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The Novel Mystique: Depictions of Women in Novels of the 1950s

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The Novel Mystique: Depictions of Women in Novels of the 1950s

Throughout history, novels have consistently been scrutinized over the images they portray (Cameron 18-25). For some readers, the concern is that scandalous scenes in dirty books will corrupt the young and the feeble-minded. Others worry that representations of certain groups will disrespect and stereotype oppressed peoples. Clearly, novels are not only entertainment or means for escape; they can have moral and political implications. Popular ones especially reveal a great deal about the culture and time in which they were read. This essay examines the images of women popular novels were offering during the 1950s, an era in which the term “career woman” first became a dirty word (Friedan 32). The small sample of novels analyzed here reveal that a great portion of Americans did indeed consider independent women indecent, but a smaller fraction of society was working hard to dismantle that maxim. The first half of this essay looks primarily at the relative independence the female characters in these novels exercised whereas the second half outlines a link that was understood in the contemporary mindset between economics and sexuality. Both pieces work together to further understanding about constructions of the female identity in the postwar period.

Immediately following World War II, Americans were insecure about the state of world affairs. The world was a terrifying place filled with war, genocide, and weapons of mass destruction. Where could Americans feel safe? According to Betty Friedan’s 1963 groundbreaking book *The Feminine Mystique*, “After the loneliness of war and the unspeakableness of the bomb, against the frightening uncertainty, the cold immensity of the changing world, women as well as men sought the comforting reality of home and children” (213). In this era, Americans began marrying and having children at younger and younger ages. During the war, women had worked outside the home at record breaking numbers, but employers

and the government alike wanted to assure that veterans returning from war could find work. As such, women were quickly pushed out of the workforce through decreasing salaries and propaganda campaigns painting domestic life as women's patriotic duty (May 67).

In her book *Homeward Bound*, historian Elaine Tyler May figures that this is why images of women as housewives emerged overwhelmingly in American culture during the 1940s and 50s. Rosie the Riveter quickly became a petite young housewife enjoying her new washing machine. This image, what Friedan termed "the feminine mystique," is the focus of her 1963 study of popular women's magazines. Friedan claims, "The new mystique makes the house-wife mothers, who never had a chance to be anything else, the model for all women" (36). The mystique was this strange paradox wherein contemporary women were doing everything they were told to do that would make them happy—housekeeping, raising children, and catering to their husbands—and yet, American women's rate of depression, alcoholism, and suicide skyrocketed at this time (Friedan 22). Friedan thus set out to understand this phenomenon by interviewing housewives, studying the education of women, unpacking psychological teachings at the time, and analyzing portrayals of women in popular women's magazines.

As a former editor of a women's magazine, Friedan had an inkling that the topics discussed, and the stories told in these mediums had evolved over the course of her career. Thus, in her research for *The Feminine Mystique*, she collected magazines ranging from the 1930s to the late 1950s in order to better understand this evolution. In the notes that she took at this time, located at the Schlesinger Library at the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University, Friedan tallied the number of short stories featuring "independent" women, "housewives," and "career" women in *Ladies' Home Journal* editions for 1939, 1949, and 1959. She found that before and during World War II, independent career women were often the protagonists in magazine fiction stories;

she documented eleven independent female characters, three feminist characters, and only six housewives in 1939. Eventually, the independent women and feminists faded away, replaced with almost exclusively housewives by 1959. That year, she tallied two single women, whose stories focused solely on the pursuit of husbands, eleven housewives, and two career women, one of whom was a housewife who temporarily sold sandwiches in order to save money and buy dresses.

Ultimately, Friedan's book shows how this mystique invaded a myriad of different realms of American culture, but as comprehensive as her study is, Friedan does not include in depth analyses of contemporary novels. Instead, she points to scandalous novels superficially, using them as evidence that women were increasingly portrayed as "sex-seekers." Yet, the crux of her book is based on how women were searching for an escape from the dullness of housewifery. Are novels not one of the greatest mediums through which to escape reality? Scholar Ardis Cameron, in her book *Unbuttoning America*, asserts they are, asking in reference to women of the 1950s, "where, if not in novel form, could the female reader find herself an actor in a world where women's actions mattered?" (25). Surely, they were not major players in history books at the time, but novels with significant female characters could seriously influence and inspire female readers, a growing market at this time as an explosion in cheap dime novels made literature available to women and men of all economic classes (Cameron 86).

This project analyzes a total of seven novels that were all published at different periods throughout the 1950s, were on the *New York Times* Best Seller List, have central female characters, and have contemporary settings. In the first four, *Star Money* by Kathleen Winsor (1950), *Marjorie Morningstar* by Herman Wouk (1955), *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* by Sloan Wilson (1955), and *Peyton Place* by Grace Metalious (1956), I attempt to measure the

relative independence of the female characters. This sample suggests that popular 1950s novels indeed reflected the American societal “problem with no name”—the feminine mystique—as each, in one way or another, acknowledges that ideally women were to be obedient housewife-mothers. Winsor’s novel rejects this ideal, Wouk’s and Wilson’s embrace it, and Metalious’s complicates it. Not surprisingly, novels that most promoted the feminine mystique were those written by male authors; the female characters in these novels were happiest when married, dependent on men, and taking care of children. Female authors, in contrast, depicted female characters with other passions; these women were actually happy working and being autonomous.

Reading these novels revealed to me that a theme existed in discourse surrounding female autonomy which connected economic independence and sexual freedom. Two of the novels I analyzed, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* and *Marjorie Morningstar* depict female sexuality as appropriate contained within the confines of marriage, but I wanted to understand how different types of sexuality were being portrayed in novels of this time. In the second half of this essay, I analyze novels with female characters who participate in sexual behaviors outside of marriage: *Melville Goodwin, U.S.A.* (1951) by John P. Marquand, *Sweet Thursday* (1954) by John Steinbeck, and *Odd Girl Out* (1957) by Ann Bannon. These novels demonstrate that economic independence, indeed, was seen as increasing women’s sexual freedom. Additionally, they suggest that the reason “deviant” female sexualities were understood as dangerous to the fabric of United States culture is due to a contemporary fear of “race suicide.”

Star Money

Kathleen Winsor's *Star Money* features Shireen Delaney, a young woman who begins her career wanting fame, fortune, and respect. When her husband Ed leaves to fight in World War II, she sets out to gain this kind of celebrity through the publication of a novel she had worked on for years. Navigating her new way of life, Delaney better understands herself as well as American patriarchal society.

Published in 1950, *Star Money* embraces a dying narrative. This narrative was, according to Betty Friedan, that of "the New Woman" who was "independent and determined to find a new life of her own" (30). Shireen represents exactly that. After Ed's departure, her feelings of loneliness and uselessness work as catalysts for her career. Once finished with it, she sends her manuscript to an agency in New York City, and soon she moves there and starts the process of publishing her book.

Shireen quickly begins earning money for her hard work, and this financial autonomy reaps rewards of all kinds, including a sense of sexual independence. With Ed away and Shireen no longer reliant on him for finances, she feels less obliged to be faithful to him. In New York, she then begins a series of affairs that teach her a great deal about men. The relationship between Shireen's economic independence and her sexuality interestingly parallel contemporary fears of female monetary power of the time, described by May as "a scientific formula, that social freedom and employment for women would cause sexual laxity, moral decay, and the destruction of the family" (68).

Admittedly, Shireen's wealth does ultimately destroy her relationship with Ed, as the novel ends with their plans for divorce. According to our heroine, however, the end of their relationship has less to do with her power than it does with Ed's insecurity over the matter. Ed is disgruntled by Shireen being the breadwinner which apparently made, according to her male

acquaintance, “The whole pattern of marriage [turn] upside down” (Winsor 403). Instead of Shireen becoming despondent about their lost love, however, their ill-fated marriage causes her to make one of many realizations about men. In this case it is that they tend to believe

that women have no business being cleverer or making more money than men.

