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Narrative Pleasures and Feminist Politics: Popular Women's Historical Fiction, 1990-2015

Victoria Kennedy
victoriaemkennedy@gmail.com

NARRATIVE PLEASURES AND FEMINIST POLITICS:

POPULAR WOMEN'S HISTORICAL FICTION, 1990-2015

by

Victoria E. M. Kennedy

B.A. English (Hons.), Wilfrid Laurier University, 2011

M.A. English, York University, 2012

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Abstract

This dissertation contributes to a developing body of work on women's historical fiction and its significance to feminist discourse. Building from Diana Wallace's 2005 study *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900-2000*, I offer a modified definition of "the woman's historical novel" and a transatlantic consideration of several of the most popular titles in the contemporary period, including *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2001), *Outlander* (1991), *A Great and Terrible Beauty* (2003), and *Scarlett* (1991). Several studies have followed Wallace's, notably Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn's *Metafiction and Metahistory in Contemporary Women's Writing* (2007) and Katherine Cooper and Emma Short's *The Female Figure in Contemporary Historical Fiction* (2012). However, these studies are often somewhat highbrow in their scholarship; they examine prize-winning texts by authors like Angela Carter, A. S. Byatt, Michèle Roberts, Margaret Atwood, and Sarah Waters, but often leave the relationship between popular culture and feminist politics in bestselling women's historical novels undertheorized. On the other hand, while feminist critics like Imelda Whelehan, Susan Douglas, and Andi Zeisler have raised questions about the commercialization and dilution of feminist theory when it appears in popular fiction, film, television, and music, their studies have not addressed historical fiction in detail. Since historical fiction is one of the most prominent genres of the twenty-first century, this dissertation brings together the discourses of feminist pop culture criticism and theories of feminist historiography to address the tensions between narrative pleasures and feminist politics in some of the most recognizable women's historical novels of the past twenty-five years. I offer a reading of these novels that illuminates how contemporary writers and readers uphold the

importance of feminist gains when they imagine the past, but also express longing for aspects of traditional femininity that have been made taboo by modern feminist discourse. My study considers the contradictions or tensions between the novels' feminist themes, such as the importance of female autonomy, women's education, and sisterhood, and the various pleasures these texts provide, such as romance, erotic content, reverence for traditional gender roles, emphasis on clothes and other material trappings of femininity, and a focus on affluent, white, heterosexual women. Interrogating the various feminist and anti-feminist discourses and ideologies present in these popular, middlebrow novels, I attempt to add complexity and nuance to existing understandings of women's historical fiction as feminist historiography, and to consider how and why feminist discourse is shaped by nostalgia, romanticization, and exoticism in these texts.

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"We never know which lives we influence, or when, or why"
— Stephen King, *11/22/63*

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History, Feminism, and Popular Fiction

"I can read poetry and plays, and things of that sort, and do not dislike travels.
But history, real solemn history, I cannot be interested in...
It tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me.
The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page;
the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all — "

— Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*[1]

Historiography and the Historical Novel

My epigraph from Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818) presents a moment when the heroine, Catherine Morland, despairs that there is nothing pleasurable in reading "real solemn history." Nothing, certainly, to rival the psychological and physical sensations that are incited when she reads fiction. The opposition of these two forms, history and fiction, is based on the supposition that history is fact while fiction is fantasy. Although there are still historical theorists and literary critics who uphold this division, in the two hundred years since Catherine Morland despaired the solemnity of history, the line between history and fiction has become increasingly blurred. Indeed, historical fiction in the contemporary period, which I date as the period of the past fifty years from the mid-1960s to the present, might best be considered a form that brings some of the pleasures of fiction reading together with the factuality and educational value of history.

The blurring of history and fiction occurred as historiography—theories of the writing of history—began to acknowledge the similarities between the way fictional and

[1] Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey*. Ed. Marilyn Gaull. New York: Pearson Longman, 2005. 88. Diana Wallace's *The Woman's Historical Novel* also begins with a consideration of this quote from *Northanger Abbey*.

historical narratives are constructed and consumed. Prior to the mid-twentieth century, the dominant view was that there was such a thing as objective history or historical truth (which I frequently refer to throughout this dissertation as "Capital-H History"), and that it was the historian's duty to uncover and convey this objective truth. In his mid-nineteenth-century text *Lectures of the Philosophy of History*, G. W. F. Hegel lays out what he sees as the primary goals and foundational methods of writing history. For Hegel, history progresses toward an ultimate end that has been pre-ordained by God. The historian's role, in Hegel's view, is to attempt to understand the overall shape and movement of history, and, as he puts it: "to consider world history in relation to its ultimate end" (46). Hegel is wary of historians who practice what he calls "reflective history," for they often commit three sins: bringing their own spirits into the historical narrative, bringing the present into the past, and fragmenting one aspect of history (he lists "the history of art, of law, or of religion") from the wider historical context (23). Yet while Hegel and many of his ancestors, contemporaries, and descendents advocated for objective, holistic historiography, historians in the mid- to late-twentieth century more readily recognized that there is no such thing as objective history. Rather, the historian mediates history through language and thus inevitably shapes it, leaving a metaphorical fingerprint on the historical narrative.

In the mid-twentieth century, postmodern discourse led to a shift in historiography away from deterministic and teleological models, like Hegel's, toward a more nuanced, self-reflexive mode. In his 1960 book, *What is History?*, the well-established and decorated historian E. H. Carr challenges the idea of the historian as a conveyor of fact, instead stressing that the historian has a subjective and idiosyncratic relationship to his

data. Speaking of nineteenth-century historiography, Carr argues that it was too reverent toward the idea of truth, envisioning the historian as the passive receiver or collector of facts that existed "independent of his consciousness" (9). Carr debunks the fetishization of fact, asserting strongly and early in his text that "the facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context" (11). Consequently, Carr urges historians to exercise self-reflexivity in their work, recognizing the role that individual subjectivity plays in the communication of history. This idea is also described by Hayden White in a series of writings including the iconic 1972 essay "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact." Here and elsewhere, White argues that the work the historian does in creating a history out of historical events is comparable to the work the novelist does in creating a narrative out of plot elements. White calls the process of the historian arranging historical data "emplotment" (223)—emphasizing the way this activity relies on the same techniques authors employ when making fictional narratives. The significance of recognizing the emplotment of history, White explains, is that it forces one to acknowledge that "most historical sequences can be emplotted in a number of different ways, so as to provide different interpretations of those events and to endow them with different meanings" (224). In short, objectivity and truth were no longer held sacred in historiography of the late twentieth century. Rather, as Michel Foucault wrote in 1971, truth is simply an "error that cannot be refuted because it was hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history" (79).

These postmodern challenges to master narratives that purport to be truth—including capital-H History—created opportunities for historians and historical novelists to undermine established history by writing what E. P. Thompson, in 1966, called

"history from below." History from below calls attention to the ways that gender, race, and class have impacted the construction of established historical narratives. As Linda Hutcheon noted in 1989, "we now get the histories (in the plural) of the losers as well as the winners, of the regional (and colonial) as well as the centrist, of the unsung many as well as the much sung few, and I might add, of women as well as men" (66). If the historian controls the elisions, emphases, and biases of a historical narrative, then it follows that there are alternate histories that have never been popularized because they could not or would not be written by those with the education and platform to write and publish history. Indeed, it is within this context that much contemporary women's historical fiction operates as a challenge to the erasure and marginalisation of women in the established narratives of history. While it would be false to say that pre-1960 historical fiction was uniformly un-self-reflexive, it seems safe to say that, in the late twentieth century, it became extremely difficult for historians and historical novelists to take "truth" or "fact" for granted.

The academic study of historical fiction as a literary genre stems primarily from György Lukács' *The Historical Novel*, published in Russian in 1937 but not published in English until 1962. In his study, Lukács identifies Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814) as the first historical novel. The subtitle of *Waverley, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, establishes the oft-upheld rule for defining whether a novel may be considered historical. Put simply, in order to be considered a historical novel, the plot must be set at least sixty years in the past, just as *Waverley*, the genre's urtext, was set. In positioning *Waverley* as the first historical novel, Lukács discounts earlier novels that he says contain "historical themes" rather than being "historical novels." He writes:

> "The so-called historical novels of the seventeenth century (Scudéry, Calpranède, etc.) are historical only as regards their purely external choice of theme and costume. Not only the psychology of the characters, but the manners depicted are entirely those of the writer's own day." (19)

In contrast, Scott is identified as the father of the historical novel because in his novels, "the historical characterization of time and place, the historical 'here and now' is something much deeper [than picturesque descriptions]" (41). Thus, in defining the historical novel for literary theory and criticism, Lukács adopts an objectivist view similar to that of historiographers like Hegel. Just as Hegel argues that the historian must not influence historical fact, Lukács argues that the historical novelist must not allow his present sensibilities to influence his representation of history. Finally, it must be noted that Lukács' examination of the historical novel since *Waverley* is entirely focused on male authors. He identifies Hugo, Balzac, Tolstoy, and Flaubert as Scott's most notable descendants.

The publication of an English translation of *The Historical Novel* in 1962 coincided with the postmodern shift in historiography and the rise of the postmodern historical novel. Thus, as critics in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have responded to and elaborated Lukács' study in increasing numbers, the parameters used for defining and studying historical fiction have shifted. Historical objectivism—the notion that the author can keep his or her modern sensibilities and knowledge from influencing his or her representation of the past— is no longer a required feature of a historical novel. In fact, novels like *The House on the Strand* (du Maurier; 1969), *Kindred* (Butler; 1979), and *Possession* (Byatt; 1990) exemplify the popular trend of

blurring the line between past and present, challenging the separation of the two. Furthermore, critics in the contemporary period have struggled to redefine how far in the past a novel must be set in order to be considered "historical." Many continue to uphold the "sixty years since" rule derived from *Waverley*, but others have offered alternative ways of measuring historicity. Diana Wallace, for instance, presents a more flexible definition, asserting that a novel may be considered "historical" if it is set in a period before the birth of the author (x). Thus, the period can vary depending on the age of the author. However, even here I suggest there must be room for exceptions, as in the case of older authors. For instance, few would question the categorization of Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* (2001) as historical fiction, even though Atwood, born in 1939, was alive in the 1930s and 40s when the novel is set. Thus Lukács' study, though foundational to genre criticism, is no longer considered the standard by which historical narratives are measured. Instead, contemporary critics have broadened their view of the genre and are examining it through new critical lenses including, notably, postcolonial and feminist frameworks.

Redefining the "Woman's Historical Novel"

Returning to Catherine Morland and her complaints about history in *Northanger Abbey*, it is clear that the exclusion of women from "real solemn history" is one of Austen's heroine's primary complaints. Addressing the exclusion of women from Capital-H History is one of the most visible ways that contemporary historical novelists write "history from below." In *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* (1978), Adrienne Rich describes a process she calls "re-visioning," a process that is defined as "looking back, of

seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (35). Many female authors of contemporary historical novels engage in exactly this process, re-entering history through the critical lens of feminist discourse. However, the idea of a body of work unified as "the woman's historical novel" is relatively new; the term comes from Diana Wallace's 2005 study *The Woman's Historical Novel*, which was the first full-length scholarly study to apply a feminist lens to the study of historical fiction. In fact, Wallace re-writes the history of the historical novel, arguing that Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814) was not the first historical novel in English, asserting instead that it was Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1783). Wallace defines the woman's historical novel, quite simply, as a historical novel that is "written and read by women" (x). Her study builds from the argument that "the historical novel has been one of the most important forms of women's reading and writing during the twentieth century (ix)." What her study reveals is that gender can account for different approaches to genre. Where György Lukács viewed realism and an emphasis on the common man—and he did mean *man*—as the defining traits of the genre, Wallace persuasively demonstrates that women have frequently written historical fiction in romantic modes, arguing that "the 'popular' historical novel has given women more freedoms than the realist version" (22). Her overview of twentieth-century British women's historical fiction foregrounds the ways that historical fiction has enabled a female-focused view of history. Though women had been writing historical novels since the eighteenth century, Wallace suggests that they "turned to the historical novel at the beginning of the [twentieth] century, at a moment when male writers were moving away from the genre" (3).

Part of the reason women turned to historical fiction in increasing numbers was that, starting in the early decades of the twentieth century, women were permitted an education beyond any to which they had been admitted previously. History became formally accessible to women scholars, as it had never been before. Moreover, as Wallace notes, it was during these early decades of the century that most Western women began "entering into history as enfranchised citizens" (25) following the suffrage movements. Indeed, the rise of women's historical fiction in the twentieth century occurs in tandem with the development of second- and, later, third-wave feminist discourse. The argument made by Wallace, and taken up in this dissertation, is that the development of feminist discourse is not isolated to academic or political writing but appears also in women's historical novels. Wallace's study shines a spotlight on the feminist and historical implications of historical novels by British women writers like Georgette Heyer, Naomi Mitchison, Daphne du Maurier, Mary Stewart, Catherine Cookson, and A. S. Byatt. She does, however, note that her work excavating and analyzing women's historical novels is simply "a beginning" that offers "reassessments of what a 'historical novel' and/or a 'woman's novel' might be" (xi). My study is enormously indebted to Wallace's work, but it also builds upon her work in two important ways: (i) by offering a revised definition of "the woman's historical novel," and (ii) by offering a new methodological framework that more fully considers the role that popularity plays in the proliferation of women's historical novels and complicates the relationship between popular genre narrative and feminist discourse.

The way I define the woman's historical novel, which I also refer to throughout this dissertation as the female-focused historical novel, is not based primarily on the sex

of the author or the presumed reader, but rather on the focalization and themes of the narrative. In my study, the woman's historical is redefined to mean a historical novel that is focalized through a female character's perspective and focuses on the micro-details of her life—her embodied, personal experiences—against the macro backdrop of history. In this way, a female-focused historical novel tells the marginalized and erased stories of women in historical times when men tend to be the dominant figures of capital-H History. On the other hand, popular male-focused historical novels such as Bernard Cornwell's *The Archer's Tale* (2000)[2] and Jeffrey Archer's *Only Time Will Tell* (2011) focalize their texts through male characters. In doing so, they do not challenge capital-H History in quite the same way as the woman's historical novel. They do not engage in the feminist work of excavating and reclaiming women's histories—the work that is an essential component of the woman's historical novel. However, in my study, the woman's historical novel is a narrative mode rather than a biological label that describes the text's writer or reader. I redeploy Wallace's term "the woman's historical novel" using the possessive "woman" to refer to the woman character(s) at the centre of a historical novel rather than the writer or readers, though I acknowledge that they *tend* to be women. According to my revised definition, Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* (2009) does not utilize this narrative mode, but Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* (2007) does. As the commercial success of the woman's historical novel has been proven by popular texts like those I examine in this study, the past two decades have seen several male-authored works that operate in the same female-focused mode, for example: *Memoirs of a Geisha* (Golden; 1997), *Atonement* (McEwan; 2001), and *Brooklyn* (Tóibín; 2009). In Chapter Four, I discuss two examples of male-authored woman's historical novels, Hill's *The*

[2] Published in the UK as *Harlequin*

Book of Negroes and Donald McCaig's *Ruth's Journey* (2014). By expanding the definition of the woman's historical novel to include female-focused narratives that are written by male authors, my study attempts to avoid some of the essentializing that sometimes occurs in feminist literary criticism. Furthermore, my study more thoroughly considers the fact that female writers are not necessarily feminist writers.

