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Holy Stitches Batman, or, Performative Villainy in Gothic/am

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ABSTRACT

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Holy Stitches, Batman, or, Performative Villainy in Gothic/am is an interdisciplinary examination of gothic affect and deviant fashion in the narrative construction of villainy. It asks not just what a villain looks like, but what it *means* to look like a villain. A villain is a character who consciously and purposefully deviates from standards of normativity in order to pursue their own, often criminal, interests. The signifier of "villain" articulates a different purpose – an adversarial relationship with normativity that guides personal identification. Not exceptional to a gendered cultural system, they are informed by the societies in which they operate, and the cultural literacy of their authors. I argue that the materiality of these characters demonstrates sartorial literacy on the part of creators and audiences alike, and that the aesthetic representation of these villains is essential to the articulation of their deviance. Drawing on cultural history, literary studies, and media studies, I examine the villains of *Dracula, The Picture of Dorian Gray, The Beetle, Lady Audley's Secret, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Uncle Silas*, and *Batman,* and argue that the narrative dressing of villains is utilized to enforce normative categorical identities, but that these same material displays also challenge restrictive binary identifications of power, gender, and morality.

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, who supports me at my most villainous, and my children, who are always willing to be my henchmen.

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The readings of Madame de la Rougierre and the Beetle of chapter 3 were inspired by my analysis in "'It was impossible such a creature could be feminine': fashioning villainy and the language of the grotesque in Gothic fiction," published in 2019 in *Fashion and Material Culture in Victorian Fiction and Periodicals*. The analysis of Jack the Ripper in chapter 4 was inspired by my work on "Murder for a Penny: Jack the Ripper and the Structural Impact of Sensational Reporting," from the 2019 *Wilkie Collins Journal* special issue, *Victorian Popular Journalism and Fiction: Interactions.*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is about looking the part, taking as its subject the dressing of villains in Victorian and contemporary popular media, a discursive question significant in the analysis and understanding of the development of identities in cultural objects which has, hitherto, been neglected. *Dressing* in popular media is a booming field of research, and the focus of scholars in such diverse fields as literary studies, women's studies, gender studies, media studies, comics studies, and history. Michael Carter writes that "In three short essays published in the late 1950s Roland Barthes undertook to bring about a revolution in how dress was to be studied and perhaps, even, how it was to be worn" (345), in 1978 Anne Hollander brilliantly examines the function of fashions in art in *Seeing Through Clothes*, and Jennie Batchelor and Christine Bayles Kortsch read the fashioned body in eighteenth and nineteenth century English literature. Clothes (in part) make the man in Richard Faber's *Proper Stations: Class in Victorian Fiction* (1971), make the woman in Kate Soper's "Dress Needs: Reflections on the Clothed Body, Selfhood and Consumption," and make the Superman in Barbara Brownie and Danny Graydon's 2016 *The Superhero Costume: Identity and Disguise in Fact and Fiction*. But what this valuable scholarship has in common, often unwittingly, is a focus on normativity. Current research overwhelming concentrates on how the masses are dressed (i.e. how normativity is performed), or how the exceptionally positive are dressed (i.e. as models of good taste, or superheroes signifying their righteousness). Against this normative grain, this dissertation examines non-normative sartorial signaling in gothic novels and *Batman* comics: how villains are materially represented in order to communicate their identities and their deviances to audiences through the cultural dialects of fashion. I argue that the narrative dressing of villains is utilized to enforce

normative categorical identities, but also that these same material displays challenge restrictive binary identifications of power, gender, and morality, showing that the cultural cloth is not so tightly stitched in the gothic or Gotham.

Fashion and clothing are not just material and historical artifacts, but also key, meaningful elements of *stories*. Throughout narrative traditions clothes function as signifiers and lexicons, coded systems established within cultures and times, and are used to communicate complex systems of identity. Fashion is used to indicate gender, wealth, political status, occupation, religious affiliation, and so much more. "[T]he primary function of …a garment itself …, in the main tradition of Western dress, is to contribute to the making of a self-conscious individual image, an image linked to all other imaginative and idealized visualizations of the human body," writes art historian Anne Hollander, who further notes that "Anthropologists and sociologists have demonstrated that peoples who do not wear garments nevertheless develop habits of self-adornment that seem, as Western clothing does, to be a necessary sign of full humanity: they are ways of clothing the human body in some completed concept of itself without actually concealing any portion of its surface or shape," identifying the persistent significance of self-adornment to the concept of personhood (xiv, 83).

Fashioning Stories

Clothing is a link between narrative and literal worlds, and from an early age children are taught that fashion in general, and articles of clothing in particular, are of great and specific cultural significance. In the Western tradition, Red Riding Hood is a beautiful young girl named for an item of clothing which has no functional purpose in the story, other than to lend the character her identity as a child separate (and held in higher esteem) from others in her community (Perrault). In "Cinderella" a young woman's shoe is a surrogate for the wearer:

despite dancing closely with the mysterious maiden all night for three nights, the prince is unable to recognize his companion, and relies on the fit of her slipper to positively identify Cinderella (Grimm). The theme persists throughout a spectrum of genres: Medea uses a poisoned gown to secure revenge against Jason in Euripides' tragedy, Sir Gawayne is protected from death by an enchanted girdle in Arthurian legend, and Viola steps into the Duke's favor when she steps into men's clothing and the role of Cesario in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night.* In Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina* the titular character is able to fool an unfaithful lover into believing she is four different women, all through the changing of her dress and cosmetics, and a woman uses tight-laced corsets to produce purposefully-deformed children in "A Mother of Monsters" by Guy de Maupassant. The codes of clothing have been written into law, as Kate Soper remembers that "[t]he extensive sumptuary laws on dress and other modes of consumption, which persisted until the nineteenth century, were expressly designed to preserve a supposedly natural and divinely ordained difference of class and rank, and to prevent upward mobility" (Soper 21); though Elizabethan sumptuary laws are largely forgotten by the general public, purple remains a color associated with royalty. The American film industry has assured that striped stockings and conical hats will mark wearers as "witches." A red hood, a shoe, a dress, a girdle, a corset, a robe, a pointy hat; folklore and fairytales build cultural literacies, teaching the young to read bodies and clothing just as readily as they read the words that describe them. Though the specific values and meanings are unique within communities, every civilization throughout recorded history has adorned bodies in specific and meaningful ways (Hollander 83), beyond the basic functions of warmth and protection; to dress is the first thing that Adam and Eve do when they gain their humanity after eating from the Tree of Knowledge, and to dress well is a subject of discourse alive in periodicals today. On the significance and "need" of clothing, Soper says that

"since some form of decoration of the body and its use as signifier has been a feature of human societies from earliest times, we are not talking here of a need that is any more obviously 'cultural' in status than that for clothing as protection" (17). In her history of clothing in art Anne Hollander agrees: "People without clothes are still likely to behave as if they wore them; and so 'natural' nudity is affected by two kinds of ideal nudity – the one created by clothes directly and the one created by nude art, which also depends on fashions of dress. *Clothes, even when omitted, cannot be escaped* [emphasis added]" (87). Fashion is a system from which none can be exempt; to express disinterest in fashion and clothing is to contribute to the dialogue of fashion in a time and place, just as much as an active pursuit of fashionable expression. Fashion – the choice and style of dress, cosmetics, and personal appearance – is at the center of this dissertation, which reads sartorial lexicons in the construction of villainous characters in the late Victorian gothic and in *Batman* properties. Specifically, it reads fashion as a through-narrative between genres, capable of communicating significant cultural ideas related to expressed and lived identities. Material appearance imparts substantial meanings in cultural texts beyond the primary story, developing characters and offering moral and narrative guides to readers.

One such extraordinary communicative narrative is found in the purposeful disruption of visual identity performed by the infamously clown-faced *Batman* villain the Joker. The Joker, directly inspired by the disfigured character of Victor Hugo's 1869 novel *The Man Who Laughs*, is from the first a gothic character who in his first issue mysteriously murders Gotham citizens as he robs them of their valuables (White 9-10). The Joker's appearance quickly becomes iconic, and comics scholar Glen Weldon writes: "Even in this first tale, so much of what will forever define the character was already set in stone – the white face, green hair, and red lips; the impossible rictus grin; the Joker venom; the maniacal laughter; and the riverboat-gamble

couture: tails, vest, spats, and hat" (38). As the chaotic foil to Batman's focused intensity, the Joker's uncanny face – specifically his manic grin – comes to signify his violent villainy, and audiences learn to read the fashioned face as a warning. But in a 2011 *New 52* comic book by Tony S. Daniel the author defies this definition, and intensifies the gothic affect of a villain who laughs. In a gruesome act of assisted self-mutilation, the Joker employs *Batman* villain the Dollmaker to surgically remove the Joker's face. With this violent procedure the Joker has removed the signifiers of his static and familiar identity. In his mutilation the Joker defies definition: is he alive? Is he dead? Is he a victim? What does he *look like*? The melodramatic theatricality of this contemporary scene of violent exceptionism resonates with the defining anxiety and drama of nineteenth-century gothic novels. Where Daniel writes of serial killers as Dollmakers and Jokers, Oscar Wilde writes of the misreading of morality in beauty, and Bram Stoker of the adaptability of predators in capitalistic societies. Within the literary forms of gothic novels and *Batman* comics, villainy is a designation articulated through material performance, allowing authors to draw on the historical-cultural literacy of fashions and clothing in order to expound deviant qualities in the very embodiment of a figure: villains *look* villainous and threatening to an audience schooled in cultural systems of normativity and social expectation. Yet villains are not shackled to normativity, and perform a wide range of deviant, edgy, unusual, or unacceptable gendered roles, at times even shifting within a text. The gothic or comic villain articulates the instability of fashion literacy, presenting undecipherable, misread, or exceptional bodies who perform outside of an established cultural vocabulary, giving a figure of power to types which are disparaged in other social contexts: the femme, the queer, the Other. As these narratives are developed, readers come to recognize the nuance of villainy as a dialect of its own, and its representative corollary in the capitalistic material world of fashion.

"Wait till they get a load of me"[1] Defining "Villain"

The manufacture of monsters and monstrosity is a robust field of study, and scholars such as Jack Halberstam and Nina Auerbach have centered the figure of the gothic monster in foundational texts such as *Skin Shows* and *Our Vampires, Ourselves*. Many of the figures of this dissertation are monstrous – figuratively, and at times literally. And though I consider their monstrosity, the primary focus of my analysis is on their villainy, which I argue is performed separately, although at times symbiotically, from their monstrosity. So, it is essential from the offset to establish a definition of "villain" as it pertains to this dissertation. Drawing from popular media scholarship, linguistic traditions, and an analysis of the villains here described, I argue that a villain is a character who consciously and purposefully deviates from standards of normativity in order to pursue their own, often criminal, interests. It feels admittedly trite to offer a definition from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, but Peter Coogan looks no further than *Wikipedia* for his own definition, and the *OED*'s entry offers far more depth to the noun. The entry for "villain" beings with "originally, a low-born base-minded rustic; a man of ignoble ideas or instincts;" and states that the term is "in later use, an unprincipled or depraved scoundrel; a man naturally disposed to base or criminal actions, or deeply involved in the commission of disgraceful crimes" (61). Early *Batman* comics themselves illustrate the classist assumptions on the relationship between crime and social status, demonstrating a clear social connection between the concepts of "low-born base-minded rustic[s]" and "a man naturally disposed to base or criminal actions." The concept of a villain in literature, though, goes further than mere criminality, and the terms is used to introduce a sense of foreboding; when Richard III says "And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover, /To entertain these fair well-spoken days, /I am

[1] Jack Nicholson as the Joker in Tim Burton's 1989 *Batman*

determined to prove a **villain** /And hate the idle pleasures of these days" the audience is prepared for a level of social deviance and malignancy far beyond pick-pocketing and destruction of property (I.i.126-9).

The works of Mike Alsford and Lynette Porter address the subject of villainy directly, analyzing the archetype in relation to contemporary popular media. Porter writes that "A constant in the definition of villain is that villains act for themselves and display no remorse over their actions that affect the lives of innocents" (35), and Alsford agrees in saying "[i]t seems to me that at the very heart of the notion of the villain is a refusal to submit to the social contract – for whatever reason – and a willful attempt at exploiting the fact that the rest of society chooses to be bound by it" (Alsford 106). Porter suggests that the villain has become a more sympathetic character in 21st century television, as "[a]udiences might understand that villains were abused, abandoned, or otherwise traumatized earlier in their life, which leads them to bad behavior later..." (48), but sympathy for the devil does not protect one from threat: "True villainy has to do with the desire to dominate, to subsume the other within the individual self and that *without compunction*" (emphasis added, Alsford 120). Though Alsford paints the subject of villainy in rather broad strokes, and allows the categorical title to be applied more liberally than the class of fictional characters I define here, his chapter offers insights that support an understanding of how villains come to a place of purposeful deviant material performance.[2]

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[2] Alsford argues in *Heroes and Villains* that the core of villainy is the individualism decried by philosophers, critiqued in Orwellian dystopias, and nonetheless upheld as a Western (particularly American) value (98-107). "Largely as a result of Saint-Simonian ideas, individualism became widely used in the nineteenth century and in France, even to the present day, carries a pejorative connotation" (98), but "[b]y the end of the civil war individualism had come to occupy an important place in the American vocabulary," the conflicting principles decrying a retreat from public unity – a stronger collective whole – and an idealized "road to perfection as involving a society of self-determined individuals" (98-9). While Alsford's illustrative use of Hitler and Nazism feels a bit like Godwin's law[2], after which the literary examples of Macbeth, *Doctor Who*, and *Narnia*'s White Queen are less impactful, his assertion that "to define ourselves in isolation from others, to see our humanity as residing purely and simply in our autonomous self somehow disconnected from the rest of the world is … a dangerous thing" gestures towards the cultural and social fears found in my current work.

Villains are compelling for the very agency that threatens the cultural majority – the defiance that at first marks them as villainous. Says Alsford, "The person who operates according to their own rules, who refuses to conform or be limited by convention or taboo has a strength and presence that it is hard to ignore and in some ways is hard not to admire" (95). Alsford's complete definition of villainy is ultimately too restrictive for the subjects of this dissertation, assuming a sense of reason not always demonstrated by those I will call villains, but his relation of villainy to social contracts and conventions gets to the heart of the performative identity as recognized in the chapters to follow. A villain, in my use, is not just a synonym for a "really bad guy," a "crook," or a "criminal mastermind": it is a categorical identity. Villains are "guilty" of perceived violations of social mores, and whether or not they agree with the merits of those mores, they accept the consequent status of "other" by their continued performance; they "refus[e] to submit to the social contract" and "[exploit] the fact that the rest of society chooses to be bound by it" (Alsford 106). They don't want to be "good," and often flourish in their deviant identities – using fashion and form like peacocks. While the villain is often guilty of literal crimes, it is a villain's performance of social that illustrates what is *possible* if the cultural fabric begins to unravel, and what is achievable when an individual recognizes cultural proscriptions and elects to deviate for individual representation – when they choose to become a villain. They are in fact threats to social order for their failure to subscribe to cultural laws as much as judicial laws; their symbolic and representative power is sexy in a way that entices audiences, allowing them to indulge in fantasies of release while performing "disgust" with a villain's crimes, and vindication at a villain's punishment.

In a narrative and linguistic sense, the designation of "villain" carries a particular significance recognizable to audiences from Iago's treachery to the Joker's anarchy. A villain is

not (just) a crook, a gangster, a murderer – nothing so banal or limited to the judiciary scripts of organized law enforcement. The signifier of "villain" articulates a different purpose – an adversarial relationship with normativity that guides personal identification. Villains are a conscious class, distinguished by their awareness of expectations and regulations, and their purposeful engagement with the fringe and deviant. Not exceptional to a gendered cultural system, they are informed by the societies in which they operate, and the cultural literacy of their authors. Yet they actively manipulate readings of their gendered, raced, and classed bodies, using costumes and masks and dress to communicate through conventions of fashion. This class well understands performativity, reading bodies and recognizing how they themselves are read, capable of conforming (and may do so temporarily for deviant purposes), and still choosing differently for a variety of reasons, manipulating performativity in an expression of individual identification.

Literature Review: On Comics

The history of comics has been done, and done well. Comics historians such as Bradford Wright, Hillary Chute, David Hajdu, and Jean-Paul Gabilliet draw clear and specific lineages for comics that take deepest root in the nineteenth century (and acknowledge that the history continues back further still). Wright's chapter "The Origins of the Comic Book Industry" relates that "The American comic book industry is a twentieth-century phenomenon with origins in the late nineteenth century. While the juxtaposition of words and images is as old as language itself, the nearest precursor to comic books is the newspaper strip, which became a familiar daily distraction for Americans as early as the 1890s" (2). Hillary Chute likewise points to the American newspapers of the late nineteenth-century in *Why Comics?*, and further reads the history of *cartoons* as a means of narrative exposition, relating that "[the term] was first used to

indicate ‘humorous drawing, which is how people widely think of it today, in 1843, in London’s *Punch* magazine…” (6). Cartoons, then, predate the novels here selected, and comic strips are contemporaneous with five of the seven novels later discussed. Though *Batman* will not see print until forty-one years after the publication of *Dracula* and *The Beetle*, the cultural space between them is not so great.

Scholars and historians have worked diligently to build the field of comics studies establishing a history and tracing the cultural impact of the medium to demonstrate its weight and significance as an area of study. It’s not just kid stuff – it could be “a legitimate medium for the best of writers and artists,” as Will Eisner predicted (Hajdu 39). David Hajdu’s history of the comics industry is one of people; *The Ten-Cent Plague* tells the stories of early comics creators and publishers, and establishes a social context for a medium that continues to draw public attention. Supplementing the historical facts – such as “the number of comic books published ballooned from about 150 in 1937 to nearly 700 in 1940” (34) – with personal narratives, Hajdu retells the story of comics development in the context of American cultural shifts and ideas. Acknowledging scholarship that claims “the earliest North American cartoons” is “a Puritan-era children’s book published in 1646: ‘The Burning of Mr. John Rogers,’” Jean-Paul Gabilliet looks to 1842 for “the first comic book published in the United States,” and in the opening chapter of *Of Comics and Men* traces the publication history from 1842 through newspaper comics, the development of individual comic books, and the early days of the industry.

Bradford Wright’s history of comics and culture focuses on the development of youth culture, and its expression through comics publication across centuries. In his introduction Wright remarks that “Comic books have always been the domain of the young: children, adolescents, and young adults. Generally fashioned for an adolescent audience by creators often

little older, comic books have spoken to youths' concerns and sensibilities with consistency and directness that few, if any, other entertainment media can claim" (xvi), and asserts that "Any scholar seeking to test how deeply popular assumptions about issues like the New Deal, the Vietnam War, and gender roles penetrated into the American consciousness ought to consider what comic books had to say about those topics" (xvi). Because comics are traditionally written by the young, for the slightly younger, Wright argues that comics are uniquely capable of communicating the cultural, political, and social concerns and beliefs of a generation not yet in power, but on the verge of change-making themselves. I, and thus this dissertation, agree with Wright in the belief that comics offer a useful reflection of culture-building, due in part to the intended readership and means of consumption: as a form of popular entertainment quickly produced on a continual basis, comics offer a "now" that novels are less capable of, particularly as "now" changes, and so do comics. However, Wright's analysis is not necessarily timeless. He asserts that comics "are the domain of young people, who inevitably outgrow them, recall them fondly, and then look at the comic books of their own children and grandchildren with a mixture of bewilderment and, perhaps, concern" (xiii), an assumption in which he is not alone, and yet fails to recognize the breadth of comics consumption. *Because* Wright is studying youth culture, and *because* the industry overwhelmingly *targets* the adolescent (27), Wright and other scholars *assume* that the medium is the primary purview of the juvenile. Comics scholars now not only recognize the adult readership of comics, but often themselves come to the field of study through continued interest in comics from their childhoods through professional development. Julia Round and Hillary Chute are some such scholars. In *Why Comics?* Hillary Chute qualifies that "the comic book ... was firmly associated with youth culture … at least in the first few decades," (11), acknowledging both the history that inspires Wright, and the shift that happens as comics

evolve. In the preface to *Gothic in Comics and Graphic Novels* Julia Round remarks that "I wonder now if my misspent youth was so misspent after all," recalling her time as a teenage comics reader "beginning with *Sandman*, moving on through *Preacher*, and spreading outwards like a virus" (5). Comics readers, and comic scholars, have grown up, and the industry has grown with them.

Fashion in Literary Studies

I am certainly not the first to see Gothic shadows in comics, or to see the value of material fashions represented and utilized in narrative culture. Round's careful project grounds her comparative analysis in established theoretical approaches, opening each chapter with a literature review intended to offer readers intellectual lenses through which to understand not the literature of comics themselves, but their social and cultural functions as texts and objects. Round's work is as much about the readers as it is the genre. In *Gothic in Comics and Graphic Novels*, Julia Round makes a strong argument for the relationship between gothic convention and contemporary comic books. In the text's introduction Round writes that "Gothic's revivalist tendencies mean that gothic stories frequently retell old or traditional tales" and "has also long been identified as containing a dual sense of play and fear," continuing that

> [t]he playful and subversive nature of the comics medium …. can be viewed similarly, and also links to notions of excess; and many genres of comics (crime, horror, thriller) also recall the gothic literature of sensation in their subject matter and style. (7-8).

Round's project is one of textual and cultural comparison, using gothic conventions as a lens through which to read contemporary horror comics, demonstrating the connection between nineteenth-century popular fiction and culture, and comics, and identifying motifs and

techniques used timelessly to appeal to audiences. While it is common to distinguish comics from "literary" texts such as *Dracula* and *The Castle of Otranto,* Round's research marks this distinction as artificial. Concluding "A Comparative Study of Goth and Comics Cultures," Round writes:

> Angela Carter famously stated "We live in gothic times," referring to the redefinition of once-marginalized genres as dominant modes of discourse (1974: 122). This claim is supported by the expansion of fandom and its practices, and the mainstream adoption of subcultural style. Goth and comics cultures are rich in their commodities and practices, which contain some similar strategies and tensions. (154)

In using the gothic as a means of cultural comparison, Round is drawing on established critical approaches and cultural understanding to build a nuanced and layered understanding of comics and comics culture. Her goal is to advance comics as a continuation of the popular culture materials of the nineteenth century, ultimately emphasizing the remarkable similarities between genres, and identifying common histories and understandings to forward comics studies.

In defining the dual literacy which drives the analysis of *Dress Culture in Late Victorian Women's Fiction,* Christine Kortsch's writes of fabric reading and Victorian women's cultural strength, saying "women's sanctioned knowledge of all things pertaining to sewing and clothing gave them a certain kind of authority in a patriarchal society" (13). Other material scholars concur, as Jennie Batchelor asserts that "Dress functions as a kind of meta-language, succeeding and transcending verbal forms of communication" in the eighteenth-century fiction of her research (13), and Catherine Spooner observes that "the body in Western culture is inarticulate except through clothes. The so-called 'natural' body is always filtered through the dual lens of

fashion and artistic convention" (3). Working specifically within the Gothic genre, Spooner, repeats that, "'One of the ways in which the body can be made docile is through clothing. Dress renders it analyzable, either forcibly through required clothing, or voluntarily through self-selected garments. … we can also see the flesh made fabric through clothing: dress is the text that first clothes and then displaces the body'" (Spooner 12). Villains – and their authors – recognize this potential, and seek to become uncanny as they render the familiar unfamiliar, teasing their narrative associates with deviant and shifting representations.

Fashion historians and literary scholars have recognized the value of reading clothing in visual and non-visual texts, analyzing the function of dress as a narrative layer that builds towards complex social representations. American designer Rachel Zoe asserts that "style is a way to say who you are without having to speak." Style, fashion, and clothing make up a nuanced language that transcends genre and time, functioning as clearly in narrative texts as on city streets, molded by cultures and societies, and contentiously policed by the keepers of value and "taste." As Catherine Spooner demonstrates in *Fashioning Gothic Bodies*, the material construction of the body in literature is essential to the successful performance of Gothic affect – the feelings of horror, unease, and disquiet introduced by uncanny narratives. Clothing grounds at-times fantastic villains in the literally possible. In the absence of a villain's clear articulation of motivation, fashion and the body serve as a bridge dialogue, allowing authors to express intent and moral quality, while distancing themselves, the writers, from the thoughts of their immoral characters.This assertion is at the core of both Spooner's work and this dissertation, and begins with Spooner's argument that "Clothing is above all a means of inserting the self into social discourse, literary or otherwise" and "the body constructed through dress is not universal, but historically and culturally specific" (Spooner 12, 3, 14).

Traditionally, literary and cultural studies treat texts as objects produced by both an author and culture, and thus representative of the author's response to the time and culture in which they write. Gender studies looks more broadly at the social institutions of gender, to consider what society and culture *do* to the *individual*, and imagined categories of identification. When examining the function and expression of sex and gender in literary works, researchers often look to protagonists, audience surrogates, or tragic figures which engage the sympathy of the reader most directly, and thus inspire intellectual investment and perhaps a desire for redemption. Here, necessitous performativity is established as a site of oppression which problematizes gender as an institution forced upon this individual, whose compliance or deviance is a sustained struggle which critically inhibits progress or the development of personal potential; gender studies looks for the oppressive and the dysfunctional to offer a perspective on what scholars such as Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick have established as biologically artificial, but socially ingrained, and violently policed. Thus, gender studies seek reconciliatory expressions of character identification within not just the sphere of the text, but that of the reader.

Gender, Queer Theory, and Fashioning the Other

That clothes may or may not represent who someone *is* is a question popular with queer theorists, particularly when the subject is categorically deviant by the definitions of a sexist or homophobic majority. Judith Butler's 1988 "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," and later *Gender Trouble,* have become pillars of gender, queer, and identity theories, encouraging scholars and readers to consider gender identity not as biologically imperative, but as cultural (522). An oft-applied lens for literary analysis, identity studies engage with performativity as a site of oppression, problematizing gender as an institutional performance forced upon the individual, whose compliance or defiance is a sustained struggle under the weight of normativity.

In relating the theory of performativity to theatricality, Butler asserts that gender is inherently a surface construction, with "cultural survival at its end" (522) – a strictly-policed romance of normativity that one literally "put[s] on" (531). J. Halberstam recognizes this function in the costuming of the Gothic, saying that "The monster is always a master of disguise," and that the fluidity of his identification, his rejection of definition, is what ultimately marks him as "monstrous" and causes unease for the audience. Further, Halberstam asserts that "We might almost say that the grotesque effect of Gothic is achieved through a kind of transvestism, a dressing up that reveals itself as costume. Gothic is a cross-dressing, drag, a performance of textuality, an infinite readability …" (Halberstam 59, 60), forming a connection to Butler's assertions of dress, performance, and space, wherein a drag queen in a theatre is applauded, but a drag queen on a bus is regarded with fear and suspicion (Butler 527). Thus, potential authors of gender deviance seek out theatrical spaces in which to forward their countering ideas, careful to mark the Other, but also giving that same Other a performance space in which to seduce an audience – the novel, or the comic panel. Villainy continues the project of gender performativity by acknowledging the fulfilling possibilities of breaking normative binaries, and this dissertation seeks to read their fashioned bodies for the alternative scripts they offer.

A villainous performance is a release from social contracts that lends itself to the theory of disidentification, which this project will use to answer the question of how a character within such a force may read, navigate, and still purposefully perform a deviant identity. Developed by José Esteban Muñoz to consider how a queer minority establishes an affirmative identity in comparison with an oppressive majority, disidentification is significantly defined as a survival strategy adopted by minorities in their navigation of toxic normativity (4). Where Muñoz reads drag shows, punk rock, and queer theatre, I read the performative villains of *Batman* and the late

Gothic, asserting that their theatrical representations of self demonstrate the same awareness as drag performer Vaginal Creme Davis and comedian Marga Gomez. It is a self-authoring, an assertion of deviant personhood, which allows the subject agency in a system which would otherwise repress not just their actions, but their sense of self. In their efforts to avoid, or escape from, the madhouses and prisons which would confine and restrain them, they demonstrate an avoidance of institutionalized identification: the Joker is fully aware of his own madness, but he'll never accept the demotive identity of an Arkham *patient*, Dr. Jekyll would rather commit suicide than face the social and punitive reparations for his Hyde-masked actions, and Dr. Moreau will create a full civilization of Beast Men before he accepts the limitations and branding of British society.

In *Queer Retrosexuality,* Nishant Shahani considers the rise of retro fashions in queer communities as an expression of retro sexuality, linking contemporary trends in personal fashioning to a quest for social reparations against a society whose violent rejection and criminalization has left lasting trauma in populations who were not even alive for the initial violence. Shahani says that "The iconic appropriation of the past and fashionable fetishization of all things 'retro' becomes a race that marks the failure of postmodernity to grapple with history in any proper sense. Nostalgia, for [Frederic] Jameson, is mediated by what he calls 'the iron law of fashion change' that includes the architectural obsession with 1920s art deco styles, the postmodern pastiche of Hollywood film, and the remarketing of 1950s Elvis" (5). My understanding, then, is that we're not understanding history, or doing history, so much as buying a form of history which has been affectively marketed through fetish – one that, through their examples, I connect to a definition of glamour and grace (as further defined by Appadurai p. 6). Relying on Lee Edelman's advocacy of "an embrace of negativity that refuses the pull towards

affirmation or the attachment of social meaning to queerness," and the "pleasurable dimensions of the negative embrace" which can "illuminate the pleasure seeking possibilities that mark a perverse return to the 1950s"[3] (21), Shahani promises to examine "the seductive and communal pleasures in embracing a moment when queerness appeared to challenge the very foundations of the social order" (21). Ultimately, these ideas come together to define the theoretical approach of queer retrosexualities, in which the perverse reading of nostalgic materiality demonstrates an "embrace [of] the otherness and prohibitions of the 1950s" (25). Queer retrosexuality relies on the return to trauma, and the exploration of shame, negating the strictly historical in favor of locating a reparative moment. The perverse becomes empowering, history is temporary, and nostalgia is paradoxical.

The Gothic and comic genres are particularly suited for an interrogation of gender, the material construction of identity, and deviance, equally poignant whether it is the Beetle lounging menacingly in bedclothes (Marsh 86) or Catwoman slipping into a fetishistic suit as easily as she slips into private residences. The work of the Gothic and comics is significantly similar, as they bring the extraordinary to the domestic sphere of the audience, offering outlandish purple prose for entertainment, instruction, and cultural reflection. Given parallel methods and purposes, a comparative reading of the two offers a deeper understanding of the lexicon and function of gendered fashion within each, as well as the political and social subjects they represent. Both genres standardize identities through commercialization and timely material fashions, representing gendered spheres, class, and morality, and inviting a reading of the represented body, theatrical in proportion to the sensationalism of the narratives.

[3] See Lee Edelman's *No Future*

"Visibility is a trap," Foucault ominously intones of the panoptical space, and one which these theoretical approaches will help discern in an analysis of gendered villainous performativity (200). In this dissertation I study the purposeful manipulation of performativity and material identities on the part of villains, examining the autonomous agency exercised by a gendered categorical class of character who are both demonstrably aware of the restrictive cultural definitions that work to bind them, and are yet tantalizingly unfettered in their self-identification and narrative movements. This project will approach villains as manipulators of social constructs. A reading of this purposeful counter-authoring challenges static binaries of identity categories and forwards a more nuanced understanding of the representation of spectrum identity in popular literature and culture at large. These villains are narratively *capable* of following fashions, they actively read bodies, and still perform differently.

The Plurality of the Other(s): On Race and Villainy

This dissertation focuses closely on gender as a productive lens through which to examine the cultural construction of villainy, but it is essential to acknowledge that the definition and construction of gender is itself reliant on other socially-constructed boundaries. The construction of gender is complicated by the institutions of class and, significantly, race. It is important to recognize that definitions of gender in America specifically, and in Western culture at large, are implicitly tied to race, so that standards of manhood and womanhood are reliant on models of white masculinity and femininity.

Critical Race Theory recognizes the active oppression in the racial framing of gender, identifying the inherent othering utilized to establish social boundaries. Marlon B. Ross writes that "Jim Crow is as much a regime of sexual classification as it is a form of racial imposition" (2), and observes that "an internal color/gender line" is established to quell competition between

"white founders and directors" and "black men *and women"* (2). In *Manning the Race: Reforming Black Men in the Jim Crow Era,* Ross "spotlights the constant interplay between, on the one hand, race as a contested gender line of demarcation bifurcating the category 'man' into superior versus inferior males and, on the other hand, gender as a racially contested line of demarcation diving the category of 'race' into manly versus unmanly groups of men" (5).

Theorists argue that the intersection of race and gender identification is a product of nineteenth century anxieties, and a drive towards a system of classification that privileges white heteronormative patriarchy and imperialist actions. In *Queering the Color Line,* Siobhan B. Somerville interrogates the development of interdependent identities in the nineteenth-century, reflecting on "how negotiations of the color line … shaped and were shaped by the emergence of notions of sexual identity" (3). The segregation enforced by *Plessy v. Ferguson* "recalled slavery's racialized distinctions between 'slave' and 'free,'" she writes, "but reconfigured this binary by articulating it in exclusively racial terms, the imagined division between 'black' and 'white' bodies" (1). Siobhan argues that "only in the late nineteenth century did a new understanding of sexuality emerge, in which sexual acts and desires became constitutive of identity" and that "the simultaneous efforts to shore up and bifurcate categories of race and sexuality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were deeply intertwined" (3). Marlon B. Ross agrees, and argues that

> The Jim Crow regime poses an impossible paradox for those endeavoring to build an efficacious black manhood. On the one hand, the Jim Crow system insists that men of African descent are not fully men – in effect, that they are not capable of being *normal* men […]. In managing the color line effectively, the Jim Crow regime finds itself attempting to guard a sexual fault line that not only tries

> to segregate black men from white women but also – and less frequently analyzed – tries to segregate white men from black men, except in those scenarios where the white man's authority over black men is institutionally and structurally staged and enforced. (1, 2)

Toni Morrison recognizes the same gendered aggression when she writes of gender, feminism, and race. She argues that "Nothing in black life supports the thesis of black men as 'feminized' by their women and everything points to white male suppression as the emasculating force. Yet this distortion is thriving like health" and though the "abolitionist movement yielded suffragettes" and "the mid-twentieth-century civil Right movements yielded Woman's Liberation" both movements for social reform "abandoned black civil rights and regarded the shift away from the race problem as an inevitable and necessary development -an opportunity to concentrate on exclusively sexist issues" ("Women, Race, and Memory" 93, 87). Morrison demonstrates the connection between systems of oppression, and argues that these "shifts" away from civil rights "marked the first stage of divisiveness and heralded a future of splinter groups and self-sabotage" in movements for equality (87). In this way the nineteenth century systems of classification continue to successfully police boundaries, establishing an assumption of whiteness as a model of gender, and thus artificially dividing movements of racial and gender equality. That the successful villains (as the categorical class has been defined in this introduction) of popular media remain overwhelmingly white likewise speaks to the continued influence of these nineteenth century anxieties and gatekeeping.

This gatekeeping is both figurative and literal; the villains of this dissertation are overwhelmingly white because their very performative villainy is reliant on their proximity to white bodies. The gothic horror of these texts relies on a social intimacy that consistently

precludes people of color, whose Othering along race/gender lines excludes their representation. Dracula's whiteness is essential to his masquerade, allowing him to permeate British society for the perceived respectability of his skin. Were she of African descent, Madame de la Rougierre would be unable to pass as a model of femininity for Maud, Madame's assumed inferiority then marked by her race. And their very whiteness is what allows comics villains to consistently challenge the authority of Batman, relying on suppositions of potential power to establish their actual threat to Gotham City. The Beetle, the one villain *not* coded as white, is represented as so ugly they violate all gender codes, and so deviant they cannot be human.

Methodology

The groundwork for the comparative critical examination of popular multimedia texts has been laid by communications and cultural historians, and by media theorists. In the introduction to *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, Marie-Laure Ryan writes that "In 1964 Claude Bremond wrote: '[Story] is independent of the techniques that bear it along. It may be transposed from one to another medium without losing its essential properties…'" (1), witnessing that "[a]round 1930 the term medium entered language to designate channels of communication." But even as a narrative may exist across media, "[e]ven when they seek to make themselves invisible, media are not hollow conduits for the transmission of messages but material supports of information whose materiality, precisely, 'matters' for the type of meanings that can be encoded" (Ryan 26, 1-2). That my sources are novels and comics and films *matters*, as I examine the way artists and authors utilize similar concepts – specifically, the material construction of identities – in very different ways. Noting that "Ong (1982) has objected to a conception of media that reduces them to 'pipelines for the transfer of a material called information,'" she nonetheless importantly notes that "the shape of the pipe affects the kind of

information that can be transmitted, alters the conditions of reception, and often leads to the creation of works tailor-made for the medium" (Ryan "Narration in Various Media"). While stories may cross boundaries, I will argue that their success may be made or undone by the choices of artists in the narrative, visual, and material constructions of the same villain across multiple entertainment platforms. As Kyle Meikle notes, "producers of adaptations often attempt, in varying degrees, to bring new audiences into the fold alongside the old, as novels meet films, or readers meet viewers, or—to employ Linda Hutcheon's specific distinction in *A Theory of Adaptation*—knowing audiences meet unknowing audiences."

In "A Theory of Adaptation Audiences," Meikle reads extensively of adaptation studies, and importantly argues that "Adaptation is not simply the price of admission for those audiences, but part of the attraction. That is, an adaptation is not only an invitation to experience a work anew in a different textual and/or medial framework; it is also an experience unto itself." As similarly argued by Linda Hutcheon, these experiences are not hierarchical, but *different*. In her prologue to *A Theory of Adaptation,* Linda Hutcheon argues that "There are many shared lessons taught by Kristevan intertextuality theory and Derridean deconstruction and by Foucauldian challenges to unified subjectivity and the often radically egalitarian approach to stories (in all media) by both narratology and cultural studies. One lesson is that to be second is not to be secondary or inferior; likewise, to be first is not to be originary or authoritative" (xiii). This is a key assertion that I wish to echo, as I approach both first and adaptive texts in my reading of performative villainy across time and genre. Though "in both academic criticism and journalistic reviewing, contemporary popular adaptations are most often put down as secondary, derivative, 'belated, middlebrow, or culturally inferior,'" I, like Hutcheon, reject the notion that one medium is superior to another, and I likewise reject the assertion that adaptation is intrinsically

substandard (2). Instead, I assert that these texts represent a spectrum of concepts and perspectives, and that the primary concern of my analysis – the *adaptation* of fashion into multimedia sources – is enriched by the variance in narrative, analytical, and artistic approaches uniquely allowed by different media texts. As Hutcheon, "My working assumption is that common denominators across media and genres can be as revealing as significant differences" (xiv).

Hutcheon writes that "some media and genres are used to *tell* stories (for example, novels, short stories); others *show* them (for instance, all performance media); and still others allow us to interact physically and kinesthetically with them" (xiv) and that "Some theorists argue that, at a basic level, there is no significant difference between a verbal text and visual images […] A consideration of the difference between the modes of engagement of telling and showing, however, suggests quite the contrary: each mode, like each medium, *has* its own specificity, if not its own essence" (Hutcheon 23-4). I agree with Hutcheon, and so much recognize the variance in analysis of my primary rhetorical vehicle: fashion. In reading fashion in a novel, I am in fact reading what I've been told about the material fashioning of a character. In the absence of visual cues, the reader must imagine the gold of Lady Audley's hair, the shade of purple of Madame's gown, and the weave of the Beetle's robes. Novelists rely heavily on the sartorial literacy of a reader for both literal and figurative coding of dress, communicating sensory materiality in a single dimension. This is far different from the experience of comics creators and readers. In comics, a visual text is directly offered to the reader, who then consumes a far more static representation of an illustrated character. The visual representation of a character is more concretely asserted, and thus becomes a clear symbol of that character; they are visually recognizable. But like novelists, comics creators are arguably unburdened by the physics

of lived existence. Though they may elect to represent fashions realistically, skirt hems are not subject to the forces of gravity, or characters subject to the complexity of securing a collection of bespoke bifurcated suits. Live action adaptations, such as films, represent complex layering of analysis, artistic output, and material restriction, as an actress is dressed in a costume designed, manufactured, and inspired by a bevy of texts and creators. Cosplay, as a live-action performance art, focuses on the primacy of visual representation over action, and is thus arguably an interceding adaptation – it is a potentially fixed or static source, introduced into active spaces by its display on a cosplayer's body.

"The Victorians had a habit of adapting just about everything – and in just about every possible direction; the stories of poems, novels, plays, operas, paintings, songs, dances, and *tableaux vivants* were constantly being adapted from one medium to another and then back again. We postmoderns have clearly inherited this same habit, but we have even more new materials at our disposal," Hutcheon writes, and it's this very wealth which both enriches and complicates an understanding of the material performativity of villains in gothic novels, films, and comics (4).

Like this dissertation, which reads cultural texts for specific character representations, the interest of Tony Bennet and Janet Wollacott's *Bond and Beyond: A Political Career of a Popular Hero* "lies in the figure of Bond, in the diverse and changing forms in which it has been produced and circulated, and in the varying cultural business that has been conducted around, by means of and through this figure during the now considerable slice of post-war history in which it has been culturally active" (Bennet and Wollacott 1). In *Bond and Beyond,* Bennet and Wollacott make space for the critical analysis of popular media and the multimodal analysis of popular *characters* when they say that "We would suggest that popular fictional forms subject

ideological discourses to a work of transformation just as much, although not necessarily in the same way, as do fictional forms which are socially valorized in being classified as 'high culture' (Bennet and Wollacott 3). They argue that "[i]t is then, in being granted a quasi-real status that a popular hero (or heroine) constitutes a cultural phenomenon of a particular type, quite distinct from the hero (or heroine) whose existence is contained within and limited to a particular and narrowly circumscribed set of texts (13-14). Thus, popular heroes "break free from the originating textual conditions of their existence to achieve a semi-independent existence, functioning as an established point of cultural reference that is capable of working – of producing meanings – even for those who are not directly familiar with the original texts in which they made their appearance" (Bennet and Wollacott 14). Building on this foundation, and on Julia Round's observations on the gothic, I offer three further points of intersection significant to the present comparative analysis of *Batman* comics and late Victorian Gothic novels: that the genres' intended audiences suggest similar purposes, that each purposefully and similarly utilize monstrosity and deviance in performative villainy, and that film delivers the British gothic monsters directly to the American public, closing a perceived historical gap. To say that *Dracula* was first published in 1896 and *Batman* was introduced to readers in 1938 does not communicate the pervasiveness of these texts in popular culture. *Batman* has not been *out* of print since 1938, and the property has grown to include television, major motion pictures, countless comics and graphic novel iterations, merchandise, costume, and cultural iconography. Similarly, *Dracula*, as a representative of the gothic novels read in this dissertation, has not been out of print since 1897, has been adapted to the stage at least twice, and the character has appeared in over 200 films from 1922 through the present day. The materials discussed here are not passing fads but

titans of popular culture, and sites at which culture is constructed and articulated to expansive audiences, generation after generation.

Rogues Gallery

A goal of this dissertation is to examine the meanings conveyed to readers through the dress of characters represented in popular media, and, within the generic and material confines of "gothic novels" and "*Batman* comics," I have faced a veritable buffet of primary sources. My oldest source was published 158 years before the defense of this dissertation, and yet the works I read from the previous century remain, to admittedly varying degrees, virile in cultural representation. I would argue that both Dracula and Dr. Jekyll remain as well-known as Batman himself, and their cultural currency is consistently valued. But as with any buffet, I've faced greater offerings than I could consume, and so I've had to make choices.[4]

The first qualifier was admittedly one of personal attachment. I am an academic fan, or "acafan," and I came to this project first as a consumer and audience of these stories and characters. I *love* these works, as messy and complicated as they may be, and for the sake of personal entertainment I've followed the development of their popular representation. But the very immediacy of my subject matter complicates my choices. In the course of the writing of this dissertation Batman celebrated his 80th anniversary, *Detective Comics #1000* was published, and Hallie Rubenhold published *The Five* in an historically significant but problematic attempt at rescuing the biographies of the victims of Jack the Ripper. Todd Phillips directed an incredibly controversial attempt at an origin story with *Joker* in 2019, Margot Robbie challenged the standards of comic book movies with *Birds of Prey: And the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn* in 2020, and Catwoman and Joker both celebrated the 80th anniversary of their

[4] My apologies to *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, the Riddler, and Harley Quinn, who very narrowly missed selection.

appearances in *Batman No. 1*. In January 2020, Jonny Campbell, Paul McGuigan, and Damon Thomas directed a three-part *Dracula* miniseries that sought to reassert the principal character's monstrosity, and simultaneously affirmed his intrigue and blatant sex appeal, not long before a global pandemic sent (nearly) everyone inside to begin an entirely new volume of media consumption, while media production stuttered and staggered and is still trying to find a way to stay alive. To distance my fandom from my ongoing research, and more clearly frame my analysis, I limited my sources to popular media at their moment of introduction, and then moments of historically or canonically-significant shifts, as have already been recognized in scholarship.

When I write of "popular media" I do so in the most direct sense: I believe it is significant that the primary sources I address are, if only contemporaneously, popular as cultural objects and consumed by large audiences. To call nineteenth century gothic novels "popular" is not anachronistic: G. K. Chesterton refers to penny dreadfuls as "popular compositions," and both penny dreadfuls and "romantic reading" as "popular literature" in 1901 (372-3). His recognition of a binary of "literature and fiction" demonstrates a Victorian understanding of the class-based stratum of media consumption, one end of which belongs to "the educated class" and the other the residents of "lodging-houses and tenements" (372). Though he offers a binary of "literature and fiction," and recognizes "voluminous industry still marks the producer of the true romantic trash," he praises the prodigious output as satisfying a need for continuous, cheaply-produced media for "the youth of the lower orders" (373). The classism of Chesterton's observations should not be ignored, but for the present argument he nonetheless affirms that Victorians look to sensational reading material not unlike the contemporary gaze upon other popular media. Though industries and technologies have evolved, the "need" for entertainment,

and popularity of particular forms, is a bridge between the horrors of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which sold over 40,000 copies in the first six months (Davies), and *Dark Knight,* which grossed $158,411,483 during its opening weekend in July of 2008.

The novels selected for this dissertation are culturally significant from their moment of publication, and each continues a cultural presence for generations beyond initial publication through adaptation into other media. The attraction to these texts is in their very sensationalism, each offering a villain whose magnetism contributes to their long-standing social value. *Lady Audley's Secret,* published in three volumes in 1862, is recognized as Mary Elizabeth Braddon's most successful novel. According to Stephen Carver, "The novel rivalled *The Woman in White* in its commercial success, running to eight editions by the end of the year. It made Braddon financially independent for the rest of her life." A model for sensational fiction; the novel inspired theatrical stagings in 1863, 1930, and the 1970s, and six motion pictures filmed from 1912 through 2000. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas,* published in 1864, inspired the 1947 film *The Inheritance,* two television mini-series, and three radio productions. Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*, which greatly outsold *Dracula* when published in 1897, is adapted less frequently than the other, made into a silent film in 1919, adapted to stage in 1928 at the Strand Theatre, and to a radio program in 1997. The compelling characters of Dorian Gray, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and Dracula lend themselves to extensive cultural representation. Scandalous at its 1891 publication, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* makes it to the silver screen as early as 1910, inspiring 15 films, 8 television series and tv movies, and appearing as a character in dozens more. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) has been adapted to stage and film over 120 times, including a 1994 musical, and *Dracula* (1897) has been played on stage twice, at least once as a ballet[5], and

[5] Produced by the Washington Ballet and performed at the Kennedy Center

has appeared in over 217 films since *Nosferatu* of 1922. Though important for an understanding of the cultural impact of these villainous figures, and the novels in which they're found, most of these multimedia adaptations are beyond the scope of this dissertation. Here, I've chosen to focus primarily on the source media, closely reading the popular novels which introduce Lady Audley, Madame de la Rougierre, Dracula, Dr. Jekyll, the Beetle, and Dorian Gray.

In the prologue of *Hunting the Dark Knight*, Batman scholar Will Booker asks "What does it do to the concept of Batman – as a 70-year compendium of contradictory stories – when we close down his authorized, approved meaning to a selective reading from a handful of recent texts?" (xiii). He speaks to the bifurcation of Batman characterization by fans and scholars alike: the "good" Batman narratives which offer an angry, brooding, and menacing figure of the last forty years, versus the "bad" Batman of Adam-West-camp – an overwhelmingly silly and queer burlesque (xii). Over seventy years the titular character has grown and morphed significantly, and Booker succinctly demonstrates the difficulty of analyzing such an ephemeral character: there is no one Batman. Rather, there are Batmans associated with historic periods, writers and artists, directors, and actors. Each can be read as a separate text within a continually-growing canon – and so too can the villains this dissertation will consider. So, what's a comics scholar to do? Make purposeful choices.

In completing this study, I've found that *Batman* is a bit of a hydra; each time I settled into a limitation on primary sources another vein of research and material would rear its seductively fanged head. For the close readings of this dissertation it would be impossible to consider every iteration of the Batman since 1939, over comics and films and tv and more. Lines must be drawn, and I've chosen to draw them here: a selection of comics from *Batman*'s creation through the modern age is essential to the full scope of the project, and so each age must be

represented by major books, privileging *Batman* titles over villain-named titles,[6] and allowing the availability of texts to guide readings of significant villains. The first condition is met by the publication of omnibuses by DC Comics. Specifically, this dissertation will read the first volumes of the *Golden Age, Silver Age,* and *Bronze Age* omnibuses of *Batman*,[7] as well as a selection of modern age books widely accepted as monumental or canonically significant: *Batman: Year One, Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, Batman: The Killing Joke, Batman: Arkham Asylum, Batman: A Death in the Family*. Supplementing these texts are a collection of Elseworlds comics, which purposefully deviate from traditional storylines and characterizations: *Batman: Death of the Family,* and *Batman: Gotham by Gaslight*. In-depth character readings are enabled by character-specific omnibuses published by DC Comics, with the goal of representing characters as they developed over time: *Catwoman: A Celebration of 75 Years, Poison Ivy: A Celebration of 25 Years, The Joker: A Celebration of 75 Years,* and *Two-Face: A Celebration of 75 Years*. Multimedia sources include media which sought to define the characters for generations: Tim Burton's 1992 *Batman Returns,* Joel Schumacher's 1995 *Batman Forever,* Christopher Nolan's 2008 *The Dark Knight*, and Pitof's 2004 *Catwoman*.

The extensive cultural reach of the gothic generally, as forwarded by Round, and gothic villains specifically, saturates the *Batman* canon, which recognizes, remembers, and directly engages the Victorian gothic. Gothic monsters such as vampires and werewolves appear as early as the first year of Batman circulation, and is explicitly utilized in the *Batman Vampire* trilogy

[6] i.e. excluding *Catwoman* and *Joker* titles

[7] Though Wright insists that adults outgrow the comics they enjoyed as adolescents, the present publishing industry suggests otherwise. Beginning in 2015, DC Comics began releasing omnibuses of comics, returning to the 1930s in an offering of nostalgia, and collecting issue runs through the "ages." As of this writing, there are seven volumes of *Batman: The Golden Age Omnibus*, two volumes of *Batman: The Silver Age Omnibus,* and three volumes of *Batman: The Bronze Age Omnibus*. Significantly, the cover price of each volume averages around $100. The cost of the volumes suggests a larger marker than Wright originally identified – adults *returning* to the comics they already love. The price of comics initially helped define the target audience (see *Ten-Cent Plague),* as publishers were cognizant of the pocket-money children would have. The books now offered suggests that the market has expanded.

(1991, 1994, 1998) by Doug Moench, when the Dark Knight fights, and becomes, a vampire himself. Brian Augustyn's 1989 *Gotham by Gaslight* pits a nineteenth-century Batman against Jack the Ripper, and the 1993 *Batman/Houdini: The Devil's Workshop* introduces two icons of masculinity to one another.

In reading the villains of *Batman* and the Victorian Gothic together, I explore how popular literature utilizes performative villainy to instruct readers in gendered and material normativity, while simultaneously establishing narrative space for deviant autonomy to be exercised. This matters because a reading of the purposeful self-authoring of villains challenges static binaries of identity categories, and forwards a nuanced understanding of the representation of spectrum identities in popular literature. Villains maintain cultural currency: a seductive possibility that speaks to a reclamation of, and empowerment through, deviance.

Chapter Descriptions

The Victorians were astutely aware of perception and performativity, yet feared potential misreading – or misrepresentation – as much as they relied on their own fluency. This tension is portrayed in Gothic fiction through the villain disguised – the monster who dresses himself in fashionable acceptability. The reading of morality in a well-dressed man confirms the inextricability of clothing and the performed self, and the consequences suffered by innocents whose material performances are subsumed. Readers here learn that villains, too, can learn the language of fashion, and can use it to their advantage. This extends the Gothic performance of villainy, as it calls into question the morality of those met in daily life. This instability calls into questions the language of taste and cloth. If a villain may dress – and pass – as a respectable gentleman, what is a moral reader to do? These are the questions explored in chapter one, as I begin with an analysis of perfect performances: villains who are able to hide in plain sight, using

their sartorial literacy to disguise their deviant benefit. Just as Dracula is able to adapt to fashionable London the better to stalk his prey, so too does Lady Audley industriously apply her physical charms and assumed manner to the application of husband-hunting, Dorian find protection from consequences with his beautiful face, and Dr. Jekyll scientifically crafts an alternative identity in order to indulge in amoral behaviour, all the while wearing a mask of respectability as the good doctor.

But what of Batman*?* Chapter two is heavily weighted towards Gothic literature, and the threat that Victorians felt when faced with the tenuous material performance of morality upon which they built their social and commercial lives. From their earliest publications, many of these Victorian villains were *icons* – the vampire, the mad scientist, the devious dandy, the femme fatale. Dracula became a word for vampire, conjuring up images of a shifting count seeking for prey, and when *Jekyll and Hyde* hit the theatres of London, leading actor Richard Mansfield aroused suspicions that he may in fact be the elusive Jack the Ripper, due to his overwhelmingly successful portrayal of Stevenson's appalling Mr. Hyde.

The icons of *Batman* are of a different sort. The comics feature crooks and gangsters following major archetypes (and stereotypes), but the true *villains* of Gotham are not remembered in evening dress – they are outrageous figures in purple suits, burlap masks, cat ears, and waddling under ludicrous umbrellas. The iconic villains of *Batman* do not offer the gothic fear of aped respectability, but loudly assert their Otherness unrepentantly. Chapter three considers the spectacle of this purposeful performative villainy, using José Esteban Muñoz's theory of disidentificaion to analyze gothic and comics antagonists who purposefully eschew normative material constructions of identity. These villains are created to personify specific cultural fears and idealizations; they are aesthetically fashioned outside the bonds of both

cultural and judicial systems, creating a threat in their willful disregard for convention. Reading Foucault's histories in *Discipline & Punish* I begin with the argument that these sartorially sensational characters serve a very particular cultural purpose: they are strawmen intended for figurative burning. Their exceptional aesthetic fashioning places them outside of traditional judicial systems, which allows protagonists and readers to seek their public (and violent) punishment - punishment that can then cathartically fill a void left by the discontinuation of public executions. However, these characters are no sheep to be lead to the slaughter, and I continue to argue that Madame de la Rougierre, the Beetle, Two-Face, and Poison Ivy recognize the exceptionality? of their physical appearances within their texts, and subvert normative narratives by expressing agency and power through their otherness in a performative Bakhtian carnivalesque reversal of conventions.