Because whatever will the poor dears do then? They’re not used to it, because it’s their normal part in life to dominate and give women what they think she deserves—a house and clothes and whatever fragments of affection they have handy. And if that power is taken from them then they’re nervous and upset and begin walking on eggs! And isn’t it pitiful! I suppose if a woman happens to have some kind of ability she should be thoughtful enough not to use it, because she might do better than her husband and that would make him unhappy! (403)

Shireen’s understanding of men’s attitudes underscores May’s claim that because the Great Depression, World War II, and corporate jobs—that many men took after the war—disempowered middleclass men, both the media and the government pushed the idea that men should find their power as the head of their households. Accordingly, a home with an obedient wife was a place in which men “could see tangible results of their efforts and receive a measure of respect” (86).

Professionally successful women like Shireen threatened the dynamic. This is likely why the men she spent time with made sure to assert their dominance over her in a multitude of ways. Some men attempted to maintain their superiority by attacking the young woman’s femininity. For instance, one of her close male friends, Dallas, asks her, “What made you decide you didn’t want to be a woman?” because, apparently, “Children are certainly part of any woman’s life” (312). Here Dallas attempts to force onto Shireen a lifestyle of motherhood, projecting what

Betty Friedan called “a religion, a pattern by which all women must now live or else deny their femininity” (36). In making himself the authority over who is to be considered a true woman, Dallas proves, at least to himself, that he is superior to the object of his ridicule: Shireen.

Men in Shireen’s life not only made themselves feel bigger in the presence of this strong woman by rejecting her femininity, however. Another tactic was to subject her to their opinions about what they found attractive in women. Ed does this when he is clearly insecure about his place within the household and tells Shireen she is not nearly as beautiful without makeup, momentarily destroying her confidence. Many men, however, do it simply by encouraging only certain kinds of behaviors in her. One man, she realizes, loved her most:

When she suddenly betrayed herself as a child. Not when she was being a siren, dangerous to men, not as a calculating successful and independent woman, not even when she became very serious and talked... philosophically. Just when she returned for a moment to her childhood and he knew that he was older and wiser than she and had nothing to be afraid of. (329)

Only when she is being child-like and unsure of herself do men really treasure her. Otherwise, she often makes them feel anxious and fearful of their place in the patriarchal, social hierarchy. Shireen’s consistent distaste for the men’s attitudes, and her ultimate success and happiness without them, show that the novel by and large rejects the traditional maxim that women ought to accept their supposed dependence on men.

Despite this constant insistence from her lovers that Shireen should conform to men’s desires, the novel ends with her resolving to never again be dependent on a man either emotionally or financially. In her search for happiness our heroine concludes, “The solution would be found in writing—her own private and reliable world” (372). Like female protagonists

of the 30s and early 40s, Shireen immerses herself in her passion, finding a sense of security not in the arms of a man but in the embrace of a career. For both Shireen and the fictional heroines featured in women's magazines before the feminine mystique swept over American culture, a "career [means] more than job. It [means] doing something, being somebody yourself, not just existing in and through others" (Friedan, 32).

Perhaps this is why a contemporary critic of Kathleen Winsor's novel called the main character "without a doubt the dullest, silliest, and generally most objectionable young beauty in contemporary fiction" (*The Atlantic* 88). As both Friedan and May indicate, American culture was not accepting of such bold imagery of female autonomy. In fact, "Single women... became targets of government-sponsored campaigns urging women back into their domestic roles" (May 70). The mainstream critics easily fell in line by denouncing her book. Meanwhile, libraries across the nation did their part to reject depictions of female independence by deeming her novels pornography and refusing to carry them (Fowler).

In spite of these dismissals, both this book and her 1944 novel *Forever Amber* achieved great notoriety and became *New York Times* best sellers. Their content was perceived by reviewers as vulgar while readers were enticed. Regardless, critics refused to take the author seriously. Perhaps it was her surprising success as a beautiful, young, divorced female author that caused them to dismiss Winsor's novels so easily (Fowler). After years of independence during World War II, the culture of conservatism was bent on chasing women back into the domestic sphere. Thus, a successful, independent woman like Winsor whose texts addressed issues such as female autonomy and sexuality was the perfect target for scorn.

Ultimately, considering its content, *Star Money*'s success signals that while both the government and the media disparaged female autonomy in all its many forms, American readers

were at least curious enough about such a topic as to elevate Winsor's novels to best-seller status. While *The Atlantic* claimed *Star Money* "achieves a really high standard of pointlessness" clearly American readers got the point (88). They read this novel about a woman pursuing her dreams, succeeding, living luxuriously, and having affairs with multiple men, and they devoured it. Throughout the 50s, however, readers would be subject largely to images of women as happiest as housewives and mothers.

Marjorie Morningstar

Herman Wouk's 1955 *Marjorie Morningstar* follows a similar storyline as *Star Money* but with important, dramatic differences. While Kathleen Winsor's novel idolizes the independent woman, Wouk's denounces her, essentially deeming any young woman's interests in autonomy as a mere phase in her life. Moreover, whereas *Star Money* rejects the supposed feminine duty of pleasing men and boosting their egos, *Marjorie Morningstar* espouses it.

The young heroine of Wouk's novel is Marjorie Morgenstern, a young Jewish girl living in New York City with her family in the 1930s. Early on, she takes on the pseudonym Morningstar in her pursuit of an acting career. Much like Shireen, Marjorie from a young age expresses disdain toward housewifery: "It was during this time of her life that she worked up a number of bright arguments against marriage, made fun of sex, and declared that instead of becoming some man's dishwasher and cook she was going to be a career woman" (24). Both the narrator as well as the other characters of the novel treat the young woman's passion as silly, not necessarily because acting is a difficult field to succeed in but for the simple fact that it is a career at all.

Early in the novel Marjorie's mother, for instance, has an argument with her daughter about marriage prospects and Marjorie's dream of being an actress. Mrs. Morgenstern simply "[mutters] that Marjorie could probably be cured of any career by actually trying to work at it" (47). But, unlike Shireen Delaney, who faces doubts about her passion and counters those doubts by proving her abilities, Marjorie does in fact fail at every attempt at work she makes. She not only fails to become an actress, but she despises doing any kind of professional work, quitting every part time job she acquires. Over the course of a few years she finds that her mother was right in claiming, "A good husband and children is what you'll want in a year or two, darling, once you've had a taste of dragging like a tramp around Broadway" (153).

Rather than engaging in affairs with men, learning about their expectations, and rejecting them, Marjorie learns about men's assumptions through her one and only lover, other than her eventual husband. Noel writes her a letter explicitly telling her what her role as a woman should be, and she eventually follows suit. Her first love writes:

All girls, including you, are too goddamn emancipated nowadays. You get the idea from all the silly magazines and movies you're bathed in from infancy, and then from all the talk in high school and college that you've got to *be* somebody and *do* something. Bloody nonsense. A woman should *be* some man's woman and *do* what women are born and built to do—sleep with some man, rear his kids, and keep him reasonably happy while he does his fragment of the world's work.

They're not really happy doing anything else. (436)

Interestingly, the magazines Noel mentions here are those of the 1930s which Friedan claims did in fact encourage female independence. Regardless of these images though, Marjorie ultimately proves Noel's point when she marries a conservative Jewish lawyer and becomes Mrs. Schwartz.

They move to the suburbs and have four children. The young writer Wally Wonken who had fallen in love with her at South Wind acting camp visits her in 1954. According to Wonken, “Contented, she obviously is. There was no mistaking the look she gave her husband when he came in with their two boys from a father-and-son softball game, in old clothes, all sweaty and dirty; nor the real kiss, nor the way she rubbed her face for a second against his shoulder” (559). The young woman who dreaded a suburban lifestyle as a housewife and was absolutely determined to be a star on Broadway now was “only remarkable” for the mere fact that “she ever hoped to be remarkable, that she ever dreamed of being Marjorie Morningstar. She couldn’t be a more run-of-the-mill wife and mother” (564).