In terms of my methodological departure from Wallace, she argues that the two ends of the spectrum, "the 'popular' and the 'serious' or 'literary'" are "intimately linked" (5), and her analysis flows almost seamlessly through a century of women's historical novels of vastly differing publishing contexts and receptions. While I agree with Wallace that the popular is by no means divorced from the political, I argue that more attention must be paid to the different mechanics and receptions of highbrow or literary historical fiction and popular historical fiction. My study aims to trouble the connection between feminist historiography and popular fiction by analysing several of the points of tension between the two. This dissertation, being a study of popular culture as much as of literature and feminism, uses some unorthodox sources. Examining literary criticism, feminist theory, historians' accounts, and historical novels alongside articles and reviews from popular culture sources like *Buzzfeed*, *USA Today*, *The Telegraph* and *Publishers Weekly*, I am able to explore the way popular novels often exist in the worlds of both the esoteric and the entertaining. My study focuses on the points of tension between these novels' uses of popular narrative formulas that appeal to mass audiences and their engagement with feminist discourse and questions of gender, power, and historiography.

In the decade since Wallace's study was published, other critics have taken up the task of examining women's work in the historical genre, recognizing that the historical novel has been and continues to be exceptionally appealing to women. My thesis contributes to this developing body of work on women's historical fiction and its feminist significance. In recent decades, edited collections such as Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn's *Metafiction and Metahistory in Contemporary Women's Writing* (2007), and Katherine Cooper and Emma Short's *The Female Figure in Contemporary Historical Fiction* (2012) have given weight to the academic study of historical fiction by women. These studies assert that historical novels by women frequently highlight marginalized or maligned women in history, and ask important questions about whose histories are recorded and remembered, and who has authority over historical narratives. As Katherine Cooper and Emma Short point out, "what contemporary historical fiction now demonstrates more clearly than ever is an acute awareness of this fact that history, by its very nature, is always already fictional, and that it is always subject to bias'" (5). Studies of women's historical novels, therefore, are interested in the ways in which contemporary women writers redress patriarchal biases in history, foregrounding women's lives and experiences in both fact-based and imagined historical moments. The women represented in these novels are often ones who have faced marginalization, erasure, or silencing within Capital-H History. As such, their reclamation within gynocentric historical narratives is an example of feminist historiography—writing history from a feminist standpoint.

However, while edited collections like these contribute to the consideration of the work of female historical novelists and of feminist themes within historical fiction, they

do not usually perform an extended consideration of the novels' relationships to contemporary popular culture. Moreover, contemporary studies of historical fiction remain predominantly highbrow. Consider the first sentence of Elodie Rousselot's 2014 book *Exoticising the Past in Contemporary Neo-Historical Fiction*:

> Over the last few decades, historical fiction has experienced a remarkable recrudescence, with a growing number of critically acclaimed authors (such as Hilary Mantel, Ian McEwan and Sarah Waters) exploiting the creative possibilities the genres affords. (1)

Rousselot's choice to use Mantel, McEwan, and Waters as the icons of what she calls the "recrudescence" of historical fiction—the revival or elevating of the historical genre from its disreputable, *popular* status—indicates the extent to which the historical genre is the site of a "battle of the brows" where highbrow literary fiction is separated from the middlebrow narratives consumed by mass readerships. Even among feminist criticism of the genre, there is an implicit drive to authenticate the woman's historical novel through literary authors. Thus, rare is the study that does not include a chapter on a literary-prize-winning author like Hilary Mantel, Sarah Waters, or A. S. Byatt. Rousselot is not alone; indeed, most academic studies of historical fiction to date tend to focus on authors who could comfortable be described as "literary" rather than "popular" writers. Yet it is on these latter writers—extremely visible in popular culture, but absent in academic study—that my study is focused. Indeed, most of the authors examined in this dissertation have received little—if any—scholarly attention despite producing some of the most recognizable titles in recent historical fiction.

Without wishing to detract from or denigrate existing studies—after all, they were the studies that anchored my interest in this field—my study departs from the highbrow literary milieu in order to consider the interplay of narrative pleasure and feminist politics in popular historical novels. The woman's historical novel often falls into the category of "middlebrow fiction." These are the books that proclaim "New York Times Bestseller" on their covers; these are the books that your local library features in its book club; these are the books that are often made into mainstream film and TV adaptations; these are the titles and authors known to the public because they are on display tables in every major bookstore. In short, these are the books with which a great number of average people—not just academics—are familiar.[3] Due to their ubiquity and their situation within popular culture, these books offer an interesting and fruitful site to investigate the complex interplay of pleasure and politics in contemporary historical narratives. These popular historical novels straddle two worlds: the pleasure-seeking world of popularity and the intellectual world of history and politics. Analyzing the ways these texts deliver narrative pleasures while also addressing previously marginalized social and political histories illuminates much about how modern-day readers understand both history and feminism.

My study is interested not only in unpacking the representations of women and women's histories in these novels, but also in developing an understanding of the places where the novels' feminist themes give way to commercial and even patriarchal ideologies in their endeavour to conform to the formulas of popular fiction. There is a blurry and constantly shifting line between popularizing the political and diluting or

[3] For a more thorough discussion of what comprises "middlebrow fiction" in the contemporary period, see Beth Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow: Tastemakers and Reading in the Twenty-first Century* (2014).

manipulating political discourses in order to make them popular. Thus, it is imperative that we not only celebrate the way popular texts like historical novels make women's lives and histories visible; we must also probe the competing ideologies and political discourses visible in these texts, taking notice of those moments when feminist themes are problematized or even overthrown by the genre's commercial imperatives.

Feminism(s) and Feminist Literary Criticism:

In defining the woman's historical novel as a mode that is related to feminist theory and criticism, one inevitably runs up against the problem of defining "woman" and the question of whether the label "women's writing" ghettoizes female-authored texts. Can we speak of "women's writing" in the twenty-first century? If feminism in recent decades has been criticized for being too unfocused, too vague in its aims, and too broad to be contained by the term "feminism," or, as R. Claire Snyder puts it, "a movement that on its face may seem like a confusing hodgepodge of personal anecdotes and individualistic claims" (175), then perhaps the unifying feature of its discourse is a pervasive uncertainty about the definition(s) of "woman." In the late 1980s and early 1990s, several critics challenged the feminist movement for using a homogenized definition of "woman" that referred only—or at least primarily—to white, Western, middle- or upper-class, heterosexual women. Concerns with the differing experiences of gendered oppression were taken up by theorists who labelled themselves in ways that stressed the multiple systems of oppression they experienced, such as "postcolonial feminists," "Third World feminists," and "multiracial feminists." Ien Ang, in pointing out the ethnocentrism of Western feminism and the arrogance of its claim to represent "all

women's experiences and interests," also notes that "arguably it doesn't even represent those of all 'white/Western' women" (195). From another front, late twentieth-century feminist discourse was being criticized from a poststructuralist standpoint, with critics like Judith Butler insisting that "*woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end" (45), and that "it would be wrong to assume in advance that there is a category of 'women' that simply needs to be filled in with various components of race, class, age, ethnicity, and sexuality in order to become complete" (20-21). The poststructuralist challenge, in particular, causes a problem for scholars of women's writing. What does it mean, now, to study "women's writing"? Is this field of criticism dated by its second-wave associations, and useless in a contemporary context? If "woman" does not function adequately as a definition of a group of people, then what is the through-line that holds the field of gynocriticism together?

In her 2002 "Afterword" to the reissue of *Sexual/Textual Politics*, Toril Moi addresses theorists like Diana Fuss and Judith Butler who published groundbreaking books after the original publication of *Sexual/Textual Politics* in 1987. While acknowledging the importance of these theorists, Moi takes up the position that "we don't have to claim that there are no women, or that the category 'woman' in itself is ideologically suspect" (178). Speaking to the necessity of recognizing that women have been treated as a category historically and continue to be seen as a social demographic, Moi attempts to relieve feminist literary critics from this poststructuralist angst. She writes:

> There is something arrogant and something unjust about writing anything at all. How can I write when millions of others cannot? How can I justify my arrogation of voice? How can anyone? If we do decide to write, it is pointless to consume ourselves in guilt about the 'exclusionary' effects of writing per se. The question, therefore, is not how to justify writing anything at all, but rather what one aims to do with one's writing. (184-5)

Moi's argument for the eschewing of a politics of inclusivity echoes Ien Ang's 1995 essay, "I'm a Feminist but... 'Other' Women and Postnational Feminism." In that piece, Ang articulates the difficulties in dealing with differences. She argues that feminism should not adopt "a politics of inclusion (which is always ultimately based on a notion of commonality and community)," but instead develop "a self-conscious politics of partiality, and imagine itself as a *limited* political home" (191).

Taking up Ang's idea of a feminist politics of partiality, as well as her assertion that even Western women cannot be conceived of as a homogenous category, the present study examines the woman's historical novel as a literary site wherein writers of both sexes have used narrative as a means of mapping out new ways of understanding what it means to be "woman," both historically and in the present moment, in a Western context. This is, indeed, a partial view of the relationship between contemporary feminist politics and women's writing, but its partiality does not make it invalid. However, I want to begin this examination by acknowledging my own position as well as the shortcomings and biases of this study. As a white, Western woman whose education has been in the English literary tradition, it is beyond my expertise at present to adequately address women's writing and literary representations of women in a global context. Instead, what this study

offers is a consideration of how Western writers in the contemporary period have approached the woman's historical novel, and an analysis of the interplay of the political and the pleasurable within these narratives. I look to the contemporary woman's historical novel as a genre that writers have used to excavate representations of women throughout history, using contemporary gender politics to attempt to understand the experiences of women in earlier periods, and also to reflect on how we make sense of our own identities in light of those histories. Critics of historical fiction frequently note that works within the genre reveal as much about their own time as they do about the past. Taking up this claim, I work to specify how it is true for female-focused historical narratives, and how this popular, middlebrow genre is actually involved in the dissemination and popularization of current feminist identity politics among mass readerships. Interrogating the various feminist and anti-feminist discourses and ideologies that are present in these novels, this dissertation attempts to add complexity and nuance to existing understandings of women's historical fiction as feminist historiography.

Feminism and Popular Culture: Working Toward a "Politics of Pleasure"

It is important to consider the relationship between women's historical novels and the rhetoric of the popular because, for centuries now, women have been associated with mass culture in opposition to masculine high culture. As Andreas Huyssen argues, there are implications of value inherent in this gendered divide of culture that he identifies with the modernist movement: "Woman…is positioned as reader of inferior literature—subjective, emotional and passive—while man…emerges as writer of genuine, authentic literature—objective, ironic, and in control of his aesthetic means" ("Mass Culture" 189-

190). Significantly, the period in which Huyssen argues women became associated with mass culture and inferior literature is also the period that Diana Wallace identifies as the start of women's engagement with historical fiction. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw increases in literacy and education that led to anxieties about how to protect high culture, particularly high literature, from the masses, but it is important to remember that women formed a large part of the newly educated populace. The woman's historical novel is also associated with feminine mass culture through its focus on the domestic and the detail, rather than the macro narrative of capital-H History. Naomi Schor has theorized the "feminine aesthetic" as one that is concerned with detail, "bounded on the one side by the *ornamental*, with its traditional connotations of effeminacy and decadence, and on the other, by the *everyday*, whose "prosiness" is rooted in the domestic sphere of social life presided over by women" (4). This feminine aesthetic can be seen in the woman's historical novel where the details of the female experience are foregrounded even above the revolutions, wars, religious upheavals, and dynastic rises and falls that form the settings of many historical novels. This emphasis on the detail—the micro histories of women's lives—is both what draws readers to the narratives and what leads critics to denigrate the narratives as lesser forms of art.

Feminist literary critics like Helen Carr and Imelda Whelehan have emphasized the vital importance of valuing popular fiction because it has so long been associated with women writers and feminine aesthetics. As Imelda Whelehan points out in *The Feminist Bestseller* (2005), popular fiction has offered women writers and readers an accessible way of engaging with feminist ideas. She writes: "No matter how accessible some of the non-fiction feminist bestsellers were, the fiction was easier to read and had all the

qualities of good popular fiction" and stresses that "these were books that brought all the difficulties of calling yourself a feminist to life" (3).[4] Moreover, to denigrate or ignore popular fiction is to denigrate and ignore women writers on a large scale. As Carr notes in *From My Guy to Sci Fi* (1989), exploring women's genre fiction is one way that feminist literary critics can bring more prominence to female writers without "the pressure to construct an alternative canon of great women writers" (5-6)—a project that often devolves into arguments about how women's writing is similar to, and therefore equal to, great men's writing. More recently, Val Derbyshire made headlines for arguing that Mills & Boon romances are examples of feminist literature, telling *The Guardian*: "They are definitely not anti-feminist...These are novels written primarily by women, for women – why would they set out to insult their target audience? It doesn't make any sense" (M. Brown). Thus, many feminist literary critics are engaged in a struggle to bring attention and consideration to the work that women writers have done in the realm of popular fiction. Yet, even as I join critics like these in championing the study of women's popular novels, my study is also informed by the tense relationship between feminism and popular culture.

While we can look to popular culture—specifically popular fiction, in the context of the present study—as a site where feminist principles are debated, tested, modeled, and challenged, popular culture is not a benign mediator. Rather, feminist ideas are shaped by the pulls of financial interests and hegemonic consumption patterns. As Andi Zeisler, co-founder of *Bitch* magazine, has argued, commercial culture has often found ways to appropriate feminist discourse for its own ends: "As the 1990s turned into the 2000s,

[4] Whelehan also discusses the relationship between feminist theory and popular literature in her 1994 essay "Feminism and Trash: Destabilising 'the Reader.'"

companies got increasingly shameless in appropriating the language of liberation to sell stuff to women and girls" (*Feminism and Pop Culture* 103). Moreover, as Susan Douglas discusses in *Enlightened Sexism* (2010), it has become increasingly difficult in the contemporary period to distinguish where popular culture is a vehicle for feminist thought and where it works to undermine feminist thought. For instance, the Spice Girls were a massively popular girl band that many feminists point to as an iconic element of the contemporary "girl power" movement in the 1990s and early 2000s. Yet Douglas is skeptical of the feminist discussions that centre on the group. She writes: "They proclaimed that New Age feminism meant 'you have a brain, a voice and an opinion.' And hot pants. Hmmm" (2). Throughout her work, Douglas is troubled by what she perceives as one-step-forward-one-step-back feminism whereby gains are achieved, but regressions also occur.

Through the critical work being done by feminists like Zeisler and Douglas who study mass culture, it seems that the process by which academic feminist discourse enters popular culture is a process of dilution. Looking to popular television, film, music, magazines, cosmetics, fashion, music videos, and novels, these feminist popular culture critics point out how easily feminist discourse can be co-opted for capitalist and patriarchal ends in ways that play on women's desires (most prominently sexual and material desires) while still using the language of empowerment. For many women, then, "feminism" has become a word and a concept that can be infinitely tailored and modified to suit her lifestyle and provide her with a comforting sense of progress and empowerment—regardless of whether or not she critically engages with the broad spectrum of feminist theories. Elizabeth Kelly identifies this as a problem of

individualism, writing: “Too often Third Wave rhetoric dissolves into projects aimed at perfecting or empowering the individual body” (240) at the expense of broader, more complex feminist issues. This modern kind of popular feminism—referred to by a multitude of names including “girl power,” “third wave,” and “postfeminism,” and the criticisms levelled at it echo the criticisms of second-wave feminism in its later period by women who pointed out how white and middle-class much of the discourse was. The popular feminism that appears in contemporary popular culture is best described as liberal feminism, and it is primarily consumed by individuals who are privileged enough to be able to ignore the class concerns of Marxist feminist discourse, the racial concerns of black feminist and global feminist discourses, and the concerns of exclusion expressed by LGBTQ feminist discourses.