It is harder to find sympathy for the villains of chapter three, which is entirely the point, as they violently represent the dangers of toxic masculinities. In chapter four I engage with the scholarship of masculinity scholars Michael Kimmel and Ben Griffin, who argue that American and British masculinities are contentiously defined by the other, each considering the impact of paternalistic British colonialism on social identity. I argue that this trans-Atlantic tension is performed by the prominent cultural villains of Jack the Ripper and the Joker, who each serve as caricatures of the other against which each nation defines its idealized masculine identity. In the case of Jack the Ripper, I use Griffin's readings of class, and Godfrey's readings of tensions related to changing perspectives on violence to forward the argument that the Ripper as constructed by newspapers is a decidedly *American* figure. Similarly, in his 1939 introduction, the Joker is particularly British in affectation, contrary to the dominant masculinities identified by Kimmel. Further, the chapter argues that contemporary texts revisit this original othering, and

redefine these same villains to reflect domestic toxic masculinities, each nation's artists reclaiming their cultural production and using the famous villains to illustrate contemporary domestic criticism of British elitism (the Ripper in *From Hell*), and the violent potential of white, blue-collar American masculinity (the Joker in *Death of the Family*).

Continuing the close-reading of gendered villainy, "Reinventing the Catsuit" considers the iconic villainess Catwoman, and her irregular media representation. In this chapter I argue that the instability and changeability of the sartorial representation of Catwoman reflects a continual mistrust of the femme identity, and cultural attempts to regulate and control the femme's gender performativity. In other words, the frequent changes to the costuming of Catwoman through media representation illustrates changes in understanding of what makes a character or person normatively or deviantly feminine, as well as the power a feminine person can hold in American culture. In the face of this regulation and mistrust, I argue that the characterization of Catwoman empowers the villainess beyond the sexualization of her image, allowing this image and performativity to be utilized as an asset rather than a means of cultural subordination. Reading Catwoman as a monster/beauty, as defined and developed by Joanna Frueh, shows that her extreme gender performance is a source of agency for the villainess, who remains uniquely human, sane,[8] and fashionable through her 80-year representation in *Batman* comics. Ultimately, Catwoman's representation illustrates the viability of alternative autonomy[9] in a binary system, challenging the notion that power lies exclusively on the masculine end of the gender spectrum.

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[8] Comparatively sane, I will argue. In the final move of this chapter I will address the film industry's undermining of Catwoman's agency through the introduction of mental instability, framed much like the historical concept of "the female malady," as documented and examined by Showalter.

[9] That is, a consistently powerful and independent woman, not reliant on others (i.e. a husband, father, brother, male partner) as a source of power.

The final move of this sartorial sashay is to bring the analysis to the living fandom of cosplay, considering how the literary conclusions reached may impact an understanding of contemporary fantastic fashioning. In her introduction to *Narrative Across Media*, Marie-Laure Ryan says that "I propose to regard narrative meaning as a cognitive construct, or mental image, built by the interpreter in response to the text" (Ryan 8). Ryan explains that the representative code of a text is interpreted by readers, who cognitively reconstruct it as mental images and meanings (9). Stories – narratives – are incomplete constructions until they are consumed, and readers/interpreters/audiences build on the signs and signals of a text to complete an imagined structure that is an individual experience capable of conveying. This system, which relies on both creator and interpreter, emphasizes the community necessary to complete narratives – that a story isn't really told until it is heard, or understood until it is imagined. Roland Barthes' "three dresses" speak to a similar idea as he considers the garment encoded in a fashion magazine:

> I open a fashion magazine; I see that two different garments are being dealt with here. The first is the one presented to me as photographed or drawn – it is image-clothing. The second is the same garment, but described, transformed into language; this dress, photographed on the right, becomes on the left: *a leather belt, with a rose stuck in it, worn above the waist, on a soft Shetland dress*; this is a written garment. In principle these two garments refer to the same reality (this dress worn on this day by this woman), and yet they do not have the same structure, because they are not made of the same substances and because, consequently, these substances do not have the same relations with each other: on one the substances are forms, lines, surfaces, colors, and the relation is spatial; in

> the other, the substance is word, and the relation is, if not logical, at least syntactic; the first structure is plastic, that second verbal. (Barthes 3)

He says that the dresses are different because "they are not made of the same substances," changing the ways in which they are consumed and experienced. And yet the same dress three ways – worn, photographed, and described – offers a narrative, experienced by the reader – *it looks lovely,* and *what kind of person would wear this dress?* – and the consumer – *would that be flattering? Could I wear that to the picnic?*

The subject of the epilogue is the third dress – the material production of a representative garment made tangible by audience labour through the hobby known as cosplay. Cosplay is a growing expression of identity and artistry more complex than passive consumptive fandom. Cosplayers come to their creative performances from different degrees of personal investment in character and intellectual properties, from different artistic expressions, and with a spectrum of intentions from a joy of dress-up to social commentary. Maintaining the focus on villainy as built throughout the dissertation, the epilogue will concentrate on villain cosplays – those material texts created to perform the violent, the devious, or the disreputable, as a result of cosplay labour that requires an extraordinary investment of extraordinary time, effort, and creative exercise. Like the villains of novels and comics, these cosplayers purposefully adopt non-normative guises, fashioning their likeness contrary to not just fashion but social norms and morality, and the same question that runs throughout the dissertation remains pertinent in a reading of geek culture – how do we read these embodied texts?

CHAPTER 2

IN PLAIN SIGHT: VILLAINS OF (NO) DISTINCTION

Victorians were keenly aware of being watched. The rise of the newspaper in the nineteenth-century taught Victorians that their movements were constantly observed, and that their choices were open to public discourse. In an increasingly-capitalistic society their purchasing power exposed them to further critique, as their commercial choices became scripted as moral alignments, and advertisements taught that the choice of one's soap, corset, or mustache waxed reflected far more than the product itself, but the quality of one's character. Theirs was a self-policed panoptical society made possible through increasing literacy, and the wide-spread dissemination of print culture made available to broad populations. Victorian consumers sought to protect themselves from criticism and censure not through privacy and boundaries, but through consistent material performances in both public and private spaces. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* Dorian remembers "rich men who had been blackmailed all their lives by some servant who had read a letter, or overheard a conversation, or picked up a card with an address, or found beneath a pillow a withered flower or a shred of crumpled lace" (Wilde 103), articulating the fears of one's own domestic staff, the necessity of keeping up appearances, and the gossamer boundaries between public and private that keep middle and upper classes keenly anxious. The lived reality of success or failure in this ambition is not certain, but the artifacts and cultural products produced by Victorians, such as newspaper ads and household guides, continue to forward a romantic notion of reserve and decorum that speaks less to superior manners and morals, and more to anxiety over public censure and outcasting. Nineteenth-century advertisements continue the narrative that one's material possessions, and the care taken of those possessions, reflects the morality and quality of the person responsible for their management.

More directly, the cleanliness of one's front stoop is an assertion of their diligence and thus strict morality, and the quality of their dinner table speaks to their success as a household manager attuned to the physical and spiritual needs of a household of people. Just as housewives are taught the importance of maintaining their domiciles in a strict and military fashion (Beeton 20), so are their husbands taught to hold their wives' labors to high standards, and to expect a level of household management that is emotionally reserved and publicly consumable.

The thrill of the gothic novel in the late nineteenth-century is in the challenge and subversion of the anxious lived space of the reader. The gothic novel allows the reader to take on the part of the observer of the panopticon, and exposes them to the uncertainty of the system they have themselves partially created. The gothic is an uncanny and carnivalesque space which does not always behave as anticipated, and challenges notions of performativity and identity so crucial to middle class Victorian identity. Victorian middle-class culture is built around the drive to maintain appearances, both personally and domestically. According to Catherine Spooner, one's appearance is directly linked to one's professional and social success, to the extent that self-help manuals urge readers to look to their material identities, because they mark one as deserving of aid, and capable of diligence and social conformity: "Self-presentation became an essential element of social advancement and tied into discourses of self-help. This is reflected in Victorian Gothic fiction, which tends to pay much more specific and detailed attention to dress and other commodities than that of the preceding period" (Spooner 48). These guidelines are not reflective of fashion plates and stylish magazines, however, but domestic ideas of serviceable clothing. The nineteenth-century sees the rise of the middle class as the gatekeepers of cultural creation and moral regulation, and the dawning of the standards that will be broadcast as idealized harmony. The comfortable middle-class home is a romanticized haven of comfort and order, with an

emphasis on the latter – everyone and everything in its place, peace maintained through the strict adherence to artificial structures and systems. *Mrs. Beeton's Household Management* argues that

> Whether the establishment be large or small, the functions of the housewife resemble those of the general of an army or the manager of a great business concern. It is her to inspire a feeling of comfort and happiness in the home, and to see that all runs smoothly, that meals are to time, and well cooked, the house kept clean and tidy, and the general well-being of each member of the family considered. (Beeton 20)

The periodical voice of Mrs. Beeton further claims in the prologue that "What moved me, in the first instance, to attempt a work like this, was the discomfort and suffering which I had seen brought about by household mis-management. I have always thought that there is no more fruitful source of family discontent than badly-cooked dinners and untidy ways" (Beeton x). In the first seven years of publication, *Mrs. Beeton's* sold nearly two million copies, and remains in print. The twenty-one-year-old author was no ordinary housewife, but a journalist whose household compendium made audacious use of recipes taken from other sources rather than original creation. The success of the book, though, speaks to both the skill with which one can establish their public character, and the anxiety felt by Victorian women in fulfilling the roles into which they had been cast: household managers, employers, cooks and housekeepers, mothers, physicians, and legal executors. And all must be accomplished with cheer and good will.

What is notable about the advice and instruction given in *Mrs. Beeton* is attention to the surfaces akin to those described by Catherine Spooner in *Gothic Bodies* and J. Halberstam in *Skin Shows*. Even in the private sphere of the home Victorians are taught to consider the look of

the thing, from table settings to linens to the tidiness of servants and children. What is arguably not for public consumption, as Victorians maintained both "public" domestic spaces and private domestic spaces, is still given strict attention with the insinuation that private matters are still misread by the public. At a time when domestic service was still overwhelmingly common, this awareness is not necessarily misplaced – the private quarters of a home are open to domestic staff, and therefore to public gossip.

These observations are not intended to be universally critical; after all, what else can one do? If a culture is built on observations of one's moral qualities and adherence to social conventions, one *has* to perform in order to succeed – and by succeed, I mean live in comfortable economy as peacefully as possible. If one's perceived actions—including for example one's choice of clothes or cosmetics- may adversely impact one's status in a marriage market (when women have few other options for support), one's employment, or one's ability to find housing, that performance becomes a lived necessity.

The Work and Play of Playing Dress-Up: Lady Audley's Secret

The 1864 novel *Lady Audley's Secret* builds narrative, suspense, and character around this concept of observation, and the question of reliable performances of identity. In Lady Audley, Braddon introduces an antagonist, or perhaps antihero, who consciously recognizes the social and commercial worth of her physical beauty; knowing her fair features will incline others to believe she is innocent, Lucy is able to cultivate an air of childlike virtue that effectively masks her purposeful machinations and allows her to manipulate those around her. Lady Audley, as also recognized by Catherine Spooner, is a fantastic example of the threat of surface misreadings – the possibility that the surface performance does not reflect the character of an individual, but instead reflects their fluency in material performativity, and willingness to use

this performance to meet their own ends. It is difficult to make the argument that Lady Audley as a character is a *villain*, as I intend to use the term; significant to my argument is a self-awareness of deviant identity and willingness to adopt the characterization. While Lady Audley's actions are strictly criminal, she does not adopt a deviant or "villainous" identity as a result of or in relation to her criminal behavior; on the contrary, she seeks to perform perfectly in her role as beautiful, young second-wife. Her actions are unfortunate consequences of needing to achieve, and then maintain her status, and do not factor into her personal identity. As Spooner remarks, the danger of Lady Audley is that she's so good at it – she *isn't* deviant in appearance or public behavior, and instead is a picture of appropriate femininity, profiting from her personal beauty in a way allowed of young women, and occupying a social space deemed more or less acceptable. "Lady Audley's performances are alarming not only because they are for the most part utterly seamless, but also because they are perfectly compatible with contemporary notions of femininity and of self-management. Lady Audley does not represent a deviant version of femininity but conforms absolutely to the prescribed feminine ideal" (Spooner 78).

Significant is the loathing of Lady Audley's stepdaughter, Alicia, who is repulsed by the girlishness of her father's new wife. Though the text argues that Alicia is suffering from a loss of domestic power and autonomy, and thus despises the interloper, Alicia's marked critique of Lady Audley demonstrates a keen awareness of Lady Audley's performance, and allows readers a space in which to reject the surface narratives of morality and character forwarded by other cultural artifacts. Alicia's rejection of Lady Audley's sartorial narrative opens the titular character to closer examination, and warns the reader of the ease with which one can manipulate the dominate narrative of performative identity. Lady Audley is described from Alicia's perspective thus:

> That very childishness had a charm which few could resist. The innocence and candour of an infant beamed in Lady Audley's fair face, and shone out of her large and liquid blue eyes. The rosy lips, the delicate nose, the profusion of fair ringlets all contributed to preserve her beauty the character of extreme youth and freshness. … Her fragile figure, which she loved to dress in heavy velvets and stiff rustling silks, till she looked like a child tricked out for a masquerade, was as girlish as if she had just left the nursery. (Braddon 90)

In letters to her cousin, however, Alicia complains that Lucy Audley is "irretrievably childish and silly" (86), and calls her stepmother "a wax-dollish young person … with flaxen ringlets and a perpetual giggle" (72). As peers in age, if not social position, Alicia Audley's descriptions of Lucy Audley provide keen insight into the character of Lady Audley, and the extent to which her performance is recognized as such – though she behaves just as society says she should, and looks the part, Alicia has been given the same lessons, and recognizes their artifice. She is not drawn in by Lady Audley's extensions of friendships because Alicia recognizes that "[Lucy] makes herself agreeable to everyone" (90) – that it's an informed surface performance. And yet, save Alicia, everyone *does* find Lady Audley perfectly agreeable – she is just as she should be.

The level of self-awareness of Lady Audley's material performance comes through to readers in her exchanges with her lady's made, Phoebe. Spooner argues that "appearances are all that separate Lady Audley from comparable social status to her maid," having recognized that "femininity is presented as an acquisition,"(48), but this isn't entirely true; Lady Audley begins, after all, on similar footing to Phoebe, as a governess in a moderate but respectable household. The difference between them is a fluency in femininity – not the acquisition of the things that mark social status and gender performance, but in the knowledge of how to apply them. Much is

made of Lady Audley's hair, but it's in her physical performance that it gains symbolic value – sitting with her employers, Lucy Graham "lifted her head from its stooping attitude … shaking back a shower of curls. They were the most wonderful curls in the world – soft and feathery, always floating away from her face, and making a pale halo round her head when the sunlight shone through them" (49). Knowing this, Lucy wears her hair loose for the shaking, sits "at a window" when meeting with Sir Michael (51), and tilts her head for optimum framing. She recognizes the potential her physical features have when framed in a narrative of piousness and childishness, and performs to the expectations of her beauty in order to gain status and wealth, all without having to lie to her betrothed that she loves him. When Lucy says to Phoebe "you *are* like me, … Why, with a bottle of hair dye, such as we see advertised in the papers, and a pot of rouge, you'd be as good-looking as I any day, Phoebe" (Braddon 95), she remarks on the ease with which one can commercially cultivate a socially-valuable appearance, but also recognizes the work involved – that beauty is not a natural gift coming from goodness, but a product that requires maintenance and performance, made more readily available through the nineteenth-century commercial marketplace and knowledge of how to exploit it.

That Lady Audley is ultimately diagnosed to be insane and confined to a mental institution is a familiar Victorian narrative cop-out – a safety measure used to preserve the reader's sense of righteousness, and a resolution that rectifies their cultural beliefs with the actions of a beautiful deviant woman. The insane are without the reason to perform consistently, and Spooner notes that they are often marked by their eccentric appearances. Spooner cites the example of Le Fanu's The *Rose and the Key*, and the protagonist's experiences with asylum inmates she does not know to be insane. The Duchess of Falconbury, for example, "is 'a prepossessing young lady, dressed in very exquisite taste,' … [whose] masquerade is so

successful that the only impropriety in her appearance is, in fact, that she is Mrs. Fish of New York and not a duchess at all, and is therefore dressed inappropriately for her station in society" (Spooner 62). In meeting the "duchess" and Mr. Ap-Jenkins, "who is convinced he is the Spanish ambassador," the narrative shows that "Maud … does not possess the expertise to 'read' the signs that have gone awry" (Spooner 61).

The excuse of these texts is that-- being outside of reason, and therefore outside of reasoning –the insane are capable of sartorial subterfuge precisely because of their madness, and thus their full and honest belief in the fabrications of their appearances. Maud (and the reader) are not to be blamed for their misinterpretations, because they are reading the performances appropriately – Mrs. Fish and Mr. Ap-Jenkins are in fact dressed for the stations which they claim. The disconnect here is in *their* minds, and not the understanding of the reader. Braddon's novel attempts to do something similar in the diagnosis and commitment of Lady Audley, placing her in the context of Lucy's own mother, and characters such as Anne Catherick of *The Woman in White,* and relieving the characters within the novel from the burden of confronting the divorce between lady Audley's appearance and her actions: the sane mind cannot anticipate the logic of the mentally disturbed and its ability to make identity and reality performative.

The anxiety inspired by the performance of Lady Audley is a keen illustration of the same anxiety attached to later Gothic villains who demonstrate fluency in taste and class. The characters of Dorian Gray, Dracula, and Dr. Jekyll each in the context of their narratives perform social propriety, and are able to sartorially establish their middle- and upper-class identities, to the extent that their villainy is called to question. Though their actions are criminal, this is the true horror of these Gothic villains – that they are able to move through polite society undetected, even to the extent that they are defended against criminal charges on the basis of

their reputations or appearances. These are the villains who hide in plain sight, issuing challenge to the governance of the social panopticon through practiced material performance, while simultaneously maintaining villainous identities.

The Discretion of Gentlemen

That these identities can be studied and learned is made most clear in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* of 1897. As John Allen Stevenson observes in "A Vampire in the Mirror: The Sexuality of *Dracula*," Dracula is clearly other because he is "strange in his appearance," and contrary to the British expectations of health and beauty: "[t]he vampire has no rosy glow but presents what looks like dead flesh stained with blood … - a grotesque inversion of good health" (140, 142). Introduced as a foreign Other from the first, neither Dracula's appearance nor manners cause Jonathan Harker immediate alarm, despite the misgivings of Harker's fellow travelers. Not immediately connecting the Count to the driver whose strength he finds so astounding, Harker first describes Dracula as being as he should be: old, dignified, somber in dress without excessive ornamentation, and gratifyingly invested in Harker's English sensibilities. He calls Dracula's manners "courtly," and says that "the light and warmth and the Count's courteous welcome seemed to have dissipated all my doubts and fears," (22-3) – fears inspired not by Dracula himself, but by the warnings Harker hears from the locals he's met. But as the evening continues Harker is plagued by a creeping sense of incongruity in the Count – the first sense of threat coming from features that are not naturally aligned. His lips are too red for so old a face, for example. Harker certainly does not find Dracula handsome, focusing on the severity of his facial features, and cannot "repress a shudder" when the Count's unusually "coarse [hands] – broad, with squat fingers" brush his own (24). In his own space, and in his own clothes, Harker begins to find Dracula's Otherness threatening; despite his initial good opinion, it's clear that

Dracula looks like a monster. The true horror, though, isn't in this predatory face, but the deception and disguise that Dracula manages to accomplish throughout the course of their acquaintance.

The titular count, having decided to immigrate to London, has undertaken a careful study of not just the English language, but its culture, understanding the importance of passing in polite English society if he is to move through the bustling modern city undetected. In Dracula's Transylvanian castle, Harker finds a library with

> a vast number of English books, whole shelves full of them, and bound volumes of magazines and newspapers. A table in the centre was littered with English magazines and newspapers, though none of them were of very recent date. The books were of the most varied kind – history, geography, politics, political economy, botany, geology, law – all relating to England and English life and customs and manners. There were even such books of reference as the London Directory, the 'Red' and 'Blue' books, Whitaker's Almanack, the Army and Navy Lists, and – it somehow gladdened my heart to see it – the Law List. (Stoker 25)

The Count has studied history, geography, politics, custom and manners; he has looked to texts and law lists, as well as the cultural scripts of newspapers and magazines. Though he claims to wish personal attention in the purchase of a house, thus calling on Harker's firm to send an agent to his native home, the later revelation that he has purchased more than one English property shows the exaggeration of his request. His purpose in calling Harker to Transylvania is to complete his cultural education – to learn Englishness from a native Englishman. He says to Harker in chapter two, "But alas! as yet I only know your tongue through books. To you, my friend, I look that I know it to speak" (26), and when Harker protests that the Count's spoken

English is perfect, Dracula acquiesces that he knows the grammar of the language, but is worried that his speech will mark him as a foreigner. Dracula seeks mastery, as he puts it, so that none may have advantage of him. What he does not say explicitly is that he wishes to assimilate, the better to navigate British culture and evade suspicion for his predatory actions. Knowing law and geography and language will all add to this project, but Dracula understands that a bodily and social performance is just as important if he is to shake the stigma of Otherness, and thus evade suspicion.

In his address Dracula tells Harker that it's his hope to learn nuance of spoken language from the solicitor, but his actions show he is likewise interested in exercising his understanding of sartorial lexicons and personal representation. The full consequences of his tutelage and presence in Dracula's home isn't realized until Harker sees Dracula don Harker's own traveling suit and descend lizard-like down the castle wall, for distinctly nefarious purposes. Immediately, Harker realizes the deviousness of Dracula's actions, knowing that his clothes are a simulacrum that fashion Dracula into a replicant indistinguishable from Harker by the peasantry. In his guise Dracula steals children, his success marked by the woman who screams for her child's return from Harker when she sees him look from a castle window.

Recognizing his captor first by his "hands, which [he] had had so many opportunities of studying," Harker is repulsed and terrified when he "saw the whole man slowly emerge from the window and begin to crawl down the castle wall … with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings" (39). Here, Dracula's clothing becomes an extension of his body, creating a bestial figure and behaving against physics in a monstrous tableau. Forty-three days later Harker's horror increases when he sees the Count climb down again: "It was a new shock to me to find that he had on the suit of clothes which I had worn whilst travelling here, and slung over his

shoulder the terrible bag which I had seen the women take away. There could be no doubt as to his quest, and in my garb, too! This, then, is his new scheme of evil" (47). This scene echoes the fluidity of earlier descriptions of Dracula – that of strong yet old, refined yet calloused – and heightens the horror of the moment to show his ability to manipulate performative readings. Dracula understands the relationship between clothing and identity, and trusts that he will pass as Harker for wearing the other man's travelling suit, despite differences in their physical appearances. The travelling suit, so different from the native clothing earlier described by Harker himself, stands in for the man himself, and logically extends as the Englishman's presence and actions. This scheme of Dracula's is evil because it challenges British sensibilities and morality, and Harker's description suggests that he is able to do so rather effectively – that Dracula, dressed in Harker's travelling clothes and thus assuming his identity, is able to irreparably damage the reputation of the solicitor. This confirms the inextricability of clothing and the performed self, and the consequences suffered by innocents whose material performances are subsumed, but also calls into question the lexicon of taste and cloth. If a villain may dress – and pass – as a respectable gentleman, can appearances be trusted to convey the content of one's character, as Victorians have been taught?

In "'It was impossible such a creature could be feminine':[10] fashioning villainy and the language of the grotesque in Gothic fiction" I argue that this threat of subterfuge is visited specifically when the Harkers see the vampire on an English thoroughfare. Walking down Piccadilly with his wife on his arm, Jonathan Harker stops suddenly with an expression of "My God!" and stands transfixed in terror. Mina writes in her journal of Jonathan's pale complexion and his bulging eyes, as he stared unreservedly at "a tall, thin man, with a beaky nose and black

[10] Marsh, 2000: 53

moustache and pointed beard" (Stoker 155). She remarks that the subject of her husband's fascination has a face that is "hard, and cruel, and sensual" (155), and that the man's countenance is "fierce and nasty" (155), but her concern extends only to social faux pas, and the offense her husband's stare may cause to one who seems likely to be temperamental. The man in question draws no particular interest from anyone else in the vicinity of Giuliano's, and Mina watches as he hails a hansom to follow a beautiful woman down Piccadilly. As he disappears Jonathan remarks, "I believe it is the Count, but he has grown young. My God, if this be so! Oh, my God! My God! If I only knew! If I only knew!" (155).

As an observer of observers, and faithful secretary of events, Mina Harker is particularly well placed to relate the ease with which Dracula has adapted to the British public sphere, the better to secure his own hungers. His visage is remarkable only to his former solicitor, and only because of the knowledge Jonathan has of his character; Mina notices no other pedestrians disturbed by his appearance, from the beautiful woman, to the shop clerk, to the hansom driver, and herself is struck only by a lack of humour she fears may work against her husband's poor manners. Unmolested and undetected, the vampire performs the role of an affluent and unattached city resident, free of markers of Otherness, and using his disguise to his advantage as he hunts for another bride.

The action of *Dracula* is in the vampire's invasion of the British home and desecration of British order and sense of purity – his attack on beautiful and eligible young women poised on the cusp of moral marriage and motherhood. Halberstam writes that "Dracula is the deviant or the criminal, the other against whom the normal and the lawful, marriageable and the heterosexual can be known and qualified" who "threatens the stability and, indeed, the naturalness of this equation between middle-class womanhood and national pride by seducing

both [Mina and Lucy] with his particularly foreign sexuality" (Halberstam 89). The haunting of Dracula is the spectre of the gentleman in the hansom, or the wealthy but reserved neighbor – the person whose ill intentions cannot be discerned from his appearance, and whose deviance is expressed in controlled moments of action rather than external displays of inversion and villainy.

Dorian Gray occupies a similar cultural space as a beautiful and celebrated youth who willingly and knowingly cultivates a villainous identity for the sake of pursuing passions. It is not an argument to say that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a novel of surfaces and appearances; each character, as Wilde himself, is heavily invested in the look of things. Though Dorian as a character is the one known for his personal beauty, he, Henry, and Basil each exercise a devotion to appearances, and, what's more, articulate points of analysis for the instruction of the reader. The characters are of course fictional, but the Aesthetes occupy real space in nineteenth-century England, and their codes and expectations are at the fore of fashioned bodies in the 1891 Gothic novel. If the Aesthetes were ever going to create a villain it would be a beautiful one, versed in all of the material aesthetics that build their social space. As a villain, Dorian's purpose is to not apologize – to not be sorry for what he's done. As soon as he is, he becomes an insignificant old man, and he dies. Dorian has cultural value only as a villain - someone who will consume *people* in his pursuit of *pleasure*.

Anne Hollander writes that "Deep personal concern about the details of one's own clothes may still be supposed to indicate a shallow heart and a limited mind; but serious thinkers, faced with the obvious power of dress even over very profound spirits, have been led to treat clothes as if they were metaphors and illustrations" (Hollander xv).[11] These questions of taste

[11] The competition between Jane Eyre and Blanche Ingram in Charlotte Bronte's 1847 novel illustrates the Victorian tension between performative morality and expectations of femininity. Though Jane is represented as the more morally sound of the two, in no small part for her plainness of dress, she is no less invested in her material identity than Blanche Ingram in her extravagant attire – each has given great thought to their identity and purpose in dress,

and material performance are likewise at work in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in which nearly all characters demonstrate a preoccupation with, and understanding of, fashion and material performance. Before Dorian is introduced into the narrative, Basil and Lord Henry exchange a dialogue of surface analysis that frames the rest of the novel, offering quips such as "the ugly and the stupid have the best of it in this world," and "The moment one sits down to think, one becomes all nose, or all forehead, or something horrid" (Wilde 7); though the novel offers Basil as a moderate and moral foil to Lord Henry, each here espouses the same idea – that theirs is a society traded on appearance, and that personal beauty is valued above nearly anything else. It also recognizes that Victorians see beauty only in the young, and so this cultural value is by nature fleeting, and destined to destroy those who trade in it. But, even as "natural" beauty is prized, as a creator of culture (Basil) and an avid consumer of culture (Lord Henry), the pair recognize the possibility of constructing a self that functions to the benefit of the wearer; in speaking of men's fashion, Basil says to Lord Henry, "With an evening coat and a white tie, as you told me once, anybody, even a stock-broker, can gain a reputation for being civilized" (9). From the first, then, clothing is intimately connected to one's reputation, and cited as a major influence in one's social standing. Basil speaks of his social foray as his attempt to remind the public that he is still alive, still working, and not entirely bestial, even if he is an artist, and he does this not by manners or strong people-skills, but by appearing at a party in appropriate dress,

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and clothed herself accordingly. That Miss Ingram is considered shallow and indecent is the fault of the culture which inspires her and requires her actions, and not the young woman herself. Says Kate Soper, "For when philosophy said 'away with the body' it always also, in effect, said 'away with the female'. … This is a stance which also lends itself to a more general cultural process of gender stereotyping and masculine disassociation in Western culture, according to which it is women who are the vainer sex and the more concerned with what they wear while men are largely indifferent to questions of attire" (Soper 15). Thus, Jane is a more admirable character for *not* performing lavishly, while Blanche Ingram is vilified in the text for being just what she is told to be. As Catherine Spooner says, "as Robert Miles states of Rousseau's depiction of Sophia: 'Women … are forbidden to express their desire in words: their natural language for the expression of desire is the semiology of the body'" (Spooner 29).

where he can be paraded around by a hostess. Each of these men see value in Dorian for his appearance, and each is invested in the youth for a personal investment in his looks – Basil to preserve it in works of art, Lord Henry to watch it shift and change under social influence and the ravages of time. Listening to Lord Henry's assertions that Dorian's value will only decrease in time, Dorian turns on Basil for his unforgivably ageless portrait, setting the actions of the novel in motion.

Dorian is a villain entirely of Victorian cultural making. Dorian's England finds value in youth and procreation and horror in the continued presence of those who take up regenerative space without contributing to social growth. As a cultural whole they romanticize the death of the young, and reject and ridicule even the middle-aged. When Dorian asks "suppose, Harry, I became haggard, and old, and wrinkled? What then?" Lord Henry tells him "then, my dear Dorian, you would have to fight for your victories. As it is, they are brought to you. No, you must keep your good looks" (87). To be old is itself downright monstrous, and so it is no surprise when a beautiful youth makes a wish to preserve his cultural cache, resulting in an aging portrait and a perfectly preserved sinner.

As an intimate scholar of Dorian, Basil is the first to perceive a change in Dorian's character, and struggles to reconcile what he distinguishes as a shift in character and his subject's preserved innocent beauty. Basil is horrified to learn that his sentimental Dorian had attended the opera the evening after Sibyl Vane's suicide, and retorts,

> "Dorian, this is horrible! Something has changed you completely. You look exactly the same wonderful boy who, day after day, used to come down to my studio to sit for his picture. But you were simple, natural, and affectionate then.

> You were the most unspoiled creature in the whole world. Now, I don't know what has come over you" (Wilde 91).

Here, Basil asserts not just that one's faults and sins can be written on their face, but that they *should* be – that Dorian, having changed, should likewise show a change in his angelic appearance. Basil literally cannot understand what has happened – that Dorian can behave so unfeelingly, and yet still appear to be the angelic youth who sat for Basil's art. He is horrified that Dorian would behave so unfeelingly, and socially unacceptable, but ultimately cows to Dorian's protestations of feelings, willing to accept the young man's superior sensibilities because the expression of such is more in line with Basil's expectations. In other words, Basil accepts that Dorian must be more thoughtful than his actions suggest, because Dorian protests that his is, and carries the evidence of his unmarred appearance.

From the first, Dorian is young, beautiful, and wealthy. He is musically talented, and appropriately socially attached. He is also a ready study of social literacy, learning from Lord Henry, which leads him to cash in on his culturally-prized attributes to a literally criminal level. Dorian's villainy is not attributed to his physical beauty; his appearance is recognized as a great social boon, and a benefit to the society around him. But in the company of his favorite companions, Lord Henry says that "the costume of the nineteenth century is detestable. It is so somber, so depressing. Sin is the only real colour-element left in modern life," (28) foreshadowing the pursuits of Dorian, and giving them context.

The post-portrait Dorian Gray is not the same as the one gracing the parties of Lady Brandon and the tables of Lady Agatha; his discovery of the magic at work liberates the character from proprietary performance, and gives him a space to adopt and explore a villainous persona with limited consequences. This is not to say that Dorian faces no consequences for his

actions: by the age of thirty-eight Dorian is thoroughly debauched, and his social position is greatly threatened by his pursuit of pleasures. Basil brings a list of sins to his younger friend's door, horrified by the stigma that has been attached to Dorian's name. Yet in the face of accusations against Dorian, Basil says "mind you, I don't believe these rumours at all. At least, I can't believe them when I see you. Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man's face" (126). In spite of seeing the evidence for himself – witnessing the ruination of men and women alike who dare to call Dorian friends, reading the written confessions of dying women (128), and hearing charges not whispered in private, but loudly stated at social dinners (126), Basil is taken in by the character's preserved beauty, and the perceived innocence in his face. Even as he asks "Why is your friendship so fatal to young men?" (126) Basil recognizes "You have a wonderful influence" (128), and begs his friend to use it for good – to live a life as free from corruption as his face. Dorian's response is to show Basil the horrific changes wrought on the portrait by Dorian's answered wish; "My God! If it is true … and this is what you have done with your life, why, you must be worse even than those who talk against you fancy you to be!" the painter gasps in horror (131).

Performing as a gentleman and associating publicly with ladies and gentlemen serves as a perfect mask for the villainy of Dorian Gray; to expose him socially and legally would be to court censure and ridicule on the part of the informer, as a famous contemporary court case illustrates. In 1986 Linda Kitson filed a libel and slander lawsuit against her wealthy obstetrician and in-laws, Dr. and Mrs. Playfair. Having discovered professionally that Kitson likely had an abortion, Dr. Playfair informed his wife with the expectation that Mrs. Playfair would no longer receive her sister-in-law. Ultimately, others were told, and Kitson lost her family income. The case was decided in the plaintiff's favor. In the course of the proceedings, judge "Hanging

Hawkins," "a devoted opponent of immorality" (McLaren 94) criticized Sir John Williams, "a leading obstetrician, who appeared for the defense," for professional indiscretion. "Williams was no doubt dumbfounded that a judge should upbraid him for stating that a crime should be reported, but Hawkin's distaste for such tale-telling was obviously shared by the general public. They grasped, as Williams did not, the difference between the spirit and the letter of the law. A gentleman was discreet" (101). And so, it was affirmed in a court of law, by a conservative judge, against a reputable and well-placed member of society, in response to the question of whether or not a crime should be reported. Discretion, then, is an attribute of extraordinary significance, held as its own form or morality, and expected of those in positions of power and influence. This case also demonstrates discretion can be a double-edged sword, leaving individuals to decide against their reputations and social standing, and exposing criminal or deviant behaviors.

Like Hawkins, Basil Hallward is outraged when Lord Staveley attacks Dorian's character at dinner, explicitly describing why he believes "no chaste woman should sit in the same room with" the dandy (Wilde 126). The account is uncomfortable and appalling to Basil both for what Staveley asserts, but also the manner in which he discloses his judgement of Dorian's character and actions – publicly, loudly, at a dinner in mixed company. This breach of etiquette and good taste inspires Basil to approach his young friend for its extremity – gentlemen *should not* behave in such a manner, and so to do so marks the severity of his claims. That Basil still believes in Dorian's innocence is due to two factors: Dorian's preserved innocent beauty, as he states, but also Basil's adherence to an understanding of appropriate social behavior. Hawkins's judgement may have surprised Williams, but it was in tune with public discourse and expectations, as

related by the press (McLaren 101), and Basil would likely have agreed. It is better to be temperate in speech and reserved in public discourse than to be self-righteously correct.

Though most of Dorian's deviance is suggested to the reader through rumors, he is undoubtably criminal; he murdered his oldest friend and then blackmailed another to destroy the evidence. The morning after he stabs Basil, Dorian "dressed himself with even more than his usual care, giving a good deal of attention to the choice of necktie and scarf-pin, and changing his rings more than once" (136). This is not an act of anxiety related to what he's done, or what he wishes to hide – Dorian is luxuriating in the process of constructing himself, enjoying his choices and material performance as much as he enjoys several dishes at breakfast, and smiles over his letters. That his oldest friend's body remains in his school room does not change Dorian's performance – and herein lies his villainy. He possesses great personal beauty, recognizes its social value, and instead of living up to its perceived promise enjoys it for the mask it provides for his deplorable actions.

"That evening, at eight-thirty, exquisitely dressed, and wearing a large buttonhole of Parma violets, Dorian Gray was ushered into Lady Narborough's drawing-room by bowing servants" (Wilde 145). An hour after blackmailing Alan Campbell into dissolving Basil's body, Dorian appears in society looking his best. "Certainly no one looking at Dorian Gray that night could have believed that he had passed through a tragedy as horrible as any tragedy of our age. Those finely-shaped fingers could never have clutched a knife for sin, nor those smiling lips have cried out on God and goodness" (Wilde 146). Like Dracula, Dorian's appearance is divorced from his actions, and he finds himself able to enter polite society despite his murderous deeds. Though his behavior is not as breezy as it is typically, only Lord Henry speaks of a difference, and readily accepts an excuse of fatigue. For Dracula and Dorian alike, it is not enough to look

alike, but to also act alike – to behave as if they belong, and have only the cares expressed in the moment. Each achieves this by maintaining impeccable dress, and following social customs. In this way a vampire can easily navigate the shops and streets, and Lady Narborough can offer to draw up lists of eligible young ladies for a murderer's perusal and selection.

Halberstam argues that "For Dorian, and one presumes for Wilde, the surface is all that identity consists of," citing the deaths of Sibyl Vane and Basil as examples of the perilousness of "going beneath the surface," and that "each one attempts to move decisively from one realm of meaning to the other, from illusion to reality, but each discovers that the penalty for making too neat a distinction between art and life is death" (63-4). However, I would argue that these faults lie with Sibyl and Basil – that their failing is believing the surface of Dorian's identity rather than his words or actions. Sibyl and Basil each construct artificial and superficial identities that they project onto Dorian, and suffer fatal consequences when the *real* Dorian acts contrary to their fantasies: Sibyl is crushed when Dorian is not the Prince Charming of his face but the impetuous dandy of his dress, and Basil wishes Dorian to forever be the naïve and innocent youth of his artwork rather than the adult of his actual years. Dorian, for his part, does not try to disillusion either, speaking his mind with little care, and excusing his actions with internalized philosophy that shows his identity goes far beyond his surface. I agree with Halberstam that "his 'fashion' sense, his charm, his foppery make Dorian a monster" (63) but argue that this is not a disguise. Rather, Dorian's dandyism is both a lived identity and a social tool that allows him to achieve his desires of navigating wealthy society and disreputable pleasure, and his continued success *despite* the active rumors around him demonstrate his fluency in performative identity. If Dorian is hiding, he is doing to in plain sight, confident that his angelic face can dissuade challengers from their most virulent attacks and make them disbelieve the reality of his actions.

It works when he's confronted by James Vane, when Dorian expressly asks Sibyl's brother to judge the rightness of his identity by his face: "'Eighteen years! Set me under the lamp and look at my face!' … Dim and wavering as was the windblown light, yet it served to show [James] the hideous error, as it seemed, into which he had fallen, for the face of the man he had sought to kill had all the bloom of boyhood, all the unstained purity of youth" (159). Knowing full well how his face will be read, Dorian claims youth to avoid execution, performing to his face, and chastising James Vane for behaving so rashly. Despite evidence to Dorian's true reputation – his nickname, and the testament of others whose lives he's helped to poor ends – James is struck only by the innocence of the face of the man in his grasp, and lets him quickly go. To James' horror, he immediately learns of Dorian's manipulation, and the ruin the dandy has left in his path – "he's as bad as bad" says a woman from the pub (159). Ultimately, Dorian's undoing is his own desire to change his character – to rewrite his performative identity. This he seeks to achieve by destroying the portrait, and thus ends his life.

Yet, though they do not make the whole identity, these surfaces are what make characters such as Dorian and Dracula most threatening to their Victorian readers. They demonstrate keen understanding of material performance, physically representing themselves as favorably as possible, but also how these surfaces function in social circumstances. It is not enough to look the part, but they must also act the part. Basil's continued consternation with Dorian's developing character is the voice of the British public, who seek to read goodness in beauty, and a man's sins written clearly on his marred face. That these villains knowingly and successfully hide in plain sight challenges and taints with possible villainy the popular notions of keeping up appearances and public displays of morality, and warns readers that they cannot actually read a gentleman by the cut of his coat.

Like Dorian Gray, the character of Dr. Henry Jekyll is one motivated by desire for experiences – even those that are less than socially acceptable. He writes in his final letter to his friend and lawyer Mr. Utterson that in his youth he "found it hard to reconcile [a certain impatient gaiety of disposition] with my imperious desire to carry my head high, and wear a more than commonly grave countenance before the public. Hence it came about that I concealed my pleasures" (75) in what he calls his commitment "to a profound duplicity of life" (76). From the time of his youth Jekyll, like Dorian and Dracula, is keenly aware of the importance of appearances, and wars with his desires in the face of compulsive performative morality.

It is significant to note that Dr. Jekyll is neither a good man nor an upstanding citizen even before the appearance of Edward Hyde. Early on, the narrative goes to some weak lengths to suggest that he is moral and conscionable, but the question of Dr. Jekyll's morality and goodness is a conundrum at odds with the narratives actively presented to the reader. According to Utterson, whose thoughts and reflections control most of the story, Jekyll is an upstanding citizen, and the novella casually mentions both his large number of friends, and his charitable reputation. Jekyll importantly holds the esteem of Utterson, who is himself of good reputation, and is known to be socially welcome and of a reserved and contemplative nature. Yet, on the first page of the novella, it is said that "it was frequently [Mr. Utterson's] fortune to be the last reputable acquaintance and the last good influence in the lives of down-going men" for his lack of critical judgment on the choices of others (33), and Utterson himself knows and laments that Jekyll's "wild" youth could be cause for blackmail by Mr. Hyde (44). By contrast, though Dr. Lanyon is described as a friend of Henry Jekyll's, Lanyon is dismissive of Jekyll when the former is first introduced, and largely mistrusting of his colleague throughout the novella. In fact, no impartial evidence is offered that Jekyll is morally dependable – only his appearance. Dr.

Jekyll is financially secure, educated, and is literally upstanding, favorably described by his butler for his stature - “a tall, fine build of a man” (63). And it is this appearance that comes to play a crucial role in distinguishing Hyde from Jekyll, though the division between the two is not so complete as the narrative would have readers believe.

The figure of Mr. Hyde, by comparison, is seen to be a villain from his first appearance; though Robert Enfield cannot quite say *why*, he tells the lawyer Mr. Utterson that he “had taken a loathing to my gentleman at first sight” and describes the murderous intentions towards Hyde on the part of the people gathered to arrest his escape from trampling a child (Stevenson 4). Utterson as the reader’s guide offers the most complete description of Mr. Hyde, his impression that

> Mr. Hyde was pale and dwarfish, he gave an impression of deformity without any nameable malformation, he had a displeasing smile, he had borne himself to the lawyer with a sort of murderous mixture of timidity and boldness, and he spoke with a husky, whispering and somewhat broken voice; all these were points against him, but not all of these together could explain the hitherto unknown disgust, loathing and fear with which Mr. Utterson regarded him. … “God bless me, the man seems hardly human! Something troglodytic, shall we say? … O my poor old Harry Jekyll, if ever I read Satan’s signature upon a face, it is on that of your new friend” (43)

The purple prose of Stevenson’s writing attempts to paint a portrait of infamy brought to life – a figure that is so base and naturally vile that he is evolutionarily stunted – a caveman without morals or developed understanding. Unlike the angelic Dorian, Edward Hyde is stamped with “Satan’s signature,” and thus the repulsion of all who see him speaks to their own moral

superiority and clear consciousness – the Sawbones' "desire to kill him" from Enfield's account speaks to the physician's acute sense of righteousness, rather than a base desire to destroy an Other (35). Reading these passages, Halberstam argues that "sexuality and race, desire and blood, work in tandem to define otherness. Bhabha again explains this relation within racist discourse: 'First, the schema of colonial discourse – what Fanon calls the epidermal schema – is not, like the sexual fetish, a secret. Skin as the key signifier of cultural and racial difference in the stereotype, is the most visible of fetishes, recognized as common knowledge in a range of cultural, political, historical discourses'" (82). Halberstam then forwards that "Hyde is both a sexual secret, the secret of Jekyll's undignified desires, and a visible representation of physical otherness. […] Hyde's monstrosity, his hideous aspect and his perverse desires, transforms the politics of race into a psychological struggle between competing identities within one body" (82-3).

The attack on Sir Danvers Carew offers the most explicit and direct comparison between performative identities. A maidservant dreamily watching the fog in the evening is the witness to the tragedy, and is poetic in her description of the MP; not knowing the identity of Carew, she describes how the old man "bowed and accosted the other with a very pretty manner of politeness" (47) his face in the moonlight described by the romantic young woman as showing an "innocent and old-world kindness of disposition" – he is an " aged and beautiful gentleman" who comes to face the "ape-like fury" of Hyde (48), who seemingly strikes him down unprovoked. The incident is an unveiled representation of the internal conflict of Jekyll/Hyde – the *performance* of goodness to which Jekyll aspires, as he describes in his final letter, and the violent rejection of the restrictions of this performance, as he literally enacts as Hyde. In the

guise of Hyde, Jekyll is able to smash the face of respectability and goodness, and the stifling future to which Jekyll is destined if he maintains his performance of social propriety.

The figure of Hyde is one of such derision that the gentlemen describing him not only offer a natural inclination to hate his face, but mock his dress. In Lanyon's final letter to Utterson he describes Hyde as the man arrives at Lanyon's house for the drawer of alchemical concoctions:

> This person … was dressed in a fashion that would have made an ordinary person laughable; his clothes, that is to say, although they were of rich and sober fabric, were enormously too large for him in every measurement. … There was something abnormal and misbegotten in the very essence of the creature that now faced me… (72, 73)

As a deviant and a criminal, it is impossible to see Hyde in the clothes of a gentleman – he literally cannot fit the role. For Hyde to wear the fine clothes of Jekyll is seen as a burlesque, incongruous and mildly threatening. Lanyon saying such styling would make "an ordinary person laughable" suggests that Hyde is too threatening to laugh at – that something in his body language, carriage, and person performs a level of threat and villainy that protects him from the physician's derision. Even in clothes ludicrously too large, and coming to Lanyon in a position of obsequence and social debt for his aid, Hyde maintains an ominous power – an unspoken threat of possible action.

In his final revelatory narrative Jekyll clearly states that both sides of his nature are true, and argues for an understanding of the "duality of man" (76). He said that he "was radically both; and from an early date, even before the course of my scientific discoveries had begun to suggest the most naked possibility of such a miracle, I had learned to dwell with pleasure, as a

beloved daydream, on the thought of the separation of these elements" (76). His goal is not to defeat, repress, or eradicate his aggressive and amoral nature, but to liberate both "sides" of his personality for their true development: "If each, I told myself, could but be housed in separate identities, life would be relieved of all that was unbearable; the unjust might go his way, delivered from the aspirations and remorse of his more upright twin; and the just could walk steadfastly and securely on his upward path…" (77). His goal is to "liberate" Hyde, not destroy him. Like Dorian Gray, Dr. Jekyll understands the importance of maintaining appearances, and though his script maintains a moral tone his intentions are clearly less so. What he wants is not to repress deviance and preserve a "good" self – what he wants is a scapegoat, a face which can shoulder the blame for dark desires and criminal actions, divorced from the unblemished reputation of the honourable Dr. Jekyll. He wants to indulge in his desires, and maintain the privileges of a good reputation. When he achieves his goals, he feels none of the repulsion of his companions: "And yet when I looked upon that ugly idol in the glass, I was conscious of no repugnance, rather of a leap of welcome. This, too, was myself" (79).

Jekyll's drive for division is especially deviant for its challenge of gender and sexual-social expectations. In the Victorian model, men and women are assumed to naturally possess complementary characteristics that, when joined in marriage, complete a successful and socially beneficial whole represented by the husband. In writing of class and gender Patricia Ingham reflects that "feminine gender was constructed around an elaboration of 'natural' maternal and nurturing instinct into the guardianship at home of morality generally, and sexual purity in particular." By contrast, men are defined as being "self-interested, aggressive, competitive, and with a strong procreative instinct suited to the founding of dynasties" and likewise well suited to

the task of excelling professionally and materially supporting a family and household. What's more,

> by uniting himself in marriage to a satisfactory exponent of femininity, a typical exponent of middle-class masculinity could subsume her identity into his, and become possessed of her high-mindedness and purity, along with a domestic haven of comfort. (Ingham 22)

The vampiric connotations of this Victorian ideal cannot be ignored in a dissertation of this type or subject. Like Dracula taking blood from Lucy and then Mina, a middle-class Victorian man was expected to parasitically internalize their wives' distinguishing positive qualities, thus becoming an amalgamation represented by the masculine head. This relationship is represented as a symbiotic ideal, by which a woman gains a logical guide and protector, and a man gains moral grounding and domestic stability. The single "gentleman" scientist is suspiciously outside of this rationalized model, and Jekyll specifically seeks to rupture it further with chemical research Lanyon calls "unscientific balderdash" (40). This deviance becomes truly villainous when he undertakes his own kind of monstrous labour, "the most racking pangs succeeded: a grinding in the bones, deadly nausea, and a horror of the spirit… then these agonies began swiftly to subside, and I came to myself as if out of a great sickness. … I felt younger, lighter, happier in body…" (Stevenson 78). His artificial maternity culminates in a new self – not one grounded and balanced by the natural gendered order of the nineteenth-century, but one buoyed by liberation from those very social shackles: he has created a new self.

> Men have before hired bravos [criminals for hire] to transact their crimes, while their own person and reputation sat under shelter. I was the first that ever did so for his pleasures. I was the first that could thus plod in the public eye with a load

> of genial respectability, and in a moment, like a schoolboy, strip off these lendings and spring headlong into the sea of liberty. But for me, in my impenetrable mantle, the safety was complete. Think of it – I did not even exist!" (80).

Having created a human shell, he could don at will, Jekyll bastardizes Victorian domestic idealization, and manages to create a perfect guise for the deviant and indecorous desires he's harboured all along. Like Dorian, his face is not his passport to inhibition, and he is joyous in his exercise.

Dr. Jekyll begins to fear the transformations only when he can no longer control them, and when he may face the consequences of his actions as Hyde – "I was slowly losing hold of my original and better self, and becoming slowly incorporated with my second and worse" (83). And yet Jekyll has just said in the same letter that he as Jekyll was no different by his experiment – that he was not split, as he had hoped, but that he had liberated his darkest desires, while still plagued with inappropriate wishes as Dr. Jekyll (79). In essence, he had grown more villainous, as opposed to more virtuous.

When faced with true consequences, Dr. Jekyll attempts to destroy the face, if not the desires, he had created: "I preferred the elderly and discontented doctor, surrounded by friends and cherishing honest hopes; and bade a resolute farewell to the liberty, the comparative youth, the light step, leaping pulses and secret pleasures, that I had enjoyed in the disguise of Hyde" (83). Though he is *discontented* as the elderly Dr. Jekyll, the performance of propriety is more secure – Jekyll is not the one wanted by the police in the murder of an MP, after all, and can move through the streets with the impunity of the innocent. Yet Hyde is not a different person,

but a different expression of identity of the *same* person – a disguise scientifically created, and exceptionally successful in the performance of villainy, both criminally and as an identity.

In the final paragraphs of the story Jekyll laments that the changes are becoming permanent, and "this, then, is the last time ... that Henry Jekyll can think his own thoughts or see his own face" and laments the actions of Hyde once the later has gained control (89). Yet this lamentation is shallow, and contrary to much of Jekyll's earlier descriptions – his joyous narrative of freedom, liberation, and expression of true desire. What he does here at the end is lie to save face – figuratively, if he cannot save his literal face. Once his honorable identity has been destroyed his only option is to create a fictional Dr. Jekyll who is a victim of science and a monstrous creeping identity – *but he is still the same person*. Throughout the whole, Jekyll/Hyde have been one, and remain so at the end.

In *Skin Shows,* J. Halberstam writes that "Hyde [is] a kind of surface effect, an appearance that marks the loss of Jekyll … Having and hiding a secret self, then, ensures Jekyll's downfall" (68), but also goes on to say that in both *Dorian Gray* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, "another self is produced … and that self takes over the original" (70). Such a reading, I fear, accepts Henry Jekyll's narrative on its own surface, allowing him the agency of deciding when his actions are his own, and when he can blame his monstrous other. When *both* Jekyll's narrative and his actions are taken into account, the novella demonstrates that the divide between the two is not as complete as the scientist would argue – that there aren't really two at all.

Jekyll's accounts and actions are at odds, suggesting he is an untrustworthy narrator in revealing the truth of his chemical transformation and performative identity. At the end of the novel Poole and Utterson break into Henry Jekyll's laboratory to find a strange figure writhing in his death throes, dwarfed in the clothing of Dr. Jekyll but not wearing his face. Utterson quickly

determines that this is Hyde, and that he has committed suicide (66), and Utterson and Poole search for evidence of Dr. Jekyll's survival, ultimately coming across Jekyll's written accounts of his experiments. In Jekyll's own hand – the same hand as Hyde's "only differently sloped" (54) – the scientist delivers a concise exposition.

Though Jekyll asserts that "It was Hyde, after all, and Hyde alone, that was guilty" (81), a paragraph before he is exhilarated by the completeness of his disguise, crying "I did not even exist!" (80). His remaining account is similarly wavering, as he remarks that "The pleasures which I made haste to seek in my disguise were, as I have said, undignified; I would scarce use a harder term. But in the hands of Edward Hyde, they soon began to turn towards the monstrous… This familiar that I called out of my own soul, and sent forth alone to do his good pleasures, was a being inherently malign and villainous" (80), and thus begins the severance of the worst of his crimes from the performative identity of Dr. Henry Jekyll. Clearly, though, Jekyll is not unaware of his actions as Hyde – his handwriting is the same (54), and when Utterson approaches Hyde, claiming a common acquaintance, Hyde hisses "He never told you …. I did not think you would have lied" (43). Their consciousnesses, then, do not appear to be divided, and thus suggest that Hyde is in fact the mask that Jekyll claims early in his descriptions, and not the deviant Other with which he concludes

The actions of the conclusion are out of character with the Hyde Jekyll's letter describes, a villain devoted to self-preservation with minimal consideration of consequences. The Hyde Jekyll describes seems unlike to lock himself away when he could otherwise escape with Jekyll's moveable wealth, and seems even less likely to commit suicide instead of facing Utterson and the authorities. These are the cowardly actions of Jekyll, who determines to save his reputation and control his own narrative so his true nature is not scrutinized. He created Hyde to escape

consequences for his actions, fails, and tries to spin the story to generate sympathy. He wishes to be known as a misguided and overzealous scientist, rather than an ungentlemanly murderer.

The fear in his voice when Utterson and Poole break down the door – the fear that drives him to suicide – is not Hyde fearing the judgement of his friend and Butler, but Jekyll/Hyde fearing the consequences of his actions now that he is trapped in the face that had murdered Carew. He fears punishment, and losing his pleasures, so Jekyll manufactures a scapegoat.

Mr. Hyde's deviance and violence should not be read as affirmation of the Victorian principle that one's appearance can communicate their "natural" goodness or villainy. The characters of Stevenson's novel universally assume Hyde's wickedness upon the moment of meeting, and readily accept that such a person is perhaps less than human, and as untrustworthy and violently inclined as a bestial predator. But Hyde is only a mask for Dr. Jekyll – he is not truly a different person, but the guise generated for the unabashed and uninhibited inclinations of Jekyll. Perhaps the reason why characters are ready to identify Hyde by name but are overwhelmingly unable to offer clear and explicit descriptions of the man, is because they recognize he is not real, figuratively speaking. Hyde is so excessively archetypical that he does not register beyond understood generalizations – a face marked by Satan, a sense of deformity without specifically identifiable physical deformities. As Jekyll's artificial creation he represents an idea of evil and villainy untethered to biological reality – a kind of costume or cosplay performed on public streets, but without full lived experience.