Marjorie’s submission and her choice of lifestyle prove not only Noel’s assertion that women are happiest when they take on their traditional gender role, but, along with her rejection of a career comes too his claim that in order to be truly happy, she must also work to make her man “reasonably happy” (436). Unlike *Star Money*, Wouk’s text clearly supports the prevailing belief of the time that women were made to please men and be happy, dutiful housewives. This sentiment of ultimate gender traditionalism holds true for all young women like Marjorie in the text. During her time at South Wind acting camp, she sees her fellow actresses and, rather than seeing them as passionate, ambitious young women, “she thought that they were exactly like herself, youngsters snatching at fun while they chased the dream of happy marriage” (208).

Apparently, Wouk’s reinforcement of conformity was true in much of his fiction. According to scholar Ardis Cameron, another of Wouk’s novels, *The Caine Mutiny*, was one of many novels interpreted by contemporary sociologist William H. Whyte in his study *The Organization Man* as being a part of a phenomenon wherein “popular novels in the postwar period greatly distorted the realities of American life, often avoiding conflict and increasingly

advising readers to ‘adjust to the system’” (34). Accomplishing this same goal, *Marjorie Morningstar* certainly encouraged contentment with traditional gender roles. The novel especially prescribes motherhood, housewifery, and subservience as cure-alls for young women seeking a purpose in life.

Of course, Marjorie’s purpose is more nuanced given her Jewish heritage. As May suggests, “The view of childbearing as a duty was painfully true for Jewish parents, after six million of their kin were snuffed out in Europe” (26). In fact, Marjorie’s exposure to the atrocities of the Holocaust on a trip to Europe becomes one of the motivating factors that causes her to reject her flamboyant, secular lover that, at least at times supported her career, and instead marry a conservative Jewish man and rear his four children.

In this way, Wouk’s novel espouses the feminine ideal Friedan found major fault with by making the satisfaction of men the centerpiece of good women’s lives. Yet *Marjorie Morningstar* also sheds light on the significant role that World War II played in reaffirming women’s proper roles in society. Wartime gave women the opportunity to leave the domestic sphere and enter the workforce as it did for Shireen Delaney, but, for many women, the pressure to fulfill domestic duties and focus solely on supporting husbands and children after such a horrendous war won out over the pursuit of meaningful careers which were few and far between for most women.

The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit

In its own way, Sloan Wilson’s 1955 *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, like *Marjorie Morningstar*, encourages conformity; specifically, it gives readers an example of a strong female character who sacrifices her desires and natural ambitious tendencies in order to make her

husband feel more powerful. This novel focuses mainly on the father of the Rath household, Tom Rath, and it highlights the pressures men faced as breadwinners as they tried to balance family life with demanding careers. There are almost no career women of any kind in this novel. Two of the few mentioned are described superficially as “one chosen for looks, apparently, and one for utility” (9). Tom’s wife Betsy, however, does play a key role in influencing her husband’s choices. At the start of the novel, Tom is not ambitious at all, and it is Betsy that motivates him and presses him to do more at work and at home.

True, given her drive and prudence, she is not *exactly* like the happy housewife heroines Friedan found in women’s magazines, but the resolution at the end of the novel diminishes her power within her marriage, making Tom more dominant and Betsy more dependent, a common trope of 50s literature. In the second chapter, the narrator acknowledges that Betsy is confident enough that “she was perhaps the only woman in the world who didn’t like... compliments” about her looks (5). She is not only confident, but she is competent and pragmatic. Late at night while trying to unravel the unhappiness she knows both she and her husband have been experiencing of late, she comes to the conclusion that “People rely too much on explanation these days, and not enough on courage and action” (112). From there forward she seeks to solve the problems in their marriage by altering their everyday routine, taking the matter into her own hands and pursuing a resolution enthusiastically.

Both Betsy’s energy and confidence actually turn out to be a point of tension in the Rath household that by the end of the novel is resolved. First, though, Betsy learns that Tom had a love affair and fathered a child while away at war. She is so upset she takes the family car and goes for a drive late at night, but, for the first time over the course of the entire novel, she finds herself a damsel in distress when her car breaks down and police pick her up. When her husband

saves her, she urgently tells him that he ought to send alimony to his child in Italy, insists they stop worrying so much about money, and suggests he talk to her about his time at war—all things Tom had been hoping for all along. She then apologizes for “[acting] like a child”; all of this Tom just repeatedly responds to with “I love you” (271).

Not only that, but she resolves to help him and boost his ego in one final way. A way that his poor, vulnerable Italian lover always did by asking him, “Do you think I’m beautiful?” (177). For this young woman Maria, it was true that “physical love was the only form of reassurance she knew, and that she was completely happy and sure of him only when she was caressing him and giving him pleasure... it was chiefly this that caused her constantly to entice him” (176). Clearly, Tom is attracted to women who need his approval. Betsy finally realizes this, humbles herself, and thus asks her husband after they have made up, “Do you like the way I look?... I want to hear it now. Often. Tell me again I’m beautiful” (273). For a woman like Shireen Delaney in *Star Money*, men’s ability to determine her value by focusing solely on her looks is irksome and disempowering. But in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, Betsy’s newfound dependence on Tom and her desire to please him is treated as a sort of skill she has learned to strengthen their relationship. In fact, in the final line of the aforementioned scene, Tom muses “all’s right in the world” (274).

This lesson Betsy learns works to alter her behavior in a way that literature of the 1950s promoted across the board. For instance, one short story Friedan highlights in her chapter “Happy Housewife Heroine” involves a wife whose husband has cheated on her with a clingy, innocent, needy young woman; a friend of the protagonist points this out and encourages similar behavior in the wife in order to win him back. She does, and her problems are thus so easily resolved. The lesson the story teaches mirrors that of an article titled “Do Foreign Women Make

Better Wives?” that Friedan studied in her research for her book. According to the article, the answer is yes. Why? Ultimately the author of the article concurs with an army chaplain who is quoted as saying that “European girls have been brought up feeling a traditional dependence on men—and that makes them more attractive” (30). Tom’s affair with his Italian mistress works in much the same way that this article does, reminding American women of their vulnerability, and the fact that they ought to act properly according to the feminine mystique because they are replaceable.

The U.S. in the 1950s was a world in which women’s career prospects were severely restricted, their average pay equaled half of men’s, and the mere act of pursuing careers often made them suspects of communism in this red scare era. Thus, marriage to a man was their only really viable option for economic stability. Messages identifying what was attractive to men consequently promised to seriously influence women’s behavior (May 85). *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* much like *Marjorie Morningstar*, reinforced problematic gender roles and contributed to a culture of limiting women’s autonomy by subverting the agency they had discovered during wartime and redefining feminine patriotism as service to one’s husband and children exclusively. For Betsy, her patriotism is expressed through making her veteran husband’s happiness her priority. Just as May proposed, after World War II, “Much of the healing process [fell onto] women” (64). So too did it for Betsy Rath.

Peyton Place

While the three other novels this project analyzes either accept or reject ideas about gender role conformity, the 1956 “blockbuster novel” *Peyton Place* offers more raw, honest, nuanced depictions of female life that complicate the discussion. For example, every female

character *Peyton Place* focuses on has a job, not because they desire to be strong, independent women, but by pure necessity. Nellie Cross's husband Lucas is a drunk and spends his money irrationally on booze, so in order to keep their family afloat, Nellie works as a housekeeper. Constance MacKenzie is a single mother and owner of a clothing store in town. Nellie's daughter Selena started working for Connie in high school when she decided she wanted to have spending money. Allison MacKenzie, Constance's daughter, is the only woman for whom having a job is a choice. She chooses to write for her local newspaper and then move to New York City writing short stories for women's magazines because, for her, writing is both a passion as well as an escape.