Noting that consumer pleasures and feminist politics have a complicated relationship, Andi Zeisler has emphasized that one task of contemporary feminist discourse is to develop of “politics of pleasure” (132). To this end, my study considers the popular genre of women’s historical fiction, interrogating the pleasures to be gleaned from these novels and the relationships between pleasure, popularity, and feminist politics. My study argues that popular women’s historical novels like *Outlander* (1991) and *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2001) cannot be classified simply as either escapist popular fiction or feminist fiction; rather, these narratives are battlegrounds of conflicting ideologies and discourses that throw into light the tensions between feminist theory and popular culture. Building on arguments set out by Diana Wallace and other critics, I discuss how the historiography being done in these novels has feminist overtones. However, I also unpack the ways in which the kind of feminist discourse these novels use

is primarily liberal feminism stemming from the second-wave period, which is problematic to pluralist, inclusive, self-conscious feminist politics. Indeed, even a brief survey reveals how heteronormative and white the genre's most popular texts are. Thus, my study probes the competing feminist and anti-feminist discourses at play in these novels. I ask what subject positions the novels invite women readers to take up or to reject, and consider the ideological underpinnings of these positions. My study questions how a feminist lens renders history pleasurable to women, but also considers whether there are contradictions between feminist theory and the various pleasures these texts provide, such as exoticism, emphasis on clothes and other material trappings of femininity, and erotic content. Ultimately, my study aims to arrive at a better understanding of how feminist discourse is disseminated, but also refashioned, through popular historical novels.

Case Studies

Contemporary women's historical fiction is a site of tension wherein feminist politics contribute to a gynocentric re-reading of history, but also where patriarchal ideology—wrapped up as it is with popular narrative forms like the romance and literary archetypes like the virgin and the whore—continually undermines or challenges the feminist themes of the novels. This dissertation features four chapters that function as case studies exploring these tensions and questioning the uses of historical fiction as a platform for feminist discourse. Each chapter is devoted to a close consideration of one prominent and popular body of work—either a series by the same author or a set of novels linked by their representation of a particular historical moment. My study is

transatlantic, though Western in focus, and thus primarily interested in American and British historical narratives and authors. The reason for this emphasis is that American and British texts are the most prominent ones in Western popular culture, generally having the broadest circulation and media exposure. It makes sense, therefore, to focus a study of Western popular literature on texts that are ubiquitous, recognizable, and commercially influential. I felt it was important to be transatlantic in my examination of women's historical novels because the nationality of an author is not always indicative of the national history being excavated in the text. For instance, American author Diana Gabaldon had never been to Scotland when she began writing *Outlander* (Gabaldon "FAQ"). Moreover, many historical novels, including those in the *Outlander* series, take place in more than one national historical context.[5]

Chapter One focuses on the use of romance narrative archetypes and formulas in the construction of female subjectivities in Philippa Gregory's Tudor series. Gregory has, to date, published over two dozen historical novels, many of them bestsellers. Among them is *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2001), the first published in an ongoing series about the Tudor court, and possibly her most famous work. In Gregory's novels, female subjectivities are given prominence in ways that reveal the impact of the domestic sphere on the political realm. Through the romantic narratives she weaves, Gregory offers readers a chance to explore how sexuality historically functioned as a political and cultural currency that both objectified and gave power to women. However, while her narratives foreground the roles that women played in one of the most iconic dynasties in

[5] For many readers of historical novels, the narrative is rendered exotic not only by the time period, but also by the geographic and socio-cultural context. Thus, *Outlander* is exotic for British readers because of its temporal distance, but it is doubly exotic for American readers because it is also geographically distant.

English history, Gregory is also acutely aware of her role as a popular novelist of historical romances. As such, her novels often use archetypes of female literary identities which somewhat undermine her attempt to write feminist historical fiction. Most obviously problematic is her creation of narrative tension by opposing women binaristically: Mary Boleyn versus Anne Boleyn; Amy Dudley versus Elizabeth I; Elizabeth I versus Mary Queen of Scots. In some cases, as with Mary Boleyn, Gregory discursively creates an identity for her character that is at odds with the historical record. While some simplification is necessary when writing a complex historical situation in narrative form, the way Gregory constructs oppositional archetypical identities for her female characters reveals a reliance on the patriarchal madonna/whore binary, which is at odds with the feminist angle of her novels.

Chapter Two considers issues of the female body in popular women's historical novels. Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander* series, begun in 1991 and still ongoing, defies many of the conventions of the typical romance novel, in large part because of its historical and fantastical elements. Indeed, one of the most striking things about the series' initial novel is its many reversals of expected conventions, such as the virginity of the hero rather than the heroine. The device that allows this narrative to defy genre conventions is the historical context: Claire is a post-suffrage WWII nurse in 1945 Inverness who, through mysterious means, is transported to the year 1743 where she meets and eventually marries a Scotsman, Jamie Fraser. Although she does her best to acclimate to her new eighteenth-century life, Claire brings with her a post-suffrage, twentieth-century understanding of gender relations and women's rights. This meeting of two different historical periods and the clash of their ideological stances on women allows Gabaldon to

highlight, through Claire, embodied instances of gender inequality and the sexist abuses women faced in the eighteenth century. Yet, despite bringing a somewhat feminist lens to bear on history, there are also many troubling moments in the narrative when Claire's twentieth-century feminist ideology gives way to the patriarchal ideology she encounters in her eighteenth-century life, particularly in terms of the rights of the female body. This chapter, therefore, elucidates the conflict between the Claire's feminist identity and the development of a romance narrative that naturalizes and even condones actions like wife-beating and marital rape.

Chapter Three explores the connections between neo-Victorian YA novels and the development of a third-wave, youth-oriented, "girly" feminism. Using Libba Bray's bestselling Gemma Doyle trilogy, I explore the tensions between feminism and femininity, exploring how the corset operates in contemporary historical fiction as a contradictory symbol that represents both repression and desire for modern readers. Although corsets and other restrictive undergarments were criticized by mid-twentieth-century feminists as symbols of restriction and repression, the prominent presence of the corset on the covers and within the pages of neo-Victorian YA novels suggests that Victorian undergarments do not repel young female consumers with connotations of asexuality and the restraint of passions; rather, Victorian undergarments excite and attract young women readers. To a contemporary woman, whose first-hand knowledge of corsets comes from Victoria's Secret catalogues and window-displays in shopping mall storefronts, the wearing of Victorian-inspired undergarments is a choice. The contemporary fascination with Victorian undergarments reveals that we do not understand the Victorian period solely in terms of oppression. That many modern women

continue to choose to wear modern versions of corsets and choose to read books that have corsets on the covers reveals that there is something empowering—even arousing—about the corset, not just for men, but for women. The struggles experienced by Gemma Doyle, the corseted heroine at the centre of this YA trilogy, involve sexuality, her relationship to her mother, relations between generations of women, and female friendships across class boundaries. Yet at the core of each of these struggles is the tension between tradition and rebellion, manifested in the novel as the conflict between femininity and feminism. In this chapter, I argue that Gemma's attempt to navigate these tensions presents a mirror to the way young women of the third wave negotiate the rejection of traditional femininity often associated with their second-wave foremothers and their own attraction to these objects and aesthetics.

Chapter Four investigates the ways that race and gender are treated in women's historical novels set in the slavery-era American South. Although during the second-wave period the historical mode was used to politicize the marginalization of black women's histories in iconic novels like Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979), Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), in the twenty-first century, many bestselling historical novels about black women's experiences are written by white women. Historical novels about black women written by black women, though they exist, are often less well known; they aren't often adapted as movies, and they aren't featured on bestseller lists with the same frequency. In this chapter, I trace a lineage from *Scarlett*—Alexandra Ripley's 1991 authorized sequel to Margaret Mitchell's 1936 *Gone with the Wind*, through several contemporary bestsellers: *The Wind Done Gone* (2001), *Cane River* (2001), *The Book of Negroes* (2007), *The Kitchen House* (2010), *The House*

Girl (2013), *Ruth's Journey* (2014), and *The Invention of Wings* (2014). Arguing that *Scarlett* reinvigorated a particularly romanticized mode of historical fiction about the South, I investigate the nostalgia and racial erasure in historical novels of the South by white authors. In charting the legacy of *Gone with the Wind* brought into the contemporary period by *Scarlett*, I analyze the absence of critical racial discourse in recent women's historical novels, questioning what this absence means for both popular fiction and popular feminism.

—Chapter One—

Back to Formula:
Gender, Genre, and Philippa Gregory's Tudor Novels

History vs. Historical Fiction

In her groundbreaking 2005 study *The Woman's Historical Novel*, the first comprehensive consideration of women writers working in the genre over the past century, Diana Wallace asserted that the historical genre in fiction has been, since the turn of the twentieth century, "a 'feminine' form" (3). Though women had been writing historical novels since the eighteenth century, Wallace suggests that they "turned to the historical novel at the beginning of the [twentieth] century, at a moment when male writers were moving away from the genre" (3). Part of the reason women turned in increasing numbers to historical fiction is that, starting in the early decades of the twentieth century, women were permitted an education beyond any to which they had been admitted previously. History became formally accessible to women scholars, as it had never been before. As Wallace points out, many British women writers of historical fiction were among the first university-educated women, including Rose Macaulay, Margaret Irwin, and Mary Renault (27). Moreover, as Wallace notes, it was during these early decades of the century that most Western women began "entering into history as enfranchised citizens" (25) following the suffrage movements. The enduring importance of historical fiction to women readers and writers in the present century is easily illustrated by the ballooning catalogue of women's work in the genre. Librarian Sarah Johnson notes that "between 2000 and 2007, approximately one-third of the *Booklist* "Editors' Choice" titles in adult fiction were historical novels" (xv), and many of the

best-known names in the genre at present belong to women, including Philippa Gregory, Diana Gabaldon, Sarah Waters, Hilary Mantel, Tracey Chevalier, Margaret George, Joanne Harris, and Sara Gruen. In the past decade and a half, several other critical studies of women's work in historical fiction have followed Wallace's, yet even as these critical studies work to acknowledge the ways in which women's historical novels are political in their representations of gender, there are other voices that insist women's historical fiction is only loosely related to *real* history.

In a 2009 interview with *The Telegraph*, the noted British historian Dr. David Starkey asserted, "If you are to do a proper history of Europe before the last five minutes, it is a history of white males because they were the power players, and to pretend anything else is to falsify" (Adams). History, in Starkey's view, is the territory of men: of the great men in history, and the male historians and scholars who study them. Historical fiction, on the other hand, Starkey associates with women. In advance of the premiere of his four-part documentary, *Henry VIII: Mind of a Tyrant*, Starkey made a series of disapproving remarks on contemporary historical fiction by women and the "feminised" history that it propagates. Considering the substantial number of Tudor historical novels that have been popular in recent years, he said, "One of the great problems has been that Henry, in a sense, has been absorbed by his wives. Which is bizarre." What is notable throughout Starkey's statements is the relationship between genre and gender; academic or non-fictive (a term I use cautiously) historiography is masculine, while historical fiction is feminine. Starkey, whose area of focus is Tudor history, urges for the recognition of a clear and impenetrable distinction between the historical narratives that he writes and those written by novelists like Philippa Gregory.

"We really should stop taking historical novelists seriously as historians," he said in a 2013 interview, adding, "The idea that they have authority is ludicrous" (Davies). In this latter interview, Starkey attempts to uphold a boundary between implicitly masculine academic historical narratives and implicitly feminine historical fiction by pronouncing Philippa Gregory's bestselling Tudor series as nothing more than "good Mills and Boon."[6] Historical fiction by women is considered inferior by Starkey, at least in part, because of the association between women and romance, and because of the perceived incompatibility of romance and realist history.

Yet contrary to Starkey's insistence on a division between the work of the historian and the work of the historical novelist, Philippa Gregory has insisted that there is not such a great difference between them. Following Starkey's "Mills and Boon" comment, Gregory reflected in a 2013 interview that "even a historian who prides himself on rectitude as much as Starkey, if you read his history of Elizabeth, you see the creation of a partly imaginary character" (Kellaway). Indeed, though she frequently refers to the vast amounts of research she does in preparation for writing a historical novel, Gregory is also quick to point out that "when people critique historical fiction for accuracy, they forget we rarely know for sure what happened, so history books are often the best guess at the time" (Wintle). A self-labelled feminist, Gregory has been candid in interviews about the fact that she sees her work as feminist historiography—that is, the practice of rewriting historical narratives in order to foreground the previously minimized or one-dimensional representations of female figures. "The more research I do," Gregory says,

[6] Mills & Boon was a major publisher of romance novels in the early to mid-twentieth century. In 1971, it was acquired by Harlequin Enterprises of Canada. Starkey uses the name as a metonym for cheap, mass market, formulaic romance novels.

"the more I think there is an untold history of women" (Wintle). In another interview, she expresses her methodology as "reading the records with more sympathy, and with a feminist perspective" ("An Interview with Philippa Gregory"). In a Q&A published in the end matter of the Touchstone paperback edition of *The Other Queen*, Gregory further gestures to a feminist imperative behind her work, stating: "I feel very strongly that history has mostly been written by men, and even when it is not prejudiced against women it is dominated by a male perspective and male morality." Although she hesitates to say that her novels have the effect of "putting the record straight," Gregory does present her Tudor novels as countering the imposition of androcentric narratives and patriarchal appraisals of female behaviour.

Gregory's challenge to Starkey's insistence on the clear and impenetrable boundary between history and historical fiction stems from the postmodern shift in historiography, which undermines the idea of singular historical truth and opens up possibilities for new interpretations of historical narratives. According to Hayden White's analysis of historiography, first circulated in the 1970s, history and fiction are written in very similar ways. Through the process he calls "emplotment," White explains that the historian studies a group of events and "begins to perceive the *possible* story form that such events *may* figure" (225). That historical events are configured in terms of familiar narrative structures by the historian is not, in White's argument, an example of bad historiography; it is simply, as he says, "one of the ways that a culture has of making sense of both personal and public pasts" (225). By taking up this idea that the writer inevitably shapes the historical narrative no matter how much he or she strives for accuracy, historical novelists (and academic historians, too) are able to write histories

from perspectives that challenge dominant ideologies, encourage critical thinking, and play out debates of the present through the mirror of the past. The acknowledgment of the role of subjectivity in historiography has opened up space for the writing of "history from below" both in academic and literary contexts. Such historical narratives are conveyed through voices that were denied access previously, including women's voices.

Is Philippa Gregory's work an example of "history from below"? Or is it, as Starkey insists, an example of "good Mills and Boon"? Finding middle ground between Starkey's comments and Gregory's own, I suggest that Gregory's work belongs to neither category exclusively. Rather, Gregory's historical novels—particularly her Tudor series—must be located at the intersection of the popular romance and the postmodern historical novel that writes "history from below." In Starkey's evaluation, Gregory's novels are equated to cheap paperback romance novels designed to titillate readers and offer escapist fantasies. Yet it is undeniable that there is a greater amount of historical detail and precision in Gregory's novels than those of actual Mills and Boon authors, like twentieth-century icon Barbara Cartland. Gregory herself gestures toward the existence of a hierarchy of historical fiction in a statement featured in a Q&A for the Touchstone edition of *The Other Boleyn Girl*. When asked to discuss the current popularity of the genre, Gregory asserts that, "Very fine writers like Antonia Byatt, Rose Tremaine, and Margaret Atwood have written novels which have raised the standard of writing. Other writers, me among them, have raised the standards of research." Indeed, Gregory's bibliographies, which appear at the ends of her novels, illustrate an effort to classify her novels in relation to academic historical narratives rather than pulp ones. Her lists of texts used in the research of her Tudor books are rarely less than twenty books long, and all of

them, amusingly, cite David Starkey at least once. Thus, although there is plenty of sex and romance in Gregory's oeuvre, the author herself seems keen to position her work as part of a literary, rather than pulp, brand of historical fiction.