Conclusion

The work of this first chapter has been to establish an understanding of sartorial literacy on the parts of authors and readers, and to demonstrate its textual use in the communication of moral character. The narrative attention to dress and dressing in a textual (i.e. not visual) medium

illustrates an awareness of both the literal and figurative meanings of fashion, and its contemporary nineteenth century social value. That Lady Audley, Dracula, Dorian, and Dr. Jekyll *look* well is essential to the development of their social threat: their villainies are made possible, and made threatening, by their ability to masquerade as decent, and even desirable, figures. And Count Dracula, Dorian Gray, and Dr. Jekyll *are villains*: they are characters whose deviant identities are purposefully developed contrary to both law and social expectations for their own benefit. Unlike the characters of subsequent chapters, these characters are notable for electing to hide in plain sight

The character of Dorian most consciously, but also Dracula and Dr. Jekyll explicitly, expose the lie of this core Victorian principal: that one's character is reflected by their appearance. Though Victorians market morality on the basis of performativity, these villains illustrate the true façade of the concept. What makes these novels *horrific*, as opposed to moralistic, is that they offer no consolation or alternative instruction in avoiding or knowing the villainy they represent: the final resolutions only affirm the danger and uncertainty of a social system reliant on surfaces and performances. True, the villains ultimately suffer for their deviant and criminal behaviors, but none are exposed to the full public, and no lessons are offered to readers for personal growth. The conclusions offered by these novels are thus only moderately successful in re-establishing the comfortable order expected by the Victorian reader. Though Lady Audley is locked away, and the gentlemen die, the threats they introduce are unresolved, and their intimate, shuttered punishments fail to affirm morality and social expectations. To resolve this lingering anxiety, other media creators focus offer audiences far more outlandish, and easily recognizable, villains. Why do gothic and comics authors introduce such extraordinary

villains? I argue that it is because the visually villainous is easier to dehumanize than a villain who looks respectable, and is thus easier to punish in extraordinary ways.

CHAPTER 3

"AND SINCE I CANNOT PROVE A LOVER"[12]

In chapter two I address villains whose threat is their cultural and fashionable literacy, demonstrated narratively by hiding in plain sight: villains who use their fashionable beauty to achieve their nefarious advantage. As I argue there, Lady Audley is beautiful, as is Dorian Gray, and both are written as the villains of their stories, enabled by their beauty in the commission of violent crimes against innocent people. The threat of such villains is their desirability– villains who can secure their goals because they are beautiful, fashionable, or look respectable. But in broader cultural narratives ugliness and oddness far more consistently serve as warnings of a character's wicked intentions or threatening ideas. A character whose body is twisted is often narratively revealed to be morally twisted, and another who eschews *sartorial* conventions may likewise take exception to *social* conventions. Popular culture has long taught audiences to ostracize the odd, and adopt deafness to their social protests, by equating oddness of dress with threats of exceptional criminal activity. In this way, audiences are taught to maintain the status quo, and social change is warded off by a mistrust of the unfamiliar and unusual.

The unfamiliar and unusual are the subject of chapter two: in this chapter I read the characters of Madame de la Rougierre from *Uncle Silas*, the titular villain from *The Beetle*, and *Batman*'s Two-Face, and Poison Ivy, and argue that each are empowered by their nonconformity, and purposefully adopt deviant signifiers to thwart social conventions of age, deformity, and gender that would otherwise oppress them. I argue that, as characters, Madame de la Rougierre, the Beetle, Two-Face, and Poison Ivy are written to disidentify with majority powers structures and recognize the otherness of their physical appearances, and express agency

[12] Shakespeare, *Richard III* 1.1.28

and power through their reversal of conventions, using fashion to defy the categorical identities of powerlessness as related to their age, gender, or deformity.

The spectacle of performative villainy is a fundamental prop of cultural narratives: the crooked crone and the mustache-twirling menace simultaneously instruct audiences in social orthodoxy and instill a fear of the "other" who rejects, or is incapable of, such conformity; writing on the instruction of gender roles, Paula Ruth Gilbert asserts that women "have learned these messages since childhood, when fairy tales have inculcated in them images of the beautiful and nonaggressive princess in contrast to the ugly and powerful witch" (1287). These stories teach that social deviance is etched upon the form, punishing and marking as villains the ugly, the deformed, or the unfashionable. One such example is that of Shakespeare's *Richard III*. The tyrant sneers in the first act "And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover, /To entertain these fair well-spoken days, /I am determined to prove a villain /And hate the idle pleasures of these days" (I.i.126-9). In this direct address and statement of purpose, audiences are taught through Richard to equate his physical deformity with his moral failures, and his subsequent malicious intentions and lust for power. Richard is determined to "prove a villain," gaining through treachery what he cannot secure through grace of form and adoration. There is the argument in Shakespeare's play that Richard becomes a villain because of his appearance, and that were he more conventionally attractive, he would not be motivated to seek power and dominance through treachery. This equation of deviance and deformity is a hideous notion not original to Shakespeare, but serves as a strong illustration of a concept consistent in cultural artifacts which affirm an inclination to associate the ugly and unfashionable with the immoral.

Othering from the Outside: The Theory of Disidentification

But Richard III's assertion of agency is not found in traditional folktales. In response to the cultural construct of beauty, which forever marks him as an object of pity or fear, Richard consciously adopts the character projected onto him, and in that role finds power. In the face of his appearance, Richard *adopts* the title of "villain," rewriting the term to reflect the power he seeks, and the means through which he intends to achieve that power. This echoes José Esteban Muñoz's theory of disidentificaion, which Muñoz says "is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship" (4).[13] Muñoz's description of queer performance art could easily refer to the character of Richard III, when Muñoz says that "disidentificaion with these damaged stereotypes recycled them as powerful and seductive sites of self-creation" (4). In Munoz's theory of identity, disidentification is the system by which a minority subject gains power through the queering of the identity projected onto the subject. In a system that would work against him, Richard queers the categorical identity of "villainy" by embracing villainy as a means of obtaining what society would withhold: wealth, power, sex.

Disidentification as an identification system is reactive to the majority narratives within a specific society or community. Muñoz's queer theory begins with French linguist Michel Pêcheux's theory of identity and disidentification, which argues that there are "[t]hree modes in

[13] Muñoz writes: "the theory of disidentification that I am offering is meant to contribute to an understanding of the ways in which queers of color identify with ethnos or queerness despite the phobic charges in both fields" (11). Only one of the villains here analyzed – the Beetle – can be directly described as a "queer of color." The other characters, though marginalized, all belong to a superficial ruling class on the basis of their whiteness. Their "queerness," though, directly relates to their disidentification; Madame is disenfranchised for her age, and Poison Ivy for her femininity. Two-Face begins as a member of the most dominant ruling class – a powerful, educated, successful white man, but struggles with the frailty of this identity after his disfiguring attack.

which a subject is constructed by ideological practices," the first of which, "a 'Good Subject' chooses the path of identification with discursive and ideological forms." In literature and other cultural narratives, the "Good Subject" is the moral protagonist, who behaves according to social scriptures, upholds systems of gender, class, religion, and taste, and demonstrates the romanticism of conformity. Alternatively, a "'Bad Subject' resist[s] and [attempt[s] to reject the images and identificatory sites offered by dominant ideology and proceed[s] to rebel, to … turn against this symbolic system" (Muñoz 11). This rebellion, as Munoz suggests, "validates the dominant ideology by reinforcing its dominance through the controlled symmetry of 'counterdetermination.'" In doing so, the Bad Subject upholds the discursive and ideological forms of the Good Subject, to its own detriment, validating its rejection. This is the traditional purpose of a narrative villain – to uphold the current system and validate the rejection of the Other. But disidentification, on the other hand, is the subject who "tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of everyday struggles of resistance" (11-12). Muñoz continues, "a disidentifying subject works to hold onto his object and invest it with new life" (12). Thus, disidentification allows for a critical subject to find agency within the system which would oppress that subject, inverting the discrimination/object to rewrite a critical identity as a positive identification category. This is the villain who accepts their broadcasted role, and sees in that label the potential for untethered disobedience which may prove lucrative – like Richard finding very traditional power in his own villainous actions. The same can be said about the villains here discussed, each aesthetically cast to represent a social fear or ill, but who work within a cultural system to secure their own agency. They do not struggle against their labels, but rather work within them to challenge definitions of deviance.

Sartorially sensational villains are, figuratively speaking, strawmen intended for burning. Their exceptional fashioning identifies them as undeniably "other," and their signifiers, perhaps more than their villainous actions, call for redress not necessarily written into legal code – they are characters audiences want to see meet violent ends, as opposed to facing more enlightened systems of correction. Exceptionally-crafted villains allow contemporary audiences to recall the celebratory space of public execution – a public space which affirmed social mores and offered communities a sense of community through the literal destruction of a threatening force or figure. As modern judiciary systems moved from corporal punishment, communities were then denied the catharsis and finality of witnessing punitive measures. In this space the narrative villain is introduced, filling a void while affirming the moral superiority of the reader who may oppose such violent retribution beyond a work of fiction.

Burning Strawmen: Punishment and the Performative Villain

The historical site of public execution, before its English abolition in 1868, was a festival predicated on the performance of villainy and the theatre of justice, as Lucy Worsley describes in *The Art of English Murder*. The "festival" would begin with tales of murder, piracy, and intrigue, circulated by newspapers, penny bloods, and ballads. As criminals were apprehended and brought to trial social fervor would increase. The publications through which an average citizen would experience the formal events would work to dehumanize the subjects of a court case, transforming both victims and villains into characters available for popular entertainment. The justice system, at least for sensational crimes like murder, became a form of entertainment itself, and inspired a kind of participatory fandom which culminated in the attendance of the execution of the narrative villain. Regardless of the rightness of the trial, or guilt of the executed, public executions were spectacles widely attended, and *enjoyed* by vast crowds of people. Crowds

would cheer as a hangman dropped his charge, and children would scramble for high perches from which to watch the events. Though he came to condemn the practice, even Charles Dickens participated, when he rented a room with a clear view of the scaffold, to watch the execution of Maria Manning, a woman who was convicted for murdering her lover with the help of her husband, thus committing the crimes of both sexual immorality and murder.[14]

In *Violent Victorians*, Rosalind Crone argues that "scaffold culture" continues following the "dismantling of the Bloody Code during the 1820s, which saw the repeal of many of the capital statues" (loc. 1764), and into the nineteenth century "hangings were regarded by many as a form of entertainment and certainly held out attractions as a part of a narrative of violence in which keen spectators could participate" (loc. 1772). This unrelenting interest in real and imagined narratives of murder encouraged printers to "take advantage of a rapidly growing and increasingly literature working- and lower-middle-class population who were in need of entertainments suited to the constrictions of the urban environment" (loc. 1780). Crone's book shows that "in the case of London, we do not have to look very far before we encounter a wide range of very violent entertainments enjoyed openly by large audiences which suggest that, in a very important sense, things were becoming much less civilised" (loc. 257). Though "the levity, jokes, humour, rowdiness and apparent thirst for executions displayed by the lower orders provoked great concern among the higher class" Crone notes that "these accounts need to be balanced with those that describe the solemnity of the audience at the moment of justice, which could be expressed either in the form of silence or awe or, in the case of particularly heinous

[14] The scene described by Worsley, from Dickens' accounts, affirms the readiness of the English public to look upon the execution of the Mannings as entertainment, as thousands gathered to watch the act of violence, and Dickens and his companions even rent rooms to improve their view. Though Dickens was repulsed by the "upturned faces, so inexpressibly odious in their brutal mirth or callousness," mirthful they were. Worsely writes that "the writer judged that there was something degrading and animal about the relish he saw being taken all around him," and "the murderers, he thought, had 'perished like beasts'" (Worsley 79).

murderers, as loud shouts of disapprobation." She argues that "both sets of behaviour suggest the display of some kind of respect for the punishment" (loc. 1819-27).

These festivals of punishment were affirming for citizens as much as they were condemning of the perpetrators and their violations. The person to be executed was reduced to a stock character, dehumanized by the popular press, and the spectacle of a publicized death. The guilty becomes less of a person, and more a representation of an ill or fear within a society. A murderer is an explicit threat to the physical well-being and safety of an entire community, regardless of the circumstances of the murder committed; their execution, then, assuaged public fears, and offered a false sense of security. With their death would (figuratively) die the threat of murder, and with their death came a clear warning for any who might dare to commit the crime themselves. In a public execution a community is allowed to self-define and find relief in their conformity. Each of these sites functioned historically as cathartic releases for the social masses – times at which values and power structures could be affirmed, through the upholding of violent jurisprudence. They are community-building events that draw together not just ruling classes, but masses of citizenry who must, and do, live within the social confines of a particular power structure.[15] They collectively rejoice in the excising of the deviant, and teach that violations can, and will, meet violent opposition.

And, again, they were entertaining, and revisited time and time over in the popular press. The public executions of criminals are long intimately connected to literature, as William Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard* historically, and Lucy Worsley's *The Art of the English Murder*

[15] These festivals were particularly jubilant when the condemned further breached social codes, such as Maria Manning. Paula Ruth Gilbert addresses the cultural misconceptions of the violent woman in "Discourses of Female Violence and Societal Gender Stereotypes," writing that in the 19th century "Women's crimes of violence raised issues of gender and sexuality more profoundly than did those committed by men because violent female criminals were seen as having crossed the line of gender to engage in 'masculine' activity" (1294).

cotemporally, readily demonstrate. This interest in public punishment and the bodily violence offered to villains continues in media representations, from these historic ballads to gothic novels and contemporary comics properties. The torture and execution of "Damiens the regicide" in 1757, gruesomely detailed by Michel Foucault in his opening pages of *Discipline & Punish* (3-6), is not so unlike the flaying of the Joker that remains central to the theme of *Death of the Family*.[16] What is represented is a thorough and aggressive dehumanizing of a deviant subject, accepted and encouraged by the audience for a sense of righteousness – that Damiens and the Joker *deserve* the physical torment for the crimes they've committed.[17]

According to Lucy Worsley's history, this space of public execution was like that of the carnival described by Bakhtin – an informal, folk tradition that arises from celebrations of natural cycles, and fueled by a sense of laughter, even in the face of death. The carnival is an inversion of order that ultimately offers balance, and provides a necessary second life denied by formal regulations of ecclesiastical and political parties (Bakhtin 11). Though "rank was especially evident during official feasts … all were considered equal during carnival" as participants perform roles and identities unburdened by their social positions (Bakhtin 10). This sense of cultural neutrality and performance space are circumstances no less true at the site of public punishment and execution. There, the masses that gathered were not immediately divisible, but were instead part of a collective whole made possible by the othering of the punished party. Attending a public execution was a performance of morality and righteousness,

[16] As detailed in the introduction of this dissertation, the opening pages of the comic relate the flaying of the Joker's face, and the resultant tissue left nailed to a wall, but the Joker's body – alive or dead – remains missing. It is an aggressively violent scene that challenges notions of sanity, punishment, and identity.

[17] I am not arguing for a direct, conscious connection between the cessation of public executions and the development of these texts; violent literature has always existed. Rather, I am suggesting that the development of these particular texts at these particular points in time suggest a cultural movement that connects the two – a shift away from one form of entertainment and towards another.

signaling one as a member of a collective that unites against a threat. And the carnival became a space where communities could celebrate the terminal and literal destruction of both real and imagined threats.

In the first chapter of *Discipline & Punish*, Foucault writes of the decline of the spectacle of punishment – the abolition of public torture and execution - that demonstrates a cultural shift in punitive measures and ideals. The withdrawal of the public criminal body and the spectacle of execution recalls the attempts of the ruling classes to limit the medieval carnival – a taking away, without offering an alternative, which ultimately creates a cultural and social void.[18] But like the "official feasts of the Middle Ages [which] did not lead the people out of the existing world order and created no second life" the withdrawal of public punishment to the private sphere similarly "sanctioned the existing pattern of things and reinforced it" (9). Bakhtin writes of ecclesiastical feasts that these official social spaces were reinforced by established power structures, for the express purpose of emphasizing order and maintaining control. In comparison to the closing of the public from judicial punishment, power structures are similarly enforced, delineating between those with the power to determine consequences (the ruling class), and those who might suffer them (the public). Into this space of uncertainty rises the cultural figure of the performative villain, whose purpose is to supplement the missing criminal body, while maintaining moral institutions and affirming non-criminal audience identities. The Gothic novel, and comic books after them, become carnivalesque spaces in their extravagance and festivity, engaging inversion and disrupting systems by indulging in the spectacle of performativity, if

[18] Bakhtin relates that there is a clear difference between the official, ecclesiastical feasts of the Middle Ages, and the space of the carnival; "the official feasts of the Middle Ages, whether ecclesiastic, feudal, or sponsored by the state, did not lead the people out of the existing world order and created no second life. On the contrary, they sanctioned the existing pattern of things and reinforced it" (9). These official social spaces were reinforced by established power structures, for the express purpose of emphasizing order and maintaining control.

only for a limited and policed time. In the figurative marketplace authors create a second space in which alternative lives and narratives are made possible. And in the inversion of the carnivalesque narrative space authors are emboldened to offer violent conclusions that carry connotations of justice and righteousness, as opposed to the indelicacy or outright barbarism of actual executions. Though the inhumanity of torture and executions is recognized, the uncouth desire remains to witness the deviant be punished – and to see them figuratively, if not literally, be dismembered in defense of the state (of morals and culture).

To do this, texts cannot introduce average criminals, who may be managed by the culturally-lauded prison state. Instead, an author needs must introduce *villains* who not only break laws but also threaten society and culture itself through a level of deviance the judicial system is unprepared to formally address. Authors signify such deviance through the exercise of culturally-constructed material performativity – they alert readers to the character of the deservingly punished through their appearances. But clothing and fashion are not passive scriptures – material identity doesn't simply manifest. It is an active cultivation and curation of both social codes and artifacts which coalesce into a whole, and which are then read through the lenses of archetype and socially-cultivated categorical expectations of class, gender, sex, occupation, and age. One such active curator is created in the character of Sheridan Le Fanu's wicked governess of *Uncle Silas*: Madame de la Rougierre.

The Sartorial Spectacle of Madame de la Rougierre

Sheridan Le Fanu's 1864 gothic novel *Uncle Silas* tells the tale of a sheltered and naïve young heiress, Maud Ruthvyn, living with her reclusive father, Lord Ruthvyn. Concerned that his isolation has detrimentally impacted Maud's gendered education, Lord Ruthvyn hires Madame de la Rougierre as a French finishing governess, employing the woman to prepare

Maud for a public life as a respectable and wealthy young woman; Madame's own respectability is oft-questioned, and she is dismissed when Maud discovers the governess criminally invading Lord Ruthvyn's study. Maud's peace is short-lived, and, orphaned at the death of her father, seventeen-year-old Maud is removed from her family home and familiar companions, and sent to live with her estranged Uncle Silas, finding herself in the middle of a gothic horror of isolation and manipulation as Silas seeks to secure the family fortune denied to him and bestowed upon his niece. There Maud discovers Uncle Silas find an accomplice in cackling Madame de la Rougierre.

To begin an analysis of Madame de la Rougierre I first argue that the narrative space of *Uncle Silas* is a Bakhtian carnival, in which the grotesque and the language of the carnivalesque are significant in the material and comparative development of characters, and their representative places in a familiar social order. Bakhtin writes that "through all the stages of historic development feasts were linked to moments of crisis, of breaking points in the cycle of nature or in the life of society and man. Moments of death and revival, of change and renewal always led to a festive perception of the world" (Bakhtin 9). As often with gothic novels and comic books, the space of *Uncle Silas* is thus like the festival space of the public execution, in which participants are encouraged to pass judgment on social transgressors and celebrate their punishments – a cultural (and at times literal) marketplace that transgresses social hierarchies in observance of natural processes that do not privilege social constructs.

In the gothic festival of *Uncle Silas,* binary characters are introduced: the admirable and socially-compliant Maud, who is defined by her youth, wealth, and as one available for consumption on a marriage market, and Madame de la Rougierre, who is defined by her age, gluttonous consumption, and sartorial deviance. The one is quiet and reserved, and the other is

gregarious and exceptional. Madame's auditory interjections link her as much to the carnival as her sartorial inversions, loudly rejecting quiet domesticity for the vibrancy of the public performative space. Bakhtin says that carnival laughter "is, first of all, a festive laughter. Therefore, it is not an individual reaction to some isolated 'comic' event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people" which may be "directed at all and everyone," and is "ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives" (Bakhtin 11-12). In this it is markedly disrespectful of both individuals and institutions. Maud represents the normative space of appropriate identity, Madame the carnivalesque inversion, and it is the novel's project to right this inversion through the punishment of Madame, and the protection of Maud. But I assert that it fails in its alienation of Madame, for whom narrative space is made when the character is materially constructed, and thus embodies the excess Bakhtin identifies as natural. More directly, by dressing Madame in inverted fashions, the novel places her within the space of the carnival, and asserts her natural order. Though the novel publicly executes Madame in its conclusion, it also makes space for the material success of one who rejects social sartorial conscriptions.

From her very first description in *Uncle Silas* the figure of Madame de la Rougierre is offered as an extraordinary domestic horror, guilty of social and moral sins, and reminiscent of childhood nightmares.[19] She is a gaudy crone who respects no boundaries, and fails as a surrogate mother figure, primarily successful in her criminal pursuits. The novel casts her as a villain, but the character of Madame is unconcerned with the critical labels offered by the characters around her. Instead, I argue that the character is shown to cultivate fashioned deviance as a strength to secure material goals in the novel, the efforts of which culturally challenges the

[19] For a history of actual Victorian governesses see Ruth Brandon's *Governess: The Lives and Times of the Real Jane Eyres.*

script of aging women's bodies through Madame's disidentification with ageist gender expectations.[20] She refuses the fashions of old women and repressed governesses, and instead performs fashionable ambiguity as a woman old enough to know better (than to dress as she does), and confident enough not to care. Art historian Alison Gernsheim quotes Balzac as lamenting "An Old woman nowadays literally does not know how to dress herself. Why are we tried with the unbecoming appearance of those who won't be old and can't be young? She who is ashamed to wear a costume as old as herself, may rely upon it she only looks older than her costume" (32). This complaint renders the fashions of older women as an act against observers, dismissing mature women as inappropriate in their public appearances, and arguing that the bodily readings of other cultural participants "should" be considered by women as they dress. This perspective privileges Balzac's perception of age and beauty and fashion over the independent identities of the women he critiques, rendering their fashioning something that is done by them to others. In typically-undercutting fashion, Gernsheim upholds Balzac's nineteenth-century perspective, offering her own critique of mature fashions: "Mutton dressed up as lamb is rarely seen today, except in the case of a certain type of elderly dame from America, addicted to heavily flowered hats and 'jewelled' hairnets in the daytime" (Gernsheim 32). [21]

The first image of Madame de la Rougierre is directly contrary to the novel's protagonist, the quiet, decorous, and homely teenage Maud. The evening of Madame's appearance Maud finds herself "sitting at the great drawing-room window" alone, "the lights near the fire … hardly reached to the window at which [she] sat" (Le Fanu 20). The tone of the chapter is one of

[20] Demonstrated by Madame's growing collection of material goods through her narrative representation.

[21] These "elderly dame[s] from America" are not dressing to impress *you*, Gernsheim.

solemnity and philosophy. As she looks across a late-night landscape, Maud recalls the death of her mother eleven years before; she remembers, too, the strange religious conversation she subsequently had with a solemn Swedenborgian, walking in those same woods. With these melancholy remembrances she looks "upon that solemn wood, white and shadowy in the moonlight, where, for a long time after that ramble with the visionary, I fancied the gate of death…" (24). It is into this retrospection that Madame physically steps. Maud is startled to see through the window glass: "an odd figure – a very tall woman in grey draperies, nearly white under the moon … I stared in something like a horror upon the large and rather hollow features which I did not know, smiling very unpleasantly on me; and in the moment it was plain that I saw her, the grey woman began gobbling and cackling shrilly" (24). In the space where Maud imagines the gates of death – and the final resting place of her mother – Madame manifests as a perverse, carnivalesque inversion. She is not the kind mother Maud remembers, but a laughing, manic figure who looks as if she's just crawled from a crypt.

Madame's gobbling and cackling is a forcible disruption of Maud's reserve, just as she bodily dominates her pupil. Where Maud is a young woman who believes she looks "younger still" than her seventeen years, Madame is a towering presence, advancing towards Maud in something akin to a burial shroud. Her smile is not one of welcome and warmth, but a barring of teeth suggesting a threat, and immediately correlates Madame not with refined society, but bestial tendencies. Maud's first reaction is to leap away from the window and call for the help of her butler. The further fashioning of Madame is not helped by the analysis of Mrs. Rusk, who aligns the new governess with a ravenous beast. She tells Maud after her first supper that the governess "eats like a wolf" and has "oogh! such a mouth! I felt a'most like little Red Riding-Hood" (26). Though Mrs. Rusk is disapproving of Madame's appetite, Madame's gluttony

recalls the grotesque of Bakhtin's feasting, which he argues is "deeply positive. It is presented not in a private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all the people" (19). Like Bakhtin's example of Sancho from *Don Quixote,* Madame's "appetite and thirst still conveys a powerful carnivalesque spirit" and she represents "a material bodily whole" (22, 23). Madame's language further demonstrates an awareness of Bakhtin's carnivalesque, as he considers the language of the marketplace. Bakhtin observes that "when two persons establish friendly relations, the form of their verbal intercourse also changes abruptly; they address each other informally, abusive words are used affectionately […] Verbal etiquette and discipline are relaxed and indecent words and expressions may be used" (Bakhtin 16). Though the two are certainly not friendly, Madame uses informal language and "playful" insults to perform a close relationship with Maud, despite the former's intentions and the latter's understanding of their toxic pairing. Maud addresses this directly when she says to Madame,

> "You shan't call me those names," I said, in an angry tremor.
>
> What name, dearest cheaile?"
>
> "*Calomniatricei* – that is an insult."
>
> "Why, my most foolish little Maud, we may say rouge and a thousand other little words in play which we do not say seriously."
>
> "You are not playing – you never play – you are angry, and you hate me," I exclaimed vehemently. (Le Fanu 371).

Madame's intentions are what we might now call "gaslighting"; she is challenging Maud's perception of their relationship, and thus Madame's intentions, but continuing a carnivalesque performance of laughter. Here, Madame is laughing at Maud, as the governess seeks to deny Maud her agency and power. From her introduction Madame is defined by Bakhtin's

carnivalesque language, cackling in unchecked mirth, and reportedly gluttonous. That her manners do not fit her station suggest that Madame is not to be trusted in her performance as a mature woman hired to instruct a young heiress in gendered manners and culture.

More unsettling than Madame's poor manners and gluttony, though, is her fashionable appearance, which even the cloistered Maud recognizes is inappropriate as she describes Madame as a fearsome sight. The hiring of Madame, and the later criticism of Cousin Monica, suggests that Maud requires greater instruction in fashion literacy. However, the dress and presentation of Madame suggests the author's attempts to cue the reader's superior understanding of fashionable presentation, the better to know Madame's character. As I note in the introduction, Catherine Spooner writes that "Clothing is above all a means of inserting the self into social discourse, literary or otherwise" (3) and finding that "As Alexandra Warwick and Dani Cavallaro argue, 'One of the ways in which the body can be made docile is through clothing. Dress renders it analyzable, either forcibly through required clothing, or voluntarily through self-selected garments'" (Spooner 12). Similarly, in "The language of fashion in postmodern society: A social semiotic perspective" Marianna Boero observes that "clothing is a language with its own grammar and vocabulary" and goes so far as to say that "trimmings and accessories have the same function as adjectives and adverbs, which is to enrich the dress or the phrase, respectively" (306). Both scholars recognize the importance of sartorial analysis in the decoding of a character as a means of self-definition, noting that the biological body can become a readable text through the purposeful dressing of a human. It is a cultural manifestation that elevates identity beyond the strictly animal.

For all of her social villainy, the dress of Madame seems to be strangely forthright, signaling not fashionable illiteracy or outright rebellion, but her disidentification with the

gendered expectations of Victorian England. Even in her subterfuge as Maud's "governess," a role adopted for a larger plot, Madame does not blend in, but is rather dressed to her character – as someone boisterous and animated, and a woman who wishes to take up a great deal of social space. Her large frame is clothed brightly, and adopts strong contrasts, such as black hair over ghostly skin; the rustling of her silks is not a whisper, but a sensory intrusion into the quiet space of Maud's previously peaceful life. Contrary to the social expectation that older women would fade into the background, Madame demands notice.

Her more purposeful performance offers little improvement from Maud's first impression:

> She was tall, masculine, a little ghastly perhaps, and draped in purple silk, with a lace cap, and great bands of black hair, too thick and black perhaps to correspond quite naturally with her bleached and sallow skin, her hollow jaws, and the fine but grim wrinkles traced about her brows and eye-lids. (27)[22]

This descriptive catalogue offered by Maud says as much about the young woman and the culture of her readers as it does about the governess herself. Narratively, Maud has no reason to fear or distrust Madame, other than a sour first impression – one which is ghostly, but offers no physical threat. And yet Maud is inclined to be critical of the woman standing before her, judging her to be in poor taste. Fixated on Madame's age, Maud emphasizes her "hollow jaws" and "grim wrinkles," far more critically than the Swedenborgian's previously-remembered "grave, dark face," (20); though the latter was "gentle … and seemed kind" despite brooding features, Madame is "cunning" in her glance (27). The governess is "ghastly" and too much for

[22] This description of Madame is often cited in scholarship of *Uncle Silas;* Joseph Browne uses the passage in "Ghost and Ghouls and LeFanu" to represent the negative characteristics of Uncle Silas' accomplice, feeling no need to develop an assessment of her character further (Browne 11).

her gender and role, and that she is "draped" in silk, as opposed to dressed in silk, suggests an unforgiveable excess and richness. Though she professes herself unfashionable, Maud's sartorial expectations still forecast the deviance of the woman before her. She is, of course, as villainous as Maud would fear – perhaps more so – and this fashionable defiance evolves into something far more aggressive and threatening as her character is later exposed. Madame is not "inserting the self into social discourse," as Spooner notes, but expressing her agency by actively disavowing social expectations through villainous "disidentification.".

This exceptionalism is the object of social conflict, as members of the household are called to explain their dislike of the woman. The artifice of her toilette draws the ire of the female members of staff, who mockingly refer to her as "Madame de la Rougepot" (38) in a demonstration of their disdain. The standard here is one of natural grace over artifice, and the good taste to know how to fake nature without detection. One may assist nature, subtly, but to have a heavy hand with the rouge is to mark oneself as deceitful – one who will lie with even her face. Mrs Rusk says of the interloper "She *does* know how to paint up to the ninety-nines – she does, the old cat" (38), an insult Penguin Classics editor Victor Sage says can be used to suggest a "'drunken, violent prostitute', associated with the excessive use of cosmetics" (449). Le Fanu constructs her materiality as a series of wrongs the reader sees as both ridiculous and potentially threatening. This is much like Christine Kortsch's reading of Bertie (of *From Man to Man*), whose inappropriate clothing inspires a materially literate mother to remove her daughter from the proximity of one who has so clearly fallen (47), and the insults used to describe Madame purposefully frame her in contexts of the theatre and prostitution, categorically aligning her with the trope of the disreputable "fallen women" who work in these industries.

Le Fanu's extensive descriptions of the appearance of Madame de la Rougierre has inspired scholars to consider the significance of the governess' styling and presentation. In "Sheridan Le Fanu's Ungovernable Governess," Teresa Mangum reads the wrongs of Madame as those of a "kind of sexual dominatrix," whose characterization speaks to "Victorian commentators [who] often expressed particular trepidation about foreign women" (214, 221). Elena Maria Emandi agrees with Mangum's reading in "Women Who Have Fear of Uncle Silas: A Stylistic Approach," likewise asserting that the governess is "gender-ambivalent" (286), citing description after description with no analysis (282), and finally asserting that "she appears no more woman than man, with her strange mixture of features that border upon monstrosity" (283). Unfairly I think, Mangum and Emandi both deny Madame agency as a woman, instead reading her "'unusually large scale,' [and her] … malevolent display of her stark baldness, a feature of both her unnaturalness and her perverse gendering" as necessarily masculine (227). This reading forgets both nature and fashion – it ignores that women, too, may go bald in old age or from medical conditions, and that women who wore wigs would often shear their own hair to do so. As I note elsewhere, Mangum's assertion of the governess's "androgyny" is challenged by the excessive femininity of Madame's purposeful performance of lace and silk, cosmetics and coiffeur. The features Mangum reads as "the bifurcation of Madame de Rougierre into husband and wife" I argue is a carnivalesque reflection of natural degradation (227). She is performatively excessive, queering notions of beauty and age in her refusal to disappear into quiet respectability. And, as an aged but vital figure, Madame represents the grotesque conclusion of life, her natural place affirmed by the representation of the carnival.

Through her fashioning the character of Madame shows that she directly disidentifies with the social role into which she has been cast. Her position in the Ruthvyn household is a

traditionally feminine employment, through which she has been given charge of a young woman's social development. Madame, however, actively rejects the very standards she has been hired to relate. Madame feels no pressure to conform to the aesthetic standards of either age or country of residence, indulging in her cosmetics to suit her own pleasure, and wearing a dark wig in defiance of advanced age. She is not attempting to appear *natural*, as her critics may scoff, but rather to appear as herself, which she continues to do resolutely. Though she is capable of more sombre dress, as she first appears at the window, it is the purple silk she chooses to wear at home that most clearly defines her sartorial space, aesthetically and auditorily.

Madame's gendered place is directly challenged by a representative of normativity in chapter 11, when Lady Monica Knowllys visits her cousins. The first suggestion that the governess is suspect is in Madame's failure to outfit her young pupil in accordance with fashion. As Catherine Spooner writes:

> In *Uncle Silas*, Monica Knollys' concern with clothing as a means of maintaining social concord has its malevolent reflection in the governess, Madame de la Rougierre … Like the madhouse sufferer from 'Intense vanity', the governess is grotesque because she also wears a costume 'too girlish for her years and unflattering to her heavy features'. However, she is also, as a governess, in an ambiguous social position and therefore wearing extravagant clothing (she also appears in a shop in Paris wearing silk, velvet and the very latest bonnets) is as inappropriate to her status as is Milly wearing short dresses and navy boots. (71)

It is clothing that calls Madame's villainy to the attention of other women, and Cousin Monica's superior understanding enforces the gender and class codes Madame violates.

In chapter nine, Cousin Monica asks Maud who makes her dresses, and when the young woman responds that she and the staff consulted on its purchase Monica laughs "very heartily indeed" at the idea of old country women outfitting an heiress who "ought not to appear like a jack-pudding" (51). Knowing that Austin Ruthvyn has hired a French finishing governess for his daughter, Cousin Monica continues to push, asking "why does not Madame make your dresses, my dear?" (52). She cannot understand why the governess would not make her pupil's dresses, assuming she would be expected to do so as part of her duties. When Maud exclaims that Madame certainly would not, and finding Maud so shabbily dressed, Cousin Monica begins to suspect that the woman is not as she claims to be. Here, Monica's reactions demonstrate an expectation of fashionable guidance and maintenance in a gendered sphere; in the absence of a mother to guide Maud, Monica expects that a governess of Madame's skill and occupation would undertake the sartorial instruction the young heiress will need. Though Monica laughs, it is significant enough a point that she presses, and becomes determined to meet the governess to judge for herself the appropriateness of the woman's instruction; if Madame allows Maud to dress such without intervention, what could she possibly be teaching the young woman? "[N]othing but devilment" Monica concludes (52).

The meeting reveals that the governess has already established a reputation with Lady Knowllys. The exact nature of Cousin Monica's relationship with Madame is never explicitly revealed, but much is implied in her cutting remarks; she is familiar with the governess under an unmarried name, and her scathing response demonstrates that Madame did not make a favourable impression on Lady Knowllys. In their first meeting of the novel Lady Knowlly's most direct challenge is to Madame's married state; referring to her as "Mademoiselle," Cousin Monica charges "you have married, it seems, since I had last the honour of seeing you? I did not

recognise Mademoiselle under her new name," to which Madame responds that she had "Very respectably married, for a person of my rank" (58). Given the previous characterisation of Madame as hag-like, the reader is like to share Cousin Monica's disbelief, and even repulsion at the idea of one such as Madame finding a husband at this point in her life. A woman's cultural value is in her youth, and weighed by the gendered performativity that promises the continuation of society: fertility, maternity, adherence to social and moral values. The carnivalesque figure of the laughing hag is a direct challenge to these values. The young, taught to value their beauty and vitality, are thus encouraged to fear her physical degeneration – that which they are taught is ugly – as a manifestation of decreased worth. Unable to fulfill traditional roles, she is a burdensome relic of what is lost, and the inevitable end to come. But the laughing had demands space, raising her voice as a reminder that she is still here. She is unburdened by institutions of gender and revels in her social defiance. Though madame claims matrimony, she moves freely without the direction of a present husband, pursuing independent, often material, desires. Her recent marriage suggests continued sexuality, and her shopping and dressing performs sensuality.

In *The Female Grotesque* Mary Russo says that "for the feminist reader, this image of the pregnant hag is more than ambivalent. It is loaded with all of the connotations of fear and loathing around the biological processes of reproduction and of aging. Bakhtin […] fails to acknowledge or incorporate the social relations of gender in his semiotic model of the body politic, and thus his notion of the Female Grotesque remains in all directions repressed and undeveloped" (63).[23] This loathing is illustrated by Monica's scorn of Madame's late marriage,

[23] As a married woman, Madame is Bakhtin's "senile pregnant hag" (25), a grotesque that performs instability and ambivalence, embracing the degrading elements of Bakhtin's grotesque realism. She is a coming to earth, consumption, copulation, and even consummation, suggesting that which is essential for the brining of new life (21). Bakhtin writes:

> The grotesque images […]are contrary to the classic images of the finished, completed man, cleansed, as it were, of all the scoriae of birth and development. In the famous Kerch terracotta collection we find figures of senile pregnant hags. Moreover, the old hags are laughing. This is a

and her disbelief that any would seek an attachment to the older woman. The undesirable features that establish Madame's performative villainy are inherently natural, and her age, her wrinkles, her bald head "represen[t] a material bodily whole," (Bakhtin 23) and the inevitable narrative of old age and death. Madame's marriage is conceptually threatening to Cousin Monica for the unexpected transience of identity – a woman whom she already mistrusts, yet she believed fixed in her social place, is instead unstable, and thus unpredictable. Through the narrative of marriage Madame is reborn in social legitimacy, and offers a spectre of conception that inverts the Victorian expectation of womanhood; she expresses her unstable and reborn position in life by her adoption of fashion deemed too youthful and exuberant for her age, and painting her face as a desirable figure. Madame is, then, a carnivalesque inverse of Maud, serving as a threatening reminder of the potential of the lower stratum, representative of the grotesque which "exercises the same function: to consecrate inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from the conventions of established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted" (Bakhtin 34, Mishou 170).

This inverse is materially performed by Madame's association with fashion through the conclusion of the novel, and is of particular interest when she leads Maud through her uncle's final deception. While Maud attempts to sleep, Madame "busied herself in unpacking and displaying over the back of the chair a whole series of London purchases." Maud says that she "at last fell fast asleep with the gaunt images of Madame, with a festoon of grey silk with a cerise

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typical and very strongly expressed grotesque. It is ambivalent. It is pregnant death, a death that gives birth. There is nothing completed, nothing calm and stable in the bodies of these old hags. They combine a senile, decaying and deformed flesh with the flesh of new life, conceived but as yet unformed. Life is shown in its two-fold contradictory process; it is the epitome of incompleteness. And such is precisely the grotesque concept of the body" (Bakhtin 25-6).

tripe, pinched up in her finger and thumb, and smiling over her shoulder across it into the little shaving-glass that stood on the chimney" (Le Fanu 417). The tableau invokes a sense of disgust on Maud's part, as her villainous adversary fondles her fashionable purchases and admires her own reflection. For her own part, Madame is demonstrating the relationship between fashion and confidence, and the literal spoils of her criminal actions: she has purchased fine silks with her blood money, and performs no remorse as she admires the results. The previously-docile teen finds both Madame and her choices disgusting, performing for the audience the part of taste and respectability. These purchases mark Maud's understanding of Madame as a deviant figure, allowing Maud the cultural space and language to critique her character and her actions. Maud writes of Madame that she is "The vainest and most slammakin of women. The merest slut at home, a milliner's lay figure out of doors. She had one square foot of looking-glass upon the chimneypiece, and therein tried effects, and conjured up grotesque simpers upon her sinister and weary face" (Le Fanu 417). That Madame's violent execution follows this particularly garish display offers contemporary readers the rectification they desire, suggesting that her murder is justified punishment for both her criminal behavior against Maud, and her defiance of social expectations of good taste. Again, the inverse of Maud, it is Madame who is stabbed in her bed by her own co-conspirators, her body reduced to material that then must be discarded without ceremony, and with haste.

Ultimately, the novel suggests Maud's superior, because decorous, material taste is responsible for her narrative success, while the "vainest and most slammakin" Madame is murdered in a case of mistaken identity. The auditory invasion of fabric is visited throughout *Uncle Silas*, and, the rustling of silks, closely associated with Madame, is established as both a threat and a warning. While the sound of silk is marked as an aggressive invasion, Maud's life is

saved when she genteelly avoids such auditory signifiers, a choice which enforces the superiority of good taste. At the novel's climax Maud, hiding from her cousin Dudley who has just stabbed Madame to death (believing her to be Maud), and her Uncle Silas who has orchestrated the murder, says that "I stood up swiftly. I often thought if I had happened to wear silk instead of the cachmere I had on that night, its rustle would have betrayed me" (437). The patented British wool allows Maud social decorum, and literal stealth, as she flees from her bloodthirsty (and inheritance-hungry) relatives.

Yet, like any translation, the reading of fashion is not a strict one-to-one means of comparison, by which "x means y" and codes are clearly defined. Jennie Batchelor warns against the reading of fashion as a strict lexicon, acknowledging that

> the language of clothes is … vulnerable to manipulation and misinterpretation. In the world turned upside-down of the masquerade, individuals subverted the supposedly incontrovertible distinctions of rank and gender …If, … dress is a language, it is one whose meanings are negotiable and open to endless reinterpretation …the meanings of dress can never be controlled completely. (9)

This does not mean there is no value in sartorial scrutiny in cultural artifacts, but rather that it is polysemantic. Such is the express case in *The Beetle*, in which a bodily state has multiple explicit connotations across character.

Binary Slasher: *The Beetle*

Academics' descriptions of the plot of Richard Marsh's 1897 gothic novel *The Beetle* reveal the intellectual projects and prejudices of the scholars working with the text. The Broadview edition of *The Beetle* describes the novel most succinctly as the "story of a fantastical creature, 'born of neither god nor man,' with supernatural and hypnotic powers, who stalks

British politician Paul Lessingham through *fin de siècle* London in search of vengeance for the defilement of a sacred tomb in Egypt," further remarking that "Marsh unfolds a tale of terror, late imperial fears, and the 'return of the repressed,' through which the crisis of late imperial Englishness is revealed" (Cover Copy). In this, the Broadview edition is framing the narrative as one of singular conflict between a representative English masculine authority – Liberal politician Paul Lessingham – and the imperial subject – whom the blurb refers to as "the creature" from Egypt. The Beetle as a character is cast in the novel as subhuman, her ability to transfigure into different kinds of bodies used to literally dehumanize the character as much as to thrill readers. The repugnance experienced by those who meet the Beetle is textually justified by her villainous actions, offering a comfort denied by the villains of chapter one: she is as malicious as she is ugly.

Missing from this account are the domestic anxieties of the novel – specifically, concerns over gender, power, and vulnerability – which are the primary objects of study in Leslie Allin's 2015 article "Leaky Bodies: Masculinity, Narrative and Imperial Decay in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*." Allin's account makes space for the wider cast of characters active within the narrative, from "Robert Holt, an unemployed clerk, who, emaciated and exhausted, crawls into a mysterious house," to "Paul Lessingham's fiancée, Marjorie Lindon, an independent young woman sympathetic to Lessingham's Liberal politics," to "Sydney Atherton, a mercurial gentleman scientist who is Marjorie's confidant and would-be lover" and Detective Champnell, who is "employed to track down the transgressor" (115).[24] In summarizing the story through the wider cast, Allin emphasizes the primary social roles most important to her arguments of majoritarian gender and imperial anxieties, placing each character in their social sphere and stock

[24] Allin's text consistently refers to Paul Lessingham, Marjorie Lindon, and Sydney Atherton by first name, but calls Robert Holt by his last name, and Detective Champnell by his professional title.

categories. As my own project is invested in the primary villain of the novel, the Beetle, [25] Allin's descriptions of the titular character are of particular value to the present analysis.

Allin describes the antagonist of Marsh's novel as the "Lord of the Beetle, a bi-gendered,[26] shape-shifting priest(ess) in the cult of Isis," consistently referring to the character by masculine pronouns[27] or, perhaps problematically, calling the Beetle "the creature"[28] (115, 122) and even "it" (123). Allin's article is a smart and thoughtful examination of the "dangers of gender disruption, capture, physical dissolution, bodily penetration, and threats to normativity and to 'white skin' in the *fin-de-siècle* British imagination," reading primary masculine characters such as Holt, Aetherton, and Lessingham to argue that "this novel critiques justifications of patriarchal governance and imperial legitimacy: which ultimately become leaky, grotesque, and thus profoundly unstable" (Allin 114-5). But of interest here is the language Allin uses to describe the Beetle's uncertain and indeterminate identity, performing Victorian anxieties over the unclassifiable, and struggling with a character who is difficult to normatively justify. Contrary to the language used in the novel, Allin titles the Beetle a "Lord," reflecting the masculine power presumed by Holt, and possibly responding to the binary through which the

[25] I say primary, as no character is truly innocent or incorruptible in the novel. Sydney Aetherton is especially repugnant, as a scientist invested in the development of devastating weapons of war, and casual killer of cats. Allin says that "Sydney reveals the morals of his research projects to be profoundly misdirected concerning the impacts of military research" and in a footnote states that "Anna Maria Jones likewise finds Sydney problematic, condemning his propensity for killing street cats at random" (121).

[26] A categorical identity that describes an individual who expresses two distinct gender identities.

[27] My own reading responds to the text's definitions of identity, which is uncomfortably problematic. Nineteenth-century authors did not have the language to describe gender identities beyond an artificial binary, and so Marsh's characters refer to the Beetle as "he" before nudity challenges the pronoun assignment, and "she" after sex organs are observed. As both the humanoid and beetle forms are identified as "female," I have chosen to use feminine pronouns in describing the Beetle, even as I believe a singular "they" would be more appropriate in contemporary contexts.

[28] As does the Broadview edition, quoted above. This designation calls into question personhood, and suggests that the critical representation offered by the text is justified by the character's difference. I suggest this is just as problematic as the novel's colonialist and racist descriptions of the character's physical features, and argue that the Beetle as a character has just as much personhood as the traditionally human British characters, and thus read the Beetle for what they accomplish in human social spaces.

Beetle is described in the novel – as a creature too ugly to be female, and yet one whose body is decidedly so (Marsh 53, 152). Similarly, Allin asserts the title of "priest" when the character is consistently narratively named a priestess. But most informative is Allin's assignment of a bi-gender identity, using a twenty-first century identification in an attempt to describe a nineteenth century figure. The use of the identity "bi-gender" seeks to grapple with a nonnormatively gendered character from a time in which normativity, and the binary, is assumed, and nonnormative identities are sweepingly categorized as inversions of nature. But this assignment introduces its own complexities, as in recognizing the Beetle's nonnormative identity Allin's language projects a normative binary – which I argue the character soundly rejects in action and self-representation. Both of our approaches speak to the tenuousness of analysis and understanding, as the novel presents a character of unresolved ambiguity.

The horror of the Beetle, like the horror of Madame, is intimately related to this reading and question of gender. Though Madame thwarts gendered expectations of propriety related to her age and social position, the Beetle's representation and actions actively attack the system as a whole, negating gender assignments by masking secondary sex characteristics in androgynous robes in active disidentification with the majoritarian imperial invader. Once the novel's characters determine that the Beetle is female by their definitions, the horror of her actions is increased, and her violation of others – the forced nudity and penetration of Holt and the violent disguising of Marjorie Lindon – enforces a cultural fear of gender deviance and inversion, aligning both with the criminally malignant other.

In the second section of their paper, in which they seek the queer in *The Beetle*, W.C. Harris and Dawn Vernooy relate that "[Kelley] Hurley also reads [the Beetle] as female," suggesting this is not a forgone conclusion made by Marsh in the text (352). Performatively, the

Beetle is androgynous, but the revelation of her naked body to Atherton suggests that she has female primary and secondary sex characteristics. As Butler argues, sexual organs and gender are not a strict one-to-one identification, and Harris and Vernooy struggle with this throughout their own gendering of the titular villain (as does Rhys Garnett in "*Dracula* and *The Beetle*: Imperial and Sexual Guilt and Fear in Late Victorian Fantasy"). Throughout scholarship on *The Beetle* there seems to be a confusion of gender and sex, a lack of differentiation that hamper critics' ability to fully read the complex villain; Garnett likewise insists on masculine pronouns in referring to the Beetle, introducing the term "priest" (31) when the novel says "priestess," and reading the Beetle's remark of "if I were a woman" as confirming a masculine identity in a strict gender binary (and therefore Garnett's homosexual reading) as opposed to an acknowledgement of her potential non-human origination. Harris and Vernooy's earlier allusions to Atherton provide a key to the intended gendered performance of the Beetle, as the scientist observes both that the body under the robes is female, as is the beetle she becomes. That she is able to violate her victims with her appendages does not actually make her *male*, but does affirm her status as *queer;* as Victoria Margee acknowledges in her own reading of the novel, "being sexually violated – indeed penetrated – is culturally coded as a *feminine* experience" for the Victorians (66). Importantly, to be feminine does not make Holt female, as Garnett likewise recognizes: "in the power of the Isis-priestess, Holt becomes 'feminised'. Already reduced to less than a 'man' economically and socially, he is resistlessly overwhelmed in these scenes by the sexual desire, racial envy and supernatural powers of the Oriental-African Other" (42). The penetration (not unlike that of Dracula and his brides) is thus masculine, but not *male*. In arguing for the Beetle's maleness, Harris and Vernooy, and Garnett, are demonstrating the reading of performativity of which the Victorians themselves may have been guilty: this unattractive figure *looks* wrong,

looks dangerous, and *looks* male, and must therefore be a homosexual Oriental villain present in London to abduct young British women for sadistic sacrifices (Harris and Vernooy 350). However, this reading of the Beetle's body is unstable, the glorification of the youthful, innocent, and rigidly constructed, and vilifies the old and Othered.

The descriptions of the titular villain from Richard Marsh's 1897 novel *The Beetle* are grounded in the body, rather than the material construction of identity, and in this way deflect the bodily analysis suggested by Spooner – [the Beetle is *less* analysable for the performance of nudity, as their naked body reads to Victorian audiences incongruously with their performativity]. Seen as a foreign figure of indeterminate age and gender, but marked by ugliness, the Beetle is represented as a character of changing skins rather than changing fashions, the better to distinguish the Other from the sartorial boundaries of the British.[29] in "It was impossible such a creature could be feminine" I argue that, like Madame de la Rougierre, the Beetle is a disharmoniously carnivalesque being, whose natural features and mysterious wrappings cause a sense of unease in onlookers (Mishou 173). But it is the state of *déshabillé* that most clearly articulates villainy for the Victorian reading public.

Having first read of Robert Holt's bodily violation by the Beetle in the pitch blackness of an unlit room, inspiring the horror of the unseen and thus unknown, the reader's first visual introduction to the titular villain is in the nude. The language Holt uses to describe his tormentor is markedly vague, as Holt himself is unable to define the person. He says "I saw someone in front of me lying in a bed. I could not at once decide if it was a man or a woman" ultimately

[29] Descriptions of the Beetle run to hyperbolic racism: Holt describes "the nose, on the other hand, was abnormally large; so extravagant were its dimensions, and so peculiar its shape, it resembled the beak of some bird of prey" (53), and Atherton later more explicitly asserts that "whatever his race might be … his lips were thick and shapeless, - and this, joined to another peculiarity in his appearance, seemed to suggest that, in his veins there ran more than a streak of negro blood. The peculiarity alluded to his semblance of great age" (140).

concluding the person is a man because "it was impossible such a creature could be feminine" (Marsh 53). That the Beetle is nonbinary in appearance – and not markedly feminine – is enough for Holt to determine the figure must be male. For Holt it is an impossibility that a woman would appear so ugly or so immodest– and that a woman would *behave* so aggressively and vindictively. The figure Holt sees is lounging suggestively in bed, covered to the shoulders, but direct in eye contact, and able to command his every action. But during his second interview with his captor Holt begins to doubt his initial impressions, this time reading the figure as "feminine; so feminine, indeed, that I wondered if I could by any possibility have blundered, and mistaken a woman for a man; some ghoulish example of her sex, who had so yielded to her depraved instincts as to have become nothing but a ghastly reminiscence of womanhood" (61). From the beginning, the Beetle is most unsettling and upsetting for this ambiguity, and for the absolute refusal to sartorially or socially perform according to a predetermined binary makes the Beetle a paradigm of disidentification with binary heteronormativity.

That the Beetle is later exposed to have female reproductive anatomy is intended to magnify the horror of the reader, who has been narratively instructed that such a thing is impossible to the extent of monstrosity. Aetherton's observation that "her body, [is] by no means old or ill-shaped" (152) is at odds with Holt's emotional response; having had the most intimate contact with the Beetle to this point, Holt has shown that the possibility is utterly repulsive. This is not just an assertion of ugliness of face, but a complete rejection of feminine power – specifically, that of reproduction. Should the Beetle prove to be a woman she would not only violate the cultural tenants of her sex, and *indeed* be "a ghastly reminiscence of womanhood" (61) in Holt's eye, but her threats of marriage and intimacy complete a horror of inversion. As I've argued before, here the Beetle recalls the threat of the over-sexed woman, described by

William J. Robinson and quoted by Bram Dijkstra: “there is the opposite type of woman, who is a great danger to the health and even the very life of her husband. I refer to the hypersensual woman, to the wife with an excessive sexuality. It is to her that the name vampire can be applied in its literal sense. Just as the vampire sucks the blood of its victims … so does the woman vampire suck the life and exhaust the vitality of her male partner – or victim” (334). Without clothing, the Beetle is threatening to the very vitality of men, as casual and comfortable nudity suggests aggressive and deviant sexuality (Mishou 174). “[I]f I were a woman, would you not take me for a wife?” the Beetle asks of Holt, when he returns from robbing Paul Lessingham of his letters. Holt’s internal response to the question is a desire for violence – to be able to slap the Beetle, “or, better, to have taken him by the neck, and thrown him through the window, and rolled him in the mud” (86). Such is the force of his repugnance for his captor, but also the strength of that selfsame – Holt can do nothing but stand, holding out the letter the Beetle sent him to purloin.