At fifteen, Allison thinks much like the young women of *Star Money* and *Marjorie Morningstar*. When discussing her future with a friend, Allison declares: "I am going to be a brilliant authoress. Absolutely brilliant. And I shall never marry. I just hate boys!" (91). But, while Allison has a seemingly typical attitude toward men that the young women of the other novels have also espoused, the other women of this novel have different kinds of skepticism toward men. Rather than disliking them generally for the way they tended to demean women verbally as Shireen Delaney did, these women of *Peyton Place* are cynical about men because men in their lives had seriously injured them in some way or another.

Constance is always wary of men until she meets her eventual husband Tom Makris because she had been impregnated by a man who already had a family, and when he died she was left with little money and social stains she had to constantly lie about to cover up. Nellie, on the other hand, was terribly abused by her husband, physically, emotionally, and sexually, leaving her so disoriented, depressed, and mentally ill that before committing suicide, "Nellie

had gone from cursing [her husband] Lucas and all other men to believing that she was afflicted with a strange disease” (186).

Worse still, Selena Cross’s experience with her stepfather causes her once to contemplate telling her friend Allison that “[Your father, h]e’s dead—and you’re better off for it, kid” (40). Selena’s step father, also Nellie’s husband, is so cruel, he physically abuses the girl at a young age, rapes, and impregnates her too. Her pregnancy causes not only her, but the local physician to grapple with the luxury of holding such conventional moral beliefs in the face of such horrific circumstances. For, how could he follow traditional morality by denying the child an abortion and thus sentence her both to motherhood as well as social leprosy?

The text poses a myriad of questions about contemporary morality, especially gendered morality. If it is good and moral for women to obey men’s desires, what does a woman do when a man wants to have unprotected, premarital sex? What does she do when her stepfather forces himself on her? If she is supposed to be the homemaker, and her husband the breadwinner, what does she do when her husband does not earn an income that allows for such a lifestyle? What about when the man dies? Metalious raises these questions simply by writing about the reality that she and millions of other women experienced on a daily basis. As Cameron shows, “Allison MacKenzie [is] like her creator, restless, eager for success, hungry for something else... A small-town girl without a father but whose mother carries on in arch solitude, protecting her past by keeping a social and emotional distance from others” (71).

The experiences of the women of Peyton Place are not only reflective of the author’s experience as a woman: catalogued in Cameron’s book *Unbuttoning America* is further affirmation of the events that take place in Metalious’s novel. Cameron shows that the experiences of women in Peyton Place seriously resonated with readers. The American Studies

scholar documents letters written to Metalious by fans after the publication of *Peyton Place* and finds that the novel “represented a radical leap in its conception of women characters, encouraging readers to recognize themselves or one of their neighbors in its pages” (117). Moreover, she asserts “the women of *Peyton Place* touched a national nerve, their true-to-life stories simultaneously well known and silenced, the subject of clandestine gossip and will-to-not-know” (117). Accordingly, fans again and again wrote to Metalious, “I live in *Peyton Place*” (117).

Part of that familiarity was not just the recognition of how gossip spreads in towns, and how gender role ideals were unobtainable for many women, but it was also their unfortunate ability to relate to the hardships the female characters of the novel faced dealing with the men. As Cameron points out in reference to Selena Cross’s traumatic experience, “The home remains today... ‘the most dangerous place for children’; their most likely [sexual and physical] assailant is... their father” (48). So, while United States leaders of both government and media, as well as a number of novelists, spent their time urging women to humble themselves and make the satisfaction of men the focus of their lives, a great many women and children were already subject to men’s violent, brutal desires.

Fortunately, women not only related to the traumas of the women of *Peyton Place*, but also recognized these women’s attempts to seize control of their own lives. As *Star Money* displayed, financial independence often gave women some degree of sexual independence. The same is true in *Peyton Place*. While, “Husbands, the academic experts and health professionals agreed, should assume not only just economic but sexual dominance,” both the promiscuous women of *Peyton Place* as well as the notorious 1953 Kinsey Report reveal that women can be sexually assertive and desiring, not just submissive and desirable (128).

While *Star Money* glamorizes the rarely experienced life of a successful female author, *Marjorie Morningstar* rejects such dreams as silly and insists on the contentment women acquire from adherence to traditional gender roles, and *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* proposes families are happiest when wives are submissive, *Peyton Place* represents something far closer to reality. Regardless of their desires, women often *were* dominated by men, poor ones were forced to take jobs, but those jobs were likely under-paid and gendered. But mostly, they did have personal desires that deviated from the supposed norm; they often sought escapes from female oppression through activities including but not limited to reading, writing, sex, and working.

Interestingly, one young woman of *Peyton Place* who possesses a notable passion which she uses as an escape from the social ostracism she faces in high school and beyond is Allison MacKenzie. She is the only woman of the text privileged enough to pursue the kind of lifestyle Betty Friedan prescribed to the women of the United States—that of a career woman. Allison ends up working in New York City, “carry[ing] out the formulas,” as Friedan put it, of “happy housewife heroine” short story writing (49). Her story published in *McCall’s* mirrors well those that Friedan described: “It’s about a girl who works in an advertising agency in New York... She is a career girl who wants her boss’s job. This boss of hers is young and handsome and the girl can’t help herself. She falls in love with him. In the end she marries him, after deciding she loves him more than her career” (272). Having been fortunate enough to escape Peyton Place, Allison finds herself restricted to doing the uncreative, fruitless work of carrying out formulas of women’s magazine fiction. The resolution to the novel suggests that despite the limited opportunities women had in finding creative, fulfilling work in writing, there was hope. Readers are left with Allison back in Peyton Place, happy and planning on pursuing the publication of a novel.

Both Shireen Delaney and Allison MacKenzie found that their only route to a career that could be rewarding both intellectually and monetarily was novel writing. This speaks volumes about the career opportunities for women in the 1950s. According to Friedan, when the happy housewife heroine stories of women's magazines were being circulated at large, it was the case that in the magazine industry "Women often carr[ied] out the formulas, women edit[ed] the housewife 'service' departments, but the formulas themselves, which have dictated the new housewife image, [were] the product of men's minds" (49). Men were in charge. Both the top editors and writers of women's magazines as well as the supervisors, directors, managers, and CEOs of the majority of organizations in the United States were male in the 1950s. Not only that, but of the women who were still employed in war industries after World War II ended, "90 percent of them were earning less than they had earned during the war" (May 75). Wage discrimination and limits on work place advancement opportunities for women were rampant in the postwar era.

The novelist heroines of *Star Money* and *Peyton Place* find a way around those barriers in order to be successes. They escape the chains of traditional gender roles by pursuing the publication of novels. During the middle of the twentieth century, this was indeed one of the few career opportunities open to women. Cameron discusses the prospects granted to female writers after a dramatic commercialization of the novel-writing industry provoked publishing agencies to enlist everyday readers to write for them. The culture around writing ultimately "Invit[ed] readers to imagine themselves as writers... advertisements for schools and contests conceptually flattened the hierarchies of talent and effectively tethered authorship to the consumerist fantasies of the era" (87). Essentially, while the majority of industries were confining women to low wages and at times rejecting their employment altogether, a massive commercialization of

literature actually gave some of the forlorn, disoriented housewives Friedan studied a chance at success and fulfillment. Indeed, the industry glorified the career of authorship, and gave consumers the impression that anyone who worked hard enough could *be somebody* (88).

Both Grace Metalious and Kathleen Winsor, as well as their apparently autobiographically inspired young female protagonists, benefitted from this revolution in publishing. These women were ordinary, without university educations, and became major successes to the surprise of the public. Winsor's success was shocking because her writing abilities were not expected in such a beautiful young woman. Metalious was unique as a housewife and mother of three. Unlike the male authors Wilson and Wouk, Metalious and Winsor were pioneers of their demographic. Thus, their very ordinariness made them extraordinary.