However, despite her emphasis on research and her claims of historical authenticity, Gregory's novels also foreground romance and eroticism, sometimes bending or outright disregarding historical facts to allow for the creation of romance narratives. It is precisely because of this use of romance formulas and tropes that one must be cautious about too liberally applauding Gregory's novels as examples of feminist historiography. In the present chapter, I focus on the relationship between feminist historiography and the formulas and archetypes of the popular romance narrative as they play out in several of Philippa Gregory's bestselling Tudor novels. Put simply, the poststructuralist argument that the historian shapes the history she or he writes through the very act of constructing a narrative does not mean that contemporary historiographers are *necessarily* more self-aware or reflective of their biases. If, on the one hand, historiographers have the potential to write self-reflexive narratives that subvert hegemonic ideology, on the other hand, they also have the potential to reaffirm conservative ideologies, to keep historical figures entrenched in superficial stereotypes, and to render the past as an exotic, spectacle-laden world ready to be the backdrop to contemporary readers' escapist fantasies. In terms of Gregory's work, one must consider how emplotting history in accordance with the narrative tropes and characterizations that define the romance genre involves the adoption of ideologies about gender and sexuality that undermine the potential for subversive historiography.

Historical Fiction and Romance

While David Starkey seems to view history and romance as incompatible forms, Diana Wallace argues that the use of romance in the woman's historical novel is a strategy rather than a weakness. She asserts that, "The transformation of history into romance allows the reinsertion of women's concerns" (20). Since women have often been kept within the domestic, private sphere, they have been absent or marginalized in historical narratives that focus on subjects usually associated with the public sphere: rulership, rebellion, war, and conquest. The traditional foci of the romance narrative—courtship, betrothal and marriage—allow for the representation of women's lived experiences and for the illustration of the connections between the personal and the political. From Wallace's perspective on the role of the romance in the woman's historical novel, it becomes clear that Starkey's rejection of the genre—particularly as utilized by women writers—signifies a desire to bar women from history and from historiography. Indeed, the fact that Wallace's 2005 study was the first to chart a literary genealogy of women's historical fiction suggests that the desire to exclude women from history through a dismissal of their historiographical work has been a consistent and ongoing concern. Yet, despite Wallace's embracing of romance as a strategy of feminist historiography, the romance has not had an easy relationship with feminism. So while it is useful to consider, as Wallace does, that realism is not the only mode a historiographer may employ in order to make sense of history, the relationship between women's historical fiction, romance, and feminist historiography must not be oversimplified.

In defining the romance genre, it quickly becomes clear that historical romances and historical novels that contain romances are not the same thing. As critic Pamela

Regis explains, "The romance novel is a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines" (14). Regis outlines eight narrative elements that she says define the romance novel:

> *a definition of society*, always corrupt, that the romance novel will reform; the *meeting* between the heroine and hero; an account of their *attraction* for each other; the *barrier* between them; the *point of ritual death*; the *recognition* that fells the barrier; the *declaration* of heroine and hero that they love each other; and their *betrothal*. (14)

Furthermore, Regis notes that romance novels are defined by their happy endings (9) and their ingénue heroines (49). The virgin and the whore appear as standard archetypes in romance narratives. As Diana Wallace notes in her dissertation, *Sisters and Rivals: The Theme of Female Rivalry in Novels by Women, 1914-39*, female rivalry is a "structuring element" in many romance novels that defines the heroine's identity against other women (5). The virginal ingénue is the usual heroine of a romance novel (Regis 49). This figure, as Janice Radway explains, allows the "ideal romance" narrative to deal with female sexuality "by confining the expression of female desire within the limits of a permanent, loving relationship" (169). Indeed, the element of "love" is central to the ideal romance heroine. As Helen Hughes notes of the romance genre's typical heroine, "a woman who wants love is a sympathetic figure" (112). The ingénue's opposite—the whore, seductress, or fallen woman—is a figure that severs that link between love and sex, and consequently is denied the happy ending of matrimonial bliss that is granted to the heroine at the conclusion of the romance narrative. However, the ingénue figure need not be entirely passive. In Janice Radway's study of the Smithton readers—a community of

women readers of romance novels—in *Reading the Romance* (1984), she notes that the most recommended romances "are those with 'strong,' 'fiery' heroines who are capable of 'defying the hero,' softening him, and showing him the value of loving and caring for another" (54). Yet it is paramount that, although she may be fiery or even rebellious throughout the narrative, the ideal romance heroine—like the hero she softens—will be firmly established in the rhetoric of love and monogamous matrimony by the narrative's conclusion, thus quelling the need for fiery rebellion.

However, when discussing historical fiction, one cannot simply apply the formulas of Harlequin, the preferences of the Smithton readers, nor even the eight elements that Regis describes to every historical novel that contains romance elements. As numerous critics have noted, not all stories about love are romance novels in the strictest sense (Radway; Regis; Strehle). The label "romance novel" is imprecise and inadequate to describe a wealth of historical novels that contain romances, including some of the most iconic women's historical novels of the twentieth century such as Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936) and Colleen McCullough's *The Thorn Birds* (1977).[7] With this in mind, I suggest that many historical novels operate in a romantic *mode*, that is to say, they use romantic narrative patterns and archetypes within their historical frameworks, as opposed to being structured as a typical romance novels with added historical details. The historical novel that is written in a romantic mode foregrounds at least one romantic relationship, and it often makes use of romance archetypes like the ingénue heroine and the Byronic hero along with their placement in

[7] Pamela Regis contends that *Gone with the Wind* is not a romance novel (48), and in Radway's study of the Smithton readers, "at least four of the women mentioned Colleen McCullough's best-selling novel, *The Thorn Birds*, as a good example of a tale that technically qualified as a romance but that all disliked because it was too 'depressing'" (99). These examples illustrate the way the historical novel modifies the romance formula in ways that some romance readers dislike.

romance narrative patterns like the love triangle. However, this kind of novel also features elements that are usually omitted from the traditional romance novel, such as bodily illnesses and ailments like plague and syphilis, events like miscarriages and births, and graphic representations of violence, including battles, assassinations, and executions. The corruption of society may not be reformed by the novel's conclusion, nor is the conclusion necessarily happy—although, as Susan Strehle points out, the romance plot can operate as a counter to the "destructive force" of history, "providing a soothing alternative story with more opportunities for a happy ending" (31). Because they are concerned with history, including less disputable facts such as marriages, divorces, and deaths, these novels do not always adhere to all elements of the romance formula. For instance, while a novelist like Philippa Gregory may use artistic license in her depiction of a historical period, she is limited by the rules of the historical genre, which privilege realism and authenticity, or at least the guise of authenticity; she cannot write a "happily ever after" narrative for Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn.

Feminist critics have spent much time and ink engaging in archetypal analysis and pointing to the problems that occur when narrative archetypes—simplifications of identity that they are—come to be accepted as the realities of female identity positions. In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Luce Irigaray writes of the way women, in patriarchal ideology, are "commodities" that "relate to one another as rivals" (196). Feminist discourse has shown how patriarchal society, buoyed by representations of women in popular culture, makes space for only two understandings of women—the valorized virgin and the desired but detested whore. As Jane Caputi explains, the madonna/whore dichotomy signals "a sexual double standard...one that allows men greater sexual latitude,

defines women in relation to men, and splits women into pure or dirty, "virgins" or "whores," "keepers" or "trash," good "goods" or "damaged goods" (314). Moreover, many feminist critics of the romance express the view that "the romance novel straightjackets the heroine by making marriage the barometer of her success" and that "the romance novel sends a message to readers that independent, questing women are actually better off destroyed" (Regis 11). The work of feminist literary critics to unpack the troubled relationship between feminist politics and the popular romance narrative—both textual and visual—is extensive. It should be noted that while many critics are pessimistic about the romance form, many others argue for reading romances in ways that potentially empower women readers and writers. Reflecting on the myriad positions that feminist literary critics have taken up in relation to the subject of the romance, Joanne Hollows summarizes: "If feminist critics cannot align their feminism with the romance, then it seems that the romance cannot completely come to terms with feminism" (83). A great deal of the tension between feminism and the romance, I suggest, lies in the fact that the romance's formulaic female archetypes represent precisely the static female identity positions that feminism has long fought to undermine: the oppositional positions of the madonna and the whore. In terms of historical romances like those Gregory writes, the tension lies in the conflicting narrative strategies of feminist historiography, which aims to undermine stereotypical representations of women, and the popular romance, which relies on stereotypes (or, more properly, literary archetypes) for the creation of a familiarly plotted genre narrative.

Blending "History from Below" with Historical Romance: Philippa Gregory's Tudor Series[8]

Philippa Gregory, like any writer of historical narrative, interprets data, invents explanations for gaps or ambiguities in the historical record, and makes decisions about emplotment including the decisions about what to exclude and what to emphasize. From one perspective, these narrative decisions are what allow Gregory to write gynocentric history. On the other hand, despite the work she does to foreground the central roles women played, Gregory's Tudor series undeniably relies on narrative archetypes connected to the romance genre that position the women of her novels within madonna/whore binaries. In *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2001), for instance, Gregory positions the naïve and loving Mary Boleyn against the scheming temptress Anne Boleyn. Anne, of course, is also the rival to Katherine of Aragon,[9] whose innocence and faithfulness are established in *The Constant Princess* (2005). In *The Boleyn Inheritance* (2006), the plain and non-sexual Anne of Cleves is contrasted to vain, licentious Katherine Howard. Continuing beyond the death of Henry VIII, *The Queen's Fool* (2003) positions the fictional Hannah Green between two rivals for the throne: Mary I and the Princess Elizabeth, who are set up as near-perfect mirrors to their mothers, the angelic Katherine of Aragon and the siren Anne Boleyn. Indeed, in many ways *The Queen's Fool* is a transposed replica of *The Other Boleyn Girl* wherein the central perspective is provided by a figure (Hannah / Mary) positioned in between the binary opposites (Mary

[8] The Tudor series includes, to date, *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2001), *The Queen's Fool* (2003), *The Virgin's Lover* (2004), *The Constant Princess* (2005), *The Boleyn Inheritance* (2006), *The Other Queen* (2008), *The Taming of the Queen* (2015) and *Three Sisters, Three Queens* (2016). The books in this series focus on the period from 1491 (the start of *The Constant Princess*, which opens just before Katherine of Aragon travels to England to marry Prince Arthur) to 1587 (the execution of Mary Queen of Scots at the end of *The Other Queen*).

[9] I have adhered to the spelling that Gregory uses throughout her series. However, many historians instead use "Catherine."

and Elizabeth / Katherine and Anne). In *The Virgin's Lover* (2004), Elizabeth I's famous virginity is shown to be an empty moniker as the queen carries on an affair with the married Robert Dudley, leaving his devoted, faithful wife Amy waiting, heartbroken, on the sidelines.

What is important to note is that these madonna/whore binaries and rivalries do not arise organically from history. Historian Retha Warnicke cautions that "in histories that treat men as three-dimensional and complex personalities, the women shine forth in universal stereotypes: the shrew, the whore, the tease, the shy virgin, or the blessed mother" (*Rise* 57)[10]. This sentiment is echoed by Antonia Fraser who opens her *Wives of Henry VIII* by noting, "their characters are popularly portrayed as female stereotypes: the Betrayed Wife, the Temptress, the Good Woman, the Ugly Sister, the Bad Girl, and finally, the Mother Figure" (1). Yet these archetypes have proven irresistible, for historians and historical novelists alike. Perhaps the most pronounced evidence of Gregory's manipulation of historical narrative to suit popular literary archetypes is in the characterization of Mary Boleyn. In Gregory's series, Mary Boleyn is naively innocent and becomes mistress to Henry VIII not through her own ambition, but as a pawn in her family's political intrigues. Moreover, once instituted as Henry's mistress, Gregory's Mary is genuinely in love with him and becomes a devoted lover and eventually a devoted mother. Yet as historians like Alison Weir have shown, Mary Boleyn did not have such a virtuous reputation in history, having spent several years in France in the service of Mary Tudor and later Queen Claude, and having there acquired a reputation as "a very great whore" and mistress of King Francis (72).

[10] Somewhat ironically, Gregory credits Retha Warnicke with influencing her depictions of Anne Boleyn and Anne of Cleves in the author notes of *The Other Boleyn Girl* and *The Boleyn Inheritance*.

While many of the rivalries Gregory represents are supported by historical documents, she makes particular choices through her language, emplotment, and characterization that emphasize the idea that there are two kinds of women, madonnas and whores, and that these two kinds of women are always in competition. Moreover, Gregory's Tudor series as a whole strongly suggests the superiority of the innocent ingénue—the patriarchal ideal of femininity—since these are the women who are represented most sympathetically. Maternity, devotion, and preference for family life over court life are held up as ideal qualities through characters like Katherine of Aragon, Mary Boleyn, Anne of Cleves, Hannah Green, and Amy Dudley. In contrast, ambition and pleasure-seeking are shown as insidious qualities, generating little sympathy for figures like Anne Boleyn, Katherine Howard, and Elizabeth I. Without pretending that such a thing as objective history exists, I nevertheless suggest that Gregory's visible narrative bias in favour of the "good wives"[11] of her Tudor series is problematic if one is to take the series as an example of feminist historiography. This chapter therefore elaborates upon the narrative choices in four novels of Gregory's Tudor series, examining how the author emplots Tudor history in ways that privilege romance archetypes above the feminist project of writing history from below. By analysing the narrative construction of virgins and whores in Gregory's Tudor series, I point to the ways in which her novels exist in tension between the formula of the traditional romance narrative and Gregory's own explicitly stated interest in feminist historiography.

Case Studies:

***The Other Boleyn Girl* (2001)**

[11] A phrase used frequently throughout the Tudor series.

The Other Boleyn Girl, Gregory's first-published Tudor novel, focuses on the relationship and rivalry between Mary and Anne Boleyn from 1521 until Anne's execution in 1536. Indeed, the title itself signals the structural pattern of the rivalling, oppositional female figures at the heart of the story. One of the most famous women in English history, Anne Boleyn was the second wife of Henry VIII. Gregory's story, however, sheds light on the life of Anne's less famous sister, Mary, who was mistress to Henry VIII for some time before the king and Anne began their relationship, while Henry was still married to Katherine of Aragon. The premise of focalizing history through a marginalized female figure immediately suggests a project of feminist historiography, the excavation of women's histories that have often been forgotten or downplayed in Capital-H History. The novel's central narrative thread is the rivalry between these two sisters to be the favourite—of the family, of the king, and of the court. To be "the other Boleyn girl" in the novel is to be invisible, overlooked, and powerless. At the same time, the title comments metafictionally on the fact that its narrator and protagonist is a woman who had—at the time of the novel's publication—been forgotten by popular history. Yet because *The Other Boleyn Girl* is written as a historical romance centering on the competition between two sisters to be the better married Boleyn girl, Gregory's characterizations fall somewhat short of being truly subversive representations of women, instead reverting to the familiar archetypes of the whore and the ingénue of romance love triangles.