Holt’s descriptions of the Beetle are intended to articulate disgust as a natural response to this fashioned villainy – like Madame, the Beetle is wrong, and the Beetle’s Otherness should be rejected. However, the truly lasting impression of the Beetle comes from Marsh’s description of what Mikhail Bakhtin identifies with the grotesque lower stratum – the degradation of the revelation of her body. In Atherton’s lab the priestess reveals under duress what was hidden from Holt, and this affirms the sexual deviance of the early scene. Significantly, it is up to the strong masculine characters to throw aside the confusing and ambiguous fashion the Beetle prefers in order to expose her threatening potential. While the nonbinary robes serve similarly to Dracula’s first described garments, which mark him as foreign, the Beetle’s body connects the character to humanizing biology as it disrupts the narrative of gender performance expected by Atherton:

"One startling fact nudity revealed, that I had been egregiously mistaken on the question of sex. My visitor was not a man, but a woman, and, judging from the brief glimpse which I had of her body, by no means old or ill-shaped either" (Marsh 152). In the absence of material performance, Atherton gets to the "truth" of the Beetle's human form, and the threat of the priestess transitions from that of aggressive male mystic to deviant and unpredictable woman, whose physical virtues are noted in a moment of patriarchal proprietorship (Mishou 174-5).

Whereas Madame's attraction is doubted by Cousin Monica due to Madame's poor taste and advanced years, Atherton's evaluation of the Beetle suggests her sexual value from the heteronormative patriarchal gaze, and the character's material performance is described as all the more damning for masking the perceived truth of observed biology from that gaze. Atherton's and Holt's descriptions open the character to a reading of horrified pity: here is a powerful priestess who once seduced British men, but now can only horrify them; though "her body [is] by no means old or ill-shaped," her performative self is read as "deformed" in her "loose draperies" (Marsh 152, 53, 150). However, the Beetle demonstrates no weakness in enchanting men, and her clothing serves the cultural function of hiding a body that would mark her as culturally lesser and weaker.

And though androgynously dressed, the priestess's power is the same as the supernatural threat perceived by adversaries – able to transform from beetle to human, the immediate physical performance belies full potential. Just as the Beetle's human figure is non-binary, read as both male and female dependent on the state of undress, so too is the Beetle's humanity, given apparent transformative powers. Like Dracula, the Beetle masquerades as a non-magical human, yet possesses the power to transform a physical self, the extent of which is unknown to British adversaries. The Beetle resists definition and limitation, and thus confuses the gentlemen as to

how the villain can possibly be managed – or defeated. Dressed, the Beetle breaks the social limitations that bind women from the public, and manages to execute her dark plans uninhibited by the social regulations of women (Mishou 175).

One of the Beetle's most villainous inclinations is to strip British citizens of their humanity by stripping them of their sartorial identities. Culturally, especially for Victorians, the state of nudity is one of exposure, vulnerability, and disgrace – a dejected state of failure, of victimization, or an abhorrent state of licentiousness. Kate Soper reminds readers that "As all prison camp guards and torturers have always been well aware, to force strip the victim is to initiate the process of dehumanisation, to signal contempt for personal identity by playing with or mocking at the aspiration to preserve it" (21). It is no accident that the Beetle's first villainous action seen in the novel is to forcibly disrobe the home intruder Robert Holt; forced nudity is a weapon to be wielded, and a two-fold villainous offense – a disregard for the principles and beliefs of the British cultural system, and an acute awareness of that system that allows the Beetle to punish and manipulate.

The pathetic representation of Robert Holt establishes from the first the cultural reading of forced nudity, and the Beetle's villainy in enforcing that state. Though Holt is told by Lessingham that he "look[s] English" (78), Lessingham is uncertain, and Holt's state of undress comes to define the man. He ruminates on his own nakedness as the lies on the Beetle's floor (57); sent on his criminal errand, he speaks of his "naked feet" and his "naked flesh" (69) under the poor covering of the cloak, and being "so depressed … by the knowledge of the ridiculous appearance [he] presented" (70). It's not surprisingly that Lessingham refers to Holt's state repeatedly when the two meet in Lessingham's home – the politician referring to the burglar's "extraordinary garment" (77), and asking if Holt has "come through London, or through any

portion of it, in that costume – or rather, in that want of costume?" (78). Ultimately, Lessingham draws a direct connection between the absurd figure and the source of the conflict – the Rue de Rabagas. It is in this place that Lessingham had met the Beetle, and found himself similarly exposed on the streets. Thus, the reader learns to read public nudity as a signifier for the Beetle's villainy.

The Beetle's own shapelessness is suggested by her shapeless clothing, and (it is through formless textiles that the Beetle manages the capture of Marjorie Lindon, Paul Lessingham's fiancé. Alone in the Beetle's house, awaiting an escort, Marjorie is drawn to consider the poor furnishings of the dwelling, including the rather curious bed. Without frame or mattress, Marjorie describes "rugs piled apparently indiscriminately upon the floor," topped by a singular cover: "white silk – in quality, exquisite" on which was depicted "a naked white woman being burned alive," about which Marjorie exclaims "The person who likes to live with this kind of thing, especially as a covering to this bed, must have his own notions as to what constitute agreeable surroundings" (231). Movement causes Marjorie to believe she is hallucinating – that the representation of the sacrificed woman is moving – until "A thin, yellow, wrinkled hand was protruding from amidst the heap of rugs … The hand was followed by an arm; the arm by a shoulder; the shoulder by a head, - and the most awful, hideous, wicked-looking face I had ever pictured even in my most dreadful dreams. … He had been hidden in the heap of rugs all the while" (231).

Marjorie's narration is not heard again, and other narrators come to describe her fate using material products associated with her body as surrogates for the missing Marjorie. Like with many female characters, clothing is the vehicle through which the violence to Marjorie's body is communicated, and the signifier for the depth of the Beetle's cultural depravity. Her

clothing is found under the floorboards, “An entire outfit was there, shoes, stockings, body linen, corsets, and all – even to hat, gloves, and hairpin …whoever had worn those clothes had been stripped to the skin” (264). This suggestion of nudity is more frightening than Holt’s nude performance, as the physical location of Marjorie’s body – whether she remains alive -- is unknown. While the reader is told of Holt’s horrific violation by the Beetle, there is greater terror – and stronger implications – in the narrative absence of Marjorie’s experience and victimized body. Marjorie’s assault is assumed by the disposal of her material possessions – her calling cards, embroidered handkerchief, and the nameplate on her keys – and her ruination and possible murder is signified by the bloody braid found at the bottom of the crevice. This is the clearest indicator of the violence that may have befallen the young woman, and her fiancé treats her bloody plait as a memento mori: “it was a long plait of woman’s hair. It had been cut off at the roots, - so close to the head in one place that the scalp itself had been cut, so that the hair was dotted with blood. … ‘This is mine, - I shall at least have something’” Lessingham snarls as he “pressed it to his lips” (265). To Lessingham, the loss of her hair suggests that Marjorie is beyond rescue.

Marjorie’s dehumanization is further completed by the involuntary inversion of Marjorie’s dress; the Beetle violently shaves Marjorie’s head, and forces her to wear shabby masculine clothing. The changing of clothes invalidates the character’s established privilege of class and gender, as she no longer carries the signifiers of her wealth and femininity. Marjorie becomes less of a person in the observation of others, described as no more than a “young man of very disreputable appearance” (311). Guards and citizens see not a young woman who has been attacked and abused, but a character they mistrust, and look down upon. In this way the Beetle has challenged the infallibility of Marjorie’s identity, and robs the young woman of the

respect she once commanded, inflicting lasting consequences in the form of psychological distress.

The conclusion of the novel offers readers an almost comically violent end to the Beetle's terror: she is squashed like a bug, her train "matchboxed" by tumbling trucks of cement, leaving only "fragments … of some material – animal rather than vegetable" and a "stain … caused apparently by a deposit of some sort of viscid matter, probably the excretion of some variety of lizard" (318-9). This inhuman termination is offered as a fitting end for a villain who violently disrupts human systems and threatens the fabric of British culture. Marjorie's mental breakdown is the greatest consequence of the Beetle's actions within the novel, because of the further potential threat it suggests. The actions against Lessingham and Holt are more pitiable than terrifying: though the Beetle's actions are villainous, both men encounter the Beetle when engaging in deviant behaviors – Holt by housebreaking, and Lessingham by indulging in immoral nightlife in a foreign country. Marjorie's fault is in exercising agency and believing in her own independence,[30] which leads her to accompany the cadre of men in their search for the Beetle. This exposes her to the machinations of the Beetle, who disrupts Marjorie's domestic narrative not just through her forced fashion inversion, but through her institutionalization. On the verge of marriage, Marjorie *should* have spent those next three years as a young wife, preferably caring for a growing family. Instead, the Beetle symbolically and literally disrupts the domestic narrative of the English middle class, carrying the suggestion that even temporary,

[30] "Marjorie Lindon's abduction and despoliation occur only partly because she has rejected the authority of her father and honorary brother, Atherton, and insisted on taking active part in the pursuit of the monster," argues Garnett. He further lays blame on poor masculine performance, arguing "It occurs also because Atherton *allows* her to overrule his authority and because he leaves her unprotected in the monster's London lair by rushing off …" (Garnett 40).

forced androgyny or gender deviance may threaten the familial future of much wider populations.[31]

The Gothic Villain in Gotham: Two-Face

The suggestion that a respectable person can become less so through the ruination of their physical appearance is a gothic trope that finds its way clearly into comic books, and is expressly considered in the *Batman* villain known as Two-Face, a celebrated Gotham district attorney who turns to villainy after a disfiguring assault. Moving from the Victorian gothic to the gothic villains of Gotham City, the fictionalized New York City of *Batman,* I argue that comic books and comic book films continue the Foucauldian project of violent cultural regulation through the vilification of socially deviant characters such as Two-Face and Poison Ivy. Like the gothic novels discussed above, comics employ systems of discipline and punishment as described by Foucault, fulfilling the need for cultural regulation through public punishment.

Like Madame and The Beetle, these comics villains embrace the textual identities assigned to them, and find liberation and agency in their socially-deviant villainous identities through their disidentification with majoritarian narratives. Their extraordinary characterization draws focused attention in a panoptical system, securing an audience and making textual space for their successful challenges of identity, where more common criminals are missed in the masses. It is their extraordinary fashionable scripting that both signifies their Otherness, and secures them a platform to challenge social codes.

[31] The connection between female madness, gender failure, and a patriarchal savior complex is widely discussed in literary analysis. In *Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel: Studies in Bronte, Wolf, Lessing, and Atwood*, Barbara Hill Rigney's reading works with notions of power and insanity, and how powerful women – or, at least, women who challenge the gendered standards of their time – are marked as emotionally and intellectually flawed and in need of restraint and masculine medical intervention. They are "broken" women who *need* masculine saviors to bring them back to the stable normativity which itself robs these women of their agency and individuality.

Called Harvey Kent in 1941, Gotham's D.A. is introduced to audiences as a dashing and admired figure; reporters nickname him "Apollo" and call for the lawyer to "Pose that famous profile, D.A.!" while the narrator describes the figure as "handsome" in sequential frames (*Two-Face* 9-10). Prosecuting a mob boss, Kent is given three frames of decisive action and fearlessness, but as he produces evidence against the accused the criminal shouts "Okay, pretty boy, I'll fix you!" before throwing acid on Kent, who shouts "Ugh! My face!" (10). The sequence is brief, and pointed – Harvey Kent is a capable and attractive man, who challenges a criminal element familiar in concept to readers. Yet the assault is not designed to impede his intelligence nor professional capabilities – the acid is thrown to disfigure Kent's face, which it does. A month after the attack Kent's bandages are removed, and Kent exclaims in horror "My face! The acid has left one side scarred and hideous!" (10).

The character of Two-Face is a thoughtful, if gruesome, rumination on performative morality, and the stock characterization utilized by genres to communicate concepts of goodness and wickedness. Like the Beetle, Two-Face is consistently preoccupied with his own appearance, adopting his disfigurement as a primary identity. In *Batman,* this dramatic shift of appearance is the root cause of Harvey Dent's transformation from respected D.A. to one of Gotham's Most Wanted. Two-Face's visage inspires his actions from the moment of his disfiguring assault, and while comics are unclear as to whether the acid is the cause or the facilitator for his mental state and criminal status, they consistently look to the face(s) to reveal the man. The primary assertion may be that of Victorian adage – that one's moral character shines in their face, drawing easily-understood lines between Prince Charmings and Wicked Witches.[32] Yet the complexity of Two-

[32] The authors and artists of *Batman* comics enforce this Gothic performativity in the creation of a Rogue's Gallery built not on criminality, but the expressed and purposeful performance of *villainy*. From the start it is important to acknowledge that Batman does not exclusively combat foes as eccentrically dressed and characterized as himself; Golden Age comics[32] more frequently show the Caped Crusader in conflict with racketeers, bank robbers, and

Face's internal struggles lends itself to a second, more nuanced reading on the relationships between beauty and society, which inclines one towards virtue or villainy. Two-Face comics suggest not that the ugly are more apt to be immoral, but that society's treatment of the less-than-beautiful may antagonize neutral, or even good, characters to lash out as a reaction to abuse suffered or imagined. Extending my analysis from gothic novels to comics, I here argue that Two-Face's disfigurement is the catalyst for his disidentification with traditional social and judicial systems, navigating ableism and beauty standards initially, and ultimately allowing for Two-Face to challenge the perception of vigilantism at the heart of *Batman*.[33]

The connection between the British gothic and *Batman* villains is readily acknowledged by *Batman* creators and authors, who cite both novels and film adaptations as sources of inspiration for their otherworldly foes. According to the editors of *Two-Face: A Celebration of 75 Years*, "[Bob] Kane stated in his autobiography that the character was inspired by Robert Louis Stevenson's 1888 novel, *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Two popular movie adaptations of the book in 1932 and 1941 were likely inspirations as well" (6). Kane needn't have clarified in his later accounts; the leading page of *Detective comics No. 66*, in which Two-

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gangers. These criminals are themselves stock characters crudely developed and specifically type-cast with the expectation that reader familiarity with tropes renders careful development unnecessary. Villains, as I argue in the introduction, are a separate class: though equally criminal to their more pedestrian counterparts, the villains that threaten Gotham City embody Gothic affect and excess to establish characters as socially threatening as they are felonious.

[33] In researching for this dissertation I was surprised to find that villainous characters such as Harvey Dent/Two-Face are not often academically examined, only mentioned in passing in relation to Batman, or other fields beyond comics studies. The article "Two Faces of Criminal Prosecution: Harvey Dent, Mike Nifong, Craig Watkins" by Dennis A. Rendleman (*JSIS,* vol. 9, 2009) uses the character as a framework to consider the public perception of criminal prosecutors. In 2014 Sharon Mastracci likewise uses the juxtaposition of the fantasy of Harvey Dent/reality of Commissioner Gordon to examine the representation of public servants in film ("Public Service in Popular Culture: the Administrative Discretion of Commissioner Gordon and Harvey Dent." *International Journal of Organization Theory and Behavior*, vol. 17, no. 3, pp 367-388). Glen Weldon's *The Caped Crusade* represents a typical treatment of *Batman* villains in *Batman* and comics scholarship. Though the index lists Two-Face eleven times, this catalogues only the mention of his name. "…Arkham counted only the Joker and Two-Face among its denizens," Weldon writes (118), with no further character analysis.

Face first appears in 1941, is dominated by a shadowy figure reading *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by dripping candlelight. Turning to his left, half of the reader's face is shown, as unremarkable as the brown suit jacket and fedora that adorns his right side. The left side of the character's ensemble is a deep purple, and the left side of his face is lost to shadow; the second tone of the suit may be dismissed as shadow, were it not for the green hand raising in a moment of surprise. Like the illustration on the book he holds, the man is clearly one divided, and the artist draws on the cultural awareness of the recent *Jekyll and Hyde* films[34] to establish the character to be introduced.[35]

The influence of this narrative on *Batman* is clear, as Two-Face is a character trapped between moral sensibilities, represented by two separate presentations. Like the film Dr. Jekyll, Two-Face is first young, attractive, professionally passionate, and romantically attached to his sculptor fiancé. And like Dr. Jekyll, Two-Face establishes a secondary identity when his performative identity is disrupted, using the change as an excuse to indulge in antisocial inclinations. Following his courtroom attack Harvey Kent is not yet Two-Face, but Bob Kane and conspirators foreshadow the visual development to come in the coloring of Kent's clothing:

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[34] Like the novel, Jekyll and Hyde of the 1941 Metro Goldwyn Mayer film are not separate people. Though Dr. Jekyll looks to his changed face and calls it "evil," with an excited grin, his consciousness remains consistent. When Beatrix's father takes her on a tour of the continent, Dr. Jekyll makes the active decision to take his position for the express purpose of pursuing Ivy the barmaid.[34] These "immoral" choices are made outside of the influence of his transformation[34] - the chemicals only allow him a mask to indulge without social consequences. He enjoys the indulgence of rape and sexual abuse so greatly that he is distressed to hear of his fiancé's imminent return and has to take pains to deny himself the pleasure of such an indulgence again: the temptation is so great he must melt his own key. The conclusion of the film is most direct in its message: Dr. Jekyll, facing police officers and Dr. Lanyon after the violent murder of Sir Charles Emery, transforms spontaneously while repeating "I'm Dr. Jekyll! I'm Dr. Henry Jekyll!" No matter the face, he is just one man.

[35] As film adaptations often do, the 1941 Metro Goldwyn Mayer film starring Spencer Tracy adapts the character of Dr. Jekyll to the sympathies of viewers; most specifically, Dr. Jekyll is represented as a much younger man, engaged to Beatrix Emery, and actively discussing his work to medically separate the moral from the immoral in man, as if innocence and villainy are biological manifestations. In these ways Jekyll is romantic, as both a literal romantic lead, and as a passionate scientist working for good. But the 1941 film stays true to several character elements of Stevenson's original novel, demonstrating Henry Jekyll's moral failures when he, for example, flirts with and encourages sexual contact with a woman he saves from assault – having just left Beatrix's company. This liaison is interrupted with Dr. Lanyon walks into Ivy's room unannounced, to find the two embracing. Were it not for this witnessing there is the suggestion that Dr. Jekyll would have carried the affair further.

from this moment forward his suit is bifurcated, his unscarred side a conservative tan, and his scarred side a garish purple. After hearing that the physician-of-last-hope has been captured by Nazis, Kent slogs home to face his fiancé, his uninjured side turned to the reader while passerby exclaim "What a horrible-looking man!" and "That man frightens me!" (11). When his artist-fiancé rejects him for his new ugliness, Kent violently smashes the bust she had carved of him, before turning to a mirror and snarling "Who … what am I? I'm not a man! I'm half a man … beauty and beast … good and evil! I'm a living Jekyll and Hyde!" and "I'm all alone now … Shunned … Like a shameful thing … a criminal! Wouldn't take much to make me one now … A trick of fate perhaps … A flip of a coin…" (12).

Up to this moment Kent has done nothing shameful, and is only the victim of another's violence – the attack of a mob boss he prosecutes as D.A. That Kent calls himself "criminal" is a social fiction: the character suggests that to be shunned is to be criminal, and that the leap isn't far. In this moment the comic is arguing that it is Kent's ugliness that allows him the potential to become criminal, and that the isolation from others on the basis of his appearance is the driving motivation in his coming criminal career. As the "Apollo" of the Gotham court system, Kent is admired and loved; he is professionally and personally supported by those around him and is thus encouraged to continue his good deeds – in particular, fighting the criminal element of his city. Once he is disfigured, he experiences social and personal rejection, but not professional – there's nothing preventing Kent from continuing a successful career as a D.A. – the comics never assert that the accident has cost the D.A. his job. Yet the social rejection has the greatest impact on the one-time moral leader, who turns almost immediately to villainy. His fiancé has rejected him, and a young girl on the street has called him frightening, and so he determines to be just that.

Only not entirely: Kent-as-Two-Face allows his morality to be guided by chance through the flipping of a coin. When his coin lands to one side, his deeds are philanthropic; when his coin lands on its marred side, he keeps the spoils of his crimes for himself. Kent's actions suggest that morality is really only skin-deep, but so is villainy. His narratives consistently demonstrate that each is the performance of a moment and does not happen in a vacuum. This is Two-Face's strongest moment of disidentification, and one which uniquely defines him as a deviant character. The very creation of the Two-Face persona upholds the cultural narratives Harvey Dent directly espouses – that to be beautiful is to be good, and that to be disfigured is one step away from being criminal. To then only become a criminal, without moral ambiguity, would affirm the ableist narratives that suggest to be disabled or disfigured is to be lesser; that his disfigurement means Two-Face can only ever be *wrong*. But he does not do just this. Instead, Two-Face finds agency akin to Richard III, and institutes his own moral system, thwarting the majoritarian narrative of good and evil. Fractured from normative beauty, Two-Face guides his actions with the neutrality of chance, flipping a coin to determine his motivation. He is *both* good and bad, even as he continues to identify as a criminal akin to those he once prosecuted. Kent/Two-Face is wholly unpredictable, and for *this* he is scripted as an unequivocal threat – a villain who cannot be relied upon to act villainously.

Despite his extraordinary appearance and origin story, Two-Face, like Madame, is materially grounded in the possible (if unlikely) world of the reader. In 1942 the acid used to harm Harvey Kent is identified by Batman as "Vitriol," confirmed by a physician as being "a concentrated solution, too!" (*Two-Face* 10). The *double meaning* is unlikely an accident, given the penchant for *double* crimes later assigned to the villain. Vitriol is both a sulfuric acid and harsh criticism, and it is a combination of the two which inspire Harvey Kent's/Dent's

transformation into Two-Face. The real health hazards of vitriol, or sulfuric acid, are extraordinary; it is "Corrosive to all body tissues. Inhalation of vapor may cause serious lung damage. Contact with eyes may result in total loss of vision. Skin contact may produce severe necrosis" ("Sulfuric acid"). Developed in Britain in the eighteenth-century, the vitriol used in the industrial revolution became a readily available and notable weapon of malice. In the nineteenth century "Acid throwing was used as a means of dispute resolution, but the disputes were mostly personal and men were just as likely to lash out as women were" (Watson). Acid attacks continue around the world. According to A.S.T.i., the Acid Survivors Trust International, attacks are reported in India, Colombia, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Uganda, Cambodia, and, still, the UK, who has "one of the highest rates of recorded acid attacks in the world. In 2016, in London alone, corrosive substances were used in 454 crimes" (A.S.T.i.org). Although historical reports show that victims and perpetrators were both men and women, today "80% of attacks are on women," often as punishment or to assert patriarchal dominance.

Like other *Batman* villains, Two-Face's narratives run from the campy and the comic, to the violent and horrific. This shift is readily signaled to the audience by his visual representations, as creators utilize his signature bifurcated suiting to project the extent of his deviance. When first introduced, Two-Face is a comparatively benign character, whose Otherness is woven into his appearance: by donning a two-tone suit the character is drawn to emphasize the duality of his nature, and call into question the distinctions between good and bad. His fashioning suggests that each are equally possible, and that together they make a whole. Thus, though criminal in his actions, Two-Face's first comics characterization challenges the notion that villainy is extraordinary, and suggests that it is something that may be consciously adopted, and just as easy (and purposefully) overcome. Later texts, specifically popular film

representations, demonstrate the discomfort such ambiguous villainy poses for contemporary audiences. Threatened by such moral uncertainty, modern film drives a rewriting of the character as either mad, or deeply villainous, neutralizing the balanced bifurcation of his 1941 introduction.

Two film representations of Two-Face offer strong illustrative samples of the spectrum of character traits attributed to the villain, with correlating aesthetic fashioning. The first is the Two-Face of Joel Schumacher's 1995 *Batman Forever*, played by Tommy Lee Jones. Schumacher's *Batman* series is decidedly campy, and widely criticized.[36] I read it as a film of surfaces, in which designers tried to make something that *looked* like a comic book movie, without loyalty to the narrative development that came before; of the film's aesthetic production Glen Weldon says that "Scumacher, a former window dresser and costume designer, concentrated on the film's visual elements" (199). Tommy Lee Jones' Two-Face is a product of its text, campy and theatrical, but is a useful object of study for what it *over*does: clothes, villainy, and insanity.

Jones' Two-Face adopts a split personality, speaking of himself in first-person-plural, and crafting an ethos of joined opposites.[37] His uninjured side is that of normativity, in a stark black suit and gel-slicked hair of the 1990s, and is in line with the aesthetic of the original Two-Face: his hair is cut to the style of the day, and his suit reflects the palette of sobriety favored by the era

[36] Weldon's analysis of the film is illustrative of the critique Schumacher's approach receives. He writes that "Schumacher knew exactly how he hoped to achieve the studio's desired all-ages Bat-film: by throwing off Burton's grayscale somberness and embracing – nay, throttling – humor." Weldon reports that "cinematographer, Stephen Goldblatt, was nervous. 'It's an extravagant opera,' he said. 'It borders on excess, which inevitably causes problems'" (199).

[37] While his initial conception was that of an honorable man turned villain by the social rejection of his injured face, later Two-Faces introduced an element of psychosis to explain the full derangement of a respected D.A.-turned-murderer; "It appears Dent had two personalities – he'd managed to sublimate the second, anti-social one since he was a teenager" says a psychiatrist in *Batman Annual #14* in 1990 – a diagnosis commonly recycled in Two-Face narratives of the 1990s forward (*Two-Face* 255).

of his representation (brown for the 1940s, black for the 1990s). It is harder to read Jones as the "Apollo" of the original comic, and his eccentric performances as an actor make it harder still to read Two-Face as a split personality, given the exuberance of both "sides." What is most memorable about Jones' Two-Face is the visual representation of his damaged side, which is a cacophony of textures and colors and prints that are as disharmonious as his two sides are supposed to be. The left side of his suit is a purple velvet zebra stripe with a contrasting blue lapel; his shirt is a neon green leopard print, and half of his tie is a yellow cheetah print. On his left hand he wears a leather fingerless glove, and his left shoe is studded with silver. His burned face shows the same snarl that is a trademark of Two-Face representation, and his hair is as wild and purple as his complexion. While the green skin tone of the original comic is dehumanizing, the palette and patterns of the 1995 film are a caricature of the cartoon. More comical than cunning, this Two-Face is not one to be taken seriously, but one to be laughed at; he is a purposeful exaggeration of the absurdity of the comic, to the extent that it mocks the source material. Far from the original social commentary, which builds concepts of villainy on physical appearance and social acceptance, this film Two-Face invites observation and offers little more than a surface reading of stock character. He is shallow, and offers none of the complex challenges of the dangerously-neutral 1941 comic.

Christopher Nolan's 2008 *The Dark Knight* attempts to take the franchise in another direction from Schumaker's legacy, offering a trilogy that places Gotham in a world familiar to viewers, and removed from cartoons. While extraordinary, the heroes and villains alike are emphatically human, allowing the director to offer a sense of potential and threat in the telling of a billionaire orphan who dresses as a bat to fight an elite class of criminal. Nolan's film recognizes the driving social forces behind the original Harvey Dent, and sees in him the

potential for a villain's journey: the movement from the hero of the city through violent disenfranchisement to vengeance and self-destruction, all traced through the signal of his face.

In *Dark Knight* Harvey Dent is again the D.A. of Gotham City, tallying enemies as he tirelessly prosecutes the organized crime of the city. Early in the film he is even attacked in the courtroom, as the origin story generally relates, but this time by a gun. The potential shooter on the stand is disarmed, and Dent is able to make a flippant joke as the witness is taken away by police. This Harvey Dent is a fully realized representation of what the Golden Age comic describes – a confident, conventionally-attractive, and professionally successful man working for the good of the city, and on the rise. This Dent is one who truly believes in the goodness of people and his city, and invests himself in its protection and improvement.

Until, that is, he is kidnapped, tied to a gasoline bomb, and is forced to listen as his fiancé is murdered in a planned explosion. In his grief Dent throws himself sidewise into a pool of burning gasoline, before being dragged from the flames by a tardy Batman. This is a turning point for Dent, who in a flash loses his most human connection and anchor – his intelligent and righteous lawyer fiancé - at the hands of a literal madman. And for what? A little chaos, the Joker will later tell him when he visits Dent at Gotham General Hospital. The disfigured man who soon after escapes from Gotham General Hospital undetected is no longer Harvey Dent, Gotham D.A., but Two-Face, a man driven by a desire for revenge, and untethered to social constructs of justice. The destroyed flesh of his face recalls a living monster, and Dent's actions are as unbalanced as his curiously bifurcated face and suit. Now he is not making clearly-performative choices to establish his own identity, but instead visually recalls the actions of others. In wearing his damage this Dent has lost his own agency, and becomes an agent of chaos created, and directed, by the Joker. Less guided by chance, he is determined to find the corrupt

police officers who abducted he and Rachel, and anyone else he feels is to blame for their assault.

Once a signifier of his class and professionalism, Dent's suit reflects a shift in character more readily than any of the bifurcated jackets of his previous iterations. It shows the damage that has been done, and argues that this damage, caused by people, is enough to change even the greatest of social champions into a violent and methodical weapon of retribution. He is now as the Beetle – read by a fearsome face, and hell bent on revenge, disidentifying with the majority system he once worked to uphold. And this is when the lines between heroes and villains becomes skewed, and audiences' perceptions of right and wrong are challenged. Dent is *right* before his kidnapping, as he works within the system to challenge corruption and major crimes. He is also *right* in his grief for Rachel, and his understanding that the very corruption he fought lead to her death. But is he *right* for seeking revenge? Is he *right* for doling out violent, vigilante justice? His face suggests he is not; though Dent's injuries are the result of another's vicious attack, Dent's actions defy social codes of decency and propriety. In leaving the hospital prematurely, and removing his bandages, Dent brings his literally horrific injuries into the public space, revealing the deconstruction of his face and forcibly reminding onlookers of their own mortality and the fragility of their health and well-being. In action, and in the public sphere, Dent's injuries mark him less as a victim and more as a threat, moving under his own agency with such disregard that he may be capable of anything. In this way his gruesome injuries make him look more monstrous than human, signifying his actions are equally twisted. But his disidentification with the justice system is supported by the very premise of the movie, as audiences already accept the heroism of a private citizen working outside of legal boundaries: the unique and pointed threat of Nolan's Harvey Dent is that his disidentification aligns Two-Face's

motivation with Batman. Like his comics predecessor, Harvey Dent of the film embraces criminality, without thought to his previous reputation. But he does so in a way that shadows his former self: he is determined to challenge the system from within by seeking vigilante justice, when the justice system has proven itself corrupt. In *Dark Knight,* Two-Face is a villain, and the film suggests his actions aren't entirely unjustified.

The problem with simple signified villainy is that the resulting characters can be exceedingly sympathetic. Their key motivations, often framed at odds with a highly restrictive and grim Victorian order, speak to wider ranges of readers than the billionaire playboy who decided to kill off gang members without trial. *Batman* villain Poison Ivy's narrative is another of victimization turning one to villainous behavior, but whose physical beauty becomes a literal weapon, and, unlike Madame de la Rougierre and the Beetle, Poison Ivy is a ready example of villainy that has the potential to *appeal* to audiences.

Femme Fatally: Poison Ivy

My final object of study, Poison Ivy, née Dr. Pamela Isley, draws together the analysis of chapters one and two, as a comics villainess who demonstrates both the subterfuge of "passing" in normative gender spaces, and the disidentification of an empowered villainous identity. Created to be the most beautiful villain of Batman's acquaintance, Poison Ivy is a sex object used to forward sex-critical morality and enforcement of female stereotypes, warning readers of the dangers of sexually-provocative women. In most origin stories, Dr. Pamela Isley is an intelligent and driven academic whose criminal career begins with the encouragement and direction of an emotionally abusive professor, who exploits Pamela's naive attraction, and then uses her as an unwilling medical test subject. Recovering from her ordeal, Pamela's devotion to plant life increases, as does her critique of patriarchal figures who manipulate and abuse women;

she targets men specifically, using heteronormative expectations of gender and sex to attack men who would seek to consume or control her. Continually thwarted by Batman, Poison Ivy's arcs are as regretful as they are exploitive: Pamela Isley is described as having great academic and intellectual potential, lost because of an inappropriate personal relationship with a professor who is able to manipulate her because of her weak feminine nature. Poisoned by this same lover, Pamela gains supernatural control over plant life, herself becoming part plant (*Batman Arkham: Poison Ivy* 41). Now adopting the persona of Poison Ivy, she is marked by her eccentric and revealing dress as much as her criminal actions.

But Poison Ivy is not always so restricted by this material performance of sex appeal, and through her history she demonstrates the same social stealth exhibited by Dracula, manipulating gender expectations to particularly lethal effect. Importantly, Poison Ivy is intelligent, and violently capable: a combination that violates gender normativity, as Paula Ruth Gilbert illustrates in "Discourses of Female Violence and Social Gender Stereotypes." In a call for a more nuanced examination of the motivations of violent women, Gilbert cites arguments by Victorian phrenological researcher Lombroso, who "stressed in *The Female Offender* that intellectual activity in a woman was a sign of criminal abnormality," (1286) and psychologist D. C. Jack, who "Emphasized that boys are learning physical force as girls are learning the power and use of words and manipulation silencing any feelings of aggression" as women have "throughout history […] been punished for obvious displays of aggression" (1279). Recognizing the "cultural message that is given to young and adolescent girls as well as to adult women: They must not depart from the sanctioned cultural script" that forwards notions of masculine violence and feminine social manipulation, Jack argues that "women's acclaimed empathy has been shaped by inequality, by the requirement that they serve as caretakers, and by the threat of

violence against them" (Gilbert 1280). The history of Poison Ivy – that Pamela Isley's criminal career begins with her need to care for her romantic partner, and that she's the victim of his violence – affirms these cultural scripts. But as a result, Poison Ivy loses her feminine "acclaimed empathy" for humans, and learns to exploit the gender system to the detriment of the men who resist her eco agenda as Poison Ivy. Poison Ivy is introduced to be punished for her nonconformity, and her deviance as an empowered feminine figure demonstrates the power femme agency that threatens the patriarchal systems recognized by Gilbert and Jack.

When Poison Ivy is introduced in the 1966 *Batman #181*, her primary role is to function as a sexual object; looking not unlike Peter Pan, she's positioned on the cover between competing profiles of Batman and Robin, juxtaposing an arrow banner asking "Is SHE the cause?" for their internal conflict. This full-frontal representation puts Ivy's body on display for the reader, while simultaneously dominating her character with the masculine energies of Batman and Robin. Whereas the duo are intended to function as a joint force of vigilante morality, here they are instead represented as "men" – i.e. competitors for the attentions of a beautiful woman. Her character is less important than her figure, which serves as her "weapon" in the absence of traditional tools. The danger, the cover says, is not from what she does, but what she represents – the sexual distraction of men from their noble causes.

This introduction of Poison Ivy in issue #181 relies on a carnivalesque institution known to readers – that of the beauty pageant. The beauty pageant in its many forms is a space created by patriarchal powers as an inverted play on professional competition and distinction enjoyed by professional men. Women's work, by comparison, is to be beautiful and attract those successful men, and so the beauty pageant is established as a *pageant* in the historic theatrical sense – a play of inversion of the masculine work place, where women perform and are crowned not unlike the

King of Fools at a medieval carnival. Continuing this program of inversion for the entertainment of readers, who readily recognize the absurdity of a beauty pageant of villainous women, *Batman #181* opens with an exhibit of "pop art" featuring "three of the most beautiful women in the world – and the most deadly!" Gargantuan pinups dominate a museum wall, featuring "Dragon Fly," "Silken Spider," and "Tiger Moth" as "public enem[ies]" numbers one through three, ranked as beauty contestant winners. All are featured in leotards with coiffed hair and high heels; Tiger Moth aggressively points a handgun at the camera, while Dragon Fly and Silken Spider lean to show their figures to the best advantage, looking like Bettie Page BDSM prints.[38] Though Tiger Moth holds a sack suggesting an armed robbery, the actual crimes of the figures are not discussed – their value and interest is entirely represented by their appearances (*Batman Arkham: Poison Ivy* 7).

The exhibit is what draws Poison Ivy out into the public sphere for her first comics appearance – she is said to resent the hierarchy of the three beauty queens, asserting that *she* is the best villainess, and that her anonymity attests to such – her crimes have been "so perfect" that she's never been caught, and has therefore evaded public attention, (*Batman Arkham: Poison Ivy* 7). Affirming that the point is performance rather than criminal success or wealth, however, the lack of public attention inspires Poison Ivy to publicly announce her deeds at the exhibit, demonstrating her beauty and ingenuity as she flirts with Bruce Wayne (whose first words to her are to call Poison Ivy a "luscious dreamboat!"), and uses a small device to temporarily blind patrons to make her escape, personally protected by special contacts (*Batman Arkham: Poison Ivy* 8). This public performance demonstrates both the gender stereotypes of Poison Ivy texts, as well as her deviant strengths: as a character, she is vain and jealous; she is distracted from her

[38] Bettie Page is a mid-century American pinup model, regarded as the "Queen of Pinups," famous for posing with whips and riding crops.

purpose by an attraction to the handsome Bruce Wayne, suggesting the weakness of romantic attraction; she is criminally accomplished and intelligent, as she employs technology in the execution of her plan. Though her personality affirms her stereotypical gender alignment (jealousy, vanity, romantic preoccupation), her actions suggest her successful deviance (she is able to achieve her goal – announcing her villainy – and escape unscathed and untraced).

This initial introduction is more invested in the former than the latter, treating Poison Ivy as the pinup she is intended to be. Like most of the criminals and villains introduced in Golden Age *Batman* comics, Poison Ivy is a shallow character created as a representative archetype, infatuated with Gotham's vigilante Batman, and driven by her own ego. Most significant to her representation is that she is a beautiful woman, but also that her strengths are the consequence of a man's action. Unlike Harvey Dent, who decides his own face is best suited for nothing but villainy, Poison Ivy is thrust into the *moral* change, i.e. criminal actions, by a man's *direction*, stealing ancient herbs from a museum. Her physical change into a supernatural figure is a consequence of his actions, when he uses those same herbs in attempt to poison her. In this origin story the figure of Poison Ivy has little to no agency, and her resulting criminality is dismissed through the pedestrian trope of "a woman scorned" as she first seeks revenge against her former lover, and then grows distracted by her infatuations with both Bruce Wayne and Batman. That she is naïve enough to fall for her professor's schemes is intended to incite pity from the reader, and allow them a position of intellectual and emotional superiority to the villainess – the ease of her manipulation, and the ridiculous circumstances of her first theft and the professor's attempted murder lessen the threat she poses, and suggest that she is someone easily overcome by superior male intellect (such a Batman's). Pamela, for all her education, is

guilty of flighty romantic devotion over logic and reasoning, and needs the guidance of a stronger masculine mind to direct her morals and actions.

The opposition faced by Poison Ivy is not unique to her 1960s introduction, and remains a core aspect of the character's representation through her comics career. That Poison Ivy is critically regarded, and underestimated, by the masculine characters around her is particularly illustrated in a seven-page scene in 1995's "Poison Ivy" from *Batman: Shadow of the Bat Annual #3*. Having completed a heist, Ivy's two masculine henchmen sit alone in their hideout, one airing grievances like a pedestrian employee in an office breakroom (nicknamed here "Disgruntled"). He is quick to establish his criminal resume – "…Ain't that I'm prejudiced against kooks! I've worked for Penguin and the Joker," before explicitly naming gender bias as the root cause of his dissatisfaction. "I guess it's 'cuz she's a *woman* – that's what I don't like. Don't feel right, takin' orders form a babe!" (*Batman Arkham: Poison Ivy* 144). His companion counters with "Poison Ivy *pays* well – an' her plan worked, right?" but Disgruntled argues that the heist was of no particular brilliance, and that the two could have accomplished the same and kept the spoils entirely for themselves. Enforcing Disgruntled's prejudices, Poison Ivy then emerges in poignantly femme representation. Her standard villainous uniform of leotard and tights is accentuated with the jewels she has stolen, drawing attention to her large bust, wrapping around her slim waist, and hanging from her shapely hips. Her red hair is coiffed and held with a decorative comb, and Ivy poses to accentuate her figure, hands raised to her hair as she asks "So … what do you think?" (*Batman Arkham: Poison Ivy* 144). The next frame takes the representation further, showing Ivy from the back as both henchmen stare from the front, while the reader sees Ivy's thong leotard framing her shapely glutes and inviting a sexualizing gaze from the audience (*Batman Arkham: Poison Ivy* 145). A third frame shows Ivy again from the

front, leaning against the break table as her arms frame her cleavage, as she angrily asks Disgruntled if Batman would like her look. He leers, and says "Sure! Any many would go for you! You look like a million dollars!" (145).

The gender bias that inspires Disgruntled's dejection ultimately leads to the henchmen's downfall, demonstrating the fallacy of a feminine weakness/ masculine strength binary. The henchmen approach Poison Ivy, saying "Ahh … This is kinda embarassin" before telling her they're taking the jewels, kindly leaving her enough to return to an unspecified home, where they believe Poison Ivy belongs. Disgruntled goes so far as to say "Gotham City ain't for chicks like you!" (148), establishing the criminal sphere of the city as a wholly masculine space, and attempting to force Poison Ivy into a parallel feminine domestic sphere. The only villains capable of running rings in Gotham City are those like Penguin and the Joker, he's implying – the *men* who are equally unusual, but are superior for their gender and the assumed strengths this allows them. But the henchmen underestimate their boss, and the powers at her disposal. They assume that her only strength is her sexuality, "you sure *ain't* kissin' *me*!" (148), and do not recognize the attributes for which she has earned her name and reputation. Poison Ivy has no need to employ her famous poison kiss, and instead flexes the supernatural strength bestowed by her transformation, directing the plant life in her lair. As her plants incapacitate the men, seemingly without direction, Ivy picks up one of their fallen handguns and shoots, finishing "Men! An ugly mixture of conceit and deceit – At least they make good compost!" (150).

The henchmen's critical failure, the comic illustrates, is in their misreading of Poison Ivy's hyper-sexualized femininity as weakness. Her strengths are those for which women are consistently dehumanized and underestimated – her initial character is built primarily on her physical beauty, which remains a defining characteristic through every iteration. Shannon Austin

is critical of this comics trope in "Batman's Female Foes: The Gender War in Gotham City," arguing that "These women, in order to obtain and keep their power, must also use a mask of femininity to survive in a male-dominated society, forcing them to sometimes use typical female displays of sexuality and seduction to fight back" (287). The argument that characters like Poison Ivy are "forced" to use seduction to their advantage is a cheap recycling of anti-femme rhetoric, which in practice enforces the idea that femininity and sexuality are weaknesses. On the contrary, Ivy as a character demonstrates the powerful potential of her femme identity and appearance in a biased binary system, and utilizes it as a successful offensive weapon. It productively serves to mask her *additional* strengths – both her supernatural powers, and her consistent intelligence, which she demonstrates in the successful execution of vengeful plots.

Like a gown gifted from Medea, Ivy's kiss and touch are desired by the men of the comics – Batman included – and are just as toxic; her kiss, used as a consistent weapon from 1966 through present representations, has the potential to kill, confuse, control, or simply share affection.[39] This is an element of her characterization which works to mark the character as villainous, as opposed to the passive victim of the forced experiment which granted her these powers: when poisoned, Ivy gained *potential* which she, like Medea, chooses to use against men as a weapon in service of her eco-activism. She chooses to use this poison in 2008, as she seeks revenge against developers who are responsible for the "deliberate destruction" of the park in which she was living (*Batman Arkham: Poison Ivy* 254). In the comic Ivy easily gains access to

[39] Significantly, Ivy is allowed choice within the comics; unlike Marvel *X-Men* character Rogue, whose touch is potentially lethal to friend and foe alike, Poison Ivy *can* excrete a deadly toxin from her skin – but doesn't have to. Comics representing the personal relationship between Poison Ivy and Harley Quinn call this attribute into question. Early comics explicitly state that Ivy *can* excrete toxins, and chooses not to, dependent on her situation. The 1999 *Harley Quinn #1* shows Poison Ivy giving Harley an immunization to withstand her toxins, which is also casually mentioned in the 1998 "Oy to the World." In the March 2010 *Gotham City Sirens #8*, a series representing a partnership between Catwoman, Poison Ivy, and Harley Quinn, the pre-criminal Dr. Harleen Quinzel offers to shake Poison Ivy's hand to demonstrate her trust that Ivy won't *choose* to poison her with a touch.

one developer, David Bennet, by posing as a prostitute. In this professional capacity Bennet welcomes the villainess to his home, making himself vulnerable to her attacks. It is a complicated narrative, as it unfairly and sweepingly maligns both sex workers and their clients, casting moral judgment on providers and customers in general, while nonetheless empowering a specific femme villain whose motivations for ecological preservation are not themselves villainous. Bennet's willingness to buy sex is cast as one of his many moral downfalls, which Poison Ivy is able to utilize for her revenge, drawing his attention with her beauty, and putting him at ease with her feminine performativity. Bennet reads the disguised Poison ivy as nonthreatening specifically because she is a femme figure offering her body for his consumption. In the privacy of his home, Ivy incapacitates the man with a poisoned kiss, directly challenging his reading of their power dynamic – when he threatens to fall asleep out of boredom Ivy croons "Oh, that's not boredom. It's the paralysis from my kiss…" (262). The consequence for his assumption of normative power dynamics is an exceptionally violent death, as she can viciously murders the incapacitated but conscious man with a hatchet. Without remorse, she says "Now, if only we could build a house with the *pieces*, then we'd really be on to something, wouldn't we?" (264), connecting his dismemberment with his role in cutting down "her" forest.

Poison Ivy's strength is not in aesthetic deviance; she is conventionally attractive, and hypersexual in a way intended to appeal to the presumed heteronormative masculine audience. Her agency is instead found in her dedication to this traditional feminine sartorial performance, and the underestimation this engenders – the misreading of other characters. Because she is feminine, because she is beautiful, because she is sexually available, characters within the comics read her as weak, unprepared, or incapable, as her disgruntled henchmen. Time and again she is underestimated, which ultimately allows her the element of surprise, and thus the upper-

hand in her criminal pursuits. Her opponents allow her to get close enough for a kiss because they never expect that they'll be poisoned.

That she is able to use these gender stereotypes is a continued demonstration of the shortcomings of a binary gender system that upholds Victorian notions of separate spheres and inherent characteristics, and subsequently labels one set of those characteristics as superior to another. Ivy's beauty is a strength, in that it allows her an opportunity to manipulate and control, but that she *needs* to do so remains a point of frustration even for the villain, who continually berates those who fall as a consequence of their investment in stereotypes. A shift in the characterization of Poison Ivy demonstrates a growing awareness of this sympathy on the parts of comics creators, who wish to maintain audience interest in the character without losing her villainous and deviant characterization. One way in which they attempt to further Other Ivy is through the dehumanizing of her biology - they make her green. Now her limited humanity is literally written on her skin, and she is crafted as a beautiful monster, the more readily consumed as opposed to respected. This othering further fetishized the character whose narrative is entwined with sex, striving to associate her more closely with consumable life forms than the humanity she opposes.

Just as her first cover representation, Poison Ivy's body and beauty are consistently foregrounded in her comics representation. Through decades she is represented most often in a leotard with an ivy motif, and in recent years is objectified as a fully nude Eve-like garden goddess. Despite the power attributed to Poison Ivy, this objectification is explicit in the comics treatment of her in these moments, as writers and artists try to align her more and more closely with the plants she loves best. By drawing closer lines to the flora and fauna she nurtures, the

comics reduce her humanity, and thus justify their continued gaze – she is there to be looked at, no different than a beautiful garden.

Conclusion: I Am What I Am

This turn to monstrosity re-grounds Poison Ivy in the same character class as the others discussed in this chapter. Each of these characters are particularly guilty for transgressions against society, marking them not just as criminals, but as *villains* - performative transgressors who position themselves outside of, or adjacent to, social limitations and expectations. Unwilling to accept the social demise of her status as crone, Madame exercises material excess to make a space for herself. Madame is not a reserved household employee, but a figure seen and heard, literally and figuratively grasping to feed a hunger for the trappings of social improvement denied to her by standard institutions. She is frightening both literally and figuratively, a cackling specter and the promise of illicit possibility for those willing to eschew moral boundaries.

The Beetle similarly demonstrates contempt for cultural gender institutions. Unfazed, and perhaps empowered by, an assignment of Otherness, the Beetle unrepentantly trespasses on English codes of decency, horrifically demonstrating the ease with which one's identity and humanity can be stripped away. In Marsh's novel the taboo of nudity becomes an offensive weapon that equalizes all, in that all – men and women, wealthy and poor – are susceptible to such an attack. The Beetle's very ugliness becomes an affront to the English citizens of the novel, who associate the disharmony of the Beetle's face with morality, asserting a natural abhorrence for the figure they refuse to call prejudice, and instead understand as a natural repugnance for evil.

This is a lesson that inspires Harvey Dent's transformation into Two-Face. Lauded as an Apollo before his assault, and socially isolated after an acid attack leaves him scarred, the move

from D.A. to criminal is one actively embraced by the *Batman* villain. In the introduction to this chapter I argue that the villains of comics and gothic novels come to fill a void of entertainment left in the cessation of public executions, and a character who so actively identifies his own villainy perfectly suits this social need. When Dent adopts a life of crime, he becomes not an ordinary crime boss, but a super-villain – one for whom the police force are unequipped to handle, and whose capture require the intervention of a vigilante beyond the scope of the written law. This social exceptionism allows Batman to pursue Two-Face, and others of his ilk, unfettered by procedure and accountability, and further allows the reader a sense of righteousness in enjoying this treatment. A villain is one who is beyond the scope of an ordinary human, and thus deserves the exceptional treatment delivered by Batman.

And so too is Poison Ivy, whose characterization is increasingly dehumanized, the better to objectify the character for her body, and withdraw agency from her methods. But like other *Batman* villains, Poison Ivy finds power and strength by identifying outside of coded systems and false binaries. Her femininity is neither mask nor costume, but an intrinsic aspect of her identity, and an underestimated weapon. As such, she is allowed a cunning that continually thwarts the patriarchally normative – she is able to trick her way into a developer's private residence, kiss her way to murder, and develop biological weapons unsuspected by crooks who read no depth in her pretty face.

In their material performances, each of these villains demonstrate not just sartorial literacy, but keen, attentive awareness to expectations of gender performativity. Even as they attempt to negate them, the characters of Madame, the Beetle, Two-Face, and Poison Ivy are representative of power systems associated with performances of femininity and masculinity and, despite differences in time, country of origin, and media, these texts all work within consistent

gender frameworks, relying on generalized Western expectations and codes. However, as the next chapter shows, gender codes are in fact plural, and gendered systems may even develop contentiously, offering the potential to villainize what another culture most values.

CHAPTER 4
FIENDS OF VARIOUS SORTS

The Joker and Jack the Ripper aren't the most fashionable of fiends. Unlike the villains of chapter one, who use fashion to hide in plain sight, or the villains of chapter two, who use fashion to purposefully establish their deviant disidentifications, the villains of chapter three demonstrate less narrative concern with their own fashioning. Their styling is an external device, rather than a tool used by characters within narratives, as authors and illustrators visually shape these characters to emphasize their particular threats. They are instead narrative mannequins, crafted to recall material constructions of manhood. The Joker and Jack the Ripper are styled not as individuals, but as representatives of type, the horror of their actions lending critique to the visions of deviant manhood projected by their suits.

The Joker, identified by comics scholar David Hajdu as "Batman's chief nemesis," (61), is defined not just as a criminal, but as a mass-murdering madman without conscience, whose tenuous grip on reality is matched with an extraordinary intelligence that catapults him into Gotham infamy. That the Joker has seen consistent comics and media representation from his introduction in *Batman No. 1* (1940) demonstrates the extent to which he both engages and terrifies comics and media audiences, his popularity utilized for commercial success. This engagement is not unlike the character of Jack the Ripper, who stands as a media proxy for an unknown murderer in the 1888 Autumn of Terror. As Londoners feasted on the narratives spun by penny papers, a human assailant murdered real residents of Whitechapel - but so removed, and so extraordinary, was the reporting that the tale from the first was commercialized as a media sensation. The murderer became a character of print, and a villain of cultural interest.

Here I will argue that both of these villains independently demonstrate cultural anxieties surrounding the definitions of national masculinity, as both British and American men separately

attempt to define idealized manhood. As scholars Michael Kimmel and Ben Griffin demonstrate, these masculinities are developed antagonistically, as British and American men define themselves against one another following the American Revolution. Thus, in examining the masculine villainy of the Joker and Jack the Ripper at their moments of creation, I argue that each performs this trans-Atlantic tension by representing the Other against which national masculinities are developed. I am not arguing that the artists are explicitly casting these villains as English Joker and American Ripper. I am instead arguing that the Ripper and the Joker reflect the social apprehensions about contrasting contemporary masculinities, to which artists give literal faces in popular entertainment. Thus, the masculinities of these characters are not universally villainous, but their characterizations, and gender deviance, are culturally bound.

To establish this initial challenge, I engage with the scholarship of masculinity scholars Michael Kimmel and Ben Griffin, who argue that American and British masculinities are antagonistically defined by the other, each considering the impact of paternalistic British colonialism on social identity. This martial conflict, they observe, leaves American men without a stable role model for developing distinct American masculinities, and the British seeking a new system of power in the face of domestic disruption in the loss of a major colony. In the case of Jack the Ripper, I use Griffin's and Judith Walkowitz's readings of class to forward the argument that the Ripper as constructed by newspapers is a decidedly *American*-like figure in his masculine gender performance. Similarly, in his 1940 introduction, the Joker is a particularly British in affectation that contrasts with the dominant American masculinities identified by Kimmel. Having established this common conflict as a source for anxieties of masculinity, I turn then to scholars John F. Kasson, Angus McLaren, and Richard Faber, who argue that the resultant American masculinity is developed in relation to the physically powerful performance

of the male body, and British masculinities are distinguished by the enforcement of class systems and renewed definitions of the English gentleman as a model of gendered superiority.

The second move of chapter three is to examine these same characters in their representations in comics and films beginning in the late 1980s, where I argue that contemporary texts revisit the original Othering of Joker and Ripper and redefine these same villains to reflect *domestic* toxic masculinities, as each nation's artists reclaim their cultural production (i.e. The Ripper as British and The Joker as American), and use the famous villains to illustrate present-day domestic criticism of British elitism (the Ripper in *From Hell*), and the violent potential of white, blue-collar American masculinity (the Joker in *Death of the Family*). The Joker and Jack the Ripper are individual constructions of their times and places, created by men who, through their stories and illustrations, explore questions of deviant identity: *who* could do such terrible thing*s, and, more specifically, what kind of man* is capable of such atrocities? Their answers are relayed in the villains they illustrate – madmen whose crimes defy reason and pattern, and whose characterization is necessarily *other*.

Trans-Atlantic Masculinities: A Family Story

The tension between American and British masculinities begins with questions of power, blood, and violence. Specifically, the literal violence of the American Revolution – an event which *Manhood in America* author Michael Kimmel calls "a somewhat disturbing start" (14) to the establishment of a national identity, a perhaps understated reference to the symbolic patricide of the war, which "freed the sons from the tyranny of a despotic father" (15). Transatlantic masculinities scholars such as Kimmel and Ben Griffin consistently point to this martial conflict as the catalyst for evolving gender idealizations, resulting in systems of masculinity that reflect shared cultural roots, and the persistent fears of inadequacy. Though both American and British

systems of manliness prize personal control, and each finds their roots in the American War of Independence (Kimmel 14, Griffin 39), the outcome of their martial conflict influences gender identities in contrary ways.