Undoubtedly, their experiences navigating a man's world as ambitious women determined to make names for themselves and garner respect influenced the images they chose to portray in their fiction. While the male authors perpetuated and encouraged a mystique with which they were not intimately familiar, Metalious and Winsor both offered to American reading audiences alternatives to the traditional narrative. Ultimately, while it was Friedan who put a name to the "problem with no name," these female authors started the conversation by projecting it through their fiction.

A Bombshell: Connecting Sexual Liberation and Economic Independence

Despite, or perhaps because of, Friedan's impact numerous scholars have reexamined her analysis of American society. Joanne Meyerowitz has provided evidence suggesting that the 1950s were not necessarily as socially conservative as Friedan proposed. Critics have pointed to

the fact that minority women are utterly absent from Friedan's analysis. Others have addressed her undoubtedly problematic views on homosexuality. Truly, while Friedan's book was able to connect disparate women suffering similar kinds of oppression and change their perspectives forever, her analysis was by no means infallible. The former section of this essay adds significant nuance to her proposition that popular culture was providing women with a strict image of their sex, but this latter section will challenge her assertions about female sexuality, especially as portrayed in popular culture.

This inquiry found significant evidence contradicting Friedan's claims regarding promiscuity. In her chapter "The Sex-Seekers" she analyzes Americans supposed preoccupation with sex, and, specifically, women's increased interest in sex. She claims that "by 1950 the salacious details of the sex act to be found in men's magazines were outnumbered by those in fiction best-sellers sold mainly to women" (312). She views this growing obsession with sex as stemming from the feminine mystique. The mystique requires women to define themselves by "the achievement of sexual conquest, status as a desirable sex object, identity as a sexually successful wife and mother" (316). According to her analysis, under the mystique women, and housewives specifically, had only sex and love to provide them with fulfillment. Friedan believed that women needed ambitions other than sex and family to gain self-actualization and remain contented. Thus, for a housewife, sex with her husband would inevitably stop quenching her thirst for happiness, but because sex and love were her only known paths to satisfaction, she would overcome her frustration by engaging in promiscuous activity, having affairs with neighbors and strangers.

While Friedan makes a compelling argument about the sexual behavior of the housewives she interviewed, she fails to account for the many reasons women were increasingly interested in

sex. For instance, not once does she analyze the content of any of these titillating best-sellers sold mainly to women she refers to time and time again. Instead, she perceives women's curiosity in them as hard evidence of an overarching problem of them identifying themselves solely as sexual objects, an issue instigated by the feminine mystique. She, however, fails to see how greater sexual activity for some women was a sign of empowerment, a phenomenon many of these best-selling novels centered on.

Her view of female promiscuity contradicts analyses of several intellectuals. Elaine Tyler May, for instance, provides evidence suggesting that during and just after World War II, contemporary thinkers specifically saw women's promiscuity as a negative effect of their growing agency in society. She cites a number of wartime pamphlets and school textbooks that urged women to avoid becoming too much like men. One warned:

The greater social freedom of women has more or less inevitably led to a greater degree of sexual laxity, a freedom which strikes at the heart of family stability... When women work, earn, and spend as much as men do, they are going to ask for equal rights with men. But the right to behave like a man [means] also the right to misbehave as he does. The decay of established moralities [comes] about as a by-product. (68)

Whereas Friedan viewed increases in female promiscuity as the result of housewives partaking in extramarital affairs, a symptom of the oppressive feminine mystique, voices interested in maintaining tradition during her time focused more on what they saw as the dangerous promiscuity of single women. According to May, these women were actually often economically independent, permitting them to be sexually liberal. Rather than sex-seeking being the one and only goal of these women, it was simply a benefit of general autonomy.

The proposition that women's sexual agency is tied to other forms of freedom is one that existed decades before Friedan wrote her criticism of female promiscuity. The pioneering birth control advocate and workers' rights activist Margaret Sanger, for instance, linked sexual freedom and economic freedom in her political philosophy. In her sex education article "What Every Girl Should Know: Sexual Impulses—Part II," she points out "There seems to be a general tendency on the part of the Woman who is demanding political freedom, to demand sexual freedom also" (43). Sanger saw that as women gained independence they were having more sex for pleasure, which to her was perfectly healthy. Not only that, but with more agency generally, women could make better choices about with whom they would have children. Accordingly, she claims "When women gain their economic freedom they will cease being playthings and utilities for men, but will assert themselves and choose the father of their offspring" (43). Here, Sanger is admittedly aligning womanhood and motherhood, but Friedan does something similar when she argues for increasing women's ability to pursue ambitions besides mothering because working women raise healthier children. For Sanger, "sexual laxity" was simply a sign that women were gaining independence, experimenting with men, and choosing their partners more carefully. She believes that, unfortunately, when women have fewer opportunities for financial independence, they are forced into the arms of the first man who can provide for them.

While both Sanger and Friedan make arguments in favor of women's liberation premised on the notion that women would eventually be mothers, not all women seek motherhood. While a fictional character, Shireen Delaney of *Star Money* is a perfect example. Delaney is surely sexually liberated; she enjoys the company of many men, but she never gives any indication that she has the desire to have children with them. Instead, she sleeps with multiple men simply because she loved being around them and being loved by them. These relationships are a perk of

the wealth and independence she gains when she becomes a published author. Delaney's story proves at least some of the tantalizing novels Friedan was concerned about, are actually embracing her belief in women's independence. Delaney is a character whose sexuality is perfectly contained within the confines of marriage, but becomes sexually liberated when her ambition led to fame and fortune.

Marjorie Morningstar similarly frustrates Friedan's thesis but offers a much different moral compared to *Star Money*. As a young woman just entering adulthood, Marjorie believes she would become an independent woman with a career in acting. Along with this purportedly naïve ambition is a sexual laxity influenced by her cool but immature fellow aspiring actors and actresses. When she finally concludes that a career in acting is neither viable nor what she really desires, she enters a serious relationship with a respectable, conservative Jewish man. In this novel, sexual liberalism is so correlated with female independence and sexual conservatism so linked to female domesticity that her fiancé nearly calls off their wedding when he finds out she is not a virgin. In the context of this novel, given that Marjorie eventually becomes the epitome of the "happy housewife heroine" as well as more rigid in her sexual behavior, it would appear that traditional roles of women do not produce promiscuity but husband-controlled sexuality.

For another housewife, Betsy Rath of *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, sex is hardly part of the equation. In the context of marriage sex is assumed though not discussed, and Betsy surely has no participation in any kind of extramarital affair, but her husband does have an affair. As a man and the sole provider of the family, he has essentially free range to engage in whatever relationships he chooses. While away at war, he justifies his infidelity with his feelings of loneliness and fear of death, but he also has the unspoken benefit that such behavior would not result in him losing his home and way of life. Though he could face divorce, for a housewife in

the same position divorce would mean the loss of her (likely) one source of income—her husband. I pointed out in my earlier analysis of this novel that Betsy chose to change her behavior in order to improve their marriage. In many ways though, she had no choice in the matter. While husbands could control the sex lives of their wives with the threat of divorce, women could not use that same threat to reduce the livelihoods of their spouses. Instead, many simply had to cope their husband's infidelity in whatever way possible.

Peyton Place represents a much different way in which sexual freedom operates. While Friedan criticized the novel for its glorification of female sex-seekers, what she fails to recognize is the ways in which the economic independence of the protagonist, Connie MacKenzie, and her status as an unmarried woman allow her to not only seek sex, but to opt out of it. Liberal sexuality means not only the ability to have sex freely, but it also means the ability to choose abstinence as well. Married women were restricted in their sexuality during this time not just because an extramarital affair could translate into a loss of their home and other resources, but they were also restricted because they were legally obligated to have sex with their husbands. Until 1979, there was no legal precedent interpreting marital rape as a crime in the United States, but a wife refusing sex from her husband was, in many states, grounds for a divorce (Rothman). Thus, Connie's ability to remain abstinent for so many years of her life was an act of sexual freedom enabled by her status as a single woman and her economic independence.