The representations of Mary and Anne in *The Other Boleyn Girl* are of two opposites who are nevertheless two sides of the same coin. Throughout the novel, their brother George frequently refers to them as Annamaria and Marianne, emphasizing their

inextricable, yet oppositional, connection to one another. Thus, in order to effect an opposition between two women who are remembered primarily for their sexual relationships with a king, Gregory characterizes them as deploying their sexuality in entirely different ways. Gregory's Mary is a mistress who believes herself deeply in love with Henry. Their sexual relationship produces two children, and her identity in the second half of the novel is largely informed by her role as a devoted mother. In contrast, Gregory's Anne is a mistress who uses sexuality—or the withholding of it—as a tool for her own ambitions, and to whom maternal feeling does not come easily. The decision to characterize these two women in such contrasting ways produces interesting narrative conflict, but somewhat undermines other efforts in the novel to show the ways in which women were oppressed under patriarchy at this place and time in history. For ultimately, Gregory's novel privileges the point of view of the loving, dutiful, and maternal woman, asserting the superiority of this kind of femininity over the ambitious, analytical, and self-preserving behaviours exhibited by Anne.

As historian Alison Weir explains, there has been a centuries-long debate about the nature of Mary Boleyn's relationship with the king, especially since the affair was "conducted so discreetly that there is no record of the date it started, its duration, or when it ended" (114-15). However, as historians excavated Henry's private life over time, they uncovered "overwhelmingly conclusive" evidence that the affair between Henry and Mary did take place (115). Yet while she depicts Mary Boleyn as a mistress of Henry VIII, Gregory's representation of Mary before and at the start of her affair with Henry differs somewhat from the accounts laid down by academic historians. There is evidence to suggest that Mary Boleyn might have had a reputation as a licentious woman during

her life. Weir suggests that Mary was reported by some to have been the mistress of King Francis during her time in France (72)[12]. Certainly, this is a reputation that historians have often given her. In *The Wives of Henry VIII*, Antonia Fraser characterizes Mary as "a high-spirited, rather giddy girl who enjoyed all the pleasures of the court on offer—including the embraces of the King," and notes that "when she was fifteen she had gone to the French court in the train of Princess Mary Tudor where she had acquired an extremely wanton reputation" (101).

Gregory's Mary, in stark contrast to these accounts, is represented as a naive young girl at the start of *The Other Boleyn Girl*. As she contemplates what will be expected of her as the king's mistress, she tells her siblings: "I don't know how to do it...William did it once a week or so, and that in the dark, and quickly done, and I never much liked it. I don't know what it is I am supposed to do" (33). In Gregory's narrative, although she is married and thus not a virgin, Mary is nevertheless established as sexually inexperienced. Her innocence is further solidified when Mary assures Henry that she is not merely interested in him as a means of social climbing: "I promise you, it's no game to me, Your Majesty" (45). As the affair blossoms, Mary declares herself "a girl of fourteen in love for the first time" (64) and asserts, "I want the man. Not because he's king" (72). Later, when he has shifted his affections from Mary to Anne, Mary is heartbroken. Moreover, her despair is not for the loss of wealth or status, but for the loss of Henry's love, which she thought was true: "For the first time in all the long while that I had been his lover I felt like a whore indeed, and it was my own sister who shamed me"

[12] Weir does, however, trouble these claims in *Mary Boleyn: Mistress of Kings*, noting that history has often remembered Mary Boleyn without referring to tangible evidence.

(264). Gregory's Mary is the typical ingénue heroine of the romance novel, ready for her romantic—and sexual—awakening at the start of the narrative.

Throughout the first half of the novel, when Mary is Henry's mistress, Anne is depicted giving sage, if cynical, advice to her sister. In these speeches, Anne positions herself as a strategist rather than an emotional lover, telling her sister:

> You are all ready for the pleasures of bed and board. But the woman who manages Henry will know that her pleasure must be in managing his thoughts, every minute of the day. It would not be a marriage of sensual lust at all, thought Henry would think that was what he was getting. It would be an affair of unending skill. (54)

She criticizes Mary for enjoying the relationship with Henry, and cautions her to not lose herself in fantasies of love and forget that she is there to please the king. Indeed, during Mary's first pregnancy, Anne warns: "No woman has ever kept a man by giving him children...You can't stop pleasing him just because he's got a child on you" (193). In keeping with her view of sex and romance as tools of manipulation, Anne's later relationship with Henry is represented as a carefully crafted game of cat-and-mouse. The advice that Anne has been giving Mary all along is now used for her own benefit. Anne seduces Henry not for her own pleasure, but for the social status and power that he bestows on her in return for the pleasure she gives him. The challenge for Anne, as her courtship with Henry draws out, is to keep him desirous of her without giving in to the point where he can cast her off as he did with Katherine and Mary. As she explains to her sister, "I have to do something to keep him hot for my touch. I have to keep him coming forward and hold him off, all at the same time" (326). The difference between Anne and

Mary as mistresses is that Mary gave her sexuality out of love, whereas Anne seeks to use these "whore's tricks" (326) in order to manipulate Henry and raise her own social status.

In recent decades, historians of female-focused academic histories have challenged the prevailing representation of Anne Boleyn. Antonia Fraser notes that she is usually presented as a "temptress" (1), and Retha Warnicke refers to the typical image of Anne as "an aggressive woman, who manipulated or bewitched Henry VIII into ending his union with Catherine of Aragon" (xi). Both historians have attempted to add nuance to the historical treatment of Anne Boleyn. In her study of Anne Boleyn, Warnicke is conscious of the roles that stereotypes and archetypes play in historical narratives, and attempts to prevent her representations from falling too neatly into familiar narrative patterns. Of its subject, Anne, Warnicke's study ultimately argues that "the modern conception of her as a *femme fatale* must be discarded" (5). With this assertion, Warnicke succinctly points to the way that literary archetypes—like the *femme fatale*—are used to give a sense of understanding to complex individuals. Yet in Gregory's narrative, Anne's complexities are largely elided. There is nothing particularly subversive about Philippa Gregory's representation of Anne. In *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Anne is represented much as she has been for centuries, as a wanton and depraved figure. Like a *femme fatale*, Gregory's Anne is shameless with her body and her sexuality, even kissing her brother passionately on the mouth (392) and letting him see her in the nude (411). Indeed, Gregory goes so far as to suggest that Anne and George engaged in incest in a desperate attempt to create a viable child to present to Henry (564). While George and Anne were, in fact, accused of incest, modern historians have discounted the validity of the charge,

pointing to the feebleness of the evidence against them (Fraser 252; Starkey *Six Wives* 580). Gregory's choice to give validity to the accusation in her narrative reflects the way she interprets and emplots facts in order to construct Anne as the archetypal femme fatale in contrast to the ingénue, Mary.

Throughout the novel, Mary becomes increasingly aligned with Katherine of Aragon, Henry's first wife, as an embodiment of the ideal "good" wife. When Henry's affections shift from Mary to Anne, Mary finds herself sharing a moment of camaraderie with Queen Katherine while they joke about Anne's attempts to convince the king of her fragility and demureness. Connected as Henry's cast-offs, Katherine and Anne also share intimate knowledge of Anne's nature and her methods of dissembling. Mary becomes increasingly sympathetic to Katherine as Anne continues to rise in status. After receiving a triumphant letter from her sister, Mary reflects:

> Nothing would be the same for any woman in this country again. From this time onward no wife, however obedient, however loving, would be safe. For everyone would know that if a wife such as Queen Katherine of England could be put aside for no reason, then any wife could be put aside. (276)

Mary continues to hold Katherine up as the ultimate embodiment of the ideal wife. During a trial in the spring of 1529, Mary watches in passionate solidarity as Katherine challenges the king's attempt to put their marriage aside. As Mary explains:

> I was near to delighted laughter because Katherine of Aragon was speaking out for the women of the country, for the *good wives* who should not be put aside just because their husbands had taken a fancy to another. (316-17, emphasis added)

Not only does Mary idolize Katherine, she espouses the model of the obedient, devoted wife and mother following the end of her affair with Henry. Indeed, Mary's relationship with William Stafford is the central romance plot of the narrative, and it establishes Mary as the conventional romance heroine for whom love and marriage restore balance to a chaotic social world.

While most accounts confirm that Mary and William Stafford married for love, Gregory emphasizes and idealizes their romance somewhat more than is merited by historical record. For instance, immediately following the text of the novel, Gregory's author's note begins: "Mary and William Stafford did live a long and happy life at Rochford" (663). In this way, Gregory emphasizes the "happily ever after" aspect of a romance plot over the novel's otherwise grim conclusion, which ends shortly after the executions of Anne and George Boleyn. Yet there is a note of falseness in Gregory's assertion of the "long" marriage of William and Mary, since Mary died in 1543, only nine years after they married and seven years after the events of the book's final chapter. Indeed, the fact that Mary did not live a long life is supported by the fact that William outlived her by more than a decade, remarrying in 1552 and producing five children with his second wife before dying in 1556 (Weir 254-5). Indeed, Weir suggests of Mary, "we might even speculate that the stresses and tragedies of the past decade had hastened her end" (250). Thus, Gregory's author's note functions as part of her construction of a romance narrative out of the events and figures of Tudor history.

This prominent romanticization of history is at odds with the self-proclaimed feminist imperative of Gregory's novel. At one point early in the narrative, Elizabeth Boleyn, Mary and Anne's mother, points out: "There is no freedom for women in this

world, fight or not as you like. See where Anne has brought herself" (145). On one hand, sentiments like this within the text signal a feminist historiographical approach that emphasizes the ways in which women have been oppressed, historically, under patriarchy. Yet on the other hand, Elizabeth Boleyn's outlook coupled with the unsympathetic portrayal of Anne and the happy ending that focuses on Mary's marriage to William Stafford suggest that for a woman to fight patriarchal oppression, as Anne does, is a futile endeavour. Instead, the course of action idealized within the text is the adoption of the madonna archetype of female identity.

The narrative centrality of Mary and William's marriage and their escape from court reveals the novel's emphasis on the nuclear, patriarchal family unit, and the conservative ideology that goes hand in hand with that unit. William's idealized image of Mary as his wife entails her working in the kitchen skinning chickens and making cheese (404; 418)—in other words, firmly contained within the home and the domestic role expected of a wife. This is what he offers when he proposes marriage: not a way for her to subvert the ideology that oppresses women, but a way to, as Mary Wollstonecraft would say, "adorn its prison" (157). Perhaps that is what readers find so attractive in Gregory's historical romances: resistance in positivity, in the ability to make the best of one's life, even if one's choices are constricted. From one point of view, the shift of a character like Mary Boleyn from the role of "whore" as the King's mistress to the more acceptable roles of wife and mother illustrates the interconnectedness of these two polarized archetypes. To a certain extent, then, Gregory might be said to destabilize the binary opposition of these two roles for women. However, the problem with this reading lies in the presence of repeated narrative judgments about which one of these roles is

"good." When Mary leaves behind her life at court and her reputation as the king's whore and declares to William that she will marry him and become "a farmer's wife" (451), William tells her, "you're a good girl" (452). The language of goodness associated with wives and mothers can be seen throughout the novel and the Tudor series as a whole. So, although Mary embodies both parts of the madonna/whore binary within the text, Gregory's language never challenges the hierarchy of these roles and the patriarchal values associated with them.

The problem, I suggest, is not that Gregory represents the virgin and the whore as the two archetypes by which patriarchal society, throughout history, classifies women; the problem is that her novel uses this same classification system, and upholds the moral lesson for its modern-day readers about which model of womanhood is to be emulated and which is to be scorned. She is not alone in espousing this sense of proper femininity, since even Alison Weir concludes her biography of Mary Boleyn with some moralizing remarks on love and priorities, asserting that "unlike her sister, Mary had not tempted fate too far," that she "had learned what really mattered in life," and "found love and stability" (252). Perhaps the appeal of the romance narrative for historiographers is its orderliness; perhaps its usage reveals a desire to achieve understanding of historical figures through the categorization of complex individuals into essential archetypes. Ultimately, in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Gregory's narrative account of Anne Boleyn is a cautionary tale against licentiousness and ambition in women, while Mary Boleyn is the ideal to be celebrated.

***The Boleyn Inheritance* (2006)**

In her concluding author note to *The Boleyn Inheritance*, Philippa Gregory briefly explains her impetus for writing the novel. She starts by noting that Anne of Cleves and Katherine Howard, the fourth and fifth wives of Henry VIII, are the two wives that "we know least" although "we think we know them well" (515). As she elaborates, she explains that what we know of Anne and Katherine are stereotypes and that her goal in *The Boleyn Inheritance* was to "get past the convention that one wife was ugly and the other stupid" (515). Accordingly, Gregory notes that Anne's "prettiness and her charm were widely reported at the time and are shown in the painting by Holbein" (515). As for the assumption that Katherine Howard was stupid, Gregory explains: "My bias is towards understanding Katherine as a young girl at a court of far older and more sophisticated people" (516). Nevertheless, the following analysis of *The Boleyn Inheritance* will question the extent to which these stereotypes are successfully undermined in Gregory's representations of Anne of Cleves and Katherine Howard. Notably problematic to her claims of circumventing stereotypes is the fact that Gregory's account of Henry's fourth and fifth wives is not particularly different from the accounts of established academic historians. Moreover, although she claims to take issue with stereotypes about women in history, Gregory nevertheless structures this novel, as she does most of her Tudor novels, around two women who are presented as polar opposites and romantic rivals. As in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, readers are presented with a good wife and a bad wife, women rhetorically positioned as a virtuous and chaste ingénue and a sly whore, and readers are encouraged by the text to align their sympathies and judgments accordingly.

From her initial appearance in the novel, Anne of Cleves is set up as the novel's ingénue. A chaste and virtuous, but inexperienced woman, Anne is first represented as a

victim of an abusive family life. She views the opportunity to leave Cleves in order to become queen of England as a chance to escape the cruelties of her mother and her brother, who is referred to as a tyrant and described as "cunning" in his meanness (5). This narrative positioning within the first pages of the novel prompts the reader to sympathize and root for Anne. Anne is clearly characterized as a madonna figure, a virtuous and chaste girl who asserts, "I have no desire to be anything but a good girl, a good queen" (9). Accordingly, as she sits to have her portrait painted by Holbein—the portrait from which Henry VIII will determine whether or not to marry her—Anne expresses a desire to convey trustworthiness, "my frank stare indicating honesty but not immodesty" (4). Yet while she hoped that England would mean freedom from the patriarchal oppression she has experienced at the hands of her brother, Anne comes to find marriage to Henry not unlike her life in Cleves. On her wedding night, she realizes "I have exchanged one difficult man for another. I shall have to learn how to evade the anger of this new man, and how to survive him" (128).

As a "good" woman, sexual purity is a central aspect of Anne's character. She has been trained by her family to recoil from licentiousness, with her own brother expressing disgust for female sexuality when he advises: "She must not seek him out!...She must do nothing wanton...She is not to be his whore" (20). Jane Boleyn describes Anne as "a modest woman, an untouched girl" (77). Although she does not express sexual desire, Anne does display maternal instincts. Even before marrying Henry, she begins to think of herself as a mother to his children: "I know his daughters have been estranged from him. Poor girls, I so hope to be of service to little Elizabeth, who never knew her mother...And the Princess Mary must be lonely, without her mother" (98). Later, she shows affection

toward Prince Edward, wishing she could claim him as her own: “More than anything else I long to mother him” (141). She also longs for children of her own. Yet during her first sexual encounter with the king, on their wedding night, Anne is mortified: “My cheeks are burning with shame that he should just stare at my exposed body...I lie absolutely still so that he shall not think I am wanton” (129). At the end of their failed wedding night, Anne wishes she could comfort the impotent Henry, wanting to tell him “even though there is no desire between us that I hope to be a good wife to him and a good queen for England” (131).