As British subjects, the masculinity of American colonizers masculinity mirrored that of England, valuing the masculine class of the "Genteel Patriarch," who represented the landed gentry of England, and the archetype of what Kimmel calls the "Heroic Artisan" – the loyal and trustworthy craftsman whose morals are as straight as his anvil (13). But in this system is an enforced order which disallows social mobility, and thus encourages social tension. Unlike natural families, which see the death of older generations and the rising power of the next, the colonial system forever enforces the infantile state of the colony, and with it its citizens. "Being a man meant being in charge of one's own life, liberty, and property," Kimmel writes, and not "enslaved by the English father, infantilized, and thus emasculated" (14, 15). Kimmel reads this tension, and the divorce of the Revolutionary War, as the American colonies breaking from Father England in order to assert their liberty, and with it their manliness, as "British manhood and, by extension, aristocratic conceptions of manhood […] were denounced as feminized, lacking manly resolve and virtue, and therefore ruling arbitrarily" (Kimmel 15). But what does it mean to be a man, to a son who has killed his father? Kimmel quotes "'Having left the British parent as a child, America miraculously becomes capable of its own nurturing; independence transforms the son into his own parent, a child into an adult.' The American man was now free to invent himself" (15). But this "freedom" was an incredible burden, and lead to unresolved and continued crises of identity – revolutionary American masculinities has only destructive qualities (opposition, violence, independence) and had not yet identified constructive values. American

men will come to rely on the development of the powerful and violent body to further demonstrate American masculine superiority.

Kimmel's theories of evolving American masculinities focus on the homosocial – spaces occupied by white men, in which they can explore concepts of manliness. He writes that

> Manhood is less about the drive for domination and more about the fear of others dominating us, having power or control over us. Throughout American history American men have been afraid that others will see us as less than manly, as weak, timid, frightened … American men define their masculinity, not as much in relation to women, but in relation to each other. Masculinity is largely a homosocial enactment. …[notes] playwright David Mamet, "What men need is men's approval." (5)

American masculinity, Kimmel is suggesting, is a pearl built around a worrying grain of sand – a fear that one is not *enough* of something that society has defined as masculine. But also, I argue, out of fear of violence. As Kimmel himself acknowledges, America is a country borne by spilling the blood of the figurative father, whose martial failure in holding the rebellious colonies feminizes the country in the eyes of dominating Americans. Without positive example and without his own history, the American man was first, and consistently, defined through violence and physical bodies. As Kimmel goes on to define the symbolic patricide that marks the development of new masculinities, he does not consider in these early stages the literal violence from which it comes. American masculinities have their strongest roots in conflict – in fighting, and in killing, "other" men. But he does recognize the importance of physical might in the development of American masculinities. "To be considered a real man, one had better make sure to always be walking around and acting 'real masculine'" (Kimmel 75). Implied by, but not

directly addressed in Kimmel's initial definition, is that a "real man" must also be white. As noted in the introduction of this dissertation, Critical Race Theory demonstrates the significant relationship between developing notions of gender and race, as scholars such as Marlon Ross and Siobhan Somerville identify the shared gender/race line which forcibly identified black men as bestial rather than manly, and thus incapable of exercising masculine power and dominance.

Kimmel's model of developing American manhood assumes whiteness, as it considers systems of power in its construction of gender identity. When racial identity is considered, the framework of martial conflict is continued, as "the 1940s also resounded with voices of rage and pain, the voices of those groups of men who had historically been marginalized and emasculated by such self-made middle-class white men" and the "building black rage" Kimmel asserts is signaled by the novels of Richard Wright (166). He looks at "James Baldwin's powerful essays and best-selling novels" which "focused a tormented rage on white men's projections of their fears and longings on black men" (196) and the observation that "gender and racial equality often feel like a loss to white men" (240). Not explicitly addressed is the agency of white men in the development of American masculinity. White American masculinity is written by those in power seeking to define themselves, and oppressively framing others in the process. That race is a secondary subject of consideration, addressed to frame conflict rather than definition, demonstrates the privilege of whiteness. The concept of "American masculinity" does not become "white American masculinity" until the Other, who has been there all along, finds the courage to challenge the assumption. As Toni Morrison says, "Except when they are soldiers, blacks are never American citizens. Why? Because in media-talk we are not local, or general citizens – we are those whose financial security is fragile; those whose reactions are volatile" ("A Race in Mind, The Press in Deed" 35).

For those in power, the ideal American man was the majoritarian-representative self-made man, both physically and professionally. In the early nineteenth century, the "new wealthy were no longer the landed aristocracy but the new merchants and industrialists" - such as the fictional Wayne family, from which Batman comes. Kimmel continues, "American culture followed suit. Gone were the powder, wigs, and richly ornamented and colorfully patterned clothing that marked the old gentry; the new man of commerce wore plain and simple clothing 'to impart trust and confidence in business affairs.' Countless pundits recast the Genteel Patriarch as a foppish dandy as they railed against Europe…" (Kimmel 21). The monster in the closet was the father they had left behind: "American men's chief fear at the time was that the overthrown effeminate aristocracy would return to haunt them" (16), perhaps in the figure of the Joker, wearing a purple suit and a manically exaggerated red grin, as he poisoned their households and stole their wealth.

This domestic and familial threat similarly drives the development of eighteenth and nineteenth century British masculinity. "If we are to explain why the fear of household discord had such a hold on the imagination of the Victorian governing classes we must start with the fundamental transformation in gender politics that began in the final quarter of the eighteenth century," Ben Griffin writes in *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain*. "The most immediate cause of this transformation was the American war of Independence (38-9). Griffin writes that "the horror with which the British viewed this conflict 'was frequently expressed through images of an unnatural family affair or domestic strife,' … 'gender panic' was, therefore, one expression of that broader movement for the reformation of manners that followed defeat in America – that national effort to set Britain's house in order" (39). The "house," as both a domestic and social

framework, becomes the symbol of English gender codes, and the means through which middle class family men come to represent ideal British masculinity.

In Victorian England, manliness is marked by gentlemanliness. In *Proper Stations: Class in Victorian Fiction,* Richard Faber speaks to the inability of men of all classes to aspire to proper British masculinity, as class boundaries serve as a gatekeeper for education and opportunity, which are essential to nineteenth-century upper- and middle-class masculinities. Faber asserts that "Manners and conduct went far towards making a gentleman; and to acquire these a good education was usually necessary" (Faber 130). English masculinity was, then, something that could be learned, and was taught through academic and social education. Angus McLaren affirms the readings of other masculinity scholars when he asserts that "The goal [of *The Trials of Masculinity: Policing Sexual boundaries 1870-1930*] is to show that the norms of male heterosexuality were not innate, but socially and culturally constructed" (2). Likewise, McLaren's work directly addresses the hypocrisy of the system he argues that "The same authorities, in condemning laborers' brawls as irrational outbursts while turning a blind eye to gentlemen's brawls, were implicitly acknowledging that 'the typologies designating honorable and dishonorable masculinity were highly class specific'" (McLaren 3). Rosalind Crone further addresses the classism of representations of violence, and sees in the late nineteenth century "the emergence and vigorous promotion of a more self-disciplined and pacific ideal of manhood. From the late eighteenth century until *c.* 1870, duelling, prizefighting and common tavern brawls became increasingly sitgmatised with the triumph of a 'civilising offensive' waged against the 'customary mentality', a previously shared culture which saw violence as a legitimate form of self-expression but which had first been confined to the lower classes and finally to the rough residuum located at the very bottom of society" (Crone loc. 233). The working-class man (or the

"rough residuum" as Crone says) becomes a figure of dishonor, maligned for his actions, and defined as a threat to the domestic tranquility of other classes. Here is a prototype of the character who will become Jack the Ripper – an unknown man who violently upsets the domestic social order by murdering women and mothers. But here, too, is the deviant American son who has sundered the genteel English imperial family, identifying his own masculinity through might.

With a far less stable class system, and in light of westward colonization efforts, American masculinity comes to define itself by the might and capability of the masculine body. To say that this prototypical American son is more invested in physicality than his British contemporary is not unjustified, as Kimmel directly attests. Kimmel illustrates this grounding of American masculinity through accounts of dude ranches, vigilante cowboys, and pervasive self-help manuals that preach physical discipline as the key to manliness, made flesh by figures such as Charles Atlas.

> The late nineteenth century was full of commentary on how the frontier made men. If the workplace could not inspire the 'manly independence' of the earlier Heroic Artisan, escape to the primitive conditions of existence on the frontier might do the trick. In a magazine essay, General Horace Porter invited his audiences to compare two men… By contrast, British manhood, and, by extension, aristocratic conceptions of manhood (which would soon come to include the Genteel Patriarch) were denounced as feminized, lacking manly resolve and virtue" (Kimmel 65-6, 15).

Just as Kimmel, masculinity scholar John Kasson recognizes the body of Roosevelt as an illustration of American masculinity in *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man*, for "his ability to

turn prized characteristics of manliness into spectacle, literally to embody them" (4). For Kasson's exploration of the masculine body, he further looks to body-building pioneer Eugen Sandow,[40] magician and escape artist Harry Houdini,[41] and the fictional character of Tarzan,[42] as written by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Kasson argues that "the spectacles of the male body mounted by these three figures built on values embodied in men such as Theodore Roosevelt… [but] the popular spectacles created by Sandow, Houdini, and Burroughs take us far beyond Roosevelt's performances of manliness, expressing even deeper fantasies and anxieties" (8). Like Kimmel, Kasson writes of the conscious and purposeful performance of masculinity adopted by white American men, who "in the guise of entertaining, they reasserted the primacy of the white male body against a host of challenges that might weaken, confine, or tame it" (Kasson 8). These figures stand as singular illustrations in the cultural imagination, as much characters in popular culture as real men. In this way, historical figures such as Sandow and Houdini are much the same as Tarzan, and even the Joker and Jack the Ripper – their performances are cultural artifacts sought to offer direct arguments of masculinity being equal to physical power and the potential for 'revolutionary' violence. They function as symbols that speak both to the values of white masculinity, and the fears that inspire the actions of other white men. As Kimmel writes, "by the 1870s the idea of 'inner strength' was replaced by a doctrine of physicality and the body. …by the century's end [the self-made man] was making over his physique to *appear* powerful physically, perhaps to replace the lost real power he imagined that he … once felt" (89).

As living men the bodies of Sandow and Houdini are intimately and physically inspected by contemporary audiences in person and in photographs, as Kasson examines their bodies in

[40] 1867-1925
[41] 1874-1926
[42] Author Edgar Rice Burroughs, 1875-1950

retrospective analysis. Sandow, advertised as "the perfect man," builds a vaudeville career on his physical strength in the nineteenth century, leaving a legacy of body-building and strength competitions still active in American culture. Kasson says, "His physique was widely interpreted not simply as an individual achievement but as a reaffirmation of male identity … by stressing the potential for strength, control, heroism, and virility in the male physique, he reassured a broad public for the continuation of these qualities" (76). On vaudeville stages "spectators viewed Sandow's body as both an attraction and a challenge, a model of strength and an object of desire, an inspiration, a rebuke, and a seduction" who "claimed to embody an ancient heroic ideal of manhood that had been lost in the modern world," (29), reminiscent of the romance of the cowboy that inspires the American self-made-man, building his name and his fortune with his own calloused hands. "More immediately and intensely than any figure before him, Sandow aroused a desire among men to emulate another man's body" – one who could "no doubt … kill any man with a blow very easily. He could crush in the chest, break the neck, or fracture the skull of any man, and not use one-half his strength" (Kasson 46) – qualities, and violent potential, offered as admirable, as Sandow's body represented what men were capable of doing to their own bodies, and how that self-making could in turn protect them from the violence of others or be turned on others.

But Sandow, like this frontiersman, became a relic to turn-of-the-century audiences, and some scorned the "artifice" and "counterfeit" of Sandow training his body in strength, rather than expressing natural masculine superiority (Kasson 76). Houdini, on the other hand, performed "amazing feats of mastery over objects and situations," proving he, and magicians like him, could be "exemplary masculine figure[s]" for speaking "to dreams of dominance and authority in the modern world" (79). Where Sandow illustrated masculine control and mastery over his own

body, Houdini built a career on performing mastery of an increasingly industrial and capitalistic world around him. And though both Sandown, the body-building "perfect man," and Houdini, the body-manipulating escape artist thwarting upper-class institutions, would appear dressed as gentlemen, and could "pass" as gentlemen on both sides of the Atlantic, Sandow and Houdini each trades on his body, capitalizing on the fantasies of white masculinity as unlimited power and freedom that they perform.[43] But why are such fantasies significant? Because of the very tenuousness of their definition of manhood, free white masculinities are imagined as being under constant threat and in need of violent defense. But rather than acknowledge the "women's movement, the civil rights movement, and the gay liberation movement" which "all offered scathing critiques of traditional [white] masculinity and demanded inclusion and equality in the public arena" (Kimmel 196), escapist entertainment offered more comfortable foes: white men whose failures in masculinity affirm majoritarian definitions of ideal manhood.

The physical and visual representations of Jack the Ripper and the Joker serve as cultural artifacts used both to entertain masses with their sensational exploits, and to demonstrate gender codes important to each country of origin. Initial representations of these criminals demonstrate a cross-Atlantic exchange of the familiar threatening Other, and an anxiety over parallel yet contentious masculinities that casts its trans-Atlantic brethren as deviant: an ideal American man is *not* British in affectation, and vice versa. These contradictory representations of villainy, established in 1888 illustrated newspapers and Golden Age *Batman* comics, are affirmed in the historical readings of the masculinity scholars cited above. However, in more contemporary

[43] "Throughout his career he cannily sought the appearance and demeanor of a gentleman, if a rather flamboyant one. Sandow early sensed, as would Edgar Rice Burroughs in *Tarzan of the Apes,* the importance of social credentials as well as great physical strength. Both Sandow and Burroughs were aware that a privileged class standing was vital in the new ideal of the male body, that class remained inscribed on the body, even the nude body. Class and, in Sandow's case, the incessant cultivation of classicism provided social and aesthetic cover that saved the body from mere nakedness" (Kasson 33).

texts, represented in this chapter by *From Hell*, *Death of the Family*, and modern films, American and British authors and artists work to reclaim these significant villains as subjects of domestic interest and symbolism, capable of communicating apprehensions for new generations waking to tumultuous political landscapes; the Joker of *Death of the Family, Batman* (1989), and *Dark Knight* is a thoroughly American villain, and the Jack the Ripper of *From Hell* is resituated as a genteel British aristocrat. In their modern roles Jack the Ripper and the Joker demonstrate that what is most threatening today isn't the international Other of history, but the cultural and political consequences of the ways that national gender and class constructions license and provoke extreme, "terrorist" violence as a potential if villainous performance of masculinity.

The Threat of the Disinherited Son: Jack the Ripper

The Joker and Jack the Ripper are not the living subjects of Ben Griffin and Michael Kimmel, but illustrated fashioned masculinity introduced through caricature. The Joker and Jack the Ripper have no bodies, and are thus strictly material objects fashioned by men to represent men – by comparison or contrast – in a particular time and place. My analyses of the Joker and Jack the Ripper are specifically situated in not just country but time, and so I, as Judith R. Walkowitz in "Jack the Ripper and the Myth of Male Violence," (544), need to begin my analysis by historicizing the characters in their respective moments of creation, to better frame the prevailing masculinities at work at the time and place of their introduction. Walkowitz does so succinctly in the beginning of her article, situating the character of Jack the Ripper in time and social context, recognizing that "The Ripper murders were the latest of a series of sexual scandals linking highlife and lowlife in London in the 1880s," as rising social awareness of the destitution in London's East End mobilized both "philanthropic activities […] in the forms of religious missions, college settlement houses, housing reform, and elaborate social surveys" and

organizing socialists (544). The demonstrations of the latter "confirmed [propertied classes'] worst fears of 'Outcast London' as a vast unsupervised underclass could be readily mobilized to the revolutionary ranks of the socialist movement" (545). In the midst of this class and social unrest an unknown killer murders at least five East End women, feeding "the flames of class hatred and distrust, on both sides" (545). Recognizing too the agitations of middle-class feminists who seek to overturn the Contagious Disease Acts and "liberate women from male sexual tyranny and brutality," (545) Walkowitz argues that the phenomenon of Jack the Ripper is a product of class and gender conflicts, and that "one cannot emphasize too much the role of the popular press, itself a creature of the 1880s, in establishing Jack the Ripper as a media hero, in amplifying the terror of male violence, and in elaborating and interpreting the Ripper murders to a 'mass' audience" (546).

In the fall of 1888, the murders of women in Whitechapel caught public attention for their savagery, and the dawning realization that these murders were likely the work of a single, unknown, and unpredictable madman. Individually, the deaths of these women were not extraordinary, in a journalistic sense – violence was a regular exchange traded in British newspapers: Lucy Worsley writes, "the British *enjoyed* and *consumed* the idea of murder" (2), and Rosalind Crone writes that "In eighteenth-century England, the public nature of criminal behaviour and its punishment meant that every level of society became intimately acquainted with and almost obsessively interested in crime" (loc. 1693). "It is not surprising then, that such widespread interest in crime encouraged the emergence of a popular literature which intricately explored its commission and punishment," she continues (loc. 1704). Of this genre of popular literature Crone writes that "On one level, criminal lives were cautionary tales, designed to deter audiences from the path of temptation and crime. However, on another level, shrewd publishers

also recognised the necessity of entertainment and, as a result, pamphlets and multivolume biographies were extremely sensational" (loc. 1722).

Collectively, the serial murders of women became a profitable and popular media sensation, and the coverage of the brutal attacks on poor women in Whitechapel demonstrated the continuing profitability of crime reporting throughout the nineteenth century (Altick 3). In the epilogue of *Violent Victorians* Rosalind Crone considers the late nineteenth century phenomenon of the Ripper murders, and its place in entertainment publishing. "The Jack the Ripper murders of 1888 not only occurred at the very gateway to the East End," which Crone says "symbolized urban decay," but that the murdered women were considered "representative of the degenerate folk of the neighbourhood" for their reported professions, and " 'Jack' became the embodiment of that very environment. In many ways, Jack the Ripper, and the media frenzy that surrounded the murders, represented the loudest and most famous representation of the violence of the late nineteenth-century East End" (loc. 5181). Crone argues that "the repeated characterisation of the Eastenders as savages, not unlike the natives of deepest, darkest Africa,[44] provided a convenient other, a vital prop for civilising narratives" (loc. 5181). She argues that "the daily reports on the pursuit of Jack the Ripper, were consumed by record numbers of people in London" and that "There is no doubt that they enjoyed the stories in large part because these publications offered a means of vicarious participation. In other words, they were a powerful and appealing form of entertainment for both high and low" (loc. 5194). Slaughtering somewhere between five and thirteen women, with increasing brutality, this faceless fiend was the terror of Whitechapel – and a darling of the printing press, as historians frequently recount.[45] Perry Curtis

[44] Again identifying the racial connotations of identification categories.

[45] Perry Curtis writes that "Apart from all the sensation-horror and mystery, the most obvious feature of Ripper news was the sheer volume of space assigned to the slayings, the inquests, and the police investigation. For four or five

writes that "Apart from all the sensation-horror and mystery, the most obvious feature of Ripper news was the sheer volume of space assigned to the slayings, the inquests, and the police investigation. For four or five days after each murder and for one or two days after each inquest, most papers gave big headlines and multiple columns to the story" (200-1). Crone reflects that "delight in gazing upon dark and violent spectacles was not just limited to the everyday lives of the Eastenders, but was also apparent in patterns of crime reporting in the press. In this respect, the late Victorian press was far from respectable or civilized. Hardly any detail of the mutilation Jack the Ripper inflicted on his victims was kept from readers of lowbrow and highbrow newspapers alike" (Crone loc. 5205). The murderer later named Jack the Ripper became a notorious celebrity, and a romantic character who could hold a place in British popular culture into perpetuity.

The fictive character of Jack the Ripper is so extraordinary that he becomes a cultural icon even as the actual murderer is still attacking women in Whitechapel.[46] Not contained by the penny papers, the Ripper is utilized in wider cultural texts that shift the characterization of an unknown murderer to a literary villain almost immediately. Less than a month after the murder of Mary Ann Nichols on August 31, 1888, her story was adopted as a fictional thriller to supplement the sensationalism of the illustrated penny press; on September 29, 1888 an advertisement for *The Whitechapel Murders, or, the Mysteries of the East End, a Thrilling Romance* appears just below *The Butcher* and *The Family Doctor* in *The Illustrated Police News*, usurping its place from a notice for *Buffalo Bill*. But in *The Illustrated Police News*, Jack the

days after each murder and for one or two days after each inquest, most papers gave big headlines and multiple columns to the story" (200-1).

[46] Sensationalist journalism was already well-established before the Autumn of Terror. According to historian Richard Altick, "sensation itself … was the sensation" after a pair of violent crimes gains particular journalistic attention in 1861, establishing a generic trend that "evok[es] a spate of worried commentaries in the intellectual periodicals and leaving a lasting mark on English fiction and popular drama" (3).

Ripper becomes an extreme illustration of the MP's concerns of lower-class base maleness, violently disrupting the family by literally brutalizing women. This physical maleness is abhorrent to middle class British expectations of masculinity, and illustrated papers generate an every-villain figure suitable for representing a fiend whose actions are known, but whose identity is not. The paper casts Jack the Ripper as a malleable face for the looming Other, and morality-destroying maleness, as it capitalizes on the "un-British" sensationalism of the attacks.

Yet Jack the Ripper *isn't real;* the figure still named in whodunits and films is a fiction created by newspaper*s* to further sensationalize the horrific murder of women in Whitechapel. In the absence of testimony and reliable facts, journalists were even responsible for the lasting moniker of the killer, a journalist faking the famous letter sent to the police and signed "Jack the Ripper" (Flanders 36, Walkowitz 551). But the monster they created slowly crept through their papers, saturating pages with Whitechapel stories. In the present chapter I approach Jack the Ripper as a character (rather than an historical figure), developed, like the Joker, through narrative and illustrative texts, created as a commercial product, and utilized to forward, and reflect on, cultural ideals. This is justified in part by the standing uncertainty of the murderer's true identity: the 1888 Whitechapel case remains unsolved to this day. The name connected to the slayings is attributed by newspapers contemporary to events, and nearly all "clues" pointing to an identity are conjecture. Though the women murdered in the East End were real, their remains serving as the only tangible evidence in the case, the figure known as *Jack the Ripper* is fictive. As L. Perry Curtis Jr. argues in *Jack the Ripper and The London Press,* "Like all forms of news, crime news is both an institutional product and the result of a cultural process, churned out by a complex organization (the newspaper) and subject to strict economic and spatial constraints" (52). Thus, as a figure placed in print by professionals at the time of panic, I

approach the Ripper as a reflection of these artists and writers, used in much the same way Bob Kane and Bill Finger use villains in *Detective Comics*, and later *Batman* to address cultural anxieties.

Punch attributes this vulgar commerce of sensationalist reporting to an unfortunate American influence, writing in verse "Some would have it an age of Sensation, / If the age one of Sense may not be - / The word's not *Old* England's creation, / But New England's over the sea" (qtd. Altick 4). The writing of sensation itself is by association brutish, and the rough figures whose crimes are represented carry the taint of Americanisms. *The Illustrated Police News,* as described by Curtis, is an admittedly sensationalist penny paper, relating contemporary crimes and escapades as much through its ghoulish fully-illustrated front pages as the tightly-packed six columns of text within: "A fine example of pictorial sensationalism was the weekly *Illustrated Police News* (founded in 1863 and costing a penny), which featured dramatic sketches of crime scenes, victims, and villains on every front page" (Altick 69).

But still, it is a sensation. Between August and December of 1888, during the height of Jack the Ripper panic, *The Illustrated Police News* capitalizes on it each week with maps and murderscapes, dignified portraits of professionals investigating the crimes, and a parade of mutilated corpses. In contemporary reading, the Victorian paneling is reminiscent of modern comics, placing depth and development in the quiet gutter, a term used to describe the white space between illustration panels, and speaking to readers of all literacies through fashion, portraiture, and body language. Eleven weekly issues offer sketches of the Whitechapel murderer, illustrating five basic representations of the culprit, and often including two to three variations on the same page.

As I argue in "Murder for a Penny: Jack the Ripper and the Structural Impact of Sensational Reporting," Moira Peelo and her co-authors provide a strong framework in "Newspaper Reporting and the Public Construction of Homicide" through which one can consider the commercial and cultural implications of Ripper reporting. They write: "reporting of crime is best understood as a part of defining 'otherness' and 'difference', rather than about debating issues of justice and equity;" and they observe that "newspapers pick out [cases] as exceptional or newsworthy [based] on an assessment of what is currently morally acceptable" (256). For their purposes, the researchers are faced with the task of identifying social definitions of morality, and through said definition, a further definition of homicide. While they acknowledge that "all homicides are shocking" they go on to assert that "society does not really believe killing to be wholly wrong on every occasion; or, at least, that every illegal killing is not always defined as homicide" (257, 258). Here, questions of both motive and victim become significant, allowing periodical audiences to pardon and condemn murders as part of a system of cultural jurisprudence that affirms the reader's moral sympathy or superiority, allowing them to act as judge and jury, and occasionally impacting the outcome of court proceedings through vociferous calls in the press itself, as Judith Knelman stresses in "Class and Gender Bias in Victorian Newspapers" (31, 32).

The Illustrated Police News utilizes pointed styles of representation to distinguish between the lower-class men of the Whitechapel community and the respectable middle-class men tasked with identifying and apprehending the Ripper, and the cover of the September 15, 1888 edition demonstrates these styles in close contrast. The men of Whitechapel are illustrated in proximity to the murdered women throughout Ripper reporting, either discovering bodies or loitering near the crime scenes. The loiterers, like those represented in the bottom left panel of

the front page of *The Illustrated Police News* on September 15, 1888, are immediately suspicious, hunched in a doorway, their hands hidden in pockets or arms crossed, with hats pulled low over their brows. There is aggression in their stances, and a promise of challenge in the direct stares offered the constable. These are the *kinds* of men capable of the violence of the Ripper, the illustration suggests, and it offers a warning to readers to stay away from such gatherings.

Those unfortunate enough to discover the bodies are not so critically represented, though their sketches are not entirely favorable. The shock of a gruesome discovery, like that of the top center frame, is written blandly on the man's face, horror clear in his gaped mouth and raised hands. There's the suggestion of movement in his form, perhaps stumbling away, his center of gravity threatening to throw him onto the woman's corpse. Significantly, this man is shown in a moment of utter helplessness – for all of his movement and anxiety he can do nothing but wail and raise the alarm, incapable of protecting his own neighborhood. He is a pathetic figure. This class-critical reading of popular journalism is borne out by the historical research of Walkowitz, who says that "the rough elements of Whitechapel, female or male" were "excluded from the mobilization and press debate," to whom victims such as "Annie Chapman and Mary Jane Kelly were not degraded outcasts, but members of their own class and community" (558). Walkowitz says that "the poor also expressed their anger at the Ripper murders by rioting […] against the Jews, against the police (for not solving the murders)" (560). Walkowitz succinctly summarizes Ripper research when she says that, "Response to the Ripper murders, then, reveals significant class divisions" (Walkowitz 560).

A counter narrative of respectable British masculinity is offered through the portraiture of distinguished gentlemen associated with the case. The paper consistently represents coroners,

constables, inspectors, and doctors in thoughtful three-quarter portraits, hatless and staring intently into a middle distance (*Police News* 1888 Sept. 8). Individually framed, their proximity to the dead is clinical and removed; they do not occupy the same frame, nor the same social space, as the victims. These illustrations clearly represent the moral characters of the gentlemen by their intelligent expressions, unshaded faces, and upright postures, and instruct the reader to regard such reserved control and reason highly. They are represented *well*, in order to articulate an example of propriety, and communicate none of the panic of the street illustrations, instead appropriately somber and determined. The irrefutable maleness of the figures, represented on September 8 in "Revolting and Mysterious Murder of a Woman – Buck's Row Whitechapel" (*Police News*) completed the narrative of positive manliness, literally giving faces to the proper masculinity Griffin describes in the crafted identities of morally-crusading professionals invested in gendered codes of chivalry and the protection of women.

On September 15 the two contesting classed masculinities meet on the cover of *Police News* as a person of interest is arrested. The Inspector in charge looks sternly at his suspect, features framed by a neat beard and bowler. His coat is crisp and buttoned, a white pocket square visible. He is restraining the culprit, but with limited force, a gloved hand on a shoulder and the other on the man's arm. By contrast, the suspect is disheveled and gruff; his hair is too long, his beard is untrimmed, and his overly-long coat is open to show rumpled shirt and baggy trousers. Like the other Whitechapel men, he is shown in distressed movement – he is twisting, preparing to run, and physically shrugging off the inspector. He is exactly the type the public expects to be the murderer. And yet this face is just one of many.

The very inconsistency of Ripper's portraiture reads as a distinct threat, as it affirms that the killer truly remains unknown. In the eleven named issues of this reading he appears six times

clean-shaven and wearing a bowler (*Police News* 1888 Oct. 27), ten times with a similar hat and full beard, once as a chilling death mask (*Police News* 1888 Dec. 8), once with a mustache and no hat (*Police News* 1888 Oct. 20), and thirty-two times as well-mustachioed and sternly-browed, and skulking under a derby (*Police News* 1888 Dec. 1). There is little other regularity, and no pattern, precluding the suggestion that Ripper may be altering his facial hair as a disguise. Ripper's distinguishable nationality swings, his features entirely inconsistent from one witness account to another, and represented as entirely different men within the same publications, at times Irish (*Police News* 1888 Oct. 27), and others a Jewish caricature (*Police News* 1888 Oct. 20). Of these types of racialized representations, J. Halberstam writes that "Parasitism was linked specifically to Jewishness in the 1890s via a number of discourses. In business practices in London's East End, Jews were vilified as 'middlemen' who lived off the physical labor of English working class-bodies. Jews were also linked to the spread of syphilis, to the pseudoscientific discourse of degeneration, and to an inherent criminality that could be verified by phrenological experiments. The Jewish body, in other words, was constructed as a parasite, as the difference within, as unhealthy dependence, as a corruption of spirit that reveals itself upon the flesh" (Halberstam 96-7).

What is consistent is his body: Ripper is hunched, and often in motion. His clothes are largely disheveled and working-class, and he sneers into the shadows, his pinched expression communicating maliciousness and aggression. While the men charged with his capture are represented in professional portraiture, the Ripper is placed in the shadows of the East End, occupying not offices but streets, and without defining cultural occupation – he is not one who works for or within the community, but against it, his only work that of murder and terror. The illustrations favor an unabashed physicality associated with the working classes, whom Chris

Louttit identifies as an active subject of self-identity: "what must be stressed is how 'working class masculine subjectivity will differ dramatically from that of other classes'. [Ying S.] Lee suggests that this difference begins with the working man's body, since it is this, 'strong or weak, whole or damaged – [which] is his primary stock-in-trade, and … forms the basis of his identity'" (Louttit 33). This emphasis on the body is used to stigmatize the masculinized identity of working-class men, as sensational journalism emphasizes Ripper's brute criminal behavior, whether he is stabbing or looming over women dead and alive, or fleeing over fences and down the dark streets of the East End. I argue that this physicality, contrasted with the professionalism represented in the portraiture of investigators from September 8, 1888, illustrates the contested masculinities of Victorian England: one superiorly intellectual and protective, the other brutish, threatening, and monstrous in its violence and destruction of gendered systems of decency.

For the reading public, the Ripper slayings were a source of entertainment, in no small part because the murderer targeted an unprotected, degraded, dehumanized class: poor women labeled by the press as prostitutes. One contemporary reporter even went so far as to suggest that these women were better off dead. As Curtis blatantly states, "Tales about crime and social unrest always appeal to respectable readers regardless of their class, sex, ethnicity, or religious beliefs, because they live in a world of binary opposition between good and evil" (51). As there were no eyewitnesses to the Whitechapel murders, to this day no one knows the attacker's age, sex, race, occupation, education, class, motivation – or the number of people involved. Educated, and uneducated, guesses were made.[48] Walkowitz catalogues the possibilities, saying, "the

[48] A couple of suspects were tried on for size, from a mysterious "Leather Apron" to actor Richard Mansfield, whose only crime was being too good of an actor in the production of *Jekyll and Hyde* then playing in London.

murderer was presumed to be, at various points in the discussion and by different constituencies, a Russian Jewish anarchist, a policeman, a local denizen of Whitechapel, an erotic maniac of the 'upper classes' of society, a religious fanatic, a mad doctor, a scientific sociologist, and a woman" (551). The illustrated papers, however, focus on generating faces for only one of these categorical possibilities: the working-class members of Whitechapel, whose physical masculinity directly threatens the intellectual and domestic masculinity of the middle class. This became the easiest target for journalists and artists: the Other already feared as socially deviant. However, his presumed deviance is not universally constructed; though the Ripper is not called an American, the very characteristics most significant in the negative portrayal of the Ripper (his broad body, his distinct physicality) are those American men champion, demonstrating cultural conflicts between masculinities. What the British publics fear, American texts forward as desirable. Both accept violence as an indicator of masculinity, but each categorizes this violence differently as either reprehensible or admirable. This redefinition of violence, of assault versus defense, is directly addressed in the characterization of Batman and his foes.

Something Clever: The Joker

In 1940 *Batman* creators Bill Finger and Bob Kane make use of similar anxieties when they introduce the foil to their ideally-masculine Batman: the Joker. The creation of the Joker, like Two-Face as discussed in the previous chapter, is directly tied to Victorian and Hollywood influences. Bill Finger recounts in 1996:

> I got a call from Bob Kane.... He had a new villain. When I arrived he was holding a playing card. Apparently Jerry Robinson or Bob, I don't recall who, looked at the card and they had an idea for a character ... the Joker. Bob made a rough sketch of it. At first it didn't look much like the Joker. It looked more like a

> clown. But I remembered that Grosset & Dunlap formerly issued very cheap editions of classics by Alexandre Dumas and Victor Hugo ... The volume I had was *The Man Who Laughs* — his face had been permanently operated on so that he will always have this perpetual grin. And it looked absolutely weird. I cut the picture out of the book and gave it to Bob, who drew the profile and gave it a more sinister aspect. Then he worked on the face; made him look a little clown-like, which accounted for his white face, red lips, green hair. And that was the Joker! (White 9-10)

And like the Ripper, the Joker's future cultural significance and longevity was unanticipated by his comics debut. Initially, the Joker wasn't intended to survive the first issue: physically flailing, unpracticed and uncontrolled, he stabs himself in the chest when his opponent side-steps a wild swing. Six panels from the end, he laughs maniacally before collapsing, to all appearances dead – a fact the law officers seem to appreciate. But before the book could wrap "Whitney Ellsworth stepped in … he knew they'd struck upon a villain who was too good to lose" (Weldon 38). The Joker would live to kill again as the "chalk-faced mass murderer with a grisly sense of humor" (Weldon 38). From this initial introduction the Joker became a regular opponent of Batman, continually appearing in *Batman* and *Detective Comics,* inspiring a short-run comics title of his own, and appearing in nearly all *Batman* properties from video games to television shows (including the 1960s Adam West-starring *Batman* and the 1990s animated series) to major motion pictures.

Like Jack the Ripper, the Joker as a narrative villain represents the Other against which ideal masculinity is to be defined. Specifically, the Joker epitomizes the detested feminization represented by Kimmel's "Genteel Patriarch," which he argues is intimately associated with the

British at the time of the American Revolution (15). As Kasson's research then demonstrates, in the nineteenth- and turn of the century, American masculinity continues to define itself through strength of body unfailingly forwarding notions of superior physical masculinity over the reserve favored in British constructions. This comparison is demonstrated by the political connotations of the American critique of Britain's request for foreign aid through the World Wars, during which the Joker is developed. In this section I begin by arguing that the Joker is developed not in creative isolation by Bill Finger and Bob Kane, but as a cultural product reflective of the time (just before and during World War II) and space (America) in which he's introduced. In this context I argue that the Joker's failed masculinity is reflective of the American perception of Britain's failures, and the concomitant belief in the superiority of American masculinity as the compensation for British and European masculinity's inadequate capacity for overwhelming violence such as war.

In *Batman Unmasked* subject matter expert Will Booker argues that, "though America witnessed a massive shift in its popular culture as the majority of commercial forms – films, advertisements, posters, radio, comics – were given a common focus and enlisted into the war effort" Batman, introduced in 1939, was "remarkably immune" (34) to the cultural influence of the second World War. Booker recognizes that "There are propaganda messages within Batman comics of the war years," but insists these are "almost entirely along the lines of war bond appeals rather than militaristic or anti-Japanese content" (34).[49] However, I contend that Batman and his villains, though technically introduced in peacetime, are developed in a war-aware cultural space. Batman creators Bob Kane and Bill Finger are both born during WWI, and while too young to remember the war, arguably would have grown up with the narratives, and cultural

[49] Though not *Japanese,* early *Detective Comics* demonstrate an almost fetishistic condemnation of the "Oriental" villains that make up the base of Batman foes in the earlies comics

prejudices, of those who had. These prejudices included anti-British sentiment, for their failure to repay American war loans:

> Though President Roosevelt wanted to provide assistance to the British, both American law and public fears that the United States would be drawn into the conflict blocked his plans. The Neutrality Act of 1939 allowed belligerents to purchase war materiel from the United States, but only on a "cash and carry" basis. The Johnson Act of 1934 also prohibited the extension of credit to countries that had not repaid U.S. loans made to them during World War I—which included Great Britain. The American military opposed the diversion of military supplies to the United Kingdom." ("Lend-Lease and Military Aid to the Allies in the Early Years of World War II")

These acts, established before the United States' involvement in World War II after the 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor, establish the immediacy of war politics and the culture of foreign relations outside of active military engagement, confirming public concern with British military efforts and actions throughout the 1930s. Michael Kimmel's argument that American masculinity is established in conflict with British masculinity is likewise affirmed by artifacts from World War II, which explicitly name American prejudices against their allies, and address perceptions of masculine identity.

The second World War had an incredible impact on the American comics industry, both literally and creatively, as Booker and other comics historians agree. While, according to Andy Medhurst, "In Britain there was government legislation to prohibit the importing of American comics, as the comics panic slotted neatly into a whole series of anxieties about the effects on British youth of American popular culture" (153), American comics were finding their way into

the UK.[50] According to Bradford Wright, "The *New York Times* reported that one of every four magazines shipped to troops overseas was a comic book. At least 35,000 copies of *Superman* alone went to servicemen each month. Comic books became a part of G.I. culture and struck many European observers as further evidence of American Immaturity and unsophistication" (31). But this criticism went both ways, and the common cultural perception of Great Britain, and an American sense of superiority, was impetus for the governmental writing and distribution of *Instructions for American Servicemen in Britain, 1942*. "It is militarily stupid to criticize your allies," the guide asserts, and it's the goal of the text to teach American servicemen not a sense of equality (the guide repeatedly recognizes American virtues, and the higher pay of its own military), but compassion – or at least general manners to present a united front to Hitler.

The first subject of importance named in the guide is "No Time to Fight Old Wars." "You may think of [the English] as enemy Redcoats who fought against us in the American Revolution and the War of 1812. But there is no time today to fight old wars over again or bring up old grievances" the guide chastises. That this is primary in the text suggests a continuing tension between working-class Americans and the British, and likewise a competitive nature that would inspire continued conflict. The guide argues that the British and Americans are more alike than different, and offers its text as a directive to help ease the social discomfort of these "minor national characteristics that differ."

A major discursive goal of the volume is to convince American servicemen of British determination – the resolve and aptitude associated with positive examples of American masculinity (Kimmel 14). "The British Are Tough" the introduction blatantly asserts, warning soldier not to be fooled by "the British tendency to be soft-spoken and polite. … The English

[50] He offers no date, but the context of his chapter suggests this is contemporary with Wertham's 1954 attack on comics in America. Wertham is discussed at length in chapter four of this dissertation.

language didn't spread across the oceans and over the mountains and jungles and swamps of the world because these people were panty-waists." That the guide directly addresses the perception of strength and resolve, related to American perceptions of manliness, in the introduction relates the common beliefs of Americans at this historical moment, which is arguably the result of not just cultural opposition from the revolutionary war, but the contentious masculinities that develop in subsequent decades. The American perception of Britain's reasonable and chivalric definitions of proper manliness is one of weakness and is thus a subject of condescension not unlike the inverse English degradation of physical working-class men in the nineteenth-century.

Like Jack the Ripper as described by Walkowitz, who calls the Ripper a "media hero" (546), "Batman and Robin are the postindustrial equivalent of folk figures" (Danny O'Neil, qtd. in Booker *Unmasked* 41). And, as Booker, Urrichio and Pearson, and other comics scholars demonstrate, folk figures are often defined by the adversaries they face. In the case of Batman, the most oft-cited adversary is The Joker. There are two basic classes of foes faced by Batman – criminals and villains. The first are of the ilk developed in dime novels and noir films – career criminals, often with mob connections, who shoot guns, kidnap citizens, and rob safes. The second class are those for whom Batman is better known – the villains that he's catalogued in his Rogue's Gallery. The first recurring nemesis is Hugo Strange, a mad scientist figure who would be at home in any science fiction film. Hugo Strange, however, does not look strange – and even manages convincing disguises. The Joker is the first actively recurring villain whose appearance is maintained as an essential element of his character. Comics scholars Uricchio and Pearson write in *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and his Media* that "Batman's interactions with the good guys and bad guys around him help to define him" and offer a list of such characters, the fourth and final of which is "the Joker." Here, they extend that

"though we use these characters here to define the Batman, these characters themselves could be defined along many of the same parameters," illustratively offering that "the Joker has traits/attributes (rhetorical mode and whimsical approach to crime), fixed and iterative events (an origin story and obsessive criminal activities), recurrent characters (Batman and Robin), setting (Gotham City) and iconography (green hair white face, bright red mouth set in a permanent grin)" (187). Significant for my own purposes in this chapter is where they are wrong: what they call "fixed and iterative events." Casually, Uricchio and Pearson offer that such a fixed event is the Joker's "origin story," of which there is no such urtext or definitive narrative. This is precisely the intrigue of the Joker's development, this uncertainty of origin. In the ambiguous and contested nature of his criminal and villainous development is the potential for authors and artists to project the cultural fears of a particular moment. This allows the Joker to function as both a highly specific and definable character ("traits/attributes," "recurrent characters" "setting," "iconography") and a flexible representative of social discourses around deviance, power, authority, and masculinity.

But while the Joker is frequently identified as a character in *Batman* media, his independent development is under-analyzed; the Joker remains a footnote to Batman's story, as comics studies are more often concerned with dominant narratives of superheroes, comics histories, and film studies.[51] In the conclusion of *Heroes & Villains* Mike Alsford summarizes his interactions with Batman in *The Killing Joke* (124-6), and in *Why Comics?* Hillary Chute mentions his name in passing in descriptions of the same comic (248). In "American Heroes"

[51] In addition to the sources cited in the text of this chapter, scholarly treatments include Hallie Rubenhold's *The Five*, which purports to tell the biographies of the women who were murdered in 1888, Nicholas Rance's "'Jonathan's Great Knife': 'Dracula' Meets Jack the Ripper," which argues *Dracula* is inspired by Stoker's fascination with the 1888 Whitechapel murders, and "Jack, Peter and the Beast: Postcolonial Perspectives on Sexual Murder and the Construction of White Masculinity in Britain and Germany at the Turn of the Twentieth Century" by Eva Bischoff, who reads post-colonial narratives of cannibalism and masculinity in the cases of Peter Kurten and Jack the Ripper.

J.M. Tyree briefly considers Heath Ledger's film appearance as the Joker (31-2), and Glen Weldon catalogues the character's media appearances in *The Caped Crusade,* which is slightly more than the simple naming in Will Booker's *Batman Unmasked*. Wright says that "The early Batman stories achieved a uniquely surreal quality. Finger's scripts drew heavily from lurid pulp fiction as well as Universal horror films and Warner Brothers gangster movies […] Set in a claustrophobic netherworld, his adventures benefited from some of the most grotesque and memorable villains ever created for comic books: the Penguin, Two-Face, Catwoman, and, of course, the Joker…" (17), and Andy Medhurst writes of the character's queering, saying that the Joker:

> is Batman's 'bad twin,' and part of that badness is, increasingly, an implied homosexuality. This is certainly present in the 1989 film, a generally glum and portentous affair except for Jack Nicholson's Joker, a characterization enacted with venomous camp … The most recent linkage of the Joker and homosexuality comes in *Arkham Asylum,* the darkest image of the Bat-world yet. Here the Joker has become a parody of a screaming queen, calling Batman 'honey pie,' given to exclamations like 'oooh!' (one of the oldest homophobic clichés in the book) and pinching Batman's behind with the advice, 'loosen up, tight ass'" (Medhurst 160, 161).

Though scholarship has traditionally only looked at the Joker as an auxiliary of Batman, I contend that close readings of the character in his villainy are just as productive and reflective as a cultural object, particularly in the study of gender and American systems of masculinities. As the Ripper before him, the Joker is a sensational character whose extraordinary exploits excite consumers to fantasies of unrestricted masculine violence, and whose development relies on a

cultural understanding of the untrustworthy Other: this time, the British gentleman. As already noted, Kimmel roots this mistrust in the American War of Independence, when national severance necessitates a reorganization of cultural systems and means of identity construction (15). Americans achieve this by literally rejecting the reserve and restraint of the British and investing in the boisterous physicality necessary to build Western cities on Indigenous lands. This is not to suggest that idealized American masculinity was all brawn and no brains; American systems developed esteem for physically-capable masculinities, romanticizing calluses over bloodlines. Cleverness, though not a necessitous element for perfect masculinity, is still admired. For a clear example of this balance one need look no further than the Bat-Man himself.

The origin story of Batman is recounted endless times in *Batman* properties, beginning with the untimely death of Bruce Wayne's parents at the hands of an unknown criminal, and his subsequent obsession with vigilantism. To accomplish his goals Bruce "becomes a master scientist" and "trains his body to physical perfection until he is able to perform amazing athletic feats" (*Batman: Golden Age* 147). The two serve as narrative "Aces" throughout Batman's adventures: his superior intellect allows him to become the world's greatest detective, and to invent incredible defensive technologies, and his superior athleticism and acrobatics give him a physical edge on his opponents, while keeping him alive. The latter is the primary action of the comics, Batman easily flying down a flight of stairs into three gangsters with enough breath to quip "Rather unsteady on your feet aren't you?" or swinging a wooden chair into the heads of another two while jibing "Have a seat, boys! There's enough room on this chair for two!" (153). He easily scales buildings with the help of a thin cord, walks tight-ropes, throws "a massive fist … against a gunman's jaw!" (153), and hangs on to ledges by his fingertips. Not a superhuman, Batman's dedication to crafting his body is lauded as an admirable and profitable occupation.

But Bruce Wayne was never intended to be an "everyman" character. Inheriting millions (later billions, and a corporation) at the murder of his parents, Wayne is established from the first as an exceptional circumstance, giving him the *means* with which to become an example. The counter to this example is the Joker.

The Joker of 1940 is a familiar character, though he is not yet the violent psychopath best known to modern audiences. In *Batman No. 1* the Joker announces himself in the second panel over the radio, pronouncing the pending murder of a Henry Claridge, and subsequent theft of the victim's namesake diamond. Despite police protection, and no appearance of the Joker, the prophecy comes to pass: Claridge is pronounced dead in the tenth frame, and his diamond is discovered missing in the thirteenth. The Joker makes good on his threat, leaving only a calling card, and no marks of force. The police are baffled. The Joker's caper is unlike the mob robberies Batman has previously thwarted; his crime is deceptively executed from afar, relying on cunning and intelligence rather than might. That he manages such a feat undetected is threatening to the citizens of Gotham and their police protectors. To Batman, and his readers, the Joker's plot is cowardly, and distinct from the romanticized class of American criminals – mobsters – who also frequently appear in the comics.

The Joker appears first in the fifteenth and sixteenth panels, gloating over his success as he sits alone in a well-appointed room. Unlike the other characters, who thus far lack distinguishing individual characteristics, the Joker is given a highly-distinctive appearance.[52] His extravagant purple suit is well-tailored and more Wildean than clown-comedian. He is significantly the first character to wear gloves in the book (and the only one save Batman, whose

[52] Doctor Death, one of many mad scientist characters, does appear in the comics before Hugo Strange, and *is* given a nonnormative face when he is disfigured in an accident. But after this revelation he disappears from the comics for over forty years, whereas Hugo Strange and Joker continue through from their first introductions.

own may be more gauntlet than glove), his covered hands placed in the center of the panel beneath his glowing face. These accessories, starkly emphasized by the pointed purple fingers holding the Joker's ghostly white face, conveys a performance of gentility contrary to American standards. Batman is introduced in *Detective Comics* in 1939, just after the American Great Depression, and just before WWII. For the sake of both, fashions are conservative in the consumption and quality of fabrics and materials, and accessories are limited by means and occupation. Functionally, gloves are used to protect hands from work and from cold, but as a fashion accessory they are an indicator of leisure and reserve – someone who *doesn't* have to use their hands. Ladies would wear gloves to formal occasions and church in the same way they would wear their best clothes to each – such garments come out only when there is little chance of damage and wear, and when one has the opportunity to indulge in a moment of elegance. Men's brown and black leather gloves of the 1930s and 1940s do not communicate the same elegance, utility winning over fashion. The Joker's purple gloves are far more feminine, an excessive fashion that speaks to his unwillingness or inability to work with his hands, eschewing men's work in favor of deviant occupations. There is an assertion of femininity and dishonesty in the Joker's hands, which is affirmed by his behavior throughout the comic. In this first portrait he is immediately Othered in significant ways: he is gaunt with prominent facial features contrary to the wholesome Americana of Bruce Wayne's square jaw and insignificant profile, Joker's white complexion carrying connotations of cosmetics, or a life avoiding honest daylight labors; he is richly and ornamentally dressed, and he is shown not in motion, but *thinking*. Though American masculinity does not universally encourage *thoughtlessness*, cultural texts such as comics reveal a mistrust of men focused on interiority (illustrated by careful and elaborate scheming) rather than the bodily development and control demonstrated by Batman himself.

The final affirmation of this metaphor of contending masculinities comes from a reading of action. Like *The Illustrated Police News*'s 1888 representations of Jack the Ripper, the Joker's physical performance informs the development of his character. Throughout *Batman No. 1* he is erratic and unsuccessful in physical conflict, his body and tools often failing (punches landed but lacking lethal force, glancing blows off blades). In his criminal career he meets success through plotting and distance offense, but is literally overcome by Batman's controlled force and physical mastery. Nowhere is this more evident than in Joker's near-death at the conclusion of the issue: battered by a barrage of bat-blows[53], Joker pulls a green blade on the caped crusader. Easily evading Joker's swings, "the Batman side steps. The killer-clown stumbles forward into the building driving the knife into his own chest!" Joker's own physical ineptitude and failed manhood turns Batman's non-lethal force deadly; the British villain is no match for American command.

Jack the Ripper and the Joker are representatives of a heritage of British and American conflict manifested through contentious masculinities, and supporting the narratives of feuding fathers and sons forwarded by masculinity scholars Michael Kimmel and Ben Griffin. At their respective moments of creation, the Ripper and the Joker demonstrate national anxieties over contentious masculinities, the US and the UK each forwarding an idealized model that necessarily critiques the model favored by the trans-Atlantic Other. Modern re-imaginings of these two iconic figures in both comic and film further the discourse of masculinities as authors subversively reclaim Jack the Ripper and the Joker: they are not foreign Others, but representative at once of domestic toxic masculinities and the possibilities of disidentification with those masculinities. Specifically, the work of Alan Moore affirms the Ripper as a distinctly

[53] I couldn't help myself.

British character in order to criticize the class structures that prompted his initial characterization, and Scott Snyder casts the Joker as a distinctly American masculine figure to demonstrate the danger of continuing toxic masculinities. By reasserting the national identities of these characters, authors and artists turn the critical gaze inward, and use the villains to consider modern cultural discourses. That they feel a *need* to do so suggests an increased awareness of domestic strife, and uncertain modern identities.

Threats from Within: Joker and the Ripper Today

Having argued for the gendered discourse significant to the creation of Jack the Ripper in 1888, and the Joker in 1940, I now turn to their modern iterations. I begin with *From Hell,* first published serially beginning in 1989, and the Hughes Brothers' film of the same name from 2001, to argue that Alan Moore's rewriting of the Jack the Ripper narrative purposefully challenges previous disciplining of gender and class in Ripper mythology. I assert that Moore uses this mythology to emphasize continuing class tensions in the UK, and I argue that the texts directly critique the figure of the gentleman, challenging his status as an idealized masculine figure. In *From Hell* the gendered threat is not the Other from the outside, but the patriarchal gatekeepers of masculinity. I then turn to Moore's *The Killing Joke* (1988), Scott Snyder's *New 52* comic *Death of the Family* (2013), and Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008) to argue that the Joker has become a productive figure through which to unpack toxic American masculinities, as the character is imprinted with the characteristics of romanticized American criminals (i.e. mobsters) and domestic terrorists.

To begin, I look to identify the fashionable trends that represent a modern British masculine aesthetic, and reveal a continued British infatuation with fashionable representations of class. In a 2014 reading of modern British fashion trends Daniel R. Smith suggests that the

growing popularity of "archaic, yet familiar, notions of masculinity" through the performance and fashion of the English gentleman "provides imaginative solutions to current [British] cultural predicaments" as the men who stand as the Other which defines non-English masculinities (for example, Irish and Scottish). "Yet the gent may still be one of the most reliable modes of masculinity available to a white, (upper-)middle class British male," Smith observes, which leads contemporary youth to adopt systems of masculinity that have been historically lauded – and vilified (392). As Smith recounts, the rhetoric of British "gent-rification" is highly romanticized, internally invested in "normative pressures of conduct, comportment and demeanor" (393) and externally a "performance of self" that recognizes that "the 'apparel of proclaim the man'" in a system in which "class is conflated with national identity to such a degree that social station is also a beacon of national values and historically entrenched ideals" (394).

Following similar lines of comparative reasoning as discussed throughout this chapter, Smith reads the modern British "preppy" as coming from a "progressive hangover from the 1990s and perceived 'Americanisation' of the British high-street [that inspires] a reconfiguration of gentry" (398). It is to just such arguments to which Alan Moore is critically responding as he crafts a modern Victorian identity for Jack the Ripper in his graphic novel *From Hell*, originally published serially between 1989 and 1998, and collected in full in 1999. In Moore's narrative, the work of Jack the Ripper is done by the royal physician Dr. William Gull, when tasked directly by Queen Victoria to manage the scandal of her grandson, Prince Edward's, secret marriage to "some filthy shop-girl" (28). In his assertion of Jack the Ripper/William Gull's outward gentlemanliness throughout the comic, Moore forwards an agenda of cultural self-reflection, and speaks against romanticized notions of historical national identity by reminding

readers that the class-based gender codes of the nineteenth-century were dangerous and degrading – and would certainly be again.

Moore's historical research into Jack the Ripper lends a realism to his book that is parallel to the work of *The Illustrated Police News*, both utilizing a blend of supposition, speculation, and detection in the development of a gothic murder mystery. But where *The Illustrated Police News* gives several faces to Jack the Ripper, none of them real, Moore gives a name, history, face, profession, and social identity to the serial killer, effectively vilifying the gendered social strata to which he belongs, represented by the Freemasons, through their extensive complicity in his barbarity.

The character of William Gull is solidly and appropriately Victorian upper-middle-class, rising in distinction through his staunch adherence to cultural prescriptions of morality and the intellectual industry he demonstrates as a surgeon. The trajectory of his life is a demonstration of ideal nineteenth-century masculinity, as detailed by Griffin and Emelyn Godfrey:[54] Gull gains recognition as a learned professional after being helped towards education by a friendly rector, is adopted into a powerful homosocial sphere (Freemasonry), takes a wife when he is able to provide a comfortable middle-class home, serves the poor and afflicted, reproduces, apprentices his daughter's fiancé to maintain the social order of the next generation, and is even called on for special service by the queen. It is through this final achievement that Moore works to illustrate the cracks in the class-based system of British masculinity?, and to vilify a tradition of masculinity built on the consumptive domination of oppressed classes.