Ultimately, Friedan found fault with Metalious's depiction of female sexuality, claiming: "The image of the aggressive female sex-seeker... comes across in novels like *Peyton Place* and the *Chapman Report*—which consciously cater to the female hunger for sexual phantasy" (314). She, however, fails to recognize the ways in which that fantasy to which she was catering empowers women. This is a story wherein a woman, because of the agency she obtained by

being a small business owner earning her own income, does not have to be a passive object created for ensuring a man's pleasure, but is, instead, a sexually liberal individual who freely chooses when and with whom to have sex.

Of course, Friedan's reaction to *Peyton Place* and the reactions of critics during the novel's release demonstrate that the sexual experiences of Constance MacKenzie were by no means an accepted norm. This was clear in the text itself too. Men in MacKenzie's community both pined after her and marginalized her. Her sexual choices differentiated her from the rest of respectable society. So too did those of Shireen Delaney of *Star Money* who found herself repeatedly having to explain her sexual behaviors to the numerous men who felt it their place to ask her about them. For women in the post-World War II era, sex outside of marriage was deviant sexual behavior. Realizing this, I decided to further research "deviant" sexuality in post-war novels by identifying popular novels with major female characters who engaged in different versions of sexual deviance. Such an inquiry allows me to better understand the values, attitudes and anxieties toward female sexuality that defined American culture at this time.

Melville Goodwin, U.S.A.

In John P. Marquand's 1951 novel *Melville Goodwin, U.S.A.* the central character is an army general named Mel who leads a nearly faultless life consisting of service to his country, loyalty to his wife, and the drive to be a hero. After rising to hero-like status for work he did in the aftermath of World War II, a journalist is assigned to profile the general with the mediation of our narrator, Sidney Skelton who met General Goodwin in Paris during the war. While the book mostly focuses on unraveling the life and times of General Melville Goodwin, the major tension presented is focused on a single woman: Dottie Peale.

Dottie is the owner of a publishing company she acquired after the death of her husband Henry Peale. At the end of World War II she accompanies Sidney and other VIPs to Paris where they encounter General Goodwin. Despite Goodwin's longtime commitment to his wife and perfect behavior as a general, Dottie seduces him. She not only seduces him, but he falls desperately in love with her which is, according to Sidney, something much more dangerous than an unemotional fling. Unlike other officers who "knew how to handle these problems" of extramarital affairs, Goodwin was "emotionally unstable" because he not only took part in this affair, but he was actually intent on leaving his wife and family for Peale (XXXII).

Dottie's position as a single woman is what ultimately allows her to pursue the evil act she does when she manipulates General Goodwin. Instead of building a family over her adult life, she was spending her time running her business. Both the narrator, and the woman herself view this as a mistake that led her to the dissatisfaction that defines her life. For one, her careerism has made her harsh and thus not well liked. While she is certainly adept at running the business, men who work below her are disturbed by her grit. According to one man who was once her subordinate: "By God in a year she had taken over the whole damned editorial and production department" (XX). Sidney could sense that while the man wanted to say it "He wouldn't say she was a bitch, because she was a friend of [Sidney's]" (XX). Of course, Sidney is perfectly aware that Dottie is a bitch. Even Sidney's kind, gentle wife agrees when she says Dottie "really is a bitch" given the fact that she is sleeping with a married man (XXXIII). She is a bitch because she not only takes men's jobs, but also because she takes men themselves, from other women. She thus threatens both men and women by transgressing normative gender roles and acting out in an assertive way, something all the characters of the novel find fault with her for.

Moreover, Dottie is consistently pictured as a possessive, manipulative, conniving woman. She is described as being able to “find out everything by hook or crook” (XVI). Sidney claims: “She could twist and turn a man and adjust him by some sort of mental osteopathy so that he always felt he was unusually brilliant and gay” (VI). Her plotting is most obvious in one encounter when Sidney of course “knew Dottie well enough to know that she was consciously setting this scene of old friendship and enduring congeniality because she wanted something of [him]” (XXI). Much of what she does is for personal gain, and her ability to manipulate is, to Sidney at least, both impressive and dangerous.

The danger she poses is represented in multiple ways. Dottie is frequently, for instance, compared to beautiful, evil fictitious female characters of literary history. Sidney toward the middle of the narrative indirectly calls her a siren (XXIII). When Mel is at her place for a night and she asks of him “Why can’t things be like this always?” Sidney states, “Calypso must have said it, and Circe, and Cleopatra undoubtedly said it to Antony, if not to Julius Caesar” (XXVI). Moreover, when Mel first considers what life would be like divorced from Muriel Goodwin and attached instead to Dottie Peale, Sidney claims, “He was one of those Samsons ready and waiting for some Delilah to give him a haircut, and Dottie Peale was just the one to do it” (XXI). In so many ways, Dottie, to Sidney, is just another iteration of an age-old problem, a devious woman using her sexuality to destroy the livelihood of a prominent man. The fact that this femme fatale is conflated with female independence in the only career woman of the novel, suggests that it is indeed economically independent women who are the true threat to the nation.

Admittedly, Dottie is described by her friend Sidney as a bright, independent, ambitious woman who is overall a beautiful, loyal, charming person. He sympathizes by stating: “Dottie was not wholly responsible for what had happened to her. She was the finished product of a new

age of competitive women and a feministic epoch” (XXI). According to Sidney, women were now expected to be competitive and enter into fields that were once solely the sphere of men, and they were thus left “confused in their values because they had to get along as best they could and they had no mothers to guide them” (XXI). Essentially, Dottie is the promiscuous, unsatisfied, career woman who is the result of the feminist movement. While she is a good girl at heart, loyal to her friends and simply desiring to think of others instead of just herself all the time, the pressures of feminism made her into a monster and a threat to the nation. She mistakenly devoted herself wholly to attaining career success rather than raising a family and is, in the end, horribly unhappy with her life.

To Sidney, Dottie’s decision to interfere in married men’s lives is her way of competing with other women, a phenomenon he blames on the feminist movement of which she grew up in the aftermath. In this way, rather than bringing about solidarity among women, the first wave of the feminist movement bred unhappy, aggressive women that in many respects threaten national security. Indeed, Dottie’s interference in the general’s life prompts several meetings at the Pentagon wherein “what he was doing was quite frankly denoted as emotional instability” (XXXII). Dottie’s ability to manipulate general Goodwin suggests to his superiors that he is vulnerable to sexual persuasion, and this vulnerability proves him a liability in the pentagon.

This framing is eerily similar to one that May identified in her analysis of popular culture of the post war era. May claims that in these narratives was a serious fear of women’s sexual freedom. There was an “association between sexy women and aggressive power” and a concern that “if such erotic force were unleashed within the nation (rather than against its enemies), the results would be disastrous” (68). Dottie is clearly described by our narrator as a woman with incredible sexual power and the capacity to provoke catastrophe. The fact that her target was an

all-American army general in the prime of his career, corroborates May's theory that single "Women... appeared as aggressors, threatening to weaken the war effort and the family. Soldiers and happy homes would be the sorry victims of female sexuality on the loose" (69). The supposed threat that promiscuous women posed to national security was only a piece of a cultural campaign against sexual behavior that in any way endangered the nuclear family. A whole host of sexual activities were deemed deviant and ostracized as such.