There is no pleasure in the sexual act, for her, but there is pleasure in the prospect of being a mother. In fact, so thoroughly is Anne represented as a madonna figure, she expresses the desire to conceive without having to endure sexual intercourse. For Anne, intercourse is a duty, a means of producing children and heirs. When her marriage to Henry is put aside, her sadness is primarily for the loss of unfulfilled motherhood: “I will have to face a lonely life, without family. I will never have a child of my own, I will never have a son to come after me, I will never have my own daughter to love” (288). Anne’s views on sexuality, motherhood, and wifely obedience are in line with conduct books for women of the period, such as Juan Luis Vives’ *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* (1524), which was dedicated to Queen Katherine of Aragon for the education of her daughter, Mary, who “will read these recommendations and will reproduce them as she models herself on the example of your goodness and wisdom” (50). The issue, then, to a historical novel purporting to be contemporary feminist revisionary historical fiction is not the historical accuracy of Anne’s views of women’s roles, but rather the fact that

Gregory does little to subvert or alter the image of Anne as a traditional madonna figure, or to challenge the way patriarchal ideology has historically defined female goodness.

The other central aspect of Anne's character, as depicted by Gregory, is her likeness to other "good wives" like Katherine of Aragon and Mary Boleyn. Gregory's "good wives," one comes to find, are explicitly aligned across the series. Shortly after Anne's arrival in England, Jane Boleyn connects her to Henry's first wife, musing that "not since Katherine of Aragon have we had a queen who is so smiling and pleasant to the common people, and not since Aragon has England relished the novelty of a foreign princess" (74). Like Katherine of Aragon, Anne of Cleves struggles to hold the women around her to a code of proper feminine behaviour. At one point, Anne reflects: "I have to learn to command my ladies. They have to behave as my mother would approve. The Queen of England and her ladies must be above question" (154). Moreover, while Anne is presented as similar to Katherine of Aragon, she is explicitly contrasted to Anne Boleyn by Henry, who tells her that the Princess Elizabeth "had a mother so unlike you, in every way, that she ought not to ask for your company" (158). Anne of Cleves is later aligned with another of Gregory's celebrated female figures, Mary Boleyn, when she expresses desire for "a good-sized farmhouse in the country" or at least "a smaller house where we can live more simply" (171). The desire to leave the licentious, manipulative Tudor court was one of the defining characteristics of Mary Boleyn in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, and this desire is taken up in *The Boleyn Inheritance* by Anne of Cleves. Indeed, it is Mary Boleyn's childhood home of Hever Castle—the Boleyn inheritance—that Anne of Cleves comes to call home by the end of the narrative.

Once the potential for romance has been removed from Anne's narrative following her failed marriage to Henry, Gregory uses Anne to produce a critical feminist commentary on Henry VIII and on women's socio-economic disenfranchisement during the early modern period. In the later part of *The Boleyn Inheritance*, after her marriage to Henry is put aside, Anne of Cleves is represented as a kind of proto-feminist, an independent woman who takes pleasure in managing her own affairs and ruling her own household. She reflects:

> I find, to my own amusement, as I examine my thoughts—and at last I have the privacy and peace to examine my thoughts—that it may be a better thing to be a single woman with a good income in one of the finest palaces in England than to be one of Henry's frightened queens. (304)

She finds that there is pleasure in being "a dull old spinster" that comes from escaping court and acquiring things that she can call her own (361). In her final monologue, and the last page of the novel, Anne explains the freedoms she has won: "I will own a cat and not fear being called a witch, I will dance and not fear being named a whore. I shall ride my horse and go where I please...I shall live my own life and please myself" (514). It is only once Anne is not longer figured as part of a romance narrative that Gregory begins to develop a more overtly feminist socio-economic commentary through her. However, it is significant that Anne's inheritance of Hever, and thus her freedom to control her own day-to-day life, is given to her by Henry in acknowledgement of her goodness. Ultimately, the lesson conveyed to readers by the characterizations of Mary Boleyn and Anne of Cleves in Gregory's Tudor series is that ambition is a bad path for a woman, and that it is better for a woman to seek a quiet domestic life. While there is nothing

inherently wrong with idealizing quietude, country life, and a withdrawal from politics, the fact that these ideals are upheld primarily by the women who are rhetorically positioned as "good wives" in Gregory's Tudor series does, I suggest, constitute a problem for Gregory's feminist claims. For this characterization of the good wives in their country abodes echoes the image, popularized in the nineteenth century and famously rejected by feminists like Virginia Woolf, of the angel in the house.[13]

Anne of Cleves, initially the romantic ingénue and later the proto-feminist independent woman, is succeeded by Henry's fourth wife, Katherine Howard. In *The Boleyn Inheritance*, Katherine is set up as a foil to Anne—the whore in contrast to the ingénue, competing to be Henry's queen. In contrast to the immediate sympathy produced by the opening depiction of Anne of Cleves as an abused young woman, early representations of Katherine Howard do not do much to generate reader sympathy. Shallow materialism and licentiousness are the defining characteristics of Gregory's representation of Katherine. Katherine's opening words to the reader are "Now let me see, what do I have?" (10). This phrase is repeated as the opening of one third of Katherine's point-of-view chapters in the novel.[14] Katherine's early chapters find her wondering, "What shall I get for Christmas?" (39), reflecting on what she already has: "a new gold brooch given to me by the King of England himself" (102), and generally thinking about herself: "I seem to have spent my life trying to get a view of myself in silver trays and bits of glass" (166). Katherine's materialism ties in with the novel's theme of "inheritance"—both figurative and literal inheritance, with the narrative playing

[13] This figure is concretized in the poem "The Angel in the House" by Coventry Patmore (1854). In her essay, "Professions for Women" (published in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* in 1942), Virginia Woolf asserts that "killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer."

[14] It is the opening sentence of nine out of Katherine's thirty-four chapters, to be exact.

on the irony of the fact that Katherine's materialism—and Jane Boleyn's, too—comes to naught, and it is Anne who gains Hever Castle, the material Boleyn inheritance.

More than anything, though, it is Katherine's sexuality that is used to contrast her to Anne of Cleves, the innocent and naive queen she supplants by seducing Henry. In her first point-of-view chapter, Katherine is waiting for Francis Dereham to "lie in my bed," but she is quick to point out that she is already sexually knowledgeable: "Three years in the maids' chamber has taught me every little wile and play that I need" (12). Later, she describes herself curtseying for her uncle, "leaning a little forwards so that my lord can see the tempting curve of my breasts pressed at the top of my gown" (52). Katherine receives conflicting advice on how best to advance her own ambition and her family's status. While her grandmother teaches her the art of seduction, her uncle advises her, "Modesty, Katherine. It is a woman's greatest asset" (55). Katherine uses a combination of seduction and feigned innocence to catch the eye of Henry VIII and draw him away from his truly naive and inexperienced wife, Anne of Cleves. There are very strong echoes of Anne Boleyn in the depictions of Katherine. Katherine's use of French phrases and her adoration for French fashion, for instance, emphasize her connection to her deceased cousin. At one point, Katherine acknowledges the connection, saying, "I know, as if my own cousin Anne Boleyn is at my side telling me, what I should do" (81). Indeed, Katherine Howard is juxtaposed to Anne of Cleves in *The Boleyn Inheritance* through physicality, fashion, and sexuality in the same way Anne Boleyn is contrasted to Katherine of Aragon in *The Other Boleyn Girl*.

Given the representation of Katherine Howard in *The Boleyn Inheritance*, it may be surprising to see that Philippa Gregory has spoken out against the characterization of

Katherine as a whore. In a review of the novel for *The Bookseller* magazine, Nicholas Clee quotes Philippa Gregory saying of Katherine Howard: "David Starkey calls her 'a stupid slut'. That's an extraordinary epithet to apply to a girl who was dead before she was 17. I do feel very strongly the injustice that has been done to these queens." In this statement, Gregory indicates discomfort with the slut shaming to which Katherine has been subjected by traditional historical accounts. Yet the extent to which Gregory's novel undermines the characterization of Katherine Howard as an archetypal whore figure is questionable. She is villainized throughout the first half of the novel as a woman seeking to overthrow the sympathetic ingénue. There are only brief moments late in the novel in which the condemnation of Katherine's behaviour is troubled. For instance, just before her execution, Katherine defends herself with the argument "all I did was what hundreds of other young women do every day, especially when they are married to old, disagreeable men" (498-9). Even Anne of Cleves expresses sympathy for Katherine at the end, noting that she is "not an Anne Boleyn, who schemed and contrived her way to the throne over six years of striving, and was then thrown down by her own ambition" (460). Yet this statement is highly suspect, since the narrative has shown precisely that. Moreover, although Anne argues late in the text that Katherine is not like Anne Boleyn, the establishing characterization of Katherine Howard has includes numerous comparisons between the two. Even Katherine's final words of the text are an echo of Anne Boleyn's use of French: "This is the Boleyn inheritance for me. *Voilà*: the executioner's block" (507). Thus, Gregory's stated desire to represent Katherine as a naive child rather than a sexually manipulative woman is undermined by the narrative she has created in which Katherine and Anne are foils in a love triangle.

The disjunction between Gregory's comments about representations of Anne of Cleves and Katherine Howard during interviews and her representations of them in *The Boleyn Inheritance* signals the tension between feminist historiography and popular literary forms and archetypes. Although there is visible feminist commentary through the second half of Anne's narrative, the novel maintains a madonna/whore binary and largely villainizes Katherine Howard. Despite expressing a desire to exonerate Katherine from a reputation as a whore, Gregory's narrative does not attempt to generate sympathy for Katherine until late in the novel. To undermine the stereotypes that have come to represent the wives of Henry VIII, one would need to craft a narrative that does not rely on the pitting of female characters against one another for the reader's favour. In designing most of her Tudor novels around the competition between two women, Gregory has chosen a popular narrative formula—the love triangle—that upholds the madonna/whore binary. Consequently, the project of writing untold women's histories is subjugated to the project of selling women's histories as popular and familiar romance narratives.

The Queen's Fool **(2003)**

The Queen's Fool is, structurally, extremely similar to *The Other Boleyn Girl*, a similarity that illustrates Gregory's adherence to romance formulas and archetypes, and the fact that across romance novels, "the characters are typically clones" (Faktorovich 113). The narrative is told in first-person perspective by a young woman, Hannah, who is positioned between two women rivaling one another for the position of queen of England, Mary and Elizabeth Tudor. Hannah serves first Mary and then Elizabeth as a holy fool,

since she possesses the gift of Sight, and this allows her first-person narration to contrast the two queens. In this way, Hannah's perspective mirrors that of Mary Boleyn who, in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, served both Katherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn. Also significant is the recurring presence of the madonna/whore binary through Gregory's juxtaposition of Mary and Elizabeth. In *The Queen's Fool*, Mary and Elizabeth are essentially mirrors of their mothers, Katherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn, but their juxtaposition also echoes that of the sisters Anne and Mary Boleyn in *The Other Boleyn Girl*. Furthermore, Hannah herself mirrors Mary Boleyn since, through her, Gregory develops a conservative romance narrative idealizing the states of wifehood and motherhood and subordinating female ambition to the domestic sphere. During the course of the novel, Hannah transforms from a girl who believes marriage to be an oppressive institution for women into the devoted wife of a man who believes strongly in the divinely ordained subordination of women. Indeed, Hannah's narrative arch and character transition is the inverse of what one would expect from a feminist narrative. Examining the structure of the novel around these three women, Mary, Elizabeth, and Hannah, the ideology behind the narrative becomes clear: there are two kinds of women, madonnas and whores, and each young girl, like Hannah, is faced with the choice of which to become. The key to female fulfillment, the novel assures readers, is to be a devoted and obedient wife and mother.

The most villainized character in *The Queen's Fool* is Princess Elizabeth, who is figured as a manipulative seductress. Quite early in the novel, the reader is told: "The girl was a virgin in name alone. In reality, she was little more than a whore" (3). Gregory chooses to open the story when the fourteen-year-old Elizabeth is living with her

stepmother Katherine Parr and her stepfather Thomas Seymour. History has typically remembered Thomas Seymour as a scheming man who at the very least flirted with his stepdaughter, Elizabeth, and at worst sexually abused her (Starkey *Elizabeth* 67). Margaret Irwin, in her popular mid-twentieth-century Queen Elizabeth trilogy (1944-1953), depicts Seymour as a social climber who proposes marriage to the young Bess before marrying Parr. Yet Gregory's depiction of the relationship between Elizabeth and Thomas Seymour shows Elizabeth as an active sexual participant. As Gregory describes Seymour manually stimulating his stepdaughter, readers are told: "Anyone could read the tranced willingness on the girl's face; she was lost in her desire" (3). By the end of the first chapter, the narration has switched to first-person, and the narrator, the fictional Hannah Green, summarizes: "That was the first sight I ever had of the Princess Elizabeth: damp with desire, panting with lust, rubbing herself like a cat against another woman's husband" (5). Through the language—Elizabeth is a "whore," she is "lost in her desire," and she is with "another woman's husband"—Gregory makes clear associations between Elizabeth's sexuality and immorality. The narrative upholds this characterization of Elizabeth throughout, with her relationship with Thomas Seymour casting a narrative shadow over her later interactions with other married men, Philip of Spain and Robert Dudley. As Hannah summarizes: "Elizabeth was not a girl that anyone should trust with their husband" (279).

In stark contrast to Elizabeth who is characterized as pleasure-seeking, dishonest, and adulterous, Mary Tudor is represented as a madonna figure—a maternal and chaste woman. In her narration, Hannah recalls that "what struck me most about her was her air of honesty" (41). Mary is described as having "dark eyes, Spanish eyes, from her mother"

(41). Her connection to her mother—the good wife from *The Constant Princess* and *The Other Boleyn Girl*—is further solidified by the "great jeweled cross at her throat as if to flaunt her religion in this most Protestant court" (41). Later, another lady in waiting characterizes Mary as a "half saint" for her conduct during the trials of her early life (77). Moreover, although the rhetoric of the "virgin queen" is iconically associated with Elizabeth, Gregory here deploys it as Mary's image. "I will be a virgin queen," Mary tells Hannah. "I shall have no children but the people of this country, I shall be their mother" (79). The transference of the label "virgin queen" from Elizabeth to Mary is very telling of Gregory's creation of a madonna/whore binary between the two. Having made the decision to cast Elizabeth as the seductress and sexual manipulator, Gregory uses the language that history and popular culture usually associate with Elizabeth to describe Mary instead. From one perspective, this tactic of shifting the rhetoric of the "virgin queen" away from Elizabeth might be read as an example of self-reflexive historiography, reminding readers that there are alternate ways of understanding historical figures and their relationships to one another. However, Gregory only shifts the moniker in order to create a contrast between Mary and Elizabeth, who is characterized as a "whore." Thus, stereotypes may be shifted, but they are ultimately reinscribed within the novel.

