec is particularly enthralling. He compellingly contends that “the destruction of that building is not the destruction of knowledge itself; the attack is against the institutions that organize knowledge and ultimately do not distinguish between knowledge and nonsense, those institutions that also turn knowledge into a kind of propaganda for death and destruction, for collectivization and for emasculation” (79). This ominous vision of masculinity is further developed in the third chapter, “Topographies of Queer Popular Culture”, in which Schehr examines several filmic and literary autofictions. The overarching argument in this chapter is that modern technology and AIDS play an important role in enacting the contemporary crisis of masculinity. “Perversions of the Real”, the ultimate chapter, deals with the essay writings of

right leaning and heterosexual writers such as Michel Houellebecq and Marc-Édouard Nabe. Schehr discusses the manner in which political discourses infiltrate the literary works of these writers with images that invoke a reimagining of sexuality and masculinity.

3 Drawing on Michel Foucault's philosophical oeuvre, *French Post-Modern Masculinities* attempts to contextualize theoretically the current state of the masculine subject as an individual. Employing Foucault's notion of social constructivism as elaborated in *The History of Sexuality*, Schehr shows, by way of a solid historical analysis, how the present masculine subject has come to be constructed. He starts from the post-Enlightenment period in which there is an initial rise of the subject as an individual. His linear historical examination ends in the "post-human" period (10) characterized by the centrality of AIDS and the Internet. This "post-human" period marks an end of the independence of the subject as an individual given the fact that the individual is no longer entirely himself. In terms of the masculine subject, Schehr contends that in this "post-human" period there is a radicalization of discourse on gender and sexuality which has led to the proliferation of a "new masculinity as a visible, palpable vulnerability" (11). Schehr gives a convincing argument of the apparition of this new masculinity by analyzing the combined effects of AIDS and the Internet. He argues that the contemporary subject is a palpably "visible node" (12) through a multiplicity of networks or "neuromatrices" which are brought about by the Internet and AIDS. The author offers a fascinating etymological analysis of the term "matrix" showing how it is a symbol of the maternal, and by extension of the feminine. For him, this reflects the manner in which the "post-human" masculine has been emasculated and indeed stripped of its phallic power and position.

4 The sheer diversity and breadth of the cultural productions that is examined by Schehr in this monograph is nothing less than impressive and undoubtedly the major strength of the book. Effortlessly scrutinizing novels, essays, films and graphic novels, Schehr shows great insight into contemporary French cultural productions that relate to queer and gender studies. He shows inordinate assurance even when handling material which is not only complex but is by and large sexually graphic in content. One such example is the manner in which he details the demise of the invincible heterosexual male subject. Through a reading of works by writers such as Marc-Édouard Nabe and Michel Houellebecq, Schehr hypothesizes that the apparent "death" of the invincible heterosexual male subject has prompted its inauspicious conception of a sexually

decadent and amoral society whose functioning axes upon aggressive and destructive instincts. In the development of this argument, as is the case in the rest of the monograph, Schehr is at once coherent and accessible. The simplicity of expression and the accessibility of the core arguments do not nonetheless compromise the theoretical depth that is achieved in this monograph.

5 *French Post-Modern Masculinities* could however be accused of being somewhat reductionist in its characterization of French gay experience to white, middle-class Parisian experience. An analysis of the interconnections of class, race, nationality and sexuality in “post-human” France would certainly have given this a more holistic depiction of French gay experience. Still considering the weaknesses of this monograph, the presence of several inaccuracies in translation as well as a manifold of typos, spoil an otherwise well-written and well-argued monograph.

6 Given the manner in which it takes for granted the treatment of foundational theories in gender and queer studies, *French Post-Modern Masculinities* would be of particular use and appeal to postgraduate students as well as scholars and researchers interested in the fields of gender and queer studies that relate to cultural studies and production of France and the Western world. The incisive reading of sexually provocative and graphic texts makes this monograph a priceless addition to French gender, queer and sexuality studies.

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