For Donna Penn in her essay "The Sexualized Woman," "Proper female sexuality, heterosexual in orientation and reserved for the home and within marriage, was, in the postwar framework, surrounded by uncontained, rather public expressions of illicit sexual behaviors. These behaviors were constituted in the form of the prostitute, the lesbian, and the prostitute lesbian" (361). According to Penn, the prostitute and the lesbian were viewed as the most depraved and sexually dangerous figures in the contemporary framework. This is likely because both women supposedly threatened "race suicide." Prostitutes, it was believed, did not become pregnant. As Havelock Ellis, a correspondent of Margaret Sanger, reasoned, "Nearly every prostitute must very soon get gonorrhoea (even though she may not know it) & there is no cause of sterility in women so common as the inflammation arising from gonorrhoea" (112). During a time when, as May describes it, common knowledge was that "Germs were not responsible for spreading disease, 'promiscuous' women were" (69). Prostitutes, by definition, incapable of becoming pregnant and the cause for infertility-inducing venereal diseases, endangered the nation that was recovering its population in the aftermath of World War II.

Sweet Thursday

Despite their reputation, prostitutes were celebrated in best-selling novel *Sweet Thursday* by John Steinbeck, published in 1954 as a sequel to his more well-known novel published in

1945, *Cannery Row. Thursday* deals with the sexuality of its female prostitute characters in a gentle, though conservative, way. Indeed, Steinbeck dismantles the notion that the purpose of marriage is solely reproduction; thus, he makes room for the possibility of happily married former prostitutes. The short novel takes place in Cannery Row, a small town filled with bars, prostitutes, and some supposedly unsavory individuals. However, while Steinbeck describes the majority of his characters as criminals and hustlers, the plot of the novel only highlights the positive, kind things the members of this community do for one another. As such, while a number of the main characters are prostitutes living in a brothel, no specific sexual act is ever even alluded to. What the narrator focuses on is their less physically intimate interactions.

In the town's most popular brothel called the Bear Flag run by a woman named Fauna, marriage is the end game. Fauna is described as a pragmatic, brilliant business woman, but also as a caring, gentle boss who takes care of her "hustlers." Her primary interest in them is priming them for marriage. According to our narrator, she "transform[ed] the Bear Flag into a kind of finishing school for girls" (3). In her "hookshop" she chastises the prostitutes when they swear, teaches them how to set tables, and even instructs them in the art of capturing a man's heart. Fauna displays proudly a wall of stars; according to the mistress, "Every one of them stars represents a young lady from the Bear Flag that married, and married well" (77). Her goal for every one of the young women is marriage. Fauna has high hopes that even Mabel a "natural-born, blowed-in-the-glass hustler" who "in any time, under any system, after a period of orientation... would have found herself doing exactly what she was doing in Cannery Row," will one day marry (147).

Marriage is so central to the affairs of this brothel that the main plot revolves around the unification of the newest prostitute, named Suzy, and a well-respected, local scientist named

Doc. It is, unsurprisingly, Fauna's idea to set them up when the community notices Doc has become depressed, overly focused on his work, and distant from other community members. Many of the characters decide the proper solution to his problems is female company because such a relationship might rid him of loneliness and provide him with a caring companion. For Suzy, marriage to Doc, someone so above her socioeconomic status, is assumed to be appropriate despite her many protestations.

Fauna demonstrates to what extent her business facilitates marriage as well as her philosophy on how to win a man when she advises Suzy just before her first date with Doc. She tells the young woman in order to be successful: “[keep] your mouth shut,” “lay off opinions because you ain't really got any,” “listen,” and “don't pretend to be something you ain't” (119-120). Her advice is reminiscent of contemporary expectations of women in relationships generally which entailed having a pretty face, listening intently, and not challenging the man. In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan discussed this philosophy of heterosexual relationships as “togetherness.” When relationships with men require women to rid themselves of opinions and focus instead wholly on their partners, Friedan says, “The end of the road is togetherness, where the woman has no independent self to hide even in guilt; she exists only for and through her husband and children” (41). Apparently, Doc finds the passive woman of “togetherness” attractive which is why he slowly but surely becomes accustomed to the idea of marrying Suzy.

Suzy, however, lacks not the will or the desire to marry Doc, but the confidence. Given that he is an intelligent man with a PhD, Doc, Suzy reasons, is out of her league, and while Doc does eventually ask her to marry him at the request of Fauna and others, Suzy refuses because she cannot stand the thought of him marrying her simply because he felt he had to (202). Accordingly, Suzy claims of any man she does marry: “he got to need the hell out of me. He got

to be the kind of guy that if he ain't got me he ain't got nothing" (205). The ways in which the man who marries her must need her are by and large emotional. She describes her desire in the following way: "I want him to be a real guy, maybe even a tough guy, but I want a window in him. He can have his dukes up every other place but not with me" (205). She wants her man to be able to be vulnerable with her. Presumably, this tough guy she envisions needs her not for money or sex, but because she is the only person with whom he can be weak and emotional. Doc is, perhaps, truly the exact man she should be with, then. His return from World War II gave him emotional struggles so great that, as Steinbeck poetically describes it, "The worm of discontent was gnawing at him" (17). His emotional pain becomes a great problem for the whole town, but even with all his education and scientific training, he is ill-equipped for dealing with it. Quickly, he realizes that "thought is the evasion of feeling" and thus embarks on a project to scientifically study the emotional responses of octopi to different stimuli, ironically enough (18).

Despite Doc and Suzy's seeming complementary interests, Suzy assumes Doc is too smart to ever need her, refuses him, quits the Bear Flag, starts working at a local restaurant, and moves into an abandoned boiler outside the Hediondo Cannery. Ultimately, Suzy sees herself, as a prostitute, unworthy of Doc. It is only after moving out of the Bear Flag and into the boiler that she accepts the idea of them marrying. Interestingly, the narrator explains that to many of the town folk, "Suzy's choice of the boiler as a home was a symbolic retreat to the womb" (169). It seems she has internalized the idea that a man with a PhD cannot marry a prostitute, and so she must be reborn in order to truly be of value to a man like Doc.

Eventually, in order to unite the couple once and for all, Doc's friend Hazel takes matters into his own hands, breaks Doc's arm, and tells Suzy Doc needs her to take care of him. She finally goes to Doc ready to take care of him because now she knows undoubtedly, he needs her.

The novel ends with the promise that the two will marry. Ultimately, their marriage is premised on the fact that Doc has two needs, to be nursed for after his injury and to be distracted from his recent psychological struggles. Suzy can fulfill those needs, and thus marriage is deemed perfectly appropriate. Interestingly, reproduction not once enters into the equation. Whereas marriage for many postwar couples was predicated on the prospect of having children, this novel espouses the idea that marriage is the unification of two individuals where one has a need, and the other can satisfy that need. Of course, Steinbeck's portrayal of such a relationship is drawn in a gendered way, one in which the woman, generally seen as the one more in tune with emotions, meets the emotional needs of a man.

In contrast with his contemporaries, Steinbeck does offer a humanizing portrayal of prostitutes. Penn's cultural research suggests that both the prostitute and the lesbian were demonized in the postwar era as "the essence of female degeneracy" (359). Rather than being reprobates, prostitutes are regarded positively in nearly all of Steinbeck's novels. Sarah Appleton Aguiar posits as much in her essay "'No Sanctuary': Reconsidering the Evil of Cathy Ames Trask." She writes that most prostitutes in Steinbeck novels are portrayed kindly—they are even analogous to angels, and brothels to churches (147). Of course, while Steinbeck does not subscribe to contemporary theories of prostitutes as degenerates, he does give Suzy the responsibility of emotional labor in her gendered position as a wife. Whereas Doc's primary contribution to his community is his scientific findings, Suzy's, as both a prostitute and then as a wife, is her ability to comfort men. *Sweet Thursday* is undeniably anti-classist and it certainly redefines the purposes of marriage, but Steinbeck's novel does endorse the idea that the greatest support women can provide to the world is emotional, by catering to men's needs.