Gregory's Mary Tudor epitomizes the archetype of the madonna through her maternal inclinations. Mary thinks herself something of a maternal figure for Elizabeth, explaining to Hannah that "I have Elizabeth to think of, too. I have her safety to secure. I have her inheritance to pass on to her. She is my sister, she is my responsibility" (99). Even after discovering that Elizabeth has betrayed her, Mary still experiences the tugs of

maternal feelings toward her sister, reminiscing: “I don’t forget that she learned to walk holding on to my fingers” (186). In casting Mary in a benevolent light, Gregory also downplays the stereotype of “Bloody Mary,” the epithet often given to Mary I. In the novel, Will Somers, the famous court jester, tells Hannah that what some perceive as Mary’s cruelty toward the Protestants is the result of her great maternal feeling for her people and her desire to see their souls saved. He explains:

> She wants to do right and she is told by everyone around her that the best way to bring this country to heel is to burn a few nobodies who are destined for hell already. Her heart might ache for them but she will sacrifice them to save the rest, just as she would sacrifice herself for her own immortal soul. (309)

Indeed, Gregory roots Mary’s persecution of Protestantism in her maternal identity when the queen asserts: “Only when the sin is rooted out of the country will I be able to conceive a child” (325). Through Will Somers, Gregory offers a lamentation on the way history remembers Mary. Will predicts: “All they will remember of this queen is that she brought the country floods and famine and fore. She will be remembered as England’s curse when she was to have been our virgin queen, England’s saviour” (322). As historian Linda Porter explains, “The blackening of Mary’s name began in Elizabeth’s reign and gathered force at the end of the 17th century, when James II compounded the view that Catholic monarchs were a disaster for England” (418). Yet Porter is quick to note that the alternative tendency, “to depict her as a sad little woman who would have been better off as the Tudor equivalent of a housewife” is equally contrived and condescending (418). Porter intriguingly asks why modern historians and writers continue to depict Mary according to these stereotypes, noting that “Elizabeth’s

reputation is not diminished by acknowledging the interest or achievements of Mary's reign" (418). If, as Porter suggests, historical accounts generally contrast Mary and Elizabeth with the latter being favoured and praised and the former denigrated and dismissed, then *The Queen's Fool* bucks this historical trend by reversing it. Yet the result is just as problematic: a binary replaced with another binary; the stereotype of Bloody Mary replaced with the stereotype of the pure madonna.

Positioned between these two polarized daughters of Henry VIII is Hannah Green, the narrator who provides focalization for the reader throughout the novel. Hannah is initially characterized as espousing proto-feminist views, especially concerning marriage and the social position of women. Indeed, for the first two thirds of the novel, it is Hannah who most clearly suggests that the narrative utilizes feminist lens on women in history. Early in the narrative she remarks, "What is [marriage] but the servitude of women hoping for safety, to men who cannot even keep them safe?" (36). After Hannah chooses to stay at court as the Queen's holy fool, her betrothed, Daniel, tries to convince her of her duty to him. As the patriarch of his family, he tells Hannah: "See, my sisters, my mother, all obey me. You have to do the same" (220). During their separation while Hannah is at court and Daniel is in France, he writes a letter explaining that "God has given me the rule of your sex" (234). Hannah reflects on this, deciding that he may be correct, but that she is not yet ready to submit: "This was a man who believed that God had ordained him to be my natural master. A woman who loved him would have to learn obedience, and I was not yet ready to be an obedient wife" (236). However, Hannah's view of marriage begins to shift, especially after she sees Queen Mary become a wife. She thinks: "It might be that marriage was not the death of a woman and the end of her

true self, but the unfolding of her" (247). Still concerned over her own pending marriage, she writes back to Daniel, saying: "I do not want you to rule over me. I need to be a woman in my own right, and not only a wife" (249). Daniel replies: "Of course it must be possible that a man and a wife could be married in a new way also. I do not want you as my servant, I want you as my love" (260). Through their correspondence, Hannah attempts to negotiate a position for herself that allows both autonomy and marriage. Once convinced that Daniel will be a loving husband, Hannah acquiesces to her role as his future wife, announcing, "I mean to be a good wife... I mean to leave this court and go to him and become and good and steady wife to him" (313).

However, Hannah and Daniel's marriage in practice is not as equal as their negotiations promised. Very quickly, Hannah finds that rigid restrictions and expectations are placed upon her in her new position as Daniel's wife. She does not know how to complete housekeeping tasks, and is scolded and told: "As my wife you will need to know how to do such things" (357). Since they live in a small house along with Daniel's mother and sisters, Hannah's sexual pleasure is stifled. As she describes: "Within a few days I had learned to lie like a stone beneath my husband, and he had learned to take his pleasure as quickly as he could in silence" (361). Hannah is considered a failure by her mother-in-law, first for staying at court for so long and delaying her marriage to Daniel, and then for failing to become pregnant quickly. Hannah is finally crushed when she discovers that while she has been at court serving the queen, Daniel has been in a relationship with another woman and that he has fathered a son by this woman. At this point, she announces to her mother-in-law, rebelliously, "I don't care about being a good wife any longer" (366). Hannah separates from Daniel and is branded "as bad as an

adulteress" by their priest for doing so (379). Daniel urges Hannah to "forgive me and love me, like a woman...Love me from your heart, not from your head" (382). However, Hannah is resolute in her refusal to submit to the role of "good wife" as it is defined by her husband, her society, and her religion. She is, in many ways, a feminist character throughout the first two thirds of the novel.

However, the conclusion Gregory writes to the novel re-positions Daniel as the hero our heroine, Hannah, desires. Seemingly abandoning the position she has been attempting to negotiate between selfhood and wifehood, Hannah comes to embrace the ideals of the patriarchal good wife: chastity, obedience, silence, and maternal devotion. Gregory produces this shift in Hannah's characterization through her representation of the Siege of Calais. Calais is where Hannah, Daniel and their families have been living since leaving England. In the commotion of the attack, Hannah sees Daniel's mistress murdered and picks up his illegitimate child, carrying the boy with her to Robert Dudley's ship. Obtaining safe passage back to England through her court connections, Hannah provides for the child by claiming that she is his mother. In England, doting over Daniel's son whom Hannah has named Danny and accepted as her own, she suddenly longs desperately for the husband she rejected: "Nothing seemed to matter but that I knew now that I loved him" (414). It is a trope of the popular romance novel that "true love" can overcome even terrible relationship problems (Faktorovich 95), and this is certainly the narrative strategy in *The Queen's Fool*. While in England, Hannah rejects the advances of Robert Dudley—with whom she has been infatuated since the start of her narrative. Now there is room in her heart only for Daniel and his child. When she is reunited with Daniel in the novel's final chapter, Daniel asks "Have you come back to be

my wife?" (498). His phrasing of the question suggests that the position of "wife" has not changed, but that he hopes Hannah may have changed herself to suit the role. Hannah is, significantly, unable to speak, explaining that she only "nodded emphatically." After apologizing to Daniel for leaving him and revelling in the joy of their reunion, Hannah explains: "I don't want to be Mary or Elizabeth, I want to be me: Hannah Carpenter" (500). That she calls herself by her married name signifies her acceptance of wifehood. Their marriage is upheld and celebrated by the text, eliding the unresolved concerns about the power, autonomy, and equality Hannah desires yet doesn't possess as Daniel's wife. While Gregory suggests through Hannah's assertion that she represents an option outside of the Mary/Elizabeth madonna/whore binary, this argument ultimately rings false. Hannah is rendered as a madonna figure in the novel's final pages, reformed from her rebellious attitudes. Through the "happily ever after" romance narrative structure, Hannah is firmly contained within the patriarchal confines of her marriage, and this domestic containment is presented to the reader as a desirable female subject position.

The Virgin's Lover **(2004)**

The Virgin's Lover establishes a rivalry between two women and a love triangle plot more quickly than any other book in Philippa Gregory's Tudor series. The rivalry between Amy Dudley and Elizabeth I for Robert Dudley's affections is established within the first page of the novel. The representation of Elizabeth I as a whore, established in *The Queen's Fool*, is carried into *The Virgin's Lover*. Elizabeth's characterization in *The Virgin's Lover* echoes the characterization of her mother, Anne Boleyn, in *The Other Boleyn Girl* since the goal of both women is to woo a married man from his faithful wife.

Julie Crane suggests that the issue of the mother is central to representations of Elizabeth, writing: "Women writers think back through their mothers, notes Virginia Woolf, and, in the case of Elizabeth, so do queens" (86). Indeed, the issue of Anne Boleyn's reputation as a seductress is foregrounded in *The Virgin's Lover* through the efforts Elizabeth makes to rhetorically position herself as the "virgin queen" and to rewrite the rhetoric surrounding her mother so that she becomes "Lady Anne Boleyn, Queen of England, and mother of the queen" (46). Yet despite Elizabeth's attempts to characterize herself and her mother as virginal, maternal figures, the history of Anne Boleyn and the questionable nature of Elizabeth's relationship with Robert still taint her reputation. At one point Lady Robsart describes the queen as "a young woman as lustful as her mother" (71). Indeed, the word "whore" is used repeatedly throughout the book in reference to Elizabeth. Later, Cecil warns the queen that she must keep a virtuous reputation "because your mother, God rest her soul, died with her reputation most foully slandered" (389).

Gregory's characterization of Elizabeth as a whore is rooted in her approach to the question of the queen's relationship with the married Robert Dudley, and her take on Elizabeth's sexuality is quite plain— the title of the novel is *The Virgin's Lover*, after all. Within the narrative, Gregory explicitly presents Elizabeth and Robert Dudley as physical lovers. There is nothing ambiguous about her rendering of the event: "She cried out loud that she must, she must have him, and then at last he allowed himself to enter her and watched her eyelids flicker closed and her rosy lips smile" (199). However, despite the unambiguous representation in Gregory's novel, no conclusive historical evidence exists regarding the subject of Elizabeth's virginity. David Starkey, in his biography of the queen, is highly skeptical of the rumours that she and Dudley engaged in more than

flirtation. He asserts that Elizabeth's "sentimental friendship" with Dudley "played a useful part in the elaborate dynamics of her court and council" (315), but he maintains that, based on available historical evidence, "that was all" (315). In *Elizabeth and Leicester* (2007), Sarah Gristwood is less sure than Starkey, but still skeptical about the possibility of full, penetrative sex having occurred between the couple. Outlining the various pieces of evidence on both sides of the argument, Gristwood pauses to consider "the risk of an unthinkable pregnancy" noting that "an ordinary woman might risk pregnancy in the knowledge that marriage would surely follow, but a queen regnant, as closely watched and as vulnerable to scandal as Elizabeth was? Hardly" (128). Gregory's answer to this problem is to have Robert Dudley use a prophylactic "made of sheep's bladder sewn with tiny stitches" (198). While historians are, to various degrees, hesitant to accept the idea of a sexual relationship between Elizabeth and Robert Dudley, Philippa Gregory bases her entire novel on the premise that they were passionate, physical lovers. In her appended author's note, she writes: "Were Elizabeth and Robert full lovers? Perhaps in these more permissive days we can say that it hardly matters. What does matter is that she loved him all her life, and despite his later marriage to Laetitia Knollys (another Boleyn redhead) he undoubtedly loved her" (440). In her explanation for her narrative choice and historical interpretation of the relationship, it is clear that her emphasis is less on fidelity to historical records ("it hardly matters") and more on the development of a plot worthy of a romance novel: forbidden love.

The woman juxtaposed against Elizabeth to create a love triangle in *The Virgin's Lover* is Amy Dudley, the bitter but still devoted wife of the queen's lover, Robert Dudley. Amy espouses the views that characterize the good wives throughout Gregory's

series, especially the view that there is less to be gained by a political courtly life than by a quiet family life in the country. Very early in the novel, she explains to her husband: "What you don't see, Robert, is that to be a little farmer in a hundred acres is to make a better England—and in a better way—than any courtier struggling for his own power at court" (9). This preference for country life over courtly life connects Amy to the "good" wives in Gregory's other Tudor novels: Mary Boleyn, Anne of Cleves, and Hannah Green. Though she is often vocal about her unhappiness with Robert's treatment of her, Amy's moments of protest or rebellion are always followed by a reassertion of her devotedness to her husband. In other words, she fights her own feelings of loneliness and betrayal by striving to embody the image of the good, devoted, patient wife waiting faithfully at home. In one such mood, she tells her stepmother, Lady Robsart, "I love him, I am his, and he is mine, and nothing will come between us" (21). Though she often vocalizes her displeasure to Robert, she defends him to others and insists "I keep faith...I wait for him, and I trust that he will come home to me" (105). Across Gregory's Tudor novels, "good wives" are explicitly aligned with one another. Such is the case with *The Virgin's Lover* as well, where Amy Dudley aligns herself with Mary Tudor, asserting: "I always knew that Queen Mary was the true queen" (105). Amy's religiosity, too, offers a parallel to the staunchly Catholic good wives Katherine of Aragon, Anne of Cleves, and Mary Tudor. In her obedience and devotion to Robert, Amy is depicted in terms of a religious supplicant. She is rendered as such in a description that sees her "waiting, as humble as any petitioner, outside the door of Robert's privy chamber" (175). Further aligning Amy with Katherine of Aragon is her utter refusal to accept her husband's insistence on a divorce.

While this narrative does not use first-person perspective, as do most of Gregory's other Tudor novels, it still evokes reader sympathy for Amy through frequent and lengthy descriptions of her loneliness which mirror the protracted periods of waiting that Amy is forced to endure. Near the end of the novel, the narrator describes Amy as "that lowest form of female life, a woman who had married the wrong man" (382). Amy is also rendered pitiful by her childlessness. While Robert uses a prophylactic to avoid impregnating his lover, his lawful wife Amy is heavy with maternal longing for the children she has never had. At one point, Elizabeth denigrates Amy based on her age and childlessness, as though being thirty is the cause of Amy's childlessness and not the continual absence of her husband. Expressing madonna-like characteristics, Amy cares for the children of friends and relatives with whom she stays. As Alice Hyde remarks: "She would have been such a good mother if she had been blessed with children" (346). The height of development of pathos for Amy, however, comes when Cecil, at the bequest of the queen, has arranged for Amy's assassination. A messenger informs Amy that her husband has requested to meet with her in complete privacy. Ever the faithful optimist, Amy reflects: "I have to take him back without reproach. That would be my duty to him and his wife...And, in any case, whatever the reason, I would take him back without reproach...I can't even imagine how happy I would be if he were to come back to me" (409). The very next day, the visitor comes, but it is not Robert, it is a man who quickly and efficiently breaks Amy's neck and throws her down the stairs. Amy's narrative is rendered tragic, like Katherine of Aragon's in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, precisely because the text works to garner reader sympathy for her as a "good wife" who is overthrown by a scheming, ambitious, sexually licentious woman.

Although she certainly subverts the stereotype of Elizabeth I as virginal, Gregory does so only by positioning Elizabeth on the other side of a madonna/whore binary. In doing so, she is able to create reader sympathy for another marginalized female figure in history, Amy Dudley. Yet the fact that in this novel Amy is valorized for her chastity and devotion while Elizabeth is villainized for her sexual appetite reveals the shallowness of these representations of female subject positions. Moreover, as one of Gregory's more liberal diversions from historical record, her choice to set the novel around the invented details of a physical affair between Elizabeth and Robert Dudley calls into question Gregory's claims of authenticity and her emphasis on the research that goes into her novels. Erotic romance and the development of a forbidden love narrative is the most visible framework of this novel, not feminist revisionist history.