[54] See *Masculinity, Crime and Self-Defence in Victorian Literature: Duelling with Danger*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Having learned of that her grandson Prince Albert Victor has married Annie Crook, a common shop girl with whom the prince has a child, Queen Victoria solicits the aid of her physician William Gull to surgically incapacitate Crook, and silence the blackmail attempts of Crook's friends: Polly Nichols, Annie Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, and Mary Kelly. Illustrated in royal profile (Moore ch. 4, pg. 3), familiar to Victorian and modern audiences alike, Queen Victoria is succinct in her class separatism, and her motivation. She accepts that Gull may need to "enlist an accomplice more familiar with this class of person" in the execution of his duties, placing the women of White Chapel in a separate sphere from herself and her physician, indicating that those of the upper and middle classes should know little of the poor community. She dehumanizes the women in her categorization of their class, and through her description of the East End as "their habitat." Victoria further gives Gull full license in approach when she says "We leave the means to you, Sir William," and encourages him to be sure that his methods are "done well" – that is, insuring that these women are incapable of fulfilling their threats of exposing the Prince's marriage and paternity. For his part, Gull accepts his charge as a higher mission, and pursues his literal hit list with religious fervor, confident in his actions and the safety afforded to his person and reputation by his class, profession (as the queen's physician), personal associations (the brotherhood), and gender (as a man capable of deceiving and murdering a number of women).

The murder of Annie Chapman, a woman murdered by "Jack the Ripper," serves as a strong example of the correlation between class and propriety – the idea of "gentlemanly" behavior. As Annie walks down a Whitechapel street, she is approached by a man in a carriage, Dr. Gull acts the chivalrous gentleman when he stops his carriage to ask "if I might offer assistance? You see, I'm a doctor." (Moore ch. 7, pg. 20). In his approach to Annie Chapman,

Dr. Gull utilizes his performance of an upper-middle-class gentleman to establish a harmless tone for what Annie believes to be a solicitation of her services as a prostitute (fig 20). Because Dr. Gull approaches in a carriage, *looks* like a gentleman, and *speaks* like a gentleman Annie Chapman expects him to *behave* in a gentlemanly manner.[55] While Dr. Gull sits in the dark, offering laudanum-laced grapes, Annie gives the audience the uninformed perspective of Gull and his social place – he is the "gent" to which modern British men aspire, well-turned and appropriate in dress and manners. His paternal face affirms this perception, as he is represented free from facial hair (reading as open and honest, and with the means to maintain his hygiene), with styled hair, and starched collar, politely raising his top hat when he meets Annie for their proposed tryst (24). Even as he bends over her proffered form his body language is reserved and his appearance appropriate, the ink-drenched panel hiding sexually deviant behavior and allowing for a projected reading of a reserved gentleman comforting a bereaved woman (25). And then Dr. Gull strangles Annie Chapman, slashes her throat, removes part of her uterus, and arranges her intestines across her shoulders, in service to the crown, and in dedication to the rituals and beliefs of a dangerous homosocial brotherhood.

This juxtaposition offers a critique of the "gentleman," whose power is found in the suppression of others, and whose reserved and decorous masculinity is generated by oppressive

[55] Knowing the history better than the fictional representation of Annie Chapman, it is easy to dismiss Annie's reading of Dr. Gull as naive, or too trusting; contemporary Western cultures teach extreme vigilance and mistrust, especially for women, and often blames victims for their assaults when their sartorial judgements mislead them into dangerous situations. But Annie's inclination is just as culturally-instituted as the mistrust of Madame de la Rougierre, and media continues to support the notion that one can judge another's character by their appearance. In a tweet on April 4, 2019, Erynn Brook (@ErynnBrook) writes of her encounter with an epileptic 18-year-old on a subway. Realizing that a seizure was imminent, the young woman asked Brook to sit with her until Brook's stop. Brook asked her what she'd do after she left, and the young woman responded "ask someone else. Maybe her? She looks nice. Can you ask her for me?" Though not the point of Brook's narrative, this moment holds horrific potential, especially to one who is researching a dissertation on villainy – finding herself in a moment of incredible vulnerability, this young woman is forced to ask people who "look nice" to watch over her. From infancy one is instructed in surface judgement, from the passing commentary of family members and teachers, to the characterizations of media, but as media such as *From Hell* and *Dorian Gray* relate, such judgements are little better than chance.

social institutions which literally write into law the non-personhood of others.[56] Re-casting the working-class villain of *The Illustrated Police News* allows Moore to offer a contemporary review of historical standards, while rejecting the romanticism of a Dickensian-Christmas Britain of the past. Dr. Gull the surgeon Ripper is more than a single deviant figure: in Moore's book William Gull is a symbol of the privileged and abusive majority maintaining control at the literal expense of subjugated minorities, and Moore is explicit in his class critique through the observations of the false "psychic" Mr. Lee. Assisting the police in their investigation of the Whitechapel murders, Lee guides Inspector Abberline to Gull's door, claiming visions of blood. As they travel Abberline remarks "We're comin' up to Grosvenor Square. Bit posh for a killer, surely?" to which Lee counters "I disagree! How APT that one who preys upon the working classes should be WEALTHY!" (7). While Abberline expresses reservations that a wealthy man could be the murderer – or, perhaps, that he could be held accountable – Lee suggests that the violence of the acts and the disregard for the murdered women is more likely at the hands of one who would see themselves as better in all ways. The text reflects on the toxic concept of "betters", and Moore further extends the metaphor voiced by Lee to the present, allowing Dr. Gull's abuse to stand as a warning not just of criminality, but of systems of identity which allow those in power – white, cis men (white, wealthy men, specifically) – an assumption of innocence that enables their violence.

This project is attempted by the 2001 film rendition of Moore's comic, in which Ian Holm portrays Sir William Gull. Starring Johnny Depp as an opium-addicted psychic inspector, *From Hell* is a gratuitous recycling of the tired mythology of Jack the Ripper as an unknown serial killer violently murdering prostitutes. With less development and care than Moore's comic,

[56] Such as the case of abusive nineteenth-century property laws and married women

the film makes an exhibit of bodies above all else, directing long gazes at the raised skirts, slashed throats, and vacant eyes of the dead. The story is not theirs – the murdered women – but his – the character created by journalists and continued through histories and "Ripperology."[57]

Ultimately, the Hughes Brothers' film is less successful than their comics inspiration for the film's unwillingness to commit to Moore's gendered class critique, instead falling back on similar sensationalism to the Victorian newspapers who first develop the Ripper Mythos. Moore's text follows William Gull through the whole, connecting his actions with his class, professional, and gendered identities as he moves from his medical work, to consulting with the Queen, to his domestic concerns as head of a household, and to his work as a serial killer. In each of these spaces Gull is fashionably consistent, as Moore makes clear that this character's villainy is intrinsically linked to his identity, signaled through his visual representation. In choosing to preserve the "mystery" of the killer's identity, the film forgoes this character development, instead generating a figure more akin to Jekyll and Hyde, hiding in plain sight as I argue in chapter one. This choice results in a character developed more along the lines of a singular monster than a representative of a system of abuse, even as the film attempts to connect the Ripper to the symbols of class.

Like the comic, the film uses men's fashions to draw this connection. The Ripper of the film, identity obscured by camera angles and shadows, is represented exclusively by his clothing, often shown from the back, thus marked by class and gender but with no further distinguishing marks. At 21:40 he is a shadow in a top hat and cape, with a doctor's case, signaling to the audience class and profession, but offering no context or motivation. Over thirty minutes into the film the killer is shown dressing for his evening of violence, peculiarly donning white gloves

[57] A popular field that seeks to identify the murderer who evaded Victorian authorities.

as if for a formal dinner or night of entertainment. Though the logic of such a choice is clearly questionable, the film is less concerned with the questionable choices of showing gloves than it is in establishing the class of the perpetrator. Still, no guiding motivations or social beliefs are offered, as in Moore's critical text.

Both the comic and the film portray Gull the physician as a representative of class, brotherhood, and gendered expectations. This is continued in the film to the point of Abberline's accusation, when the detective confronts the doctor as the latter is dressing. Gull's respectability is suggested by his white shirt and tie, and the appropriateness of his dress, but the film's tension and direct gestures to his guilt suggest not that his class-based masculinity is to blame (as Moore does), but rather that the evening clothes are a mask. Gull at the end of the film deviates from Moore's representation in this way: as opposed to the impeccably dressed and self-righteous gentleman he believes himself to be, Gull of the film transforms into a monster at the moment of killing, signaled to the audience by shifts in his appearance. The film's Gull is maniacal, bestial along the lines of the penny weekly representations. While the Gull of the comic calmly and methodically sets about his "work," the Gull of the film bares his teeth and rears his head, directly contrasting the refinement suggested by his attire. Ultimately, the film cheapens the characterization through the addition of dark contacts, lending Dr. Gull a demonic appearance, as opposed to the respectable surgeon he's remained throughout the film. If Gull is not fully representative of his class, the critical message originally offered by Moore is muddled, and the film offers only another sensational and inexplicable figure.[58]

[58] At the end of each text, Gull's Freemason brothers determine he is insane, and resolve to commit him to a mental hospital for the protection of their own reputations. But the conclusion of the film is, if not historically accurate, more direct in demonstrating the fear of the brotherhood and the threat of having Jack the Ripper directly connected to class-based systems of idealized masculinity. The Gull of the book is no longer the same portly gentleman in a blood-soaked waistcoat from the cover, but a "Mr. Mason" staring into space in an asylum uniform. The film goes

By contrast, the aesthetic rendering of the Joker through his 80 years relies on sensation as a point of development for the character, associating his unusual appearance with his erratic and unpredictable actions. Since his 1940 introduction the Joker has seen significant representation, reinvented and reimagined for countless *Batman* properties: he's appeared in comics and graphic novels, films, television shows (live action and animated), and video games, on merchandise, and as popular cosplays. He's been a prankster[59] and a gangster,[60] a failed comic,[61] and a politician.[62] In *Gotham by Gaslight*[63] the Joker is a Dr. Thomas Cream[64] stand-in, marrying and poisoning women; in *Batman Nosferatu* he's "the Laughing Man," a cyborg built from patients of Gotham's infamous Arkham Asylum. At least twice the Joker is a woman – Martha Wayne[65] and Barbara Steeplechase.[66] Each representation of the Joker offers poignant moments and development ripe for analysis, the complete consideration of which would be a book unto itself.[67] But here I will examine the Joker's most consistent modern representation: that of a violent man, whose styling aligns him with moments of cultural anxiety over evolving definitions of identity. The Joker is the villain who threatens "good" manhood, and whose example gives a face to the crisis of gendered expectations. No longer the trans-Atlantic Other against which American masculinity is shown superior, contemporary representations of the

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further, giving Gull a lobotomy before showing him nude and witless, literally stripped of anything that could cast suspicion on his brotherhood, profession, or class.

[59] During the Silver age the Joker would become "less lethal and more goofy" (*The Joker: A Celebration of 75 Years*, 48).
[60] *Detective Comics* #475-6, for example, and 2016's *Suicide Squad* directed by David Ayer.
[61] *The Killing Joke*
[62] *Batman: White Knight*
[63] An *Elseworlds* comic published in 1989, in which Batman hunts Jack the Ripper in an 1889 Gotham City
[64] Dr. Thomas Neill Cream is a serial killer who murders women in England and North America from 1877 to 1892, favoring strychnine - a poison that can induce ghoulish grins in its victims, not unlike the unspecified poison used by the Joker in traditional continuity. See Angus McLaren's *A Prescription for Murder: The Victorian Serial Killings of Dr. Thomas Neill Cream.*
[65] In an alternative *Flashpoint* timeline published in 2011, Martha Wayne sees her son Bruce murdered, and is so traumatized she becomes the Joker, while her husband Thomas Wayne becomes Batman.
[66] *Thrillkiller* (1997)
[67] And one I would very much so like to write.

Joker have Americanized the character. The Joker is not a threat from without, but the monster in America's basement – the embodied consequences of the toxic gendered systems American society has so militantly policed. In 1988, the Joker is the "downwardly mobile lower-middle-class young white" man incapable of providing for his family, who turns to crime to chase the American Dream (*Batman: The Killing Joke*). In 2008 the Joker becomes a domestic terrorist, harkening back to the violence witnessed in Oklahoma City[68] and Columbine Colorado[69] (*The Dark Knight*). And in 2012's *Death of the Family* the Joker removes his own face and wears the guise of the "mainstream white American men" who are "exploding like never before in our country" (Kimmel 239) with the mainstreaming of White Supremacist militias and groups.

The Jokers of the late 1980s represent a transition for the villain, as creators shift from the queer camp of the 1960s Adam West era of *Batman* tomfoolery,[70] to a literally and figuratively darker Gotham City. According to Will Brooker, the darker *Batman* comics of the 1980s are a direct and conscious rejection of the camp of the television show. Brooker writes of the gender anxiety and homophobia associated with the Adam West series, arguing that "Just as Wertham is detested by fans for his role in bringing the 'gay Batman' reading into public circulation, so Adam West's TV show is disliked for its part in playing up to that interpretation." The portrayal of a queer Batman challenges notions of American masculinity; male audiences admire Bruce Wayne's wealth, intelligence, and physical prowess, but require the character be heterosexual to protect their own fandoms from marking readers as themselves queer. Fighting the "unintended side-effect of portraying […] Batman and Robin [as] homosexuals," the "1970s

[68] Timothy McVeigh bombed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building on April 19, 1995, killing 168 people and wounding nearly 700 more.
[69] Columbine high school students Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold launched an attack on April 20, 1999, killing 13 people and injuring 21 before their suicides.
[70] Made you look.

and 1980s comics, and to an extent the Tim Burton movies, sought to exorcise the 'camp'" (Brooker 174) through the exercising of graphic violence on the part of both villains and vigilantes.

Brooker quotes *Dark Knight Returns* (1986) author Frank Miller as arguing that "For me, Batman was never funny," and Alan Moore as praising Miller for "giving new credibility to" the once-farcical hero (173, 2). Moore himself takes on a similar project when he writes *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988), a one-off story conceived to explore the psychology of an erratic and iconic comics villain. Moore's Joker similarly rejects the camp of Cesar Romero's television portrayal, and further rejects the Otherhood of the character's initial inception, giving the villain a sympathetic and culturally-familiar past of economic depression, professional failure, and personal grief.

In Moore's narrative, the man who will become the Joker is ineffectual in every role he adopts: he is an untalented comic, a poor provider for his wife and unborn child, and an equally poor thief. In his mundane life, the unnamed man is a former lab assistant in a chemical plant who quits his position to fulfill his dream of becoming a comedian. Predictably, he's awful, and finds himself faced with his failure. He returns home, still dressed to impress in an unremarkable suit and bowtie, but with his hat literally in his hands. In the face of his wife's disappointment the man snarls and whines, reading in her single-word response - "oh" - a world of imagined condemnation. He lashes out in his anxiety, before literally collapsing into his wife's lap, sobbing. In these six panels the man is shown at the end of his rope. Unable to pay the rent where he lives with his pregnant wife, he subsequently agrees to lead a criminal gang through the chemical plant, but returns home from his strategic meeting to discover his wife has died

tragically while he was away.[71] Powerless to stand up to the gang even in his grief, the man is forced into the caper, where he falls into a vat of chemicals as the robbery is botched. Culturally speaking, he's a poor example of American manhood, unable to fulfill cultural expectations of familial dedication, self-sacrifice, and rewarded labor. But the scene offers a strange baptism: when he emerges his skin is bleached, his hair is green, and he bursts into maniacal laughter. While the plot of Moore's text is an ostensible examination of how one bad day can tip a man into madness, I argue that *The Killing Joke* is in actuality a rags-to-riches story of resuscitated toxic masculinity that deconstructs the expectations of American manhood and demonstrates the fragility of normative middle-class masculine identities.

Michael Kimmel writes that white American masculinity experiences a wave of anxiety at the dawning of the 1990s, when "new legions of angry white men" felt "like victims" as they experienced a "nostalgic longing for that past world when men believed they could take their places among the nation's elite simply by working hard and applying themselves" (244). This is the dream the comedian pursues, believing that his dedication to performance will secure him the financial rewards he believes he deserves. "It is the American Dream," Kimmel reflects. "And when men fail, they are humiliated, with nowhere to place their anger. Some are looking for answers; others want payback" (Kimmel 244). This is the motivation hidden in Moore's backstory – that the Joker is not a dissociated psychopath without reason, but a man lashing out for the humiliation he has faced. At the sudden death of his wife the Joker becomes "poor and neurotic. He is disposed to criminality, drugs and violence. He is irresponsible about his debts, alcoholic, accident prone…" as noted by George Gilder in his 1986 *Men and Marriage* (qtd. Kimmel 261). That the character so clearly represents the evils feared by conservative misogyny

[71] She's electrocuted by a baby bottle warmer, the comic suggesting their living conditions contributed to her accident.

speaks to an active cultural concern with masculinity and family roles at the time of *The Killing Joke*'s production, and the likelihood of the Joker being born of lived fears. Having lost everything as a result of his failure to perform culturally-accepted expectations of masculinity, he becomes the Joker – a joke of manhood that quickly turns hyper-violent.

But here the aim of this origin story fails, because this is where the Joker begins to *succeed,* and the human complexity of the earlier narrative becomes insignificant in the face of his present power. Within his new identity, the Joker finds himself capable of fulfilling the masculine expectations that eluded him before. Though he previously failed as a professional and provider, he now establishes a successful criminal career for which he earns fame and fortune, gaining confidence and social power. He secures wealth, and is unfettered by social institutions, easily escaping prisons and asylums so often that Gotham Police Commissioner Gordon himself remarks that "Whenever we jail him I think 'please God, Keep him there.' Then he escapes and we all sit round hoping he won't do anything too awful this time." Unbound by rules and roles he makes himself a statement, dressing in vivid purple suits to compliment his flash of green hair, and aggressively forcing all of Gotham to be his captivated audience as he *plays* at being a violent criminal.

The Joker's torture of Commissioner Gordon and his daughter Barbara Gordon enforces the success narrative of the Joker's origin story, while revealing the noxiousness at the heart of the myth of the self-made man. Attempting to prove that any man can be driven to criminal madness through psychological torture, the Joker brutalizes Barbara Gordon, and forces her father to ride naked through a carnival decorated with the photographic evidence of her assault. "If you hurt inside, get certified, and if life should treat you bad … don't get ee-ee-even. Get mad!" the Joker sings. And in this moment, the Joker looks more like a monster than a man – his

stark white face is ghastly, his neck distended, and the shock of his purple suit flashing in purposeful discord to the red hues of trauma saturating the panel of the Gordons' tortures. As Madame de la Rougierre in *Uncle Silas,* the Joker's garish appearance and uncanny behaviors increase the horror of his actions, and place him outside of the glass that separates his experience from that of his victims. In becoming this monster, he is pictured disconnected from the human trauma he inflicts on Gordon and demonstrates that his exception to humanity is what allows him such great power – he no longer follows rules, and is beyond emotional harm. Both men are unable to protect the women in their lives, but one fails and the other finds success: Commissioner Gordon fails to keep the Joker from doing harm, and the Joker succeeds in writing his own story. The Joker continues as a successful villain, illustrating that the only way to achieve the American Dream is to abuse systems of power and social expectations in order to achieve it.

In giving the perpetually unknown villain a static backstory, Moore grounds the character in failed American masculinity, informing Jokers to come, who will similarly explore the twisted aggression of white male outrage. The disenfranchised white male antagonist finding power through violence is adopted in later representations of the Joker, which see the character become a representative of domestic terrorism. This becomes even more threatening when the Joker is made flesh; by giving a human face and a voice to the violence and shock-jock logic of the Joker, the character becomes even more intimately aligned with the toxic masculinity that makes him *possible.*

Like Moore's comic purportedly helped "rescue" the *Batman* property from camp, so too is Christopher Nolan's film franchise noted for its efforts to reclaim the material from the juvenile commercialization of Schumacher's films of the late 1990s. Though undeniably

extraordinary, as comic book movies, Nolan's films are grounded in a seemingly real world, encouraging the audience's suspension of disbelief, and thereby both their emotional investment and the suspense of the film. And this is why Nolan's Joker is distinctly dangerous – he's directly grounded in the possible, and familiarly fashioned, aesthetically triggering unease in viewers. Nolan offers no fantastic origin story for the Joker, and actively resists limiting the character with identifying characteristics beyond those of the active villain – he carries no trinkets, ID, or memorabilia of another place. When the police apprehend the Joker late in the film they discover "No matches on prints, DNA, dental. Clothing is custom, no labels. Nothing in his pockets but knives and lint. No name, no other alias" (1:23:55); he is both tangible and intangible, known only by the identity he has actively constructed for himself – the Joker. And this ultimate agency in anti-identity is exhilarating to him.

The dedication to a sense of realism in the Nolan *Batman* films makes the extraordinary appearance of the Joker all the more unsettling within the narrative of the film. With the exception of the Batman, who wears a traditional Batsuit in the film, there is no film-world precedent for what the Joker is doing stylistically, and other characters are left to reason out his choices while suffering through his actions. Roughly consistent with the aesthetics of the Joker from previous representations, Heath Ledger's Joker is organic: the blond highlights in his auburn hair are dyed a dirty green, and his hands show traces of the cheap cosmetics roughly applied to achieve his clownish pallor and darkened eyes.[72] His hair is dirty, and his custom purple suit is distinctly serviceable; it's cut perfectly and neatly constructed, but in a shade of purple that hides the grime and gunpowder of his activities. His look speaks to intention rather

[72] He is also shown in disguise without cosmetics, during the attack on the mayor at the commissioner's funeral. Though his scars are shown prominently, and are therefore affirmed as inexplicable and organic, his face is very human, with none of the absurdity of a fantastic villain.

than care in execution, his makeup often wiping clean to show streaks of skin underneath, his hair falling into his eyes or dripping with sweat. In this balance of poor hygiene and exceptional performativity the film asserts that the Joker is placing himself outside traditional constructions of masculinity, daring viewers to read his cosmetics as feminine as he overcompensates with bullets and gasoline. This sense of theatricality is furthered when the terrorist dons the white dress of a traditional nurse's uniform to infiltrate the hospital room of Harvey Dent. While it is tempting to read the performance as camp, his body language resists a reading of drag; he does not adapt his movements and gestures to match the gendered signifiers of his clothing, but rather allows the dress sits on the same body that has been moving through the film. He is, however, purposefully defying gendered conventions in an act of self-assertion: though the uniform is a functional disguise, the performatively-aware Joker chooses the dress over a lab coat because it makes for a better performance.

The appearance of the Joker in *Dark Knight* is significant for marking the character as a purposeful outsider – someone who has taken exception to society, to society's rules, and demonstrates his disdain through his unique material performance. Though grounded in the aesthetic history of the comic book character, the unambiguous aesthetics of the Joker's 2008 film portrayal are reminiscent of cultural villains who incited school panic nine years before. "The Trenchcoat Mafia" – self-designated outcasts attending Columbine High School – was a nickname bestowed on a group of teenage Colorado outcasts, so labeled for their unofficial uniform of black dusters. Said one of their classmates of the "TCM," "It was just a bunch of people who have blue hair […] Like every school has groups – the goths, the punks, the jocks. They were just a group of friends. There was nothing different about them except for the way they dressed. Everybody says they were scared of them and they'd get out of their way. That's

not true" (Fortang). Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris felt differently about their social ostracization, finding power in their exception and their ability to intimidate, first through their atypical appearance (just as the Joker will do in 2008), and then through extreme violence (again, as Heath Ledger's Joker will demonstrate). On April 20, 1999 Klebold and Harris exercised their teenage disassociation in the violent murder of twelve students and one adult and injuring twenty-one before committing suicide.

Joker's aesthetic and antics are inspired by those like the Columbine shooters – a dark but theatrical, adolescent parody of fashion. His purple suit coat, cut long, is read as threatening in the wake of teen violence, as articles of clothing became shorthand for mainstream publications to associate the "weird" with the "potentially dangerous"; his makeup masks his face, and the length and color of his hair stand rebelliously against American notions of "clean-cut" and "wholesome." Like the teenagers who donned dusters as a self-defined uniform, the Joker looks as he does not because of a chemical accident, but because he chooses to – because he wishes to stand out and draw eyes to his violent and carefully considered terrorist actions. His is not a mission of moral value, as he suggests, but a cry for individual attention and power. It is important to him that mob-boss Maroni knows his suit is not *cheap* – "You should know, you bought it" – and that the other criminal overlords recognize his intelligence, reacting with calculated violence when called "crazy." Heath Ledger's Joker both draws attention to a real threat in American culture – the disenfranchised white men like Harris and Klebold, who believe the violent disruption of society is the only way to gain individual power – and romanticizes the figures who would pursue such violence. Though he fails to incite complete anarchy in Gotham City, Ledger's Joker wins – he challenges notions of heroism, while providing a romantic martyr for the "angry boys" described by Kimmel – the "middle-class white boys" socially punished and

bullied for failing to conform to toxic standards of masculinity, who then overcompensate by committing extraordinary and horrific acts of violence (272). "If they can't be Number One, they've decided to be Number Two – with a bullet" Kimmel observes (270).

Like the fans who miss the satire of Chuck Palahniuk's novel, and organized "fight clubs" after the debut of the 1999 film *Fight Club*,[73] the success of Ledger's portrayal may be misinterpreted. Ledger's Joker is so *good* because he is so thoroughly and consistently *bad* – he is truly and unapologetically villainous. He's also very wrong. Heath Ledger's Joker is a domestic construction born of the erroneous perception of disenfranchisement – the white man who feels he has lost the power of his forefathers - which leads to the desire to violently disrupt the system. His goal is chaos, and he creates extreme situations in order to challenge and dismantle the cultural systems by which people live their lives – to make them break their rules, and violate trusts – to show that the one motivation is to stay alive at all costs, and that humans are bestial in their survival instincts. Only his world view is faulty, which is precisely why he's a villain and not an anti-hero. The film shows that his violent and chaotic exceptionalism is just that – an exception to a rule. The culmination of this performance occurs during the Joker's "social experiment," in which he rigs two evacuation ferries with explosives, knowing one will carry convicts and the other average citizens; the pilots are each given a detonator, and passengers are informed they must blow up the other ferry to save their own lives. In the Joker's worldview this can have only an explosive conclusion, as people choose to live rather than to

[73] Matt Goldberg writes in "Fight Club': 20 Years Later and Bros Are Still Missing the Point of David Fincher's Satire" that "If you ever watched David Fincher's electrifying 1999 movie *Fight Club* and thought, "We should start a fight club!" then congratulations, you have missed the point of *Fight Club*.[…]Tearing down society completely so you can have a pair of leather pants that lasts you the rest of your life is what a teenage boy thinks about changing the world. It's not a real solution, and Tyler has no solutions. He just offers violence, chaos, and self-destruction and calls them wisdom."

self-sacrifice for the good of others. But both "criminal"[74] classes and civilians choose passive resistance to his methods, risking personal harm and even death rather than rising to the violent chaos the Joker believes is natural and ingrained. The Joker, then, is the odd man out, and a poor reader of people.

Like Moore's *From Hell* and *The Killing Joke*, and Nolan's *The Dark Knight,* Scott Snyder's *Death of the Family* is likewise invested in contemporary identity, re-casting and un-casting the Joker in an examination of modern American cultural politics. Specifically, I argue that the Joker of *Death of the Family* continues the project offered in *Dark Knight*, and further exposes the terrorist potential of downwardly-mobile white masculinity.[75] Snyder's Joker follows Tony S. Daniel's narrative arc from *Faces of Death* in which the Joker arranges a private meeting with the Dollmaker in Arkham Asylum.[76] Under the Dollmaker's capable scalpel, Joker is "reborn" (Daniel) through the removal of his face, leaving the flayed skin of his iconic, identity-marking facade tacked to his cell wall … and disappearing without a trace, for a year.

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[74] I use quotation marks to reflect the current state of the American prison system, and the suspect labeling and out-casting of incarcerated peoples. According to the Pew Research Center "black Americans remain far more likely than their Hispanic and white counterparts to be in prison. The black imprisonment rate at the end of 2018 was nearly twice the rate among Hispanics (797 per 100,000) and more than five times the rate among whites (268 per 100,000)" (Gramlich). Recognizing the prevalence of black faces in American prisons, the film signals the "criminality" of the representative prisoner by casting a tall black man (played by 6'6" Tommy 'Tiny' Lister) as an intimidating spokesperson, who says to a nervous white prison warden "Give it to me. You can tell them I took it by force. Give it to me, and I'll do what you shoulda did ten minutes ago." The warden hands the device over, signaling his own singular moral weakness, and the convict throws it into the river, before returning to a prayer group. The "good" citizens of Gotham on the other ferry are signaled by their predominant whiteness, and their arguments that "those men had their chance." When the civilian ferry votes to exterminate the prison ferry, a white middle-aged "businessman," (played by Doug Ballard) steps forward to say that the convicts "made their choices." But even as the Joker says "here we go" from the pier, the businessman realizes he is unable to kill, and the Joker's "social experiment" instead reveals the complexity of humanity, and the ultimate morality that the Joker did not believe existed.

[75] In the preface to his third edition, Michael Kimmel reflects on the additional chapter added since his first publishing in 1994, noting American men's anger at how far downward they had moved, in that they "have probably never been more equal with women, and many American men have never been angrier" (ix), and *Death of the Family* projects that anger onto the villain who so readily stands in for angry American men.

[76] After successfully stabbing Batman in the chest, twice – a marked improvement over the physical performance of his 1940 counterpart.

Snyder's story opens at the end of that year, with hordes of clown-faced devotees wreaking havoc in various street gangs named in honor of the missing Clown Prince. Joker himself doesn't make an appearance until he arranges a series of revelatory run-ins with Catwoman.

Having reclaimed his face, now wearing it as a deteriorating mask, the Joker is no longer the foreign dandy of WWII-era *Batman* comics, but a clear projection of a traditional, all-American Everyman gone horribly wrong. The purple suit has been replaced with pedestrian blue coveralls emblazoned with "Joe's Garage," and the soft purple gloves have been replaced with heavy leather work gloves. Arms now visible, the audience can see his muscles moving, bunching, and working as he throws himself bodily into his exploits in a demonstration of physical masculinity missing from former suited representations. During a prolonged and confrontational reunion with Harley Quinn, the Joker proclaims that he is now "pure animal instinct," and his actions successfully marry the honed physical manliness of romanticized working-class American tradition with the brutal and abhorrent violence of Victorian panic. But he is so much more, and in his plots and actions the Joker comes to articulate the complexities, and dangers, of modern American identity politics.

The creative decision to move away from the Joker's traditional sartorial representation is a purposeful statement of reconstruction and narrative divorce. Now, the Joker's internal *whiteness* becomes even more prominent, his bare arms signaling that Snyder's villain is not wearing cosmetics, and instead has truly white flesh. The suit, once functional as a familiar masculine uniform, is now more commonly associated with droning office workers and uncomfortable social events: the uniform of the oppressed worker bee. Instead, the Joker is given mechanic's coveralls, romanticizing the "honest" blue-collar "white American men [who] cling ever more tenaciously to old ideals, [while] women and minorities have entered those formerly

all-male bastions of untrammeled masculinity. Gender and racial equality often feel like a loss to white men … even if white American men have lost exceptionally little" (Kimmel 240). The Joker's fashioning argues for the absurdity of this white supremacy, associating signs and symbols with the villain's violence and madness.

In changing face and suit, the Joker's actions reflect the transience and adaptability of his own villainous identity: his mask is his own face, and though he removes this for a time there is no "other" self which requires protection. Instability *is* his identity, and his whole self dances between expectations of performance (social, sexual, gendered) to meet his present goals. Though the book toys with a biography for the Joker, including Harley dressed as the Red Hood and Batman claiming to know his "real" name, the book's epilogue suggests that any attempt to pin him is a bluff (Batman's computer, for example, lists Joker's identity as "unknown"), and that the Joker is just that: *the Joker*. Without a name or a face, he is a more apt sign, or perhaps even a truer embodiment, of his adaptive performance than any of the heroes against whom he initiates conflict. The Joker has no motivation to mask his identity – no domestic partner to protect, nor personal relationships he prizes; unlike heroes Batgirl/Barbara Gordon and Red Hood/Jason Todd, the Joker has no incentive to be *other* than the Clown Prince of Crime, and is thus more thoroughly represented in his performance. Though heroes draw a veil of secrecy around at least a part of their lives, the Joker is always fully present.

The Joker is unabashed in his sense of self, which from his 1940s beginnings has been cultural "other" to dominant masculinity. He's not conflicted, even as his purported insanity marks him as unreasonable. And in *Death of the Family* he adopts a new persona which is both familiar and threatening in the lens of contemporary American culture – the prince of the court of popular opinion, the white working-class man, capable of building and threatening the

constructed identities of others through violence and domination worthy of a Victorian MP, or Jack the Ripper. Throughout the narrative, the Joker of *Death of the Family* is an identity maker, not unlike the dominant identity makers of contemporary America: Joker gives Catwoman a poisoned and bat-lined suit, apes a normative wedding with Batgirl as a veiled (and masked) bride, and makes Harley in his own image with a padded suit and red helmet. He gives Jason Todd a new mask, and affirms Todd's tragic past with staged poppets and props. In providing material markers of identity consistent with each character, the Joker is grounding even those personally-constructed personalities in larger social discourses, taking away the agency of a masked identity by asserting the influence of the dominant social figure as responsible for the means through which these selves are formulated. He demonstrates that they can only be who they are because of the majority-constructed sphere, and the same dominant figure who gives is capable of taking away. Their secret autonomy is tenuous.

Joker's threatening caricature of normativity is a performance adopted to articulate cultural critique, while his deviance from the performance affirms his own transient and limitedly defined self – he is both the dominant narrative, and its subversive counterpart. Even as a caricature of the powerful majority he resists static definitions, calling himself a "mother" as he crafts a hood for Jason Todd/Red Hood, and diligently working at a sewing machine to make Catwoman's catsuit in traditionally feminine industry, which would weaken the reading of masculinity of a truly normative man. Joker's present performance is carefully calculated to cause maximum anxiety in support of his destructive drive, but the script of normativity cannot contain him. Snyder's Joker thus stands as an everyman embodiment of American cultural fears: the normative white man, and the fluid "freak" unbound by definitions. He's made himself, for now, a boogey *man* for *all* American people.

The *Instructions for American Servicemen in Britain* tells American servicemen "The most evident truth of all is that in their major ways of life the British and American people are much alike," and this critical reading of villainous masculinity supports this assertion. Building away from a common cultural branch, the foundations of American and British masculinity cast each as the Other against which to first define the appropriate self; historic representations literally illustrate these contentious conventions through the visual satire of the American-like "blood man" of Jack the Ripper, and the intellectual but physically floundering British dandy of 1940s Joker. Contemporarily, each nation has in its turn shift a critical gaze back on the self, at once asserting ownership of cultural products, and recognizing the potential of those products to exercise their anxieties over contemporary masculinities, and the violent potential that each still holds. *The Illustrated Police News* and *Batman No. 1* are cultural objects capable of representing historical values of masculinity, while *From Hell* and *Death of the Family* demonstrate the discursive potential of historic villains to communicate not just censure of who men *were*, but the dangerous potential of romanticizing historical masculinities for emulation by the modern man.

CHAPTER 5

REINVENTING THE CATSUIT

The Batman villainess known as Catwoman is beautiful. As is the case with most comics characters, her narrative arcs have changed and evolved throughout the eighty-plus years of media representation, but her beauty is consistently signified, and weaponized, in all her various iterations. This in itself is not unique; Poison Ivy and Lady Audley also use their beauty to aid their criminal activities, to great success. But Catwoman's beauty is differently represented in comics media, as it is the single consistency in the character's fashioned identity: unlike Poison Ivy, who is from the first signaled by green and leafy leotards,[77] Catwoman's costumes have no consistent elements from her 1940s introduction through her modern representations. Her primary visual signifier in comics, film, games, and cartoons is her femininity, and this femininity is signified primarily by her dress. Crucially, this dress carries codes and signifiers that demonstrate that she is a villain not because of extraordinary powers, but because she is an extraordinary woman: Catwoman is an independently powerful beautiful femme.[78]

That Catwoman is a femme character created by and for men matters. Though women have worked on Catwoman stories, as Mindy Mewell did in 1989, it isn't until 2018 that a single woman – Joëlle Jones – was given license to both write and illustrate a Catwoman storyline. As

[77] Acknowledging that Poison Ivy's significant outliers are nudity, disguises briefly donned, and prison uniforms.
[78] My choice of the term "femme" throughout this chapter is a purposeful recognition of the character's gender performativity and identity. While the reductive terms "male" and "female" are often used in an attempt to limit gender according to a culturally-constructed binary (often as a means to dehumanize and trivialize the experiences and identities of trans and nonbinary people), the terms "man" and "woman" are similarly obtusely restrictive, failing to recognize a wide spectrum of gender performativity. Conversely, the terms "femme" (or fem, feminine) and "masc" (or masculine) refer directly to the purposeful performativity of an individual, as coded and signified within an active moment. "Femme" is an identification category that expresses an aesthetic or sartorial moment, enacted by people of all gender identifications (cis, trans, nonbinary, genderqueer, etc.). A person may be femme one day, and masc the next, or may identify as femme every day. A "high femme" is one who is further extraordinary in their gender presentation, adopting the aesthetics historically associated with traditional femininity in a highly performative manner, from the highest heels to the reddest lipsticks

the Catwoman property has remained the predominant purview of masculine writers, it is men who are tasked with developing and maintaining a recognizably feminine and attractive figure for contemporary audiences who live not in the static space of a fictional Gotham City, but in a constantly changing culture which evolves ever-new notions of beauty and fashion, and so demands new Catwomen to reflect these social expectations and contemporary aesthetics. And how do men maintain a character from a distinctly separate social sphere? Through what they see as most attractive – the surface renderings of contemporary fashion.[79] As Kate Soper writes, "clothes have been very extensively used to assert the cultural status of human beings" (17), and male writers and authors utilize the commercially recognizably symbols of contemporary fashions to develop Catwoman's femininity and contemporary attraction. But the mid-century result is a chaotic approach of masculine comics creators who don't entirely understand the medium of femme fashion, or the deeply meaningful codes behind the signs. That her strength relies on her beauty requires creators to constantly evolve Catwoman's aesthetics to meet the impossible beauty standards of the present time, and reflects both historical moments of fashion and contemporary trends in the commercial representation of women's beauty and women's bodies. But just as evolving fashions helped signify the radical New Woman of the nineteenth century, Catwoman's evolving fashions carry with them social signifiers that complicate her creation as an erotic object for the masculine gaze. When examined through a feminist lens, even early Catwoman comics demonstrate an unconscious reflection of changing roles of femmes in society and the work of feminism in Western culture; that Catwoman is a powerful

[79] There is a long cultural precedent for the use of fashion to represent women in, as authors have long used clothing as a proxy for women themselves; Samuel Richardson does just such a thing when he writes of Clarissa's petticoat floating in a lake, which was supposed to convince her family of her suicide, her underwear standing in for her missing body. And so do comics creators look to familiar fashions to represent both bodies and the characters of the figures wearing them.

feminist figure is not necessarily an intention of her writers, but it is a reflection of the cultural shifts happening around them.

"Discussing beauty is taboo," writes art and gender scholar Joanna Frueh. "It is a sacred and forbidden subject because female beauty as it has been constructed in Western culture is a paradox – necessary for women yet impossible to achieve" (Frueh 3). For Frueh, a bit of an aesthete, this is a shame; her work is actively invested in the personal embodiment and eroticism of "female beauty," and as a feminist and scholar she challenges this taboo, writing not just of beauty, but of women who, like Frueh, find power in their own bodies. And like Frueh, this is exactly what I intend to do: discuss beauty, and its relationships to gender and systems of power as exemplified by the character of Catwoman in *Batman* properties. Specifically, in this chapter I argue that the instability and changeability of the sartorial representation of Catwoman reflects our patriarchal society's continued mistrust of the femme identity, and in fact constitutes a cultural attempt to regulate and control the femme's gender performativity in order to neutralize its subversive potential to disrupt gender norms. In other words, the frequent changes to the costuming of Catwoman through media representation illustrates changes in understanding of what makes a character or person feminine, as well as the power a feminine person can hold in American culture. In the face of this regulation and mistrust, I argue that the characterization of Catwoman empowers the villainess beyond the sexualization of her image, allowing this image and performativity to be utilized as an asset rather than a means of dehumanizing objectification. Reading Catwoman as a monster/beauty, a theoretical concept defined and developed by Joanna Frueh, shows that her extreme gender performance is a source of agency for the villainess, who remains uniquely human, sane, and fashionable through her 80-year representation in *Batman*

comics.[80] Ultimately, Catwoman's representations as developed through the decades illustrates the viability of alternative autonomy in a binary system, as an independent woman not reliant on others for power, who challenges the notion that power lies exclusively on the masculine end of the gender spectrum.

Unlike other Batman villains (as Two-Face, the Scarecrow, the Penguin, and more), Catwoman's moniker does not initially refer to her sartorial identity, but rather to her profession as a skilled and elusive jewel thief: in 1940 she is referred to as "the Cat" because she is a "cat burglar," or a thief practiced in stealth and deception.[81] At this point, she is without a costume; therefore, she is more normatively aligned with the thieves and gangsters that populate early *Detective Comics* and *Batman* comics, in that she is entirely human, and simply criminal. And yet, unlike the gangsters and mobsters with whom she is categorized, the Cat is exceptional for her skills, her intelligence, and her appearance. She is from the first represented as a beautiful woman, a comics pinup made more alluring and more threatening for her self-awareness. Dangerously, she uses this beauty to manipulate other characters – specifically, Batman – in her criminal activities. Her gender performativity sets her apart from disposable, suit-and-fedora-wearing *Batman* adversaries, as she literally flashes leg and bats her eyes as she executes cunning heists. This approach to crime allows her to escape the Caped Crusader in *Batman No. 1*, when even the Joker ends up wounded and in police custody in the same volume. Hanley quotes creator Bob Kane as writing "We [Kane and Bill Finger] knew we needed a female

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[80] Comparatively sane, I will argue. In the final move of this chapter I will address the film industry's undermining of Catwoman's agency through the introduction of mental instability, framed much like the historical concept of "the female malady," as documented and examined by Showalter.

[81] In *The Many Lives of Catwoman: The Felonious History of a Feline Fatale* Tim Hanley likewise acknowledges the characteristics of Catwoman important to her consistent fashioning as a character, even as her sartorial fashioning is inconsistent. He writes of her early narratives, "Despite her lack of resemblance to her modern incarnations, the original Catwoman was familiar at her core. She was a clever thief, almost impossible to pin down, and a constant headache for the Caped Crusader. Catwoman was a craft, independent cat burglar from her very first appearance, firmly establishing the heart, if not the look, of the character for the myriad versions that followed" (2)

nemesis to give the strip sex appeal. So Bill and I decided to create a somewhat friendly foe who committed crimes but was also a romantic interest in Batman's rather sterile life. […] he would try to reform her and bring her over to the side of law and order. But she was never a murderer or entirely evil like the Joker" (9-10). Arguably, the Cat's beauty and independence are what gives her the competitive edge over other femme villains who are paired with masculine counterparts, and thus enjoy only perfunctory appearances.[82] Like the Joker, the Cat is too good to lose, and she quickly becomes a person of interest for Batman and his readers alike.

Despite this longevity and consistent cultural popularity, Catwoman doesn't have a consistent, singular uniform as other comics characters. Throughout his representations the Joker wears iterations of his original purple suit, Two-Face is represented in fashions as bifurcated as his face, the Riddler dons question-marked green, Poison Ivy wears literal greenery, and Harley Quinn bears the marks of her namesake character trope.[83] For her own uniforms Catwoman has worn short dresses, long dresses, slit dresses, catsuits, leotards and tights, leather bikinis, boots or heels, capes and no capes, mascot heads, cat-eye masks and goggles, cat ears or no, at least once a tail, sometimes clawed gauntlets and other times not. She's been dressed in orange and red and green and purple and grey and black, once wearing a strangely leafy ensemble that more clearly represents Poison Ivy,[84] and another a pointed mask that looks like that later worn by the DC

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[82] The Cat is not the first nor only femme fatale of Golden Age *Batman.* In October 1939's "Detective Comics #32," Batman encounters Dala, a conspirator and fellow werewolf/vampire aligned with The Monk. Unlike the Cat, who functions as an independent character, Dala is primarily developed as an agent of her masculine counterpart, with whom she dies.

[83] Each of these villains wears a number of different fashions through their representations, both in costume and casual dress; I am not arguing that these characters *only* appear in these fashions, but rather that their character-signifying uniforms consistently follow aesthetic principals. Likewise, these characters are assigned physical features that represent their identities, even in non-uniformed representation: the Joker's smile, Two-Face's facial wounds, and Poison Ivy's red hair (and later green skin). Harley Quinn bears no permanent signifier, like Catwoman, but is consistently represented as blonde, wearing "juvenile" femme fashions when not in uniform. Catwoman, likewise human, is most often brunette, but has been represented as a blonde and a red head.

[84] 1967

hero Huntress.[85] Often, to call her masks or uniforms "cat-like" can be a stretch, leaving only her name to unify the wardrobe.

Think of the Children: Historical Attacks on Catwoman

Though her professional villainous colleagues include mass-murdering clowns, psychopaths, and gangsters, Catwoman faces pointed attacks by mid-century American moral crusaders as a particularly grievous threat to the decent sensibilities of young readers, when she is named as a detrimental representation of deviant femininity in Dr. Frederic Wertham's 1954 anti-comics manifesto *Seduction of the Innocent*. According to Wertham, Catwoman is dangerous for her artistic representation as a consistently attractive and autonomous femme who visually embodies expectations of femininity while violating codes of behavior in her very strength, independence, and rejection of subservient domesticity: a feline fatale.

Dr. Fredric Wertham's seminal work is itself seductive. Affectively persuasive, the narrative voice of Dr. Wertham is one of compassionate intelligence and honest concern for the young people who serve as his primary focus. Following logically flawed methodology, Wertham interviews "delinquent" children and finds a common element upon which he gleefully lays all the blame: comics. Wertham challenges the then-regulated comic book industry, laying at comics' feet a charge of seducing juvenile readers to unethical and immoral behavior. Reflecting the expectations of mid-century American "respectability," Wertham projects onto the femme body the fears of patriarchal "morality," offering excerpts of comics that purportedly demonstrate BDSM tropes, physical and sexual violence, gender deviance, and homosexuality. Wertham argues that "[o]nly a decent sexual orientation can lead to a decent sex life, for practically all psychological sex problems are ethical problems," and that "[c]omic books

[85] In 1946 She wears a knee-length purple dress, with a purple cowl, purple gloves, and green cape that are a mirroring of Batman's own cape, gauntlet, and cowl.

stimulate children sexually. […] In comic books over and over again, in pictures and text, and in the advertisements as well, attention is drawn to sexual characteristics and to sexual actions," indicating that the lessons learned of comics are formative yet detrimental sexual orientations (175). Wertham goes on at length describing the ways comics actively work to seduce children, suggesting that,

> One of the stock mental aphrodisiacs in comic books is to draw girls' breasts in such a way that they are sexually exciting. Wherever possible they protrude and obtrude. Or girls are shown in slacks and negligees with their pubic regions indicated with special care and attention. Many children miss that, but very many do not. In other run-of-the-mill comic books, as was first pointed out to me by adolescents who collected them, special emphasis is given in whole series of illustrations to girls' buttocks. This is a kind of fetichism and in some individuals leads to rigid fetishistic tendencies either in fantasy or in actual life later. Such preoccupations, as we know from psychoanalytic and Rorschach studies, may have a relationship also to early homosexual attitudes. (178)[86]

Attention to women's breasts, "pubic regions," and buttocks are heralded as deviant illustrations that may either lead young male readers to deviant sexuality, or fetishistic fixations that will lead them to homosexuality, as young boys make up the majority of Wertham's study subjects.

The point of contention regarding the objectification of the femme body is a bit at odds with Wertham's anxiety over the femme's social representation, which Wertham fears will leads boys into homosexuality. Wertham is deeply concerned that the sexualized representation of

[86] Wertham uses "girl" throughout his sexual discourse, even when describing young women who have reached or surpassed the age of legal majority. His insistence on patronizing the subjects is a condescension which frames Wertham as a superior patriarchal figure.

women's bodies will encourage a fetish that leads to homosexuality, but also laments an absence of attractive women who will encourage heteronormative relationships. Like illustrations of women's buttocks, "[a] homoerotic attitude is also suggested by the presentation of masculine, bad, witchlike, or violent women. In such comics women are depicted in a definitely antierotic light" in contrast to the desirable masculine heroes (188). Wertham names Catwoman as a prime example of the detrimental representations being offered to young readers, complaining that "[i]n these stories there are practically no decent, attractive, successful women. A typical female character is the Catwoman, who is vicious and uses a whip. The atmosphere is homosexual and anti-feminine. If the girl is good-looking she is undoubtedly the villainess" (191). Conveniently ignoring the representation of Julie, Batman's attractive fiancé, and other damsels in distress, Wertham's analysis highlights the magnetism of Catwoman's portrayal. She *is* a seductive figure, and one who demands space and independence in a cultural narrative that labels such demands as morally reprehensible.

That the 1954 Comics Code Authority is a direct response to Wertham's call to action of the same year is well documented by comics historians, and evidenced by the language utilized by the Code itself.[87] The Comics Code is not a self-reflective consideration of the cultural responsibilities of comics publishers, nor a thoughtful analysis of the psychology of its largest market, but a pacifier offered to a public alarmed by the charges extended in Wertham's attack. Publishers see it as in their best interest to regulate themselves in accordance with Wertham's conclusions, not unlike the choices of the film industry and the implementation of the Hays Code, supporting a cultural space defined by the psychiatrist as best supporting morally and

[87] The Comics Code Authority, referred to as the CCA, is a self-governing censorship board established by the comics industry in mid-century America in an attempt to avoid government censorship of the medium. The CCA effectively functioned as the Hays Code. See David Hajdu's *The Ten-Cent Plague*, Hillary Chute's *Why Comics?*, Amy Nyber's *Seal of Approval*

ethically developing youth. Specifically, the Code addresses the behavior of all characters, and the appearance of femmes. In a section titled "Costumes" the code bans not just "suggestive and salacious illustration" but also clothing that is not "reasonably acceptable to society," stating specifically that "Females shall be drawn realistically without exaggeration of any physical qualities" ("The Comics Code of 1954"). Wertham's critique of Catwoman specifically, but comics more generally, leads to severe consequences for the representation of the character.[88] In response to *Seduction* whole comics lines are threatened, and Batman villains are either given social makeovers, or expurgated.[89] Were Catwoman less normatively attractive, or more traditionally subservient, she may have been granted a reprieve; ultimately, it is the union of her successful femininity and successful criminality that condemns her, as it will continue to do so once the character is again given a public stage.

After holding her own – and Bat's interest[90] – from *Batman #1* (1940), Catwoman is thwarted by a system that insists that "the criminal [be] punished for his misdeeds," and "shall not be presented so as to be rendered glamorous or to occupy a position which creates a desire for emulation" in the name of "wholesome entertainment" and "standards good taste" ("The Comics Code of 1954").[91] As a "sympathetic criminal," Catwoman violates no fewer than thirteen CCA sanctions, and the verdict is strict: twelve years of solitary confinement. According

[88] Catwoman is not the only casualty of this change. Mike Madrid recalls that "with the Code's clean up, women had to be drawn 'realistically,' and as a result, many simply disappeared from comic books. Batman's sexy foe Catwoman was deemed too racy for the new world of the Comics Code. She was gone by 1955" (58).
[89] "The Code's rules about subject matter, violence, and sexuality were the nails in the coffin for sensational and prurient crime and horror comics" (Madrid 58). After the CCA is instituted the storylines of maintained villains become much more frivolous and campy, and the crimes of the Joker become more pranks than serious, threatening violence.
[90] A violation in itself, as the code demands that "live-romance stories shall emphasize the value of the home and the sanctity of marriage," condemning the flirtations of Catwoman and Batman, who claims a fiancé, Julie, during the Golden Age.
[91] Comics scholar Hillary Chute reports that "The Golden Age ended in 1954, after psychiatrist Fredric Wertham's best-selling study *Seduction of the Innocent*, which aimed to establish a link between comic-book readership and juvenile delinquency, brought the comic-book industry to a halt" (12).

to the CCA, Catwoman is far too dangerous for the reading public. Unlike the Joker, who is adapted to meet the expectations of the new code, Catwoman's gender performance marks her as unredeemable.

A Beautiful Monster: Catwoman in Theory

The identity of the femme is potentially problematic for its intrinsic attachment to fashionable performativity. Fashion industries literally trade on femme bodies, relying on a fantasy of perfection to market clothing, cosmetics, surgical interventions, and more, for the sake of capitalistic gain. The materialism of the femme identity can thus draw ire for its attention to surfaces, and reliance on markets. Catwoman is an interesting subject in this discourse, as one who steals the products otherwise sold to femmes, defying the market even as she models its ideals. But in visually representing these ideals she becomes a contentious figure, open to readings of liberated independence or of suppressed objectification. The conflict of femme construction is illustrated by the writings of Julie Bendel and Valerie Steele, who demonstrate the theoretical paradigm in which this chapter is situated. Significant is a question of agency – whether a person actively performing femininity can be a self-authored autonomous figure, and whether or not beauty is a powerful tool for the femme, or a concept used to control and suppress her.

While Bendel argues against the wearing of cosmetics as a frivolous act of the vapid and self-centered, Steele argues for the power of constructing one's material identity. In January of 2019 Julie Bendel published an opinion in the *Independent* titled "Come on feminists, ditch the makeup bag. It's a far more radical statement than burning your bra." At the core of her argument is a question of time – specifically, the amount of time femmes spend on their makeup. She assumes that "Women who wear makeup spend an average of nine whole days every year of

their lives applying it" and derides the use of personal time, virtue-signaling as she retorts "I have chosen to use that time campaigning against sexist stereotypes, such as the notion that women look better with makeup." This simplification – that people do or do not look better wearing cosmetics – is not a focus of the present chapter. But a femme's *choice* to dress in a particular manner, and the time she extends to do so, is. To whom do women owe their personal time? This, I contend, is the real argument suggested by such dismissive condemnations - that femmes should be spending their morning routine "campaigning against sexist stereotypes" as Bendel claims to do. In response, I argue that the idea that women's time spent on themselves is *wasteful* is itself crushingly patriarchal and rooted in historical gender ideals that constrict a woman's time to labor focused on the wellbeing of others – not unlike her nineteenth century idealization as a mother, wife, and homemaker. In *this* historical model a woman's personal time is framed as something that neglects her true duties and responsibilities; and in light of this patriarchal binary a woman's personal decision to spend time on herself – even putting on makeup – is radical. With more scholarly and critical attention than Bendel, fashion historian Valerie Steele writes that "The discourse on fashion has tended to stress its negative connotations. In particular, women have been positioned as the 'slaves' or 'victims' of fashion. Traditionally, the subtext has been that women were 'vain' or 'foolish." But in her history of corsets Steele rejects these common assumptions and framing of the femme figure as one who is acted *upon*, rather than acting in her own interest and desires. She continues, "More recently, it has been argued that women were oppressed by the fashion system, which is usually perceived as an instrument of patriarchy and capitalism." This gendered argument "ignores the fact that adornment and self-fashioning long preceded the rise of capitalism, and applied to men as well as women," and reveals a preoccupation with critical analysis of femme dress rather than masculine

dress, the former a display of weakness and the latter one of power. Instead, Steele argues for the agency of self-adornment. Speaking specifically of the corset, a garment which has long been the recipient of theoretical and cultural criticism, she warns that "By patronizing the women of the past as passive 'victims' of fashion, historians have ignored the reasons why so many women were willing to wear corsets for so long" and argues that these women "have their own reasons, when opposition to their fashionable choices was widely espoused by men" (Steele 2, 29) – that is, that femmes will adopt fashions such as corsets not in obedience to the fashionable preferences of men, but in *spite* of the cultural derision they face for their purposeful constructions of self.