His novel thus does not weigh in on the question of female economic independence and its relationship to sexual freedom because, in the novel's framing, women's primary function may not be to reproduce, as it is in the traditional narrative, but it *is* to act as solaces to men. Much like in the case of the institution of prostitution itself, sex in the novel is neither empowering for nor oppressive for women. By commodifying sex, making it a good to be bought and sold rather than a mechanism for reproduction, prostitution takes away its potential power as a tool to oppress women. However, because in each women's value is dependent on men's needs, the structure of both prostitution and marriage in Steinbeck's novel makes women reliant on men for their worth in society.

While Steinbeck was moralizing the prostitute, Penn contends that "the 'lesbian threat' took on more ominous meanings. Lesbians were portrayed not only as gender transgressors but also as sexual demons" (359). In her estimation, they gained newfound notoriety because the Alfred Kinsey report of 1953 on *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* revealed that higher rates of women participated in homosexual activities than was previously thought. Lesbians, then, were a threat not simply because they did not conform to the patriarchal status quo, but because a fear had been kindled that vulnerable young women could be coerced into lesbianism by charming, sexy lesbians. Thus, she claims, "Lesbians were increasingly described and publicized as a predatory lot whose lives were based on sexual conquest and the determined pursuit of sexual gratification" (367). They pursued the innocent, and their supposed objective was seen as likely to engender "race suicide," in the same way prostitutes did (359).

Odd Girl Out

Ann Bannon's 1957 best-selling novel *Odd Girl Out* may not portray lesbians as sexual demons, but they certainly are not depicted as normal, happy young women. Michelle Ann Abate reasons Bannon's portrayals were likely influenced by the fact that:

In the same way that the Hays Code imposed strict guidelines about the depiction of 'sexual perversion' in film, the Comstock Act did so in print media.... For these reasons, pulp novels provided new voice and visibility to same-sex romance, but they were forbidden from presenting it as enjoyable, healthy or rewarding. (173)

Bannon ultimately strikes a balance between the expectations of the law and culture of the day, and a nuanced, human portrayal of the experiences of lesbians. Her narrative furthermore lends credence to the idea that sexual liberation is tied to economic independence.

The two main characters who engage in the central lesbian affair are freshman Laura Landon and senior Beth Cullison. Of course, all the central characters of this novel are in college and thus do not have fulltime jobs. Regardless, Beth proves to have a serious level of independence as well as ambition. She was "sophisticated, a senior, a leader, president of the Student Union, and curiously pretty" (1-2). Moreover, by the end of the novel, in whatever fashion she acquires it, she is "rich" by "twenty-one... [she's] got [her] own money now, and no one can take it away from [her], not even uncle John. [She's] free" (202). Meanwhile, Beth is incredibly sexually liberated, in her early years in college she slept with "a long procession of boys, mostly college men" (25). Then, because none of the men she sees are able to satisfy her sexually or emotionally, she eventually gives up on the entire practice of dating and sex, until she meets Laura. Her sexual liberalism permits her to see her young roommate in a way some women would be too scared to even contemplate: "It did not frighten Beth that Laura was a

member of her own sex; it made her only the more curious” (59). Clearly, Beth is both an economically and sexually liberated young woman.

Given that Laura’s lesbian affair is facilitated by her economic independence, lesbianism in *Odd Girl Out* comes to replace sexual freedom in the cyclical relationship between economic independence and sexual freedom. Thus, on the one hand, Beth’s economic independence increases her ability to engage in a lesbian affair, and, on the other, lesbianism, by removing gender roles in romantic relationships, increases the necessity that Beth be economically independent.

Beth, however, does not choose to exercise her sexual freedom in the end because transgressing gender roles by participating in a lesbian affair proves too daunting a task. In Beth’s relationship with Laura, Beth is the more mature, dominant one. Laura is young and has never been in a relationship before. She is clingy, possessive, jealous, and dependent on Beth for emotional strength. In essence, “Laura was her baby” (192). But having both the responsibility of motherhood and the mark of lesbianism proves too great of a combined burden to bear for the young woman. While the two sorority girls eventually make plans to run away together, Beth immediately starts doubting whether or not such a move would ultimately make her happy. Under such circumstances, “Beth had no one to look to and she was suddenly responsible not just for herself but for Laura as well. It was unnerving” (190). Charlie, on the other hand, is older than Beth and possesses an even more dominant personality than the president of the Student Union. In this way, “[Beth] could command Laura the way Charlie commanded her. But the authority fulfilled and invigorated Charlie; it only amused Beth and left her empty” (150). While Beth naturally adopts a dominant role in the relationships she forms, she finds herself comforted

by a more authoritative figure in a world where her sexual freedom, in the form of lesbianism, threatens to subject her to societal exclusion.

Given that homosexuality was not even removed from the list of mental disorders in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders until 1975, the ostracization of homosexuals during the postwar period is undeniable. For a time, the love and happiness Laura provides Beth with make the sense of normalcy she will lose as a result of their relationship worth it. When Charlie learns of this love affair, however, he quickly moves to shut it down, convincing Beth a more traditional life would be perfectly satisfying, and would not force her to "[break] the rules" (205). He pleads, "This is child stuff, Beth, this thing between you and Laura. You're deceiving yourself. You're a woman, honey—a grown woman. An intelligent, beautiful girl with a good life ahead of you. And that life has a man in it and kids and a college degree. Maybe it can't be that way for Laura. But it's got to be that way for you" (205). Charlie not only persuades Beth that ending her relationship with Laura will permit her to live like a "normal" woman, but he also prescribes for Beth a life of sexual containment and economic dependence. He tells her that she will have a husband and children, a dynamic that at the time seriously limited the sexual freedom of women. And, while he mentions a degree, he does not suggest she will ever have a career, and, unfortunately, a college degree in the 1950s in no way guaranteed a woman would use that degree after graduation. In fact, in her chapter "The Sex-Directed Educators" Friedan describes how many young women during this time attended college not because they wanted to learn the skills necessary for obtaining a rewarding career, but because they were searching for a husband, and having an education heightened their chances of attracting intelligent, wealthy young men.

Given Charlie's expectations, when Beth ends her relationship with Laura to be with him, she not only relinquishes her ability to exercise her sexual freedom in the form of lesbianism, but she surrenders the prospect of becoming an independent career woman, earning her own living. *Odd Girl Out* thus strongly correlates financial freedom and sexual liberalism. Lesbians who rejected the idea of heterosexual marriage and had to earn their own living were thus more likely than a heterosexual married woman to be able to have sex with multiple partners, or with no partners, with fewer economic consequences. In some ways, while society refused to allow homosexuals to participate in normative, patriarchal institutions, this fact also freed them from the restraints institutions like marriage imposed on women. Thus, Laura is left with her options open whereas Beth's future is essentially etched in stone.

Conclusion:

The culmination of these books reveals the primitive nature of the postwar anxieties over women's financial and sexual freedom. The efforts to malign career women, lesbians, and prostitutes all worked together to define the housewife heroine, a woman whose lifestyle made her little more than a reproductive vessel, as the only moral woman. The consistent anxieties over "race suicide" bolstered these attempts to narrowly define womanhood. What this analysis demonstrates is that the root of misogyny is often embedded in the biological imperative to reproduce. The death and destruction of World War II threatened to deplete the American population, and the evidence suggests that the baby boom that followed was not necessarily just a natural reaction to that event, but was heavily orchestrated by various interested parties intent on maintaining a sizeable populace.

This inquiry though also begs the question of how gender politics intersect with racial politics. As this project demonstrates, the suburban white women Friedan studied were subjected

to such a narrow definition of womanhood because it was their patriotic duty to guarantee their white genes were passed down to the next generation. Ultimately, further research into the literature of the postwar era could really shed light on the interplay between the systems that oppress women and those that oppress people of color.

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