As an historical and contemporary illustration of feminine beauty ideals, and a consistently morally gray character, I find support for the empowering aspects of femme in the continued success of Catwoman, read through the lens of Joanna Frueh's concept of the monster/beauty, and given life and active agency by Maria Elena Buszek's reading of "awarishness." Together, these feminist works define a beauty authored by femmes, who are then able to recognize and utilize its potential against a patriarchal system which values beauty as a gendered standard, but devalues the beautiful individual and fears her agency. The body as a self-constructed text and performance is a key object of this dissertation, and this chapter in particular looks to the representation of the femme, not as a body acting on, but as an active body who demonstrably recognizes her cultural capital and uses it against majoritarian masculine powers. In examining this power move I look to the feminist writing of Joanna Frueh, who speaks of the liberation and agency found when women define and identify as sensual, beautiful individuals. In her introduction, titled "My Body, My Beauty," Frueh establishes the theoretical task of her text as one of empowerment through unapologetic self-awareness, writing, "[t]his

book presents a theory …of aesthetic/erotic self-creation by developing beauty as showiness that emerges from intimacy with one's aesthetic/erotic capacity" (11). This showiness, an embodied knowledge of one's aesthetic presentation and a desire to share it, is the action of the individual, developed purposefully from personal introspection and desire rather than the "hopeless pursuit of perfect appearance" (11). Dismissing a culturally-constructed concept of "perfection," Frueh defines "*monster/beauty* as an extremely articulated sensuous presence, image, or situation in which the aesthetic and the erotic are inseparable" (11). She argues that the monster/beauty is both "a condition," and "can also describe an individual," allowing the term to speak for both what someone is, and how they are the thing (11). As such, monster/beauty becomes both a title that can be attributed to a subject of study or observation – like a comics character – and a way to define and explain the qualities that make that subject *more* – how that character's beauty and sensuality are different from another representation.

The ultimate mission of Frueh's text is to eroticize traditionally non-erotic bodies as "monster/beauties"; or, rather, to recognize the eros of bodies traditionally denied erotic potential (for example, the middle-aged body builder, the professor). The stories she tells are of her own fulfillment, and the tension her subjects feel with the world around them – a beautiful blonde professor who feels apologetic for her features (introduction), a sixty-three-year-old bodybuilder artist who covers her figure in the gym and is harassed on the streets (chapters 1 and 2), and professors who navigate erotic relationships with students and don't know how to navigate their bodies in classrooms (chapter four).[92] But the through narrative is one of power and

[92] Though Frueh discusses consent and suggests the *possibility* of erotic relationships between students and professors, I find her arguments insubstantial in the face of the inherent power imbalance the dynamic will always involve. Even if the relationship is between a professor and a student no longer in that professor's class, for example, the power of the institution is still too great for full and understandable consent. Her arguments of student initiation, of touch, and of being a living body even at the head of a classroom is unethical and smacks of privilege. Ultimately, I argue, it carries the empowerment of embodiment a step too far.

individualized agency – of a singular figure claiming their erotic and beautiful potential, and contending with cultural scripts that would deny them this identity and the right to exercise agency via self-recreation.

The complexity of the idea is reflected in Frueh's understanding of beauty. Frueh recognizes that beauty is a source of power for women, but also problematic when focused on the pursuit of unrealistic ideals; these ideals are maliciously forwarded to inspire poor self-esteem, which is believed to fuel the purchase of beauty products. Traditionally, feminine beauty is culturally constructed as intended for male consumption, to be used by men, perhaps against other men.[93] In contrast, *standards* of beauty are used to diminish and control femme figures, placing them in a state of anxiety over the impossibility of meeting these social and cultural expectations – as Frueh laments, "the beauty game exerts control such that women assume a passive position," internalizing the definitions and expectations of others as opposed to self-defining (21). The beauty *industry,* as a capitalistic and patriarchal institution, has generated a sense of innate failure in women, and a need for competition. As Frueh notes, "when beauty is a standard of success rather than a variety of pleasures, everyone sinks and pleasure itself drowns in the tortured apparatus of effort, competitiveness, impossibility, and failure" (5). Women are told to strive to be beautiful, without ever fully accepting or realizing their own beauty –if they recognize or author their own beauty, they are told they are wrong.

The affirmation of one's personal beauty remains a critically underexamined experience. Though body positivity movements have grown since the 2001 publication of Frueh's text, these movements remain argumentative for the sake of recognition and adoption, rather than statements of truth. This is in part because even as participants work for inclusivity, the

[93] This can take a number of forms, from personal competition to the social status of trophy wives to the eligibility of one's daughter in forming alliances.

individual assertion of one's beauty is still derogatorily recognized as vanity. Frueh demonstrates this cultural criticism when she quotes a professor she subsequently names the "blonde scholar." The scholar writes that:

> Beautiful women are the ones everyone hates because everyone wants it, so if you are beautiful, as I am, as I know you [Frueh] are, … you are expected to spend your whole life pretending you are not beautiful, being vigilantly modest …. You can never have joy in your own beauty, and when you most have it is when you most have to try to counteract it or you are accused of egotism, self-absorption and vanity. (13)

The narrative of the blonde scholar demonstrates the social expectation of self-sabotage and self-deflection in the cultural construction of beauty, which so greatly relies on insecurity that it not only champions an unobtainable ideal, but also works to silence those who recognize their own beauty through a culture of shame and silence. The connotation is overwhelmingly negative, enforcing the concept that women must seek external approval to identify their worth, and self-defined or asserted worth is shallow in the absence of cultural sanction. Frueh seems to want to use the example of the blond scholar to assert that the femme conscious of her own beauty is thus a monster beauty, but the scholar's own reluctance challenges this assertion; it is significant that the scholar speaks to Frueh only under the promise of anonymity. Though Frueh fixates on the visibility of the monster in her definitions, she does not directly address the connotations of the term "monster" – the threat. For Frueh, rightly, the monster is something that culture has dictated should not be, and yet defiantly is. But a monster in cultural imagination is far more aggressive than an assertive beauty. A monster is violent – or perhaps responsible for a violent disruption that is difficult to ignore. This is more aptly seen in Frueh's analysis of the femme bodybuilder,

who purposefully enters traditionally masculine space (the gym) in order to literally build a strong body in direct challenge to the idealization of Western culture. She writes of Ms. Olympia finalist Diana Dennis who performs in *Arachnaphobia,* that Dennis represents "the formulaic fatal woman who uses her dark sexuality to deliberately lure and destroy men" (104). Frueh says that "the older bodybuilder/pinup/fatal woman is a killer; she destroys erotically outworn strictures of female beauty" (104), and yet Frueh's illustrative figure literally hides: "many hypermuscular female bodybuilders wear only large, body-obscuring clothing on the street because their bodies have frequently provoked verbal abuse. Even in the gym when she was training us, my friend never removed her sweatshirt" (72). Is she, then, a monster beauty, if her visibility is restricted to culturally-approved performance spaces - competitions? Where both of these examples offered by Frueh fail, Catwoman excels. Like the bodybuilder, Catwoman challenges the assumptions of gender performance by refusing passivity, and actively engaging with power structures. Catwoman all the more so, as a femme who takes up cultural space as an independent femme in wildly successful masculine genres, and is represented refusing the social roles allowed to desirable women – passive sex object, wife, mother. She is desirable, as the scholar, she is athletic, as the bodybuilder, but she is a true monster/beauty for her performative challenge against what these designations mean.

Frueh's work carves out and defines the deviant space that makes Catwoman so uniquely and directly threatening as a representative figure: a beautiful woman who recognizes her own beauty and utilizes the currency of beauty to secure her own goals (such as evading capture by Batman himself). Frueh's theory of monster/beauty is a feminist reclaiming of beauty that scoffs at impossible capitalistic beauty standards, and instead recognizes the beauty and sensuality of otherwise nonnormative beauty performances: extreme beauty, such as female bodybuilders,

monstrous bodies such as that of the vampire, and aging bodies. Frueh's theory of the monster/beauty attempts to redistribute the power of beauty, enabling the beautiful figure to accept her own power and the agency that comes of confidence and awareness. Frueh is arguing for what a feminist reclamation of Catwoman achieves in practice – an acknowledgement of power and a redesigning of the concept of pride.

Despite her call for agency, Frueh herself is guilty of negative critique, equating what she deems "high femininity" with "a religion of bodily perfection" in which "[w]omen waste themselves for beauty, spending too much money and time, enfeebling their health by dieting for thinness, ruining their self-confidence." Though she waxes eloquently that she sees "bodies of content whose intelligent style and purpose prove that, in contradiction to Seid, beauty has great meaning beyond simple physical existence," her critical reading of "high femininity" is not unlike Bendel's reductive chastising of cosmetics routines (257, 258). In this dismissal Frueh is attempting to distance her reading from mainstream notions of beauty, arguing that her own is more ephemeral and autonomous.[94] I agree with her criticism and exposure of the -ists and -isms at the heart of the construct of Western beauty and feminine perfection, the privileging of thin, white, young bodies and middle- and upper-class values of aesthetic class and morality. It is problematic because it *is* rooted in sexist, racist, fat-phobic, classist definitions of female perfection oppressively forwarded by Western cultural institutions and commercial markets. But while the high-femme was materially constructed by fashion industries creating an idealized image to sow self-doubt and reap profits, the identity has been reclaimed as a performance of

[94] That she includes her own nude portraits, proudly displaying her thin, white, traditionally feminine form undermines these arguments. Can she do so because she is privileged with a "naturally" thin frame? This allows for the social and commercial exploitation of beauty, while maintaining patriarchal power structures – industries freely utilizing feminine beauty in advertising and entertainment, while simultaneously shaming women in public displays of beauty, and forwarding a discourse of failure to achieve the perfection most highly valued.

glamour available to all gender identities. In the way of Shahani's retrosexuality- the reclamation and redefinition of formerly oppressive material signifiers with nostalgic ties - high femininity has become a personal identification open to all, accepting of individual definition and performance - a personal identification of both gender and aesthetic preference, and an appreciation and pursuit of material representation. Shahani writes that queer retrosexuality is an embracing of "the otherness and prohibitions" of an inexperienced historical past that informs the trauma experienced by persecuted minorities (in Shahani's text, queer people) (25). Queer retrosexuality relies on the return to trauma, and the exploration of shame, negating the strictly historical in favor of locating a reparative moment. The perverse becomes empowering, and history is temporary; a turn to the past is a move towards redemption, and a reclaiming of the signifiers once used against a less powerful demographic, for their direct empowerment. Thus, though high femininity reeks of the oppression of women and minorities, its contemporary adoption by peoples of all identifications, body types, and races is an affirming rejection of the limitations assumed by Frueh's definition. The representation of Catwoman straddles these two spaces: she is designed to illustrate oppressive perfection but written to challenge the restraint of the identity.

In *Monster|Beauty* there is also sense of passivity in one's beauty – a languidness reminiscent of Daisy Buchanan lying on a couch on a warm afternoon. The monster/beauty is a figure of being, and not necessarily one of doing. Although monster/beauties act – such as the literal heavy-lifting of Frueh's body builder or the encouragingly seductive middle-aged woman – the interiority of the concept keeps the monster/beauty from offering a direct challenge. She is like Frueh's nude self-portraits accompanying the text – quietly confident, her existence doing the work rather than her actions. In my readings of Catwoman I reject this passivity, and instead

use the concept of the monster/beauty to describe a character who illustrates this same confidence and self-definition as Frueh's autonomously sensual subject, and actively uses her beauty in non-normative ways to challenge restrictions of gender. Frueh's monster/beauty is a consumer, but I argue for her potential as an actor, using beauty literacy and the false script of feminine weakness to turn tables. It is this *work* of beauty that Maria Elena Buszek examines in her readings of "awarishness" in *Pin-Up Grrls*, similarly extending Frueh's theory to consider representations of women and sexuality in popular culture.

Like Frueh, Buszek pushes back against critical notions of beauty that represent women as passive victims to cultural standards. Instead, she counters lingering respectability politics with readings of agency and professionalization. Respectability politics have governed popular cultural production since their introduction by the Victorians, forwarding arguments of morality, taste, and class to control the public space. For Victorians, respectability was defined by heteronormative, white, middle-class standards of sexual repression, industrial production, and a social hierarchy which enforces shame and ignorance in minority and high-risk populations, for the express purpose of maintaining political and domestic power systems. Often, these discourses have gendered motivations and consequences. As a scapegoat of the false binary of Madonna/whore fostered by patriarchal discourses, the femme form has been historically marked as a site of inherent licentiousness, and the artistic display of the femme body has therefore been seen as morally disruptive, and even dangerous. Respectability requires that female bodies be regulated to the domestic sphere, where they are controlled by and for the pleasure of husbands and fathers. To offer her body publicly, be it as an actress, model, or sex worker, is thus to be immoral and unfeminine, displaying not the piety and reserve expected of women, but the crass commercialism and vanity reserved for men. By withholding cultural value for the work done by

femme bodies, capitalistic systems are able consume femmes as a resource, without respecting their agency and humanity; and by denying these professional classes their appropriate femininity, the system protects notions of separate spheres, establishing one class of women for the home and the other for licentious consumption. Writes Buszek of nineteenth-century America, "it was argued that a woman simply presenting herself in a public forum like the meetinghouse or polling booth would compromise her femininity" (Buszek 38).

Buszek begins her consideration of the agency of performative beauties with the example of nineteenth-century burlesque performers, writing that the women "were unsettling not simply because they were on stage, but also because of their conscious contemporaneity and sexual self-awareness." These leg-show performers, as with the pinups celebrated as early as 1910, rejected Victorian notions of gendered spaces by entering the public sphere, not just as professionals, but as figures attempting to benefit themselves from the commercialization of feminine beauty. Buszek remarks that "as for many social critics of the late nineteenth century, women's ability to provoke sexual desire was an unfortunate fact of their existence inevitably hindering women's ability to function in the public sphere" but the nineteenth-century performers were radical, as they "actually invite, control, and relish the same," which was "another, more dangerous issue entirely." These "modern women very much aware of their 'own awarishness'" – they knew the cultural value of their gendered performances and sought to individually benefit from their manipulation and performance (Buszek 42, 43). Awarishness is a performance and a product – a construction of self that reflects idealization and autonomy, sold as advertisements, artifacts, and cultural influence. Buszek identifies this awarishness in the proliferation of performer's photographs, which individuals circulate for self-promotion, and sell to fans as souvenirs. As physical relics, these images represent the "exploitation" of women's "sexual desire," but also

their own ownership of their gender performativity and stylized aesthetics, and their awareness of the commercial and professional value of offering such artifacts. In short, these women understand the practical value of their sexuality, and the performers of Buszek's history do not hesitate to use that sexuality to their professional and monetary benefit. In this way they disrupt the separate spheres upheld by respectability politics, attaching value to their performances and performativity. Their challenge to definitions of worth and respectability directly challenge the power of patriarchal assumptions.

This is the threat of the Cat, from her first introduction –her awareness of her beauty, her awareness of the effects of that beauty, and her willingness to use that beauty to her individual, independent benefit demonstrates the agency and awareishness that actively challenges oppressive powers. From the first she is a challenge to the "postwar American interest in idealizing a less aggressive, thoroughly nostalgic construction of the contemporary woman," imagined as not just a purposeful sex symbol, but one who "comfortably conflated traditional standards of physical beauty with unconventional elements of intelligence and sexual self-awareness" like the Hollywood pinups (Buszek 239, 240). Despite Mary Ann Doane's argument that such femme fatales are not "subject[s] of feminism," I argue that the overt representation of "male fears about feminism," which lie in the agency and independent action of a beautiful femme fatale, is in fact a feminist subject (qtd. Hanley 15).

In every iteration, Catwoman is a normatively if excessively beautiful young woman with dark hair and pointedly femme proportions emphasized by her athleticism.[95] But more than her figuring, she is written with an *awareness* of her own beauty, and the potential it holds in society.

[95] On female body builders, Frueh observes "A risky body, such as [the female bodybuilder in her 40s], a risk-taking soul-and-mind-inseparable-from-body, inspires hatred and disgust as well as stimulating erotic and aesthetic pleasure" (59).

This awareness allows Catwoman as a character to use her beauty as a tool to achieve her goals, from infiltrating fashion events to steal products (*Batman No. 3*), to engineering her escape from the caped crusader himself. Her first issue illustrates both her awarishness, and its useful application, without the crutch of an anonymous cape and cowl – the beauty of her face influences Batman's decision to allow the Cat's escape, even going so far as to thwart his sidekick's efforts to pursue her.

Even after the Cat is assigned the first of several costumes by comics authors, the character maintains this awarishness, and her costume works to further emphasize the gender performativity that is foundational to the villainess's narrative and her popular success. This success is maintained through the efforts of comics authors to maintain her fashionability. Though her comics career has spanned over eighty years, Catwoman's is never out of style: in the hands of different artists and authors her aesthetics change as drastically as her narratives, keeping pace with standards of fashion and beauty, while maintaining her independent agency.

Shakers and Makers: Gender and Selecting Sources

How to manage an effective analysis of such long-spanning characters is a challenge for both this particular study, and the fields of study that anchor it.. In his introduction to *Hunting the Dark Knight,* Batman scholar Will Booker asks "What does it do to the concept of Batman – as a 70-year compendium of contradictory stories – when we close down his authorized, approved meaning to a selective reading from a handful of recent texts?" (xiii). He writes:

> For the last four decades of Batman's 70-year career, the "good" Batman – the official Batman, pushed most vigorously by DC and Warner Bros., and preferred by many fans – has been the dark Batman, the gritty, violent vigilante: Denny O'Neil and Neal Adams' "Darknight Detective" of the 1970s, Frank Miller's *The*

> *Dark Knight Returns* of 1986, Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* of 2008. The "bad" Batman, ironically, has been the fun Batman, the playful Batman, the camp Batman: the light-hearted 1950s comics that led to Senate Subcommittee censorship for homoerotic content, the POW! AWWK! Pop Art of Adam West's 1960s TV Batman, and the gaudy pantomime of Joel Schumacher's two 1990s *Batman* movies. (xii)

The question recognizes both the industry's attempts to retroactively manipulate a property older than current creators and audiences, and the drive to control the function and symbolism of a character relevant to a particular moment in time. Booker is arguing for a more complete picture of the iconic vigilante, recognizing the breadth of his representation throughout his media career.[96]

The scholarly quest for authoritative histories is tilting at windmills and attempting to establish an authoritative history can weaken scholarly analysis. This is not to argue that all Catwoman scholarship needs must examine all of the Catwoman oeuvre – the character has existed across media platforms for over eighty years, with future casting still promised by comics, films, and video games. Rather, this is to emphasize the importance of acknowledging selections, and the further recognition that not all Catwoman scholarship focuses on the same character signs and signals. For the purpose of this chapter, I am examining a collection of

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[96] The significance of the changes Batman has undergone can be illustrated by the question of violence within his representation. It is now commonly accepted that Batman has a strict "no killing" rule in managing and combatting his enemies, as he voices to Anne Hathaway's Selina Kyle in *The Dark Knight Rises*. "No guns, no killing," he growls at her as the pair is attacked by mercenaries. "Where's the fun in that?" she snaps back, forced to fight hand-to-hand, despite being grossly outnumbered. Audiences in 2012 accept this as standard Batman procedure, but original comics audiences would be confused; in 1939 Batman has far fewer compunctions over lethal violence, even gleefully asserting "A fitting end for his kind" when scientist and murderer Alfred Stryker falls into a vat of acid in "Detective Comics #27: The Case of the Chemical Syndicate" (*Batman: The Golden Age Omnibus* 17). There is no one Batman.

sartorial representations of Catwoman in the guise of her criminal uniform – how comics have fashioned the villainess as a product and a symbol, and how the narratives and character development are communicated by these sartorial definitions.

Broadly, this chapter analyzes the variance in Catwoman's costuming in comics, as a deviation from industry standards, before closely reading her material construction in contemporary film (*Batman Returns, Catwoman)*, arguing that film representations fashionably perform Catwoman's femme agency, while also dismantling femme agency as a signifier of intellectual instability. My primary source selections reflect the discursive preoccupations of this chapter: that of sartorial representation, and that of how this representation is related to gender, specifically the purposeful performance of a high-femme identity. Opening with Catwoman's uneasy beginnings, I look to several costumes from her pre-Code years to emphasize the instability of Catwoman's material representation, and the uncertainty creators demonstrate in fashioning a character they are taught to reject, and yet still desire. From there, I move to "The Purr-loined Pearl" from 1969, just two years after Catwoman's return to *Batman*, as a representative text that directly addresses fashion and ideal beauty as a construct of the Catwoman character. This theme is revisited by a woman artist and author in 2018 in Joëlle Jones' *Catwoman Vol. 1: Copycats*, which questions the depth of material fashioning, and the fragility of surface constructions of identity.

The fashioning of Catwoman reveals the cultural understanding of what it means to be a femme fatale - what a female villain can, should, and should not be. That Catwoman changes so frequently suggests a cultural insecurity with the representation of the villain, whose character is consistently stronger and more cunning than her face belies. Unlike her later colleague[97] Poison

[97] *Gotham City Sirens*

Ivy, Catwoman shows little concern with the valuation of the male gaze, even as she uses it to her criminal advantage: while Poison Ivy actively solicits the affirming praise of male audiences within the comics, Catwoman instead uses her beauty as a tool in her villainous skillset. This makes Catwoman's fashioning all the more curious and complicated. First created by Bob Kane and Bill Finger, the introduction of the Cat in 1940 was "an unusual story in a variety of ways. First, it was a Batman comic that featured a female character in a speaking role," an infrequent occurrence at a time when "women appeared in just 7 percent of the panels in the series' Batman stories." In describing their choice to associate their new sexy character with cats, Kane said that "Cats are cool, detached, and unreliable … cats are hard to understand, they are erratic, as women are." (qtd. Handley 10). What's more, "[a]side from Catwoman, the only regularly appearing female characters were Bruce's girlfriends. […] For Batman, women were just pawns he could use to portray Bruce Wayne as a carefree socialite and protect his alter ego. […] Until Catwoman, that is" (Hanley 12, 13). Indeed, until Catwoman, who not only physically and intellectually challenges the principle hero of the comic book, but manages to best him through the additional application of her allure. From the first she is not an accessory to Batman or Bruce Wayne, but an autonomous figure that captured the attention of both the Dark Knight and his audiences. And it's no mistake that this is represented as a threat: "You always need to keep women at arm's length. We [men] don't want anyone to take over our souls, and women have a habit of doing that" warns Bob Kane (qtd. Hanley 10).

Current comics runs beautifully demonstrate the gender coding of different creator demographics. As a writer for DC comics, Tom King, a former CIA operation officer in the Counterterrorism Center and current stay-at-home father to three children, is lately the author for a long run of *Batman* issues, and is notably responsible for the (almost) wedding of Batman and

Catwoman in the 2018 *Batman #50,* infamous among fans for not delivering the promised wedding, although the pair later share private vows. For a special *Catwoman 80th Anniversary* issue published on April 15 2020, King follows his romantic narrative between Batman and Catwoman with the story "Helena," illustrated by Mikel Janín, a former Spanish architect turned comic artist. The story opens with Batman and Catwoman discussing Catwoman's unexplained ailments; as she curses over the uncertainty and anxiety of her condition, Batman quietly smiles, and tells her "it's not cancer." Recognizing what his joy must mean – a pregnancy – Catwoman responds in horror. "No. Nonononononono. Absolutely not!"

Over the subsequent pages Catwoman continues to express her horror and fears over pregnancy and maternity, experiencing morning sickness in the middle of a violent conflict (to which Batman responds "I've got a Batbucket in the car"), asserting that she's "not a *mother.* [She's] a *thief.*" She is consistent in cursing her condition, vocalizing her rejection of motherhood, and yet King writes a performance of support as Batman holds Catwoman, and tells her she's brave when she eventually goes into labor. By this point in the story "Catwoman" and the catsuit has disappeared, replaced by pajamas and slippers, and accessorized with a crying infant in a Batman onesie.

Though the story ends with Catwoman cooing to the baby "My god, you're a cute little kitten," I would argue that the ending is not a happy one. Tom King, a self-identified stay-at-home father to two children, internalizes the romance of domesticity. While authorial biography does not necessarily dictate their cultural output, it can culturally ground their influence, and, perhaps subconsciously, motivations. For King, matrimony and maternity are the natural extensions of the 80-year romance of these two principle characters, but the conclusion King offers demonstrates the gender bias of this perception, and the detrimental impact of this

narrative. Through the course of her pregnancy and subsequent motherhood, Catwoman *disappears*. The story sloppily suggests that Catwoman and Batman share parental duties; after two panels centered on the screaming infant Selena leans into frame and sighs "You couldn't do this on your *father's* night? Just because he's in another dimension fighting deliriums with the Spectre, you have to be up every two minutes?" Significantly, Batman is not physically represented in the same space as the infant; in an allusion to separate spheres, he gets to leave the house and work towards his passion project of heroism. The story *shows* Catwoman in her disgruntled maternity, caring for a child that is literally branded with her father's sigil. In this moment Selena Kyle is not an autonomous person, but Batman's wife, and the mother of *his* child. The very existence of this child binds her and restricts her actions and identity; where before she would be out on the streets of Gotham, "climb[ing] and jump[ing] and [fall]ing" she is now trapped in domesticity. To King, this is a happy ending. For Catwoman, it is an erasure.

Fashioning the Cat-Woman

Throughout her comics history the *character* of Catwoman influences the development of her costumes, rather than relying on the costume for character development and exposition. That the uniform of a superhero comics character is intimately connected with their characterization has been a driving observation of this dissertation.[98] Brownie and Graydon go so far as to argue that "the superhero identity does not exist independently of the costume. In many ways, the costume *is* the superhero. This is evidenced in particular with costumes that change hands, leading to a superhero identity that is shared between several wearers of the costume" (29). As is

[98] The costume motif is so significant to the development of a super character that the design, and initial dressing, has become a prominent feature in superhero media, from Bruce Wayne asking Mr. Fox for a suit that allows him to turn his head (*Dark Knight,* 2008*),* to Spiderman's poorly-crafted first costume (*Spider-Man,* 2002), to Deadpool's comedic attempts to remove blood from a white tracksuit in a laundromat before "Blind Al" tells him "seltzer water and lemon for blood. Or wear red. Dumbass" (*Deadpool* 2016).

typical of their text, this argument is exceedingly reductive, but it nonetheless effectively speaks to the cultural expectations fostered by comics of the relationships between superheroes and villains, and their elected and purposeful performativity. As Brownie and Graydon quote Miller, "Dress is part of the expectations for behaviour that define a person's role within the social structure. Thus, dress … helps to define an individual's role within society" (34). In turn, contemporary fashion in Catwoman comics, both costume and civilian dress, is used to reflect the difference of the character within the comic books – she is a remarkable figure, and so she is remarkably dressed.

That the foundations that becomes Catwoman are laid before the introduction of the catsuit allows for an understanding of the character independent of costuming, and foreground her as a femme representation in a possible social landscape. Even after the Cat is assigned the first of several costumes by comics authors, the character maintains this awarishness, and her costume works to further emphasize the gender performativity that is foundational to the villainess's narrative and popular success. Here I argue that her femininity is first introduced as a viable threat, and actively utilized as a machination for criminal activity. In *Batman No. 1* the Cat is introduced as a jewel thief planning to relieve a wealthy woman of her extraordinarily expensive jeweled necklace, as the aging socialite Mrs. John Travers hosts a fete aboard a private yacht. Catwoman's introduction is entirely two-dimensional.[99] She is a pin-up figure, present to introduce feminine deviance, capture the eye of Batman, and tantalize readers with the image of a woman available for punishment. This promise of punishment is directly addressed in the comic, as Batman forcibly controls both the Cat and her representation; Batman's first words to Catwoman, ever, are "Quiet or papa spank!" as he violently scrubs the costume makeup from her

[99] Pun recognized but unintentional

face, to reveal "a beautiful young woman!" (*Catwoman: A Celebration of 75 Years* 21). Despite the elderly disguise Batman has just ripped away, the Cat, as she's first known, is given a portrait panel to herself, her dark hair perfectly coiffed, her breasts pointed and perky, and her waist slim in her green dress. When Batman searches her person for the missing necklace, she coolly offers him a slender ankle, flashing a shapely calf and white high heel, saying "What's the use – I know when I'm licked!" (21).

These four panels set the tone for Catwoman representation, and illustrate her narrative purpose within the property. The first panel is dominated by Batman's back as he asserts his masculine authority over the smaller woman, patronizingly threatening her as he forcibly removes the elderly disguise she has donned. That his actions reveal the "real" woman echoes the creation of Catwoman as a character – masculine creators author a preferable feminine figure (young, beautiful, and subjugated), who is then offered for the pleasure of that same power structure. In the second panel she is pinned, self-identified as "pretty," and perfectly represented despite having her costume makeup scrubbed from her face seconds before. The third panel continues the project by focusing on her flesh, the defining characteristics of her face lost as the illustration focuses on her leg, which stands for her whole in the fourth panel. Her fashioning reflects a masculine understanding of performative femininity, lacking a realist understanding of cosmetics, for example, and color-blocking her features in black hair, punchy dress, and pale skin. But the same authors who fashion the Cat as a pin-up also write her defiance. In her portrait panel the Cat does not cower from the masked vigilante, but stands confidently, owning both her beauty and her criminal actions. What a heteronormative masculine reader might see as a flashing of skin when the Cat offers Batman her ankle, another might read the suggestion of an inversion of power. Yes, Batman has apprehended the thief before she could abscond with the

necklace, but to retrieve the jewel he kneels at the Cat's feet while she sits relaxed in a chair. The actions do not connote struggle; there is implied consent as the Cat offers Batman her ankle, and a sensual charge as he focuses intently on her body. In this first representation the Cat is a reflection of cultural beauty standards – she is beautiful enough to tempt Batman from his fiancé – and an illustration of the power femmes hold if they are confident enough to challenge patriarchal heroes.

This initial meeting is strictly gendered within the social expectations of the time, but also demonstrates the deviance and danger that will come to define Catwoman. For her part, the Cat sees in Batman a potential ally, and attempts to seduce him to her side – literally. With her hands creeping around his neck she coos about a partnership, telling him "We'd make a great team! With you as my partner we…" (22). Batman soundly rejects her, ostensibly for his devotion to justice, but arguably for his own gendered performance. As an exemplary midcentury figure of masculinity, Batman's character could never assume a partnership with a femme figure; he must always remain the ultimate authority, both a strong arm and a tactical leader. This is not a preference for solitude – after all, Robin has been his companion since Detective Comics #38, just one year after Batman's own introduction in Detective comics #27. Nor, I argue, does Batman reject Catwoman from a place of strict morality – he does, after all, let her escape quite easily, saying "Fancy that!" in one panel, purposefully blocking Robin's pursuit in the next, and concluding the comic by reminiscing "Lovely girl! What eyes! … Maybe I'll bump into her again sometime…" (22). In these early narratives Batman has to remind himself of his girlfriend/fiancé Julie (*Catwoman* 22). Julie is a figure of normativity – a promise of a nuclear family. Though Wertham and his contemporaries seem eager to "ship"[100] Batman and

[100] To "ship" is to imagine two characters in a romantic relationship when no such relationship is represented in the primary source. The "shipping" of Batman and Robin continues to be a popular subject of "slash," fan fiction that

Robin as disguised homosexuals, the comics authors are equally eager to frame Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson in the context of suburban normality with the promise of a future wife and influential maternal figure. She is the calming influence on Batman's passion for Catwoman, reminding Batman of the necessary masculine performance of Bruce Wayne.

Batman himself has no compunctions over lusting after Catwoman, frequently positioning himself as her moral savior, attempting to bring the deviant femme figure back to the peaceful domesticity of law-abiding heteronormativity.[101] Catwoman consistently rejects these narratives. From the first she tempts Batman to join her criminal efforts, and scoffs at his offer of redemption. Catwoman is undoubtably attracted to Batman, but she is unique in that she privileges her independence, desires, and profession over a romantic relationship that comes with so many qualifiers. Catwoman is both attractive and successful, but she is not the "decent" woman that Wertham desires, for the very independence that leads to an empowered personal life and a successful criminal career. At times she does reform, only to continually return to her Catwoman identity, and thus independent agency. The final scene of "The Cat" from *Batman No. 1* serves as a perfect illustration of the danger of the comics femme: an intelligent, attractive, and successful woman flees the company of the masculine authority figure to maintain her independence from domestic and patriarchal institutions. Though she's drawn for a normative reproductive domestic role, hair curled and fashionably attired in a flattering key-hole dress, she's *characterized* by her investment in autonomy.

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queerly imagines intimate relationships between two characters of the same gender (most often two masculine characters).

[101] Though a popular and prominent member of the rogues gallery, Catwoman is largely a footnote in comics scholarship (as she is in Booker), or read through the lens of her romantic significance to Batman (Madrid).

Before the Catsuit

By *Batman # 3* of 1940, the villainess has a new name – The Cat-Woman – and a new look. Critical and popular narratives erroneously suggest a linear trajectory of Catwoman costuming that evolves to become the fashioning best known today.[102] The cover of *Catwoman: Nine Lives of a Feline Fatale* is purposefully misleading, as is the introduction by Michael Uslan. Representing the "nine lives" named by the title, the cover of the anthology features nine Catwomen arranged in an arc, posing suggestively and aggressively in iconic guises. The fashions selected are largely familiar, emphasizing the *cat* of the villain's moniker, five holding her whip, and all but one masked. Though they are not presented in chronological order, comics fans would likely be able to recognize an evolution throughout the illustrations, from the first un-masked cat-burglar through the black-lipped Selina Kyle of the 2000s. There's a continuity to the nine costumes selected by the collection's editors to represent the history of the Princess of Plunder; each trades directly on her normative sex appeal,[103] working within standard pinup fantasies. Her masks hide her civilian identity while maintaining her beauty signifiers: an hourglass figure (in proportions particularly favored at different times), heels, and dramatic

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[102] That is, the black catsuit, most often including a cat-eared cowl and/or cat-eyed goggles

[103] In his chapter "Glaring Fixations," Hanley analyzes the art of *Catwoman*'s Jim Balent, whose material representation of Catwoman is "somewhat at odds with the rest of the book. While the writing on *Catwoman* presented a clever, skilled, and complicated character, the art aimed for sexiness above all else" (136), Hanley acknowledges that "this style of art catered to a certain audience, primarily male," (138) and offers the practiced understanding of gendered exaggeration in comics, saying

> While it is true that both men and women are drawn unrealistically in superhero comics, this is done for different reasons. In the 1990s in particular superhero comics were a genre drawn, edited, and read primarily by men. Male heroes were drawn with exaggerated muscles in a reinforcement of male strength, as a sort of wish fulfillment for the male creators and readers. Meanwhile, female heroes were given exaggerated curves that objectified them and emphasized their sexual appeal. Basically, men were drawn to be strong and women were drawn to be hot, and those are not equal idealizations (Hanley 140).

Hanley's point is well-made, and significant to an understanding of Catwoman's representation and reception. However, I take issue with the argument that "sexiness" is "at odds" with a character who is "clever, skilled, and complicated," and argue that the strength of Catwoman's characterization is that she *is* all of these things – sexy included.

lipstick. Following the theme of the book, Uslan writes that "She's had no less than nine unique costumes over the decades … sort of a 'Barbie' meets 'Wonder Woman' gone bad" (4). Uslan's narrative is vapid, undercutting the significance of the character's appearance, and her changing fashions. Like the sweeping analysis of Brownie and Graydon, his introduction suggests that Catwoman *is* the costume, and that these nine represent a collectible set.

Neither, though, covers the breadth of the fashioning of the comics villainess, nor the significance of this breadth. The book's choices are purposeful: its intention is to profit from the continued representation of Catwoman as a sex icon, and a "feline fatale" – a look that is harder to pull off when the character in question is wearing an oversized cat mask resembling a high school mascot. Missing from this collage is this first uniform adopted by the villainess after her bare-faced collision with Batman in *Batman No 1*. By her second comics caper the Cat has become The Cat-Woman, with an identity-skewing-and-signifying look to suit: an oversized, full-head cat mask.

The dehumanization of the Cat-Woman is a striking departure from her first introduction. In *Batman No. 1*, the Cat uses stage makeup to don the disguise of an elderly woman, cleverly taking advantage of the privilege such a disguise would extend; as a seemingly infirm white woman of advanced years, she is unlikely to be suspected of a crime, and further unlikely to have her person searched in pursuit of the missing necklace. There is a particular bodily autonomy that accepts the gendered performance of the actual woman and adopts the social space of another. Once her identity is revealed, the Cat exercises the power still afforded to her by her normative physique, flirting her way to freedom. The same superhero who sends a man falling into a vat of acid to die (*Detective Comics No. 27*), strangles henchman (*Detective Comics No. 29, No. 34*), shoots a vampire woman with a silver bullet (*Detective Comics No. 31),* and hangs a man who

was the victim of Dr. Strange's experimentation[104] (*Batman No. 1) ,* lets a jewel thief escape while complimenting her appearance. Simply, he lets her go because she's pretty. The Cat-Woman, however, is a monstrous disguise.

Writes Frueh, "The monster's purpose has been to show and be shown. *Monster* derives from the Latin *monstrare*, 'to show'; and within the Western tradition, monsters are meant to be shown as warnings that visibly reveal unreason" (26). The mask of the Cat-Woman demonstrates just this: her mascot-like disguise functions to draw attention and create a character, as much as it "masks" the identity of the wearer. The mask works to build an ethos, attributing an otherworldliness – or simply otherness – that casts the Cat-Woman as more of a villain of the ilk found in comics, rather than the transient burglars that pass through *Batman* with little to distinguish them. But as it builds an identity, it also serves to dehumanize the woman of the previous issue by completely removing her head. She is here an almost Grecian figure with the head of an animal and the voluptuous body of a woman, shown to full advantage in a physics-defying skirt and pointed heels. In place of the portrait offered by the previous issue, "The Batman vs. The Cat-Woman" invites readers to linger over her body. In this frame a flashing red cape is used to sever a monstrous cat's head from a shapely feminine body, drawing attention to the discord between the absurd and the seductive. The red of the cape is visually violent, bifurcating the figure in an attempt to direct the readers' attention to her masked snarl, as the yellow of her dress coordinates closely with her Caucasian skin tone, suggesting that the woman is made of the materiality of her representation – that dress and body are one commercial object. In fierce motion, her frame is twisted to make sure each panel shows her figure in perfectly poised pinup silhouette. Though static illustrations throughout the issue suggest her dress is

[104] In this storyline Dr. Strange experiments on escaped mental patients, injecting them with a fluid that "speeds up the grown glands" to turn them into giant, mindless henchmen (*Batman: The Golden Age* 165).

appropriately knee-length, as would be expected in the 1940s, in movement the dress swirls up past her mid-thigh, flashing the garter and the shapely calves earned by constant and consistent heel wearing. Though she is a "pretty girl" before, she is now a pin-up – and a monster/beauty.

Cat-woman's representation throughout the 1940s is consistently inconsistent, her professional costume changing with each issue after being introduced in "The Batman vs. The Catwoman!" through *Batman No 35* (1946). Her first three costumed appearances all utilize the disfiguring cat mask, although the style and cut of her dress changes nearly every time – first in an orange dress, then a black military style dress, followed by a green structured dress of the same style, and then back to the black structured dress and purple cape. This inconsistency suggests that comics author Bill Finger and artist Bob Kane[105] didn't know what to do with her; they are as fascinated as Batman himself, and equally incapable of making up their minds as to her character. Though captivating as an idea, her limited fashioning betrays creators who are (or are writing for an audience who are) purposefully divorced from the minutia of women's fashion, knowing only what traditionally registers to a male gaze: the flash of a thigh from strong movements, or the dip of a daring neckline. As often as she appears in her mask, she appears more often without it, and is even shown dressing and undressing in her professional costume. With inconsistent stories, including numerous names, professions, and varying levels of interest in Batman himself, what is most alluring about Cat-woman is her femininity; what the comics can't decide is what motivates her or fits her.

[105] Bob Kane's claims to original creative development of *Batman* characters is notoriously murky. Hanley goes so far as to say "In short, Bob Kane was a liar and a fraud, and his discussion of the creation of Catwoman should be viewed with a very critical eye" (8).

More Than Skin Deep: Pale Copies of the Catwoman

Character motivation is a pivotal point of analysis in Catwoman scholarship, as it has the power to shift the perfect beauty of patriarchal development to a monster/beauty who is "insistently and defiantly fabricated" (Frueh 12). In her reading of the pin-up, Buszek recognizes that "The most obvious problem with representing sexuality is the fact that sexualized representations of women have – like female sexuality itself – historically been used to limit women's growth and opportunities as nonsexual beings" (13). But as Frueh argues, "[t]he pinup is an image of dual pleasure in its function of subject/object: the pinup's attractiveness gives pleasure to the viewer; and especially in recent feminist reclamations of the pinup, but also in earlier twentieth-century 'proto-feminist' images, the pinup's self-confident allure signals pleasure in herself" (90). It is not a misreading of history to say that women's sexuality, and expressed sensuality, has been used to constrain women, but feminist scholarship on Catwoman does not need to perpetuate this constraint in order to forward the agency of women represented in comics. Frueh writes that "Individual monster/beauties do turn themselves into objects of pleasure, for both themselves and others. But monster/beauty is not solely a decorative or sex object, as ideal beauty tends to be. Monster/beauty does not stop at being a pretty picture..." (12). According to Frueh, the monster/beauty is not the victim of sexuality, but the owner and actor of it, who in that action finds fulfillment and strength. In this section I will read two representations of Catwoman with parallel narratives, published in 1969 and 2018, and argue that both forward the power of self-creation, and the strength available to active femme identities. The principle narrative of these comics is a question of mimicry, and whether or not Catwoman is a powerful individual, or a flashy costume adoptable by anyone. The 1969 comic "The Case of the Purr-loined Pearl" engages directly with popular perceptions of femme beauty regimes, trivializing

the femme construction of the self by suggesting that surfaces are easy to replicate, and thus femme performances are shallow masks used in deceit rather than as expressions of autonomy. The comic further dehumanizes femmes by suggesting that they are similarly easily interchangeable. This section challenges this construction and attempts a feminist reclamation by considering the Catwomen as objects of their time, and argues that the standards to which women are held are problematic, rather than the femme's choice to assert her performative identity.

There is in Catwoman analyses a sense of anxiety over the character's complex representation: feminist readings, such as this, identify the character as a challenge to patriarchal authority and defender of women's autonomy, and yet Catwoman was long a character written and drawn by men, who built her representation on increasingly shallow stereotypes, depicting her as jealous, and critical of other women. Whaley's writing on Catwoman eloquently demonstrates the anxiety when she writes:

> Catwoman expressed jealousy in the comic book and television show toward Batman's and Robin's collaborator Batgirl, which was irrational and antithetical to mature feminist sensibilities. However, her consistent critique of Batgirl was also telling in the larger context of gender relations. Batgirl, in Catwoman's eyes, was a sidekick reliant upon Batman and Robin for her identity and actions. Catwoman on the other hand was a salacious, stealthy, and quick moving feline that acted not on the prescriptions of others, but rather, as she pleased to act. (8)

Whaley's reading exposes the tension of historical representations of deviant and normative gender characterization – what audiences expect from good characters (Batgirl) and what they expect from bad characters (Catwoman). The parallelism of her reading illustrates the possibility

of feminist reclamation of sexist stereotyping and representation. Whaley acknowledges the shortcomings in the 1960s television representation of Catwoman as a standard shrewish figure, her sharp-tongued dismissal of her heroic foil (Batgirl), a sexist perpetuation of the stereotype of unfounded feminine jealousy. But Whaley's analysis of the character reveals deeper readings of this same interpersonal conflict, as she suggests that Catwoman's jealousy is actually an unfocused signal of her rejection of Batgirl's dependency on patriarchal systems for her power and identity. This is borne out by accounts and histories given by Batgirl actress Yvonne Craig, as Carolyn Cocca writes in *Superwomen: Gender, Power, and Representation*. The character of Batgirl, according to Craig, is purposefully and explicitly written to demonstrate passive femininity, providing a heroic role model for the instruction of viewers in appropriate gender roles. The actress recounts:

> [Producer Howie Horwitz] … had a wife and three daughters, and he wanted them all to be very feminine. So, he specifically said that Batgirl was not to do any karate, kung fu, any sort of martial arts-type stuff. That wasn't ladylike to him. I was allowed to kick the bad guys in a sort of high-kick ballet manner … or spin into them, but I was supposed to be able to sneak out of their grasp before any punches were thrown. (qtd. in Cocca 60)

Even in her telling Yvonne Craig demonstrates the reliance of femmes on patriarchal gender boundaries for definition. She moves from descriptions of "Batgirl" to personal pronouns, "I," in describing what she *and* Batgirl are "allowed" to do. Just as her character, Craig's movements are limited by expectations of normative femininity – the very restrictions which the character of Catwoman challenges.[106] These accounts reveal the social expectations of both good women and

[106] Batgirl's stereotypical femininity is both an asset and a weakness, as discussed in *Superwomen*. On one hand, Cocca writes, Batgirl's sexist framing demonstrates her unsuitability for heroic conflict when she stops "in the

bad women – role models (Batgirl) and warnings (Catwoman), as show creators develop criminal femininity. In Whaley's analysis, supported by Craig's accounts, Batgirl is the stifled "ideal beauty," while Catwoman continues as the self-aware "monster/beauty." But despite the authorial intentions communicated by Craig, Whaley's feminist reading reverses the script, and reclaims Catwoman as an admirable figure who thwarts the efforts of men both within the show and producing it by maintaining her own critical capacity.

While Batgirl's use of femininity is opportunistic on the part of her creators, Catwoman's manipulation of gender purposefully and directly utilizes the skills and opportunities superficially available to beautiful women in a sexist system. This is clearly demonstrated by the 1969 comic "The Case of the Purr-Loined Pearl!" from *Batman No. 120*. In the narrative of the comic Catwoman lures eight recently paroled women[107] convicts to "Selina's Slenderizing Salon, Gotham City," sending them each a letter that says "You have been selected out of thousands to enjoy the beautifying benefits of our crash-course in slenderizing … slveltifying … and stupefying! You have been a *loser* up to now, but *now* you can be a '*winner'*! Free!" (*Catwoman: Nine Lives* 99). Once collected in her salon, Catwoman urges them to join her to

middle of a fight when her 'headpiece' gets misaligned, and 'as any girl would' she stops to straighten it" (61). But, like Catwoman, Batgirl is also aware of the gaze directed upon her, and uses it to her advantage when she tears her "tights deliberately – to give [her] an excuse for showing off [her] legs and distracting those crooks!" When Batman says to her "You see, Batgirl? That was one time where you turned a feminine trait to your advantage" she thinks to herself "The fact that my feminine weakness betrayed me so often in the past – I just had to prove it has its strong points too!" (Cocca 61). Cocca says that "[Batgirl's] 'feminine weakness' or complete lack of ability to turn any 'feminine trait' to her advantage do not seem to have been in evidence when she fought alongside Batman and Robin before this point either in comics or on TV. Fox's story, its language, and its assumptions are indicative of a 'traditional' 1960s view of womanhood and femininity, and manhood and masculinity, that many took for granted and that the Second Wave of feminism had just begun to challenge" (61). Because, "[j]ust as nineteenth-century masculinists feared manly women and the unsexing of women achieved through means that included purposive exercise and art making, so today women and men, many feminists included, derogate female bodybuilders for looking like men" (Frueh 77), Batgirl is relegated by social expectations to manipulation in the fighting of crime. Though Batman suggests this is a weakness, and makes Batgirl lesser, the success of her actions belie the critique and instead suggest that the sexism of the narrative is the true weakness, allowing Batgirl to achieve her goals through the resources available to her in a limited narrative framework: "it is men's [instinct] to look at female legs even if it results in going to jail" (Cocca 61).

[107] The comic names them in classically-cartoon fashion: Light Laura, Florid Flo, Big Barbara, Sultry Sarah, Timid Trixie, Leaping Lena. Two are left unnamed.

fight “a common enemy … men!” (104). The women, for their part, aren’t enticed by her proposal. One convict asserts that she likes men, while the rest question Catwoman’s credentials and the advantage her methods would allow them. A physical altercation follows, with the eight women individually charging Catwoman, only to be overcome and forced into weight-reduction equipment iconic to the 1960s.

The plot of the comic relies on two key gendered stereotypes: first, that a woman’s success is predicated on her physical appearance, and second that a man is incapable of distinguishing between women who present similar physical features.[108] Building on these sexist premises, the comic asserts that Catwoman’s promise of “fighting trim” is *only* trim, suggesting that her success as a villain is due to her appearance as a beautiful white woman, and that her “tricks” are rooted in her beauty regime rather than training in the acrobatics and martial arts she performs (104). The text equates beauty with body type and prioritizes the smallest frame as the most desirable, and therefore fashionably successful. Six frames of the comics show six of the eight individual parolees being forced into trendy and ineffective slimming contraptions, each expressing horror at their predicaments (*Catwoman: Nine Lives*, 107-8). The comic forces these women to alter their bodies through aggressive and violent weight loss routines, for the singular purpose of fitting into Catwoman’s leotards, as opposed to less-intrusively tailoring costumes to fit individual bodies. The argument that the latter may be less effective as a disguise is of little consequence when the comic makes no effort to address variety in height. Its primary concern is not actually the subterfuge of Catwoman’s plot, but in deriding the beauty regimes femmes employ to “lie” to or “trick” men, as Catwoman and her cohorts vocally assert their intentions.

[108] I.e. Men being incapable of telling feminine garments from one another (those shoes look exactly the same) and thus one woman from another.

This is a complicated moment, when Catwoman forcibly makes the other women into her own image. Catwoman has kidnapped these parolees, who independently reject her offer of criminal partnership, and takes control of their physical bodies. She forces the women to undergo a series of uncomfortable and unpleasant procedures in order to strip them of their individual material performances, and make them over into her own "ideal" image. Her actions suggest that these women are lacking and inferior, and that her own beauty is a performance that takes extraordinary external interventions to achieve. Catwoman here is acting directly as the beauty industry acts subliminally – she is telling the women they are not physically good enough, and need to change for their own success. Contemporary to the tension between Catwoman and Batgirl in the Adam West television show, the narrative is one of force and conflict rather than willing collaboration, and enforces normative beauty standards that suggest each of these women, though normatively pretty in their own rights, are not beautiful *enough* to represent Catwoman. But she is, at the end of the day, a villain – she's not trying to be an example of righteousness or goodness. And like Whaley, I propose that this treatment of all nine women is reflective of the sexist cultural moment in which the text is composed, but that a contemporary reading allows one to identify a critique of the standards that binds these characters.

The weight-loss routines in the comic are striking, but also fleeting. After just nine days pass in the gutter of the comic, each individual parolee emerges as a perfect replica of the petite Catwoman, now mirroring not just her thin physique, but also height, hair, visible facial features, and athleticism. Despite their earlier objections to both Catwoman's leadership, and her proposed "Battle of the Sexes," they emerge from their forced makeovers as united in purpose as they are in appearance, now recognizing the potential that Catwoman's performativity offers.

The comic creators attempt to criticize feminist calls for autonomy and individual expression in their illustration of the women. The artists of the comic literally illustrate the women as identical, and the audience is then placed in the position of Batman and law enforcement, who are incapable of telling one woman from another. This is an attempt to affirm both the success of beauty, and the meaninglessness of individual aesthetic choices: if a woman can so easily become another through diet and cosmetics, is she an individual at all? But the answer is "yes": the women themselves still recognize each other as individuals, calling each other by their names without confusion, and working as a team. Significant in the narrative is their active ability to function as the same character, magnified, exhibiting not just Catwoman's aesthetics but the athletic bodily control essential to her criminal success. From the moment they emerge masked in the guise of Catwoman they are shown in action, springing and clawing, scaling walls and acrobatically disarming not just police officers, but Batman and Robin themselves.

When adopted by a femme author and artist, a similar story of replication takes on a different tone, signaling the importance of the individual and the dangers that arise when Catwoman is reduced to a costume. Forty-nine years after "The Purr-Loined Pearl," Joëlle Jones's *Catwoman: Copycat,* considers how an ease of replication can be used against a uniquely signified femme– how being too closely aligned with particular signs can be manipulated. The book opens with a full-page illustration of Catwoman firing a gun at oncoming police officers, murdering one as another runs up behind him. Her identity is communicated by action and costume: the subject uses her trademark whip as a rope to anchor herself to a high-rise sign, clothed from head to toe in a black catsuit with a cat cowl covering her hair and goggles covering her eyes. Though more utilitarian than earlier costumes, and more aggressive than the purple

Balent pinup ensemble, the catsuit is recognizable as the costume now favored by the thief-turned-antihero. What is unfamiliar are her actions, as the modern iteration of Catwoman is not one known for murdering police.

The frames that follow tell three simultaneous stories. The first is one of Catwoman and violence, as the figure runs from police, who are in turn pursued and attacked by a man in a suit. The second is a story of Selina Kyle, elegantly and confidently dressed in a stylish cocktail dress, seated at a gambling table. The third is an interview featuring a mature blonde woman (later named as Raina Creel) and her governor husband, as she discusses the public scrutiny of her life since his election. By the fifth page the narratives begin to meld, as police attempt to arrest "Selina Kyle," for "larceny, evading arrest, and two counts of murder of police officers in the line of duty!" adding "We know about your alias, 'Catwoman,' and have overwhelming evidence…" (Jones). The narratives come full circle when Mrs. Creel removes her blonde wig, blue contacts, false teeth, and prosthetic nose to reveal her natural face, and tells "Catwoman" to "take that stupid mask off!" An unfamiliar woman says "Yes … Mrs. Creel" as she removes her cat-cowl (10-12). That the doppelgänger is revealed to be a Black woman is intended to serve as an immediate visual cue that she couldn't be the real Catwoman, perhaps intended as a reflection on the racial history of the character, but problematically asserting a "rightness" and "wrongness" of racial identity. The racial identity of Catwoman through her 80+ years of representation is more ambiguous, as comics most commonly code her as white or white-passing, asserting racial standards of beauty. Though actress Eartha Kitt successfully and iconically portrayed Catwoman in Lorenzo Semple Jr. and William Dozier's 1960s *Batman* television show, it is notable that the role is more often cast as white. As part of her exploration of race and sexuality, and the problem of the "postracial fantasy" of the 2004 film *Catwoman,*

Whaley turns to "avid readers of the contemporary *Catwoman* series on DC Comics' Catwoman message boards," where she "asked readers if they felt the ethnicity of the character mattered …" (16). She reports that "For readers, Catwoman was either a mixture of Latino, Irish, and Italian, or possibly Egyptian (African) ancestry. Several responses reflect a consciousness concerning the need for comic book characters of colour" (Whaley 18). In 2017 Hanley writes that "*Catwoman* #81 … made her Latina roots clear, if somewhat stereotypically" (135). But regardless of Catwoman's canonical identity, these frames affirm the significance of being white or white-passing to Catwoman's success, and the continued abuse of women of color by white women, as illustrated by Mrs. Creel.

With this, what appeared to be the story of two women become the story of three, and how femmes actively and purposefully use artifacts of material fashion to construct narratives of self, aware of how those artifacts are read by a secondary audience. Mrs. Creel understands both that her false face is read more sympathetically than her natural visage, and that the police will quickly read a femme body in a catsuit *as* Catwoman. As with Raina Creel's public face, the Catwoman costume is used as a tool within *Copycats*, challenging performed identity versus perceived identity.

The parallel between Creel's face and Catwoman's costume speaks to the monstrous identified by J. Halberstam in *Skin Shows.* In reading gothic figures Dorian Gray and Mr. Hyde, Halberstam argues that "disguise becomes equivalent to self in a way that confuses the model of subjectivity that each other maps" and observes that "in each the hidden self subverts the notion of an authentic self and makes subjectivity a surface effect" (64). This speaks to the confusion between subject and surface, which Halberstam calls monstrous, where the surface of the subject lies about the character within. He remarks that "the important difference between disguise or

illusion … lies perhaps in their conceptions of what lies beneath the costume," suggesting that the performative intentions of the character beneath the surface is what differentiates a self-hiding disguise from the lie about character quality of an illusion (64). To that end, Halberstam writes that "Hyde is precisely the base costume, the foundation for Jekyll" revealed by a figurative chemical peel that "exposes what lay hidden" while Dorian's "portrait is all surface, but it gives the illusion of depth once it has begun to record the rotting of Dorian's soul" (64).[109] In the context of the present panels, Mrs. Creel's public face is an illusion of ill-intent, as she utilizes a performance of gentility and passive femininity not unlike the way Dorian Gray used his youth and beauty to manipulate the people around him, and Dr. Jekyll hid his ambiguous morality under the excuse of Mr. Hyde. Catwoman's costume, when worn by Mrs. Creel's henchwoman, is a similar illusion, as its intention is not to disguise the identity of the wearer, but to signal a very specific identity to observers – Catwoman's. It's a purposeful sartorial lie.

When a costume is meant to indicate an identity rather than disguise one's identity, the function of the disguise is not illusion: it defines and asserts, completing a performance. As is the case from the 1940 introduction of the villain, Catwoman's identity as Selina Kyle is known to police and vigilantes alike in *Copycats*, and offers neither the protection of anonymity nor an illusion of separate identity. Instead, the catsuit is an artifact which speaks to the complexity of a femme's movements in society, and the manipulations she must perform to secure and preserve her autonomy. When she leaves Gotham, and her nighttime escapades with Batman, prior to *Copycat,* she likewise leaves her Catwoman costume behind. But when she's faced with her

[109] Raina Creel is her own Dorian-portrait, able to move between pictured perfection and the physical consequences of the life she's lived. Her deformities are attributed to excessive drug use and overly enthusiastic plastic surgery. I am not certain what conclusions to draw on this revelation. On one hand, it can be read as an inditement of a femme's agency in pursing self-creation, and thus an upholding of patriarchal values that suggest women must *be* beautiful while striving to appear *natural*. On the other hand, Creel may be the failure of Frueh's "ideal beauty," physically demonstrating the consequences of society's consumption of femmes.

doppelganger, she chooses to investigate in the guise of Catwoman, rather than Selina Kyle. As she demonstrates when she evades police at the beginning of the book, cocktail-dressed Kyle possesses the same strength and acrobatic grace regardless of her attire, clearly indicating that this is a *choice* rather than an occupational necessity. She is motivated to investigate because her identity has been stolen, and like other victims of identity theft, she runs the risk of being held responsible for actions that are not her own. The catsuit becomes a signifier of her monster/beauty – that which she wears when her actions are performed for herself rather than at the direction of society.[111]

What she finds in her investigation is not the coordinated team attempted in 1969, but a collection of empty shells hired to *look* like Catwoman, without actually *being* Catwoman. The women she encounters are far more diverse than that of '69, racially and physically, suggesting they are hired for the existence of their secondary sex characteristics rather than a more individual resemblance to Selina Kyle. The only unifying factor between the false Catwomen is their costumes. Unlike the earlier comic, no attempt is made to fashion the Catwomen on the body of the other: instead, the costume is intended to do all the work of identity signaling – and apparently has, as the opening conflict suggests. But in frame after frame Catwoman demonstrates that she is more than her surface, and that her identity is as performative as it is material. She breaks noses and arms, whips weapons out of hands, and leaves the entire mass

[111] This is contrary to Lesa Syn's article "Catwoman's Hyde: A Comparative Reading of the 2002 *Catwoman* Relaunch and Stevenson's Novella," in which Syn argues "advocates that the comic character of Catwoman is a comic incarnation of Robert Louis Stevenson's Edward Hyde," agreeing with S. Beatty, who erroneously suggests that "Aside from a few friends and lovers, Selina and Catwoman are two different women moving in different worlds. And that suits them both just fine" (Syn 3). However, I assert that rather than a separate identity, "Catwoman" functions more as a job title. But just as an off-duty physician is likely to respond to someone in need, even out of his lab coat, Catwoman's costume is not required for her work. To argue that Catwoman is a separate character from Selina Kyle, Syn reads figurative language literally, all the while failing to address the direct connection between Selina Kyle and Catwoman for the majority of her history, and enforces normative gender roles upon a complex an autonomous figure. [this note can use some fine-tuning for clarity.

groaning and incapacitated. She picks one to interrogate, and the exchange reveals that the copycats are not adopting the Catwoman identity to suit their own criminal goals, but actresses hired to look the part. Their failure demonstrates the significance of *self*-fashioning on the part of the autonomous femme, whose strength is her awareishness of her own strengths, while likewise disproving Brownie and Graydon's assertion that the costume is the superhero. Though dressed as a powerful femme, the copycats lack femme agency because the performance is not of their creation. They lack the awareishness of the original character, that makes her a successful monster/beauty capable of utilizing her femininity for her own gains and pleasures. Though the contemporary comic is less lighthearted and frivolous than earlier narratives, this remains an essential characteristic of the success of Catwoman. Selina Kyle is a powerful femme because she is self-aware, and self-authored, beautiful, and white.[112]

The conclusion of the book shows Catwoman in her costume, more femme than that copied by Creel's cronies: she wears heeled boots to their combat boots, a bolero which allows for a risqué and battle-risky flash of skin over a halter-neck catsuit, a cincher supporting her waist without distorting her silhouette, and clawed half-gloves tip her fingers. She smirks, as she looks over her shoulder, and the book closes as she says "I realize that I never really minded being uncomfortable. I exist when I don't sleep." Creel's attempts to subvert the Catwoman identity and delegitimize Catwoman's ethos through replication has had the contrary effect, affirming Catwoman's individuality and demonstrating that her strengths are greater than the appeal of her figure. As a character of unstable comics representation, this comic demonstrates that Catwoman is a collection of traits and not just a catsuit; where the 1969 comic, and Creel, dehumanize the Catwoman identity through surface material replication, Catwoman herself

[112] Figuratively speaking, as Catwoman is a fictional character not capable of authoring herself

reasserts her individual humanity and agency by demonstrating the performance is enhanced by, rather than performed exclusively by, her fashionable performance. Catwoman lives in both her costume and her skin, as a self-authored figure.

Filmed Fashion

While comics fans are likely to be familiar with several iterations of Catwoman/Selina Kyle, the character has reached greater audiences – and critics – with her introduction to television and film, which is where I move next in my analysis of feminine agency in the representations of Catwoman. Like other popular media characters, Catwoman becomes inter-textual with her inclusion in the 1960s *Batman* television show, and subsequent fan investment in the figure prompts subsequent appearances in film and television. Like the popular character James Bond, who is introduced in a novel but made a household name by generations of films, Catwoman "has been produced in the constantly changing relations between a wide range of texts brought into association with one another," comics, television, and film narratives each speaking, and contributing to the oeuvre, that is Catwoman (Bennet and Wollacott 45). And like Bond, Catwoman becomes "the signifier which they have jointly constructed" so that each of these media texts are connected "into a related set in spite of their manifold differences in other respects," as Bennet and Wollacott argue in *Bond and Beyond* (45). Their analysis of Agent 007 lays the groundwork for comparative analyses of other multimodal characters, like Catwoman.

Like James Bond, Catwoman is a textual idea created not just in one medium or another, but across cultural products that each contribute to an understanding of the whole. On the small screen Eartha Kitt's Catwoman performances helped bring the character out of retirement and back to popularity in the 1960s,[113] but Michelle Pfeiffer's sensual performance as Catwoman in

[113] See Whaley for a thoughtful analysis of the significance of Kitt's performance.

Tim Burton's 1994 *Batman Returns* angered parents and excited scholars, just as her midcentury comics predecessor. Responding to 1997 criticisms against Pfeiffer's representation as being overly-sexualized and anti-feminist, I argue in this section that the costuming and characterization of Pfeiffer's Catwoman illustrate agency and awarishness as a character who finds strength in self-construction and the rejection of patriarchally-enforced romance and juvenilia.

In 1997 Priscilla L. Walton and Michael Dorland publish "A Slippage of Masks: Dis-Guising Catwoman in 'Batman Returns,'" in response to the costuming of and narratives around Michelle Pfeiffer's and Tim Burton's representation of Catwoman in the popular film. Walton and Dorland argue that "Burton's film does indeed 'skin the cat' by reinforcing masculinist constructions of female animal magnetism, at the same time that … it provides for a revision of women's victimization" and that the film "works to reposit woman in her traditional role as help-mate of man," (94, 98). Walton and Dorland observe that Selina Kyle is "complex to the extent that she embodies a sophisticated negotiation of women's bodily politics" and argues that "the power that woman is granted, here, serves primarily to perpetuate feminine stereotypes" (99). While I agree with the authors that much of the characterization of Pfieffer's Catwoman, like the Catwomen before her, perpetuates feminine stereotypes, Walton and Dorland's analysis oversimplifies the characterization of Selina Kyle's actions and motivations, to frame her feminine stereotypes critically within the article. Their article is an illustration of feminist analyses which discount the representation of femme aesthetics and sensuality as performing exclusively for the male gaze, and without individual agency. Such an analysis continues the puritanical project of sexual oppression by denying femme agency in sensual expression, and upholding notions of gendered gazes. Though Walton and Dorland criticize Catwoman for

"den[ying] that space to other women,"[114] they themselves deny the agency Catwoman aggressively and confidently performs. Walton and Dorland, in their reading, are continuing the project of vilifying femininity – a patriarchal perspective that is responsible for Catwoman's threat from the beginning.

Batman Returns, Catwoman, and Walton and Dorland's article pay particular attention to the catalyst of the Catsuit, and what it represents to characters and audiences. Like superhero origin stories, the initial donning of the Catwoman costume is a pivotal moment for the antihero/villain, and both its procurement and aesthetics are significant in the feminist project of Catwoman. In *Batman Returns,* the construction of Selina Kyle's catsuit is integral to her developing and evolving character, and is illustrated in the ascension of her narrative arc. At the beginning of the film, the audience sees Selina Kyle as a beleaguered and much-abused secretary of Max Shreck.[115] While Walton and Dorland describe Kyle's business-wear as "drab," (99) I read her sartorial choices as conservative, but not without attraction. Pfieffer is first seen in a skirt suit that is perfectly tailored to her slim and feminine frame, albeit in a subtle earth tone that conveys modesty rather than sex appeal. It is serviceable, but not frumpy. The cut and style communicate an attractive appearance without much self-assurance, and perform the romantic

[114] This critique deserves direct address. Walton looks specifically at a moment when the newly-fashioned Catwoman thwarts an attempted rape in an alley of Gotham City. She engages the rapist with witty banter that serves to flip the narrative, giving her control: as he would attack and adopt primary power, Catwoman purrs "Be gentle, it's my first time." He is ineffectual, and Catwoman grids his face with her claws. Walton's dissatisfaction is in Catwoman's subsequent treatment of the assault victim, to whom she says "You make it so easy, don't you? Always waiting for some Batman to save you. I am Catwoman – hear me roar." It is to this that Walton says Catwoman denies space to other women, but the scene suggests that Catwoman is not speaking to the other as a separate figure, but as a reflection of her past self. Early in the film, Selina Kyle is attacked by a member of the Red Triangle Gang, and is saved by Batman, who rebuffs her attempts at thanks and conversation. Now in a position of power to do the saving, she's telling herself that she need not wait for another. She's discovered that being a damsel in distress is unfulfilling and unromantic, and she would rather roar. This projection does not consider the humanity of the unnamed woman in the alley, and is therefore unfortunate, but Kyle is allowed a moment to speak to herself and affirm her new agency.

[115] In his own first representation Max forgets his Christmas speech, and turns to his son to say "remind me to take this out on my secretary."

longing the character vocally describes in her own apartment; she is someone who is intimately fixated on the fact that she is unmarried, and believes she should be. It is a suit of waiting, suggesting what is possible without the confidence to actively perform an assertive role. It is in this suit, and this role, that Kyle first dies.

Though Shreck dismisses his secretary as incompetent, Pfeiffer's Selina Kyle is intelligent and industrious, which leads directly to her murder at the hands of her corrupt boss. On the evening of her death, Kyle returns to the office after business hours to prepare files for Shreck's next-day investment meeting with Bruce Wayne. She pulls not only the readily-available proposals prepared for the meeting, but the locked files Shreck has hidden, easily cracking his security code. There she discovers his plans to syphon energy from Gotham City. Shreck returns to his office to find Kyle and the files, and though she initially tries to pacify his anger at her discovery, she resolutely confronts him, saying "Bully me if it makes you feel big. It's not like you can just kill me," at which point Shreck pushes her out of a high window, sending Kyle to plummet to her death. As she lies discarded in a snowy alley cats swarm her prone form, one even chewing on her bloodied finger, until Kyle's eyes snap open. The introduction of mysticism is one means through which Burton's film attempts to challenge the power of Catwoman as articulated through the comics. In comics she is human, and exceptional for her actions and strengths. In the film she is exceptional for the magic that has brought her back to life, and arguably given her the physical prowess of her feline companions. She's become a thing of mythology, complete with nine lives.

Though comics audiences can readily predict the outcome of her revival, the film does not immediately imbue Kyle with power and agency. As before, Kyle returns home from the

office, calling out to a nonexistent partner only to remind herself that she's not married.[116] As before, Kyle pours milk for her cat, and turns to her answering machine to listen to nagging messages from an over-bearing mother, and an ad for perfume, echoing that which played in her earlier domestic tableau. Following her assault the ad enrages Kyle, who responds with significant physical violence. Walton and Dorland read the scene dismissively, saying that it "signals her transformation into beauty *and* the beast," focusing on the fact that "Kyle goes 'wild'" at the seemingly benign message (100). But the message is *not* benign, and Kyle's rage is not wild, but purposeful and directed. The voicemail that triggers the episode is one that directly challenges Kyle's long-held romantic beliefs, and reveals the abuse in the system in which she participated. It purrs "one whiff of this at the office and your boss will be asking you to stay after work for a candlelight staff meeting for two" adding that the perfume is "available at Shreck's Department Store." The ad copy recycles the cliché of an office tryst through which the feminine partner can achieve fulfillment in marriage, presumably one that allows her to stop working, but Shreck is her boss *and* the figure selling the perfume – and is also the man who just pushed Kyle from a literal precipice. Kyle's anger at the ad emphasizes the imbalance of power, and her recent disillusionment – her boss is not one to woo her, but rather one to kill her. This functionally shatters the romance of conventional marriage plots, which inspires Kyle to target romantic symbols in her apartment. What Walton describes as "wild" is the targeted destruction of romantic symbols – she shoves juvenile locum in her garbage disposal, smashes romantic pictures with a skillet, and destroys trinkets associated with an infantilized feminine identity. She blackens her pink apartment walls with spray paint, and sweeps her dollhouse off of her desk.

[116] "Honey, I'm home!"

And then she stitches her catsuit. This is a moment of personal and material growth and development for Selina Kyle, similar to the self-authoring witnessed in superhero media, when protagonists first put on their "super suits" and become purposefully and powerfully *other,* outside of dominant cultural constraints.[117] The personal physical production of one's clothing is an uniquely intimate act, as it allows the maker complete autonomous control over the designs and symbols that will decorate their body. In self-making, the character is given the symbolic power of self-creation, rather than manipulating the material texts of others to negotiate a representation of the self; in making her own suit Kyle is freed from the commercial conscriptions of a women's department, and can instead fashion a suit that is even more personally tailored than her work attire. This is what Selena Kyle is attempting as she scraps her raincoat to piece together her catsuit. In a significant moment of rebirth and recharacterization, Kyle's actions are to destroy her previous, unfulfilling identity, and create for herself a new one. The catsuit is a new guise she purposefully and industriously builds for herself, sartorially signifying her transition from juvenile to adult, visually signaling her move from romantic oppression to individual autonomy. There is agency in her actions. In its first creation the catsuit is given no other purpose than to recast the character; after whipping it together alone in her room, Kyle is framed in near-silhouette, a strong, stark figure in black against a pink glow. Posing confidently she professes to her pet cat that she feels "so much yummier."[118]

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[117] Generally, one's public identity is based on a series of relationships with others. Children are named by their parents, and defined by their proximity to others – as children, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, parents and grandparents, friends, neighbors, and more. Born into majority, with no dependent adolescence, the super-character is allowed a uniquely independent identity formation. By necessity, the public identity of the superhero is isolated from nearly all human relations, and id defined through the signs and symbols chosen by the individual.

[118] It's worth noting that there is only one catsuit in the narrative of the film, emphasizing both its uniqueness, and the social and economic space from which it comes. Unlike Bruce Wayne, Catwoman is still Selina Kyle, and must manage her identity within the capitalistic realities of a secretary just newly turned vengeful villain. Following the kidnapping of the Ice Princess, Bruce Wayne walks into his Bat-closet, selects one rubber suit from dozens, his expansive costume wardrobe shown in shots that frame both excess and militaristic order. Comparatively, Selina

Unsurprisingly, Walton and Dorland are critical of "Pfeiffer's vinyl-clad body" which they argue positions "her as the object rather than as the subject of the gaze. The eye of the camera directs the eye of the viewer, and in this case, politically situates Pfeiffer's performance as a sexual exhibition" (101-2). But as with much of the article, they here rely on the assumption of response and analysis, rather than performing analysis. Catwoman's performative sexuality is actively engaged as an asset for the character, rather than a dehumanizing objectification, challenging an assumption of objectification and suggesting agency in sensuality, as a monster/beauty. In the framing of the film's narrative, the making of the catsuit is the first productive action Selina Kyle takes for herself – it is the first independent, undirected step towards personal agency. Selina Kyle, as Shreck's skirt-suited secretary, is representative of normative repressed femininity. The film carefully constructs her allegiance to dominant narratives of codependence that equates femme value with marriage and domesticity, and the lessons that maturity and adulthood are only available to married women. Though Kyle has an occupation that allows her to live independently, the suits she wears are tailored to the expectations of others, demurely hiding her body while communicating fragile femininity. The home she's created for herself is a pink-tinged theme park of an adolescent space, suggestive of expected transition rather than consistent personal preference, and the material products of her apartment are representative of what Kyle has been *taught* to pursue and desire by the mother whose messages Kyle finds so oppressive. But she rejects this materiality as she transitions into symbolic adulthood, her actions confident as they are both destructive (smashing her figurines) and constructive (stitching her catsuit from an old raincoat).

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scrambles to dress while driving, pulling her single suit from a bag with one hand on the steering wheel and the other rummaging through her bag.

As opposed to the "makeover" film trope, in which an "ugly duckling" is made over to be revealed as a beauty of society's preference, Selina Kyle fashions *herself* in active, confident defiance. Her costume is black PCV with prominent white stitching, emphasizing the labor of construction of the garment as much as the whole. The black of her catsuit is not meant to blend in with the shadows, as the Batsuit, but to shine and stand out, signaling she is someone worthy of commanding attention.[119] That some of the stitching forms a mortician's "y" down her chest, and the rest is patchworked, emphasizes her rebirth, and with it her monstrosity – she has become a Creature in the way of Mary Shelley's, but her new figure is her own design. Significantly, she croons to her cat that she *feels* yummier, not that she looks it – the transformation is one of self-confidence rather than social conformity, and the catsuit is intended to express her new-found self-love, rather than shield her from the external world. She feels good, and she feels powerful. And, most specifically, it's about independence in the face of the male gaze rather than objectification before it.

The power of Catwoman's independent sexuality is clearly demonstrated in her confrontation with the normative male gaze, as illustrated in her squabbles with the Penguin and Batman. After initiating a homemade explosion in Shreck's Department Store, a revenge-and-adrenaline-rushed Catwoman cartwheels across the street, to where Batman and the Penguin happen to be arguing. The explosion distracts both men and Catwoman escapes to climb up a building; as the Penguin himself flees the scene he hisses at Batman that he "saw her first," attempting to lay ownership of the mysterious woman they've just seen for the first time. The

[119] Significantly, it is more the suit and less the character who earned critical attention up to the film's release. Writes Glen Weldon, "Pfeiffer's Catwoman performance – and fetish gear – while praised by critics, came under fire from parents' groups, who launched letter-writing campaigns and protests against the film's frank, kitten-with-a-whip sexual content and violence" (176). It is telling that it is Catwoman's violence, and not Shreck's, Penguin's, or Batman's, that garnered a letter-writing campaign.

pairing of the two men, both enamored with Catwoman's appearance, suggest that Kyle/Catwoman is intended to choose the same romantic codependence she has introduced from the beginning, albeit one criminal and one heroic. But as a monster/beauty of her own creation Catwoman denies both in favor of her independence. Catwoman's awareishness is perhaps best demonstrated when the newly-fashioned villainess encounters Batman for the first time, after bombing Shrek's department store. On a Gotham rooftop Catwoman initiates a physical altercation with Batman, having waited to ambush the caped crusader. When he throws a punch in return Catwoman collapses to the ground, and peers up pathetically as she cries, "How could you? I'm a woman!" Batman is immediately apologetic, stammering "I'm sorry, I, I" as he reaches down to help her up. Catwoman uses his predictable gender conformity to her advantage, overthrowing the larger man and suspending him over the building by her whip. "As I was saying," she sneers down at him from her higher vantage, "I'm a woman and can't be taken for granted" (*Batman Returns* 1:00:09). Astoundingly (at least to me), Batman does not take the lesson to heart as their conflict continues. Moments after she pushes him over a building and threatens him, Batman allows Catwoman to stand in intimate proximity, and to run her hands suggestively down his chest. She uses his attraction against him, asking where he is, as she searches for a literal chink in his armor – and stabs her claws straight through before making her escape. Batman's gaze is that which Walton and Dorland anticipate in their criticism, as his actions shows he clearly does not see the woman with whom he's been in conflict for what she really is. Catwoman manages to outsmart Batman in manipulating his gendered impulse to read women as inferior, and she uses his objectifying gaze to distract him so she can physically injure him. To Batman, who consistently operates under the patriarchal system of valor, Catwoman cannot be a threat because she is smaller, physically weaker, and feminine. He seems to

perceived Catwoman's injury as chance, and a minor inconvenience; his callous response to his own injury – flirtatiously whispering "meow" to himself as he removes the claw with which she's stabbed him – demonstrates the depth of the gender bias within the film. It codes the physical conflict as "cute" and even flirtatious, unlike his physical conflicts with the Penguin's gang. It's not just Shrek, a "bad guy," who underestimates his secretary before killing her, but the "hero" of the film performs the same masculine assumption of superiority. Batman is unable to perceive the threat that Catwoman actually poses as an independent and capable foe, because she is an attractive woman, and thus a character of personal interest – he underestimates her for his own romantic presumptions, foreshadowing the conclusion of the film. Batman is thus symptomatic of the sexism lingering in the progressive male gaze.

Catwoman's seductive performativity not only allows her to escape, but influences Batman's future judgement, swaying his inclinations in her favor. This is finally affirmed in the film's conclusions, when Catwoman corners Max Shrek in the Penguin's lair, determined to kill him. Her efforts are suspended by Batman, who offers her the domestic fantasy pre-Catwoman Selina Kyle was taught to desire. "Why are you doing this?" he asks, advancing on Selina and Shrek. "Let's just take him to the police, then we can go home. Together." Catwoman is visibly moved, tearing up. The framing suggests he's cracked her resolve, as she hunches over panting, her costume ripped and her mask falling to pieces. She gasps, "Bruce, I would love to live with you in your castle forever, just like in a fairytale." But when he reaches out to touch her face she scratches his, and snarls "I just couldn't live with myself, so don't pretend this is a happy ending."

Arguably it is, though it's not the romantic ending Batman hopes for, which would uphold heteronormative gender roles and a patriarchal sense of justice. Shot by Shrek, and

unable to stop Catwoman, Batman watches as she advances on her former boss' ineffectual firing gun, spending lives to terrorize him before finally killing him with an electrified kiss, her sensuality emphasized by her self-made catsuit and her agency violently asserted in the murder of her assaulter. She does it not for Gotham, as Batman would have framed his arrest, but for herself. And she gets away with it. At the film's conclusion she remains alive and independent, while Bruce Wayne's final words are a holiday wish of "Good will towards men. And women."

A Destined Femme Fatale

Though Catwoman *can* be a symbol of femme agency and independence, a monster/beauty, this doesn't mean that every Catwoman carries the same autonomy as other iterations*;* as a multimedia character and not an actual person, the figure of Catwoman is independently developed by rhetors to suit their particular needs, which are inherently capitalistic. For eighty years Catwoman properties have developed for marketability, as a primary motivation of comics, film, and television is to generate revenue. As a comics character literally introduced to be sexy, that marketability at times still directly impedes her narrative evolution. Sometimes Catwoman properties are less independent monster, and more objectified beauty. In this chapter I have argued that the figure of the Catwoman, in numerous iterations, has demonstrated the possible autonomy of the awarish monster/beauty femme, who is able to use gender normativity to her individual benefit, often in contradiction to standard gender hierarchies. Now, I will close the chapter with a discussion of a challenge to the agency of the character, as a final move to assert the success of the other texts here discussed. As a conclusion to this examination of powerful femininity, I argue that Pitof's 2004 film *Catwoman* redefines

the titular character,[120] reducing the familiar villainous to a costume while rewriting the woman who wears it as lacking personal agency and direction.

Pitof's *Catwoman* is a reimagining of the Catwoman of *Batman Returns,* which seeks to further the fantasy of Pfeiffer's performance by casting the character as a woman made superhero. Like Selina Kyle, the 2004 Catwoman Patience Phillips is murdered at her place of wok, only to mysteriously revive, magically changed. To this, the two Catwomen respond very differently; while Kyle's rebirth is fueled by righteous anger at her assault, Phillips' is unconscious, as she fails to recognize how she's changed, or what she can do with her own power. While Kyle returns home determined to craft a new self, Phillips rejects the magical "gift" that has been bestowed, and is lead reluctantly to her destiny as a Catwoman by folklorist Dr. Ophelia Powers. Seven years earlier, Walton and Dorland argue that "the power that woman is granted, here, serves primarily to perpetuate feminine stereotypes" in Tim Burton's film (99). Pitof's framing of Catwoman is just so – she is uncharacteristically moody, aggressive towards men, and robs a jewelry store for the sake of rolling around with shiny things. The representation of Phillips "reinforce[es] masculinist constructions of female animal magnetism," as the character is literally dehumanized, unconsciously behaving animalistically (sleeping on high beams in her apartment, rubbing catnip on her own face) while emphasizing her sensuality (94). The change is significant for its lack of agency – Phillips has no control in those moments.

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[120] In her analysis of Catwoman's history Whaley attributes audiences' vitriolic hatred of the 2004 film *Catwoman* to the writers' introduction of the magical as a source of Catwoman's physical prowess. Whaley writes:

> In the graphic novel series, Catwoman was not a superhero with magic or exaggerated powers. Part of her appeal to the everyday reader was that she was an anti-hero whose fighting ability was derivative of martial arts and physical endurance training. Catwoman's ability to complete her missions due to advanced and learned physical agility in the graphic novel made her accessible and more realistic, which led to her long-term respect among readers. […] whatever her occupation, she had always been assertive, strong-minded… (15).

Whatever else she may be, the Catwoman Patience Phillips is certainly not strong-minded.

The narrative decision to introduce magical origins for Catwoman Patience Phillips undermines the agency of the original character by eliminating the element of choice. Phillips is not a femme who is aware of her own strengths within a strictly gendered social system, nor is she a sex worker who purposefully trains in hand-to-hand combat to increase her ability to protect herself, and marginalized others. Phillips is an unassuming and passive character whose strength is forced upon her, and who rejects this strength as it develops. Phillips does not want to be a Catwoman, panicking when she finds herself in unfamiliar circumstances, and reflecting in horror on what she has unconsciously done. Kyle is driven by a need for revenge, and Phillips is motivated to assault by a neighbor whose music is too loud. Kyle dons her Catsuit to blow up her assaulter's business; Phillips dons bondage gear purchased for her by a sex-positive friend to rob a jewelry store – only to panic when she awakens to find the jewels in her apartment, and scrambles to return the goods with a box of pastries and a scrawled note of apology. Kyle purposefully becomes Catwoman for her own gain; Phillips is told what she has become.

But of specific interest to this dissertation is costuming, and its relation to character. Though Hanley reports that early critical responses to the 2004 Catwoman costume were highly negative, I suggest that the true failure of *Catwoman*'s costuming is not in costume design, but in its narrative introduction.[121] The material figure of Catwoman is always up to creative interpretation, and there's no narrative reason why Catwoman *shouldn't* wear a leather bondage bikini as she does in the film. The character is purposefully sexual and sensual from her introduction, and other authors have internalized this casting in the introduction of various

[121] "*Comic Book Movie* lamented 'Oh no, Halle! Say it isn't so!' before stating, 'As you can see, the costume is awful.' While the studio thought that she looked sexy and cool, the costume was uniformly dismissed as trashy; when a producer asked writer John Rogers what he thought of the outfit, he responded, 'Well, she looks like a Quebecois stripper'" (171). These responses are aggressively gendered, and interestingly blame the actress for the creative decisions of other film professionals, and preserve the tradition of sex-shaming women whose clothing emphasize their figures.

catsuits. In Mindy Newel's 1989 origin story, Catwoman's original costume is a gimp suit forced upon her by her abusive pimp, Stan, who manipulates her into wearing it to serve a customer (*Catwoman: A Celebration* 236). In this moment Selina Kyle is passive and abused, bodily and emotionally, and the catsuit is a humiliation she endures for false promises of love. By the story's conclusion Selina Kyle has learned to fight back, defending herself and her friend Holly. When she sees Batman escaping thanks in part to his costume, she recognizes the power of sartorial manipulation, and resolves to wear a costume as a mark of her power and independence (245). In the final move of the book she is shown to the audience in the catsuit for the first time, hunting down her former pimp. Though the costume and pose are clearly sexualized, her representation is one of power; she is above Stan, looking down, and aware. This representation is a reclamation, and a rewriting of the power dynamic; she is not manipulated into a situation in which she does not want to participate, but an active adopter of a new identity (247).

As with Newel's 1989 Catwoman, Phillips neither makes, nor chooses her own similarly-fetishized catsuit. It is instead a gift from a sex-positive friend to a painfully shy Patience Phillips. The suit is so antithetical to Phillips' personality and sense of self that it remains in its original gift box, buried in the back of her closet. Phillips is embarrassed by the gift, and so hides it away. Though there is affection in its film introduction - the box is cheekily and lovingly labeled "Open in case of Dating Emergency. Love Sally & Lance" – its value to Phillips is that of a *gift*, and likely an expensive one. In giving Phillips an uncharacteristic fetish suit Sally is chastising Phillips and asserting her own dominance over her shy friend. It is anti-feminist and patronizing, as the high-femme Sally asserts that Phillips' own pretty-but-androgynous material construction of self is inferior.

Unlike Pfeifer's character, who struts into her own confidence in a moment of defiance, Phillips' construction is external, manufactured first by the film's creators, and narratively by an over-bearing "friend." That she dons the catsuit after her transformation is used as a device by filmmakers for the sake of communicating the character's comic identity, and continuing a message of sex positivity introduce by its initial gifting But Phillip's catsuit is a passive symbol; it is neither a refashioning of self, as Pfeiffer's, or a reclamation, as Newel's. Instead, Phillips wears a catsuit gifted to her by a friend – a friend who spends the entire film telling Phillips she should be somebody else. Accepting this criticism, and adopting the guise given to her without expressed consent or interest, is arguably the antithesis of Catwoman: she is a woman constructed by others, incapable of individual agency even in her dress.

Conclusion

Catwoman is a comics character, and, as a figure developed primarily by men for an assumed masculine readership, remains representatively problematic. Her initial introduction is for the express purpose of adding sex appeal to increase readership, and has maintained that sex appeal consistently through her representations. But each Catwoman is only *a* Catwoman, defined and developed in individual texts, and reflective not just of the times in which they are created, but the subconscious biases and understandings of their creators. They are independent pinups, of the sort Buszek analyzes when she argues that "[b]ecause the pin-up is always a sexualized woman whose image is not only mass-reproduced […] intended for wide display, the genre is an interesting barometer for Western cultural responses to women's sexuality in popular arts since the Industrial Revolution, as well as feminist responses to the same" (5). The work of this chapter has been to mark these moments in the service of understanding both the cultural

threat of the femme identity Catwoman represents, and the agency the character inadvertently comes to represent within it.

As a representative high-femme Catwoman has long been cast as a villain or anti-hero, articulating cultural anxieties around a femme's purposeful and direct construction of self. While historically, "…like china, women are perceived to be designed for display, potentially flawed, delicate, attractive and, in raw form, malleable," the purposefully-villainous Catwoman has demonstrated the potential of self-authorship, and the strength and agency that comes with self-construction (Batchelor 57). Even as masculine authors and artists seek to establish a critical perspective on women's vanity, the character has come to demonstrate that an attentiveness to gendered subjectivity can be turned against its author, liberating the figure of the femme from the confines of objectivity. Buszek writes that "The most obvious problem with representing sexuality is the fact that sexualized representations of women have – like female sexuality itself – historically been used to limit women's growth and opportunities as nonsexual beings" (Buszek 13). Catwoman is not a figure in need of erotic support, but the conflation of her eroticism (her design as a heteronormatively attractive subject intended for consumption and idealization by men) with her status as a feminist figure can be resolved in part through the concept of the monster/beauty, and the awarishness the theory allows. Catwoman has no physical body, but the character navigates fictional spheres reflective of those inhabited by her creators and audiences, and so her imagined body reasonably stands in as a surrogate body for those potentially like her – not cat burglars in catsuits, but femmes who indulge in their gendered signs and signals and recognize the power of their independence and performances.

CHAPTER 6

EPILOGUE: IN THE END IT'S ALL COSPLAY

The focus of this dissertation has been the examination of how authors and creators use fashion to communicate villainy in cultural texts such as novels, comics, and films. I argue that the materiality of these characters demonstrates sartorial literacy on the part of creators and audiences alike, and that the aesthetic representation of these villains is essential to the articulation of their deviance. In chapter one I read how fashion literacy can be used as a tool for subterfuge on the part of the villainous, allowing characters like Dracula, Dorian Gray, Dr. Jekyll, and Lady Audley to infiltrate social hierarchies for their own benefit, their beautiful faces helping to waylay suspicion of their violent behaviors. In chapter two I consider the inverse, and read the purposeful social challenge and autonomous self-idealization of villains such as Madame de la Rougierre, the Beetle, Two-Face, and Poison Ivy. I argue that their fashioning is not intended to articulate faux-pas or ignorance on the part of the characters, but an empowering and even aggressive rejection of oppressive social scripts which would confine them. Chapter three undertakes a close examination of the fashioning of the Other in defining national gender identities. I look at the creation and subsequent evolution of Jack the Ripper and the Joker as pointed illustrations of toxic masculinities, and how their clothes are utilized to define the threat and deviance of their gender and social classes. Chapter four also offers a close reading of gender, identifying Catwoman as a representational femme figure, and arguing that her inconsistent media portrayals illustrate an anxiety over standards of beauty and how femmes may use the gender expectations intended to objectify and suppress them to their own advantage.

As a narrative device, fashion is especially effective for its actualized corollary: garments such as those signified in cultural texts are materially available to audiences as tangible objects.

In this way the villains discussed in these chapters have the potential to directly impact real-world fashioning, communicating standards of decency and normativity, and signaling styling as deviant or threatening. Like the archetypes of witches and wicked stepmothers that populate fairytales, the appearances of these characters are intended to serve as warnings and to enforce the social rejection of the other through the illustration of their violence and deviance. But this system of communication is complicated by the contemporary phenomenon of cosplay, in which participants purposefully adopt the aesthetic signals of fictional characters – heroes and villains alike. The subject of cosplay seems like the logical next step for this dissertation, and so by way of conclusion I will here read individual cosplays of traditionally villainous characters to consider the appeal of adopting the guise of the villainous. I argue that cosplay is an act of textual analysis and a performance, which can be read as a narrative object at the site of presentation, and so contributes to a deeper understanding of material deviance and performative villainy.

Cosplay Studies

Readers come to texts with expectations and active individuality which necessarily directs their textual analyses. Readers are *people*, developing in diverse cultural spaces, whose thoughts, experiences, and assumptions are built through their interaction with other people, communities, and texts. A person's lived experiences, their fears, and their subconscious bias all directly impact their analysis of a cultural object. When we speak of inclination towards a text, character, or theme, we are referring to the alchemy of these experiences; whether or not an individual is aware of the cultural and psychological roots of their preferences does not lessen their predispositions. The villains in this dissertation represent such partialities, as well as the cultural drive to mark particular inclinations as deviant and threatening. The drive towards

masquerade, costume, and *cosplay,* too, represents a partiality. And audiences of cosplay are wont to read cosplay performances as indicative of particular leanings, and thus read as revelatory of the artist performing.

This same drive to read the artist in the work is what inspires Oscar Wilde to write a scathing letter in defense of his artistic identity, introduced into evidence at his trial on April 4, 1895. In this letter to the editor of the *Scots Observer* dated the 9th of July 1890, Oscar Wilde writes in defense of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that "The pleasure that one has in creating a work of art is a purely personal pleasure, and it is for the sake of this pleasure that one creates" (Holland 220-221). And yet this personal pleasure is offered for commercial consumption to the masses – it is in its performance no longer personal, and instead made available for public analysis. But where the recuperation of a text is rhetorically sound – within the purview of the audience, the analysis of an artist as a figure represented by their text is far more complicated. This remains especially true when the art and artist exist so closely, as is the case with cosplay performances. Wilde charges that "Your critic then, sir, commits the absolutely unpardonable crime of trying to confuse the artist with his subject-matter" (221). He continues:

> One stands remote from one's subject matter. One creates it, and one contemplates it. The further away the subject-matter is, the more freely can the artist work. Your reviewer suggests that I do not make it sufficiently clear whether I prefer virtue to wickedness or wickedness to virtue. An artist, sir, has no ethical sympathies at all. Virtue and wickedness are to him simply what the colours on his palette are to the painter. […] He sees that by their means a certain artistic effect can be produced, and he produces it. (221)

The divorce between rhetor and rhetorical text is not so complete as Wilde would assert. Though he protests that an artist is entirely neutral in the creation of his work, a text is not composed in a vacuum, and reflects, if not the artist specifically, then at least the cultural place and moment in which a text is created. Historically and culturally locating a novel, a comic, a film, or a cosplay allows for the kind of deconstructions accomplished by this dissertation; making space for a contemporary challenge and reclamation of characters whose deviance and villainy are far more nuanced when read through contemporary theoretical lenses.

The fashion and fashioning discussed in the previous chapters are decidedly not *play*; the materiality of villainy is a subject of labor, both on the part of the creators utilizing the language of fashion to define and develop textual villains, and the work of the described garments as effective signifiers within a text. Throughout this dissertation I've analyzed characters and their representation in order to assert their narrative motivations and the meanings communicated through the deliberate fashions described within texts. This task is made harder when the object of study is both the subject and the creator, and my previous research into cosplay asserts that the assumption of cosplayer identity cannot be made through observational analysis alone. The observational analysis of cosplay is akin to the textual analysis of other cultural artifacts, in which the observer consumes the cultural product from a distance, and interrogates its intention, meaning, argument, and effectiveness in a theoretical context. Observational research renders cosplay as a tangible object of study, distilling it to a static form akin to a manga or a film.[122] But unlike such textual research, in which it is often productive to analyze an object in the absence of the author, cosplay research is additionally complicated for its deeply human and individual

[122] See Scott, Norris and Bainbridge, Gn, Kirkpatrick, Anderson, Turong, Lamerich

complexity. There are two subjects within the text of a cosplay: the cosplay as an artifact, and the cos*player* as both creator and subject.

Though Mountfort, Peirson-Smith, and Geeczy assert that "Cosplay is clearly a performance form that radically problematizes identity," a great deal of foundational scholarship is preoccupied with why cosplayers take up the performance art, and how the cosplayer navigates social spaces (10).[123] Less time is spent analyzing cosplays as textual artifacts, a discrepancy I address in my forthcoming research. In "RetCon: Revising Cosplay Studies" I call for a reconsideration of the cosplayer identity, arguing that the lived identity of a cosplayer cannot be discerned from their performance, and that the cosplay and the cosplayer should be addressed as separate subjects of inquiry. Here, then, I wish to offer a complimentary analysis: that of cosplay as a meaning-making exercise. I argue that villainous cosplays perform an act of analysis through the act of creative interpretation, and that cosplays as texts continue the project of deviance – a bucking of standards and expectations, and a (peaceful) rebellion against social roles through the adoption of non-normative and fantastic fashions. Though cosplay is sanctioned by fan conventions and enjoyed by con attendees, *looking* so extraordinarily functions as both stigmatizing (Gn) and as an empowering act of social defiance, introduced by the villainous characters in literature and comics.

Cosplaying Villains

Cosplayer and the cosplay are two separate texts; the latter is an object of study analyzable through observation, while the former requires narrative disclosure on the part of the living person. To that end I feel it important to stress that this epilogue does not seek to speak for individual cosplayers, nor to assert their explicit motivations in adopting villainous cosplays.

[123] To emphasize the building that still needs to be done in cosplay studies as a field I will point out that their *Planet Cosplay,* published in 2019, is currently the only scholarly monograph to exclusively treat the subject of cosplay.

Instead, I wish to analyze the potential cosplay offers for the understanding of the significance of material character development, and how that fashioning is translated into the lived commercial market of media audiences. Cosplay as an artistic and analytical practice allows participants to interpret the material fashioning of characters, with a freedom of representative choice that also extends to them authorial power. When a cosplayer opts to faithfully recreate a character's costume from a film or show or comic, they are asserting the significance of that fashioning to the representation of the character. By this I mean that the cosplayer recognizes the artistic and narrative choices made in published media, and elects to recreate another's art in order to translate that representation for the lived space. Like Barthes' "three dresses" discussed in the introduction, the labor of cosplay is to create this third, worn dress, as an artifact related to the other two dresses (the illustrated and the described) but distinct in its actual materiality. Here is the "play" – not in the offering of the style, but in the consuming of fictional fashions. And where it becomes most playful is in the wearing of the costume – the cosplay.

It's important to understand that there are no defined obligations in cosplay, and cosplayers are overwhelmingly hobbyists who undertake the practice for multifaceted reasons. As such, the creation of a cosplay is an individual experience, made public in display. It is itself a performance art, and one through which individuals are free to express themselves artistically even as they manufacture allusions to other materials. A cosplay is as much the costumer's production as a story belongs to an author or a comic panel to an artist – each works with given media to generate a unique narrative, which may support or deviate from the traditional canon. This adaptation expresses another layer of analysis, as it considers the possibilities of a character's aesthetic structure, as well as the character *traits* which may be expressed visually. One prime example is cosplayer Meagan-Marie's "Lady Two-Face" cosplay, which remains

famous in cosplay circles since her 2011 San Diego Comic Con debut. Citing *Batman: The Animated Series* as her inspiration, Meagan built a femme-bodied cosplay of the traditionally masculine villain Two-Face; despite adopting femme gender signifiers over masculine signifiers, the cosplay is instantly recognizable, and stands as a much-admired (and replicated) cosplay text. Meagan fabricates a monster/beauty in this moment. Her suit is well-tailored, demonstrating care in the material construction of her cosplay, and her posed photos are confident and reminiscent of fashion advertisements. There is beauty in the skilled application of cosmetics and prosthetics, in the careful and purposeful styling of her hair, and in the neatness of her overall presentation. Megan's cosplay challenges standard notions of gender and beauty, performing power and attraction as unpredictably as the character she represents.

Though cosplay has been generally understood as a fan practice developed by Japanese culture enthusiasts, it is by no means restricted to media portrayals in manga or anime. Even Victorian characters find representation from cosplayers inspired by both original texts and their adoption into new media. One such popular character is Count Dracula. For the 2015 European Cosplay Gathering Japan Expo in Paris, cosplayer Shirak competed in a staged cosplay competition dressed as the elderly Count Dracula from the iconic 1992 film *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. For the event Shirak fashioned a wig, hand-embroidered a red robe, and learned how to build facial prosthetics. The intention of this representation was mimicry – the faithful reproduction of a stylistically poignant horror character, brought to the lived spaces of cosplay gatherings and comic cons where its observation immediately recalls a popular film. The observation of the text communicates the skill of the cosplayer, who writes of their creative process on social media, but its textual function is reminiscence; on stage and in photos the cosplay works to represent the film character. Shirak's cosplay visually communicates "Dracula"

– and a particular Dracula – without analyzing the novel or the film.[124] It is a neutrally reflective text. I argue that the replication achieved interestingly continues the villainous fashioning of Dracula from the original novel, in which his adaption – his ability to replicate the material performances of dominant classes around him – enables his narrative villainy. In this, the cosplay is further faithful to both the film and the novel which inspired it.

But cosplays can, and do at times, provide points of textual analysis, as is the case when the cosplayer Gregory Rasin portrayed *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in a series of photographs (AnnaProvidence). Perhaps taking cue from popular novel and film covers which represent Dorian with half of a ruined face, the cosplay styled by Rasin is a young blonde figure, the right side of his face showing age and fury. In a posed photograph Rasin leans out of a picture frame, reaching a bloody right hand towards the audience, and forcing focus on the violence which such gore suggests. In this construction and framing is a narrative of threat: here, Dorian Gray is not the lately repentant dead man at the conclusion of Wilde's novel, but an artifact come ominously to life, able to push through two-dimensional representation towards the audience. Rasin's work casts Dorian and the portrait in a context similar to a Jekyll-and-Hyde, or a Two-Face figure – one whose sides belong to a single material form. The cosplay is then both a work of analysis and a cultural text of its own, arguing for the deadly potential of the portrait, itself preserved in a static frame.

[124] Other cosplay scholars may attempt to interrogate the cosplayer's choice of Draculas, and suggest that in making a choice Shirak has made an argument. I would push back on such a line of thought, and in turn ask if it's not instead an expression of crafting fandom, or a character which represents the skill-building the cosplayer wished to master. But further, I would say that this would be an analysis of a cosplayer over the cosplay itself, which is a static text visible in portraiture.

A Villain on the Streets: Social Protest and Performative Villainy

The works by Meagan, Rasin and Shirak are presented in cultural spaces where cosplay is frequently circulated – in professional photographs, and at cosplay-centric events. The intended audience for these works is those who seek out cosplay experiences and media; cosplayers and cosplay audiences are self-aware of the performative framework. Though cosplay spaces are still contentious, the performance of cosplay is an accepted and anticipated spectacle at fan conventions, masquerades, and cosplay contests.[125] When cosplay is performed outside of an accepted artistic space the argument of the cosplay becomes more complex, opening the representation to not just material analysis of a character performance, but the argument of placing a fictional character within an inhabited space. Such is the case of Joseph Pudwill's decision to attend protests against police brutality dressed as the Joker from the 2019 film directed by Todd Phillips.

On May 25, 2020 George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, who kneeled on the 46-year-old black man's neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds until Floyd died of asphyxiation. Security cameras captured the entire incident, and this evidence was widely shared over the internet. Floyd's death at the hands of police, and the failure of the department to hold Chauvin and his fellow officers immediately responsible, inspired country-wide protests in support of Black Lives Matter and against police brutality and systemic racism. On May 30, 2020 Minneapolis resident Joseph Pudwill attended a local protest in cosplay, carrying a "Justice for George" sign; his cosplay went viral when TikTok user Nick Yan filmed Pudwill dancing at the protest, and posted the video on the social media site. Audiences,

[125] They remain plagued with racism, sexism, ableism, and fat-phobia.

including Nick Yan, were puzzled by Pudwill's decision. Though his sign showed support for the protest, his cosplay, and his dance performance, were strange.

This representation of Joker is complex as a cosplay text, and as a performance at a protest against police brutality and murder. Though film reporter Kevin Burwick viewed Pudwill's performance as an uncanny but "peaceful way of protesting," the source material is anything but peaceful. *Joker* is a film about a deeply disturbed and unwell man, Arthur Fleck, living in poverty and in relative social isolation with his equally unwell and disturbed mother. When community systems fail him at the hands of capitalistic imbalances in power and resources, Arthur loses access to his medication and to his social worker. The prejudices against Arthur as a developmentally different person inspires his coworkers to manipulate Arthur into making dangerous choices, which further results in the middle-aged man losing his poorly paying job. When his celebrity hero Murray then broadcasts his failure as a comedian on live television, actively inviting audiences to mock the aspiring comic, Arthur snaps, and the conclusion of the film documents his violent and extraordinary responses to those he feels have wronged him. Within the film, the media reports on his then-unattributed acts of violence against individuals in power, and an oppressed populace hold this unidentified "clown" figure up as a revolutionary working to liberate oppressed citizens of the city. Significantly, Arthur harbors no such noble intentions, instead behaving erratically and selfishly. Arthur remains an unsympathetic individual throughout the film, successfully communicating the social wrongs experienced by an at-risk individual while simultaneously expressing a lack of reason or social consciousness. Arthur responds favorably to the construction of his heroic identity because it is the first he's received positive attention from others, and by the conclusion of the film he's literally along for the ride, accepting the anti-heroic role handed to him by peoples struggling

against classist power systems. The message developed within the film – Arthur as justified and admirable - is a popular read of the film itself, with some suggesting that director Todd Phillips' and actor Joaquin Phoenix's Arthur, aka the Joker, is not actually a villain, but a human-rights crusader vilified by the ruling class of Gotham City.

As a devoted Joker cosplayer, Pudwill's choice is therefore unsurprising; Kevin Burwick quotes Pudwill as saying "[Joker] has become a model of social injustice, the recognition of the tragedies that occur, I have fallen in love with this character and I think today it serves to push the message."[126] But as a street performance without authorial annotation, Pudwill's cosplay can carry very different connotations. Prior to its release *Joker* inspired a great deal of controversy, centered around the fear of a sympathetic representation of "a psychopath […] who embraces cruelty and murder" appealing to incels, and inspiring gun violence like the "horrific Aurora shooting, which took place at a screening of the Batman movie *The Dark Knight Rises*" (Sims).

While Warner Bros Studio said explicitly that "It is not the intention of the film, the filmmakers or the studio to hold this character up as a hero," reporter David Sims insightfully remarks that "once a movie is viewed by a wide audience, a filmmaker's intention matters only so much; people will walk away with their own interpretations, and it can be hard to predict where or why passionate fandoms will pop up." The fictional character Pudwill holds up as "a model for social injustice" and "the recognition of the tragedies that occur" begins his revenge when he shoots and kills three businessmen who attack him on a train; he shoots and kills two in seeming self-defense before stalking down the third, shooting him four times at close range as the man attempts to crawl away, crying. Arthur then smothers his hospitalized mother, and soon after repeatedly stabs his former coworker in the neck and face with a pair of scissors, before

[126] As of June 25, 2020, Pudwill's Instagram account (@ocilious) includes 155 photos, 57 of which feature Pudwill in various explicit Joker cosplays dating back to May 31, 2018.

smashing the man's head into a wall. Invited to sit down on camera with his former hero Murray Franklin, he shoots the late-night host in the head live on television, screaming that Murray is going to "get what [he] fucking deserve[s]." Though the people he murders are not sympathetic in the context of the film, a driving message of the Black Lives Matter protests is that *no one* deserves to be killed, regardless of the crimes with which they've been charged; in this framework, I argue that Arthur's actions are more in line with the police whose shootings inspired the real-world civil unrest than they are in line with the protestors.

For those who did not see *Joker,* or those who understand the film differently from Pudwill, the representation of the Joker at a protest is distinctly threatening. Historically, the Joker is defined by unpredictable violence, and respects no boundaries. The choice to cosplay as a smiling, dancing white man in the recognizably stylistic suit of a psychopathic murderer at a protest demanding justice for a murdered black man can be read as a fulfillment of the fears of film critics. As he literally dances in the street Pudwill's sign registers as a potential mockery of the protest and of George Floyd's death, and the cosplay itself articulates a racial and gendered superiority favored by domestic terrorists such as white supremacists and their counterparts, the incels. His performance itself faithfully represents the character of Arthur– self-centered and rhetorically violent. His cosplay communicates race, gender, and character identity through the sartorial signaling of a distinct and definable figure offered through faithful replication.

Pudwill establishes a performance of white supremacist American masculinity when he elects to attend a Black Lives Matter protest dressed as a violent white man. Pudwill's performance romanticizes the character through joyful independent dancing when other protesters march, stand, sit, and kneel in supportive, communal bodies. Pudwill further singles himself out by eschewing the standard (though unregulated) uniform of the event. Though the

protest takes place in crowds at the height of a deadly pandemic Pudwill does not wear a mask for the protection of his fellow protestors; nor does he sartorially signal his support through the adoption of BLM signifiers (clothing emblazoned with BLM, activist slogans, the BLM fist, etc.). Pudwill's performance is of the type of figure young AFAB people and people of color are taught to cautiously avoid.[127] Regardless of Pudwill's intentions, and regardless of the analysis of the film, Pudwill's Joker cosplay actively does several things: first, it affirms the self-centered sense of supremacy of white American masculinity; second, it affirms the potential threat Pudwill poses, as a performer of white American masculinity; and third, it affirms an analysis of the film as one that caters to and exalts white supremacist American masculinity championed by incels. Though Pudwill's actual intentions and even gender identification may be distinctly different from this reading, the performance exists as a text independent of his intentions, and communicates a deviant narrative reflective of the social and political times in which his performance occurs. Through his cosplay Pudwill is performing the Victorian fears which first inspired this dissertation: the fear of sympathetic villains corrupting audiences, who adopt both their fashioning and their deviant identities in a real space.

Conclusion

I think it possible that "What people are likely to say does not even occur to [the artist]," as Wilde insists, and herein lies the conflict between creator and auditor, which makes space for the deconstruction and interpretation of a text beyond the intention of the writer. Here is where one may recuperate Catwoman as a feminist figure, despite her pointedly sexist creation, where one may admire the dedication of Lady Audley when faced with the poverty forced upon her by

[127] Men who exhibit excessive confidence and disregard social stigma – those who unapologetically act out – are viewed as distinctly and directly threatening to Assigned Female at Birth people, who are taught they are likely to become targets for violence from such individuals.

Victorian class systems, where one may challenge Dr. Jekyll's morality, see familiar masculinities in the Joker, and recognize the agency of Two-Face and the Beetle. The present historical moment, queer and gender theory, and even my personal experiences and perspective as a queer scholar inform readings which challenge the cultural presumptions of artistic creation. More plainly, the texts considered in this dissertation offer far more critical opportunities than their creators perhaps intended, and these readings reflect both the time of creation and the time of analysis.

Pudwill's protest performance illustrates the function of signs in social spheres, fashion as a signifier, and villainy as a constantly perceived threat. On the day of the protest Pudwill was purposeful in the application of face paint made iconic by a murderous madman, first developed in 1940, and more immediately recognizable for subtle aesthetic changes in 2019. He dressed in the red suit made famous by the 2019 movie posters, and made iconic as the character Arthur Fleck splattered it in the blood of others. In photographs and videos Pudwill-Joker danced with a sign lettered in the Joker's famous round font, his performance and intentions as unpredictable as the original character. Though his fashioning was recognizable as a cosplay, it was no less threatening on the street where tensions were high, his appearance extraordinary, and violence, largely at the hands of police, widespread. While at a convention Pudwill's cosplay would be met with praise from fans, on the street it caused anxiety. He could be a villain – he certainly looks the part.

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