Selling and Selling Out:

The massive popularity of Philippa Gregory's Tudor novels suggests that contemporary women readers—even those who adopt the feminist label, as Gregory does—remain drawn to the familiar archetypes of the madonna and the whore. The four Tudor novels analysed here employ the archetypes and formulas of the romance genre with such consistency that one cannot help but feel beaten over the brow with the lesson of how to be a "good wife"—that superior female figure revered by romanticized narratives both literary and historical. Although I have not discussed all of Gregory's Tudor novels here, this pattern recurs in many of them. Discussing *The Other Queen*, Ingibjörg Ágústsdóttir—one of only a few scholars to have analyzed Gregory's Tudor work in depth—notes that despite Gregory's comments indicating that "she clearly

intends to challenge the idea of Mary and Elizabeth as polar opposites," in actuality, her novel "by no means manages to subvert the stereotype; rather, she reinforces it" (81). Through her adherence to romance formulas and archetypes, Gregory has emplotted history in ways that juxtapose female figures as madonnas and whores, and idealize the figure of the "good wife." This way of characterizing women is rather standard across romance narratives. As Janice Radway has stated, "this literary form reaffirms its founding culture's belief that women are valuable not for their unique personal qualities but for their biological sameness and their ability to perform that essential role of maintaining and reconstituting others" (208). Yet, in light of Philippa Gregory's own comments positioning her historical novels within feminist historiography, the extent to which her novels simplify female subject positions into madonnas and whores is surprising, and reveals the limits of the relationship between feminism and popular fiction.

In her study of popular romances, Tania Modleski emphasizes the presence of small resistances in romance narratives, arguing that "even the contemporary mass-produced narratives for women contain elements of protest and resistance underneath highly 'orthodox' plots" (25). This view is echoed by Susan Strehle and Mary Paniccia Carden who point out in *Doubled Plots: Romance and History* (2003) that:

> Depending on the writer, the text, and the reader, any given romance can take a position somewhere between critique of patriarchal oppression and affirmation of patriarchal codes and values—or, more interestingly, a position adopting elements of both simultaneously. (xviii)

Accordingly, in her treatment of Philippa Gregory's *Wideacre* trilogy (1987-1990) in *The Woman's Historical Novel,* Diana Wallace focuses on the subversive Marxist feminist elements of the novels, paying little attention to the tensions she admits exist between Gregory's Marxist feminist critical discourse and "the conservative sexual politics of the typical family saga and the glamorisation of female suffering in the typical erotic historical" (187). Yet to focus on the subversive qualities of a narrative without fully considering the way its traditionally conservative framework or formula shapes that narrative is to produce a limited analysis.[15]

In *The Feminist Bestseller,* her study of the relationship between feminist politics and popular novels by women, Imelda Whelehan says that "the question of whether these books and their writers are 'selling out' is a difficult one to answer" (14). It is, indeed, a difficult question to answer. Part of the feminist literary critic's agenda is the reclamation and appreciation of the works of women writers, especially those that are usually dismissed as subpar literature. There is an understandable desire to defend and praise these women's novels that have been often unfairly relegated to the lower end of a literary hierarchy. However, the question of when "selling"— being popular, becomes "selling out"—appropriating patriarchal ideology in order to be popular, must not be ignored or downplayed. Feminist resistance in Gregory's novels, as in many of their heroines, reaches a point where it is overpowered by the social pressure to conform to traditional gender roles. As readers see in the choices made by characters like Mary Boleyn and Hannah Green, resistance is usually neither socially acceptable nor economically secure. There is comfort to be found in working to "adorn" the "prison" of

[15] *Wideacre,* too, contrasts its heroine, the lusty Beatrice, against an archetypal madonna, Celia, highlighting the prevalence of this binaristic pitting of polarized women against one another across many of Gregory's historical romances, regardless of time period.

traditional womanhood, both for these historical characters and for modern-day writers and readers who, despite the passing of centuries, still feel the weight of these archetypes. As this chapter has shown, while there are moments of feminist protest and resistance in Philippa Gregory's Tudor novels, the series as a whole provides an undeniably patriarchal and conservative reflection on women and their social positions. Ultimately, the problem with the feminist claims Gregory has made regarding her novels lies in the fact that she has not merely represented how women have historically been stereotyped as either madonnas or whores; rather, she seems to have appropriated these binaristic, patriarchal understandings of female subjectivity and presented them un-ironically to the modern-day reader as a lesson in how to be a "good" woman.

The commercial imperatives of popular fiction repeatedly undermine the political subversiveness of Gregory's historical novels. Yet their popularity—and, accordingly, their uses of familiar and conventional narrative formulas—is also the key to their subversive potential. The popularity of the woman's historical novel is precisely what offers writers the chance to disseminate alternate, feminist historical narratives to mass readerships. "History from below" that is written but not widely read has little chance of subverting dominant narratives and ideologies. One cannot subvert prevailing views if one is not heard. However, on the other hand, the desire to be read or heard—to be visible—often requires concessions to commercialism. In order to be popular and widely read, Gregory's novels adhere to familiar and enduring forms like the romance narrative. Yet it is this very form that often undermines the subversiveness of the women's histories she presents. Gregory's novels thus exist at this site of tension between the popular romance narrative and the postmodern "history from below." Presenting a challenge to

masculinist views of history, like those espoused by David Starkey, Gregory's novels encourage reflections on whose histories are told and remembered. Yet at the same time, the use of romance archetypes and tropes to tell these marginalized women's histories does not do much to undermine the stereotypes and two-dimensional representations of women in history. Less frequently represented women like Mary Boleyn, Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, Mary Tudor, and Amy Dudley have been rendered more visible in the popular remembrance of history because of their presence in Gregory's novels, but *how* they are remembered is just as politically important as *whether* they are remembered.

—Chapter Two—

The Personal is Popular:
Nostalgia and the Politics of Female Bodies in Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander* Series

"Sing Me a Song of a Lass That is Gone": History and Women's Bodies

"People disappear all the time," begins the prologue to Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander* (1991), the first novel in an immensely popular and still ongoing series. While the epigraph foregrounds the novel's focus on the literal disappearance of Claire Randall from the year 1945 and her re-emergence in the year 1743, the issue of women disappearing from history, more metaphorically, is a central concern to women's historical fiction, especially in the contemporary period. Indeed, absences and disappearances are the subject of histories from below—accounts that address gaps and biases in the dominant historical record of capital-H History. In recent decades, historical fiction has been recognized as a prominent and popular means of writing marginalized histories, a way of rendering visible that which has disappeared from mainstream historical memory. What historical fiction has meant for women is the visible presence of their sex in historical narratives where female subject positions were previously shallow or absent. As Katherine Cooper and Emma Short note in the introduction to *The Female Figure in Contemporary Historical Fiction*, "in recent years, the female figure in history has become increasingly visible—previously obscured, she is now palpable, multidimensional, and undeniably present" (1). This is not to say that women are entirely absent in dominant historical narratives, but to point out that to be *mentioned* and to be *represented* are very different things. The difference is that the former implies a name and the latter a body. Take, as an illustration, Sandra Gulland's *The Many Lives and*

Secret Sorrows of Josephine B. (1995). In this novel, the first of a trilogy, Gulland takes as her subject Josephine Bonaparte, known to mainstream history primarily because she was the wife of Napoleon. Yet Gulland's novel introduces her to readers not as Napoleon's wife, Josephine—in fact, not even as Josephine at all, but as Rose—the name she went by before she met Napoleon and he renamed her. In fact, Napoleon does not even appear until the final sixty pages of the over four-hundred-page novel. By representing the embodied experiences of women who are, generally, mere names in the historical record—and sometimes not even their own true names, as Gulland's *Josephine B.* illustrates—many women's historical novels engage in a feminist project of excavating or imagining female embodied histories.

With its emphasis on discussing women's bodies and its iconic slogan "the personal is political," second-wave feminism provided much of the impetus to write women's embodied histories in the late twentieth century. Indeed, second-wave feminist literary criticism focused on the idea of recovering a matrilineal literary history, evidenced by publications like Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* (1976) and Dale Spender's *Mothers of the Novel: 100 Good Women Writers Before Jane Austen* (1986). Such works were interested not only in recovering the literary texts produced by women throughout history, but also in uncovering the histories of these women's lives. So while many of the iconic publications of the second-wave period focused on the political and social status of women's bodies in the twentieth century—texts like Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970) and Andrea Dworkin's *Intercourse* (1987)—there was a simultaneously flourishing interest in the political and social status of women's bodies throughout history. During the heyday of gynocriticism in the late twentieth century, feminist literary scholars

wanted to know more than what women wrote; they wanted to understand the social and historical conditions in which female bodies had produced literature. Uncovering what it means to live in a female body was a central preoccupation that is reflected in much of the literature of the period—both academic and popular, whether authors signalled their ruminations as feminist or not. In *The Feminist Bestseller*, Imelda Whelehan discusses second-wave feminist bestsellers of various genres as being part of the "consciousness raising" project (2). While she doesn't discuss the historical novel in any particular detail, many bestselling women's historical novels of the second-wave period and beyond can be seen operating within this context of feminist consciousness raising through their focus on women's embodied histories. However, they do not always signal their feminist roots as explicitly as other women's novels do. In the midst of this feminist impetus to talk about the politics of bodies, the Penguin Trial of 1960 over the right to publish an unexpurgated edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) paved the way for writers to explicitly discuss matters of the body and sexuality without being banned or censored. So while an early twentieth-century historical novel like Daphne du Maurier's *Jamaica Inn* (1936) vaguely suggests issues like rape and domestic violence against women, a second-wave-era historical novel like Philippa Gregory's *The Favored Child* (1989) deals explicitly with the way rape and domestic violence relate to gendered power, and it does so in graphic textual detail.

Bodies, particularly female bodies, are central to the project of feminist revisionist historiography. For contemporary writers of women's historical novels, romance narratives are closely connected to the thematic exploration of body politics, calling attention to the way, as Kate Millet argued in 1971, coitus "serves as a charged

microcosm of the variety of attitudes and values to which a culture subscribes" (31). Indeed, I would go so far as to say that emphasis on the female body is the most readily visible defining characteristic of the woman's historical novel. Several recurring scenes that connect these novels include menarche and experiences of menstruation, sexual intercourse, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause. Emphasis on these female bodily experiences—one might say physical milestones—within the historical narrative is one of the primary differences between, for instance, *The Other Boleyn Girl*, which is a woman's historical novel, and *Wolf Hall*, which is not. By including and emphasizing details of the female body in their narratives, contemporary women's historical novels call attention to the way women's bodies are inextricably bound up with political and social histories. From Meggie's traumatic first period in *The Thorn Birds*, to the struggles of midwives in WWI-era Nova Scotia in *The Birth House* (2006), to the ceasing of Katherine of Aragon's menses in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, women's historical novels repeatedly demonstrate awareness of connections between the socio-political historical landscape and the physical lives of women, reminding readers that the personal is political.

However, in examining women's historical novels one comes to find that the personal—the bodily—is not only political, it is popular. As the saying goes, sex sells. Women's bodies are deployed in different ways within women's historical novels, and not all are politically motivated. Barbara Cartland, for instance, reportedly turned to writing historical romances simply because it became unrealistic to have a virginal heroine in a contemporary setting (Wallace 7). In the case of such novels, history is merely deployed as an exotic backdrop for a standard Harlequin romance formula. As

Helen Hughes notes, writers like Cartland and Georgette Heyer "use the past as an exotic setting to add to the 'escape' value of their stories," though the past "also functions as a mirror for the present" (5). Adding to the idea of the past as exotic through its differences from the present, nostalgia also constitutes a potential problem for feminist historical novels and body politics as well. In some historical novels, the imagined past is not so much explored or interrogated as it is idealized. In such novels, history is deployed nostalgically as a time when "men were men" and "women were women" (Doane and Hodges 3). Thus, one cannot generalize about historical novels too much in either direction, toward the political or toward the spectacular. Given these variances, representations of women's embodied experiences in historical fiction are best understood on a sliding spectrum between the poles of the political, where a character's body is part of a commentary on sexual politics throughout history, and the popular, where a character's body is rendered a narrative spectacle for the reader's pleasure. In the latter, the representation of female bodies often conforms to patriarchal ideology, which views women's bodies as male property and sexual objects.

Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander* series perfectly encapsulates the tensions between these two potential uses of the female body in the woman's historical novel—to be political and to be popular/pleasurable. The series' heroine, Claire, is both the narrative's means of introducing a feminist lens on eighteenth-century history and also the narrative's means of romanticizing a pre-feminist state of gender politics through her relationship with Jamie Fraser, a character dubbed the "king of men" by Ronald D. Moore, producer of the TV adaptation of the series (Vaughn). As Gabaldon explains on her website, she was initially given a three-book contract for the first novel, then titled

Cross Stitch, and two unwritten sequels ("FAQ"). The initial trilogy was published in quick succession: *Outlander* (1991), *Dragonfly in Amber* (1992), and *Voyager* (1993). Since then, the series has expanded considerably from its initial prospects. Its popularity and Gabaldon's interest in the characters has produced, to date, eight major novels in the series as well as several shorter novels, novellas, and short stories. Gabaldon has indicated that she is currently working on a ninth book in the series. Given the scale of the series and the fact that it is ongoing, this chapter does not presume to analyse the entirety. Rather, I focus primarily on the first three novels, examining how they establish the characters and themes that define the narrative world of the series. Focusing on the tension between the politicized and popularized representations of the female body, this chapter examines the ways in which representations of women's bodies are central to the feminist historiographic project, but also capable of undercutting that project if they naturalize and romanticize the abuses of women's bodies in history—something that, I argue, problematically occurs in the *Outlander* books. The first two sections of this chapter focus on moments wherein the series undermines the patriarchal claim on genealogy and history through the figure of the female body, examining several moments of feminist resistance within the novels. The third and longest section then explores the way these brief resistances are contrasted by the way Claire's body is deployed to inculcate nostalgia for a romanticized vision of masculine dominance over women through the physically detailed representations of her relationship with Jamie. The tension between the politics and pleasures of Gabaldon's representation of Claire's body raises important questions about contemporary women's reading practices when pleasure and politics conflict.

Gender and Genealogy in the *Outlander* Series

In the first two chapters of *Outlander*, which establish the scene in 1945 before Claire travels to the eighteenth century, history and genealogy are foregrounded. Although it is Claire who focalizes the narrative for the reader, history and genealogy are initially associated quite strongly with men. Claire reveals that she was raised from an early age by her archaeologist uncle, and that she spent her youth excavating historical sites with him throughout the world (8). It is through her historically obsessed uncle that Claire meets Frank, the man who will become her husband. Frank is a historian who meets Claire when he consults with Claire's uncle regarding Egyptian religious practices (8). Later, after WWII, when the narrative proper begins, Frank is preparing to take up a post as a professor of history at Oxford (4). Genealogy is Frank's latest passion, Claire explains, and the first two expository chapters of the novel see him pouring over ancestral charts with another historically-minded man, the Reverend Wakefield, an amateur historian with a wealth of documents and books at his disposal. In subsequent books, the Reverend Wakefield and Frank will be somewhat consolidated in the character of Roger MacKenzie Wakefield. Roger, the adopted son of the Reverend, inherits the Reverend's many boxes of documents and books regarding eighteenth-century Scottish history. He also follows in Frank's footsteps, becoming a professional historian. The association of history and genealogy with men is relatively naturalized in Western societies, which are patrilineal and signal lineage through the passing down of the male surname. The connection between genealogy and men is also reflected in the Christian tradition that is so central to Western ideology, since the New Testament begins with an outline of the

genealogy of Christ that focuses almost exclusively on males. Jesus, we are told, was "the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham became the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers," and so on (Matthew 1.1-2). Through Western culture's focus on male ancestral lines, the roles of women and female bodies are minimized, as though the wombs that nurtured these individuals, the muscles that birthed them, and the breasts that fed them are entirely inconsequential. Yet despite the fact that genealogy and written history are presented as the realms of men in *Outlander*, it is Claire who is able to travel through time and physically engage with history.[16] Thus, while the twentieth-century portions of the novels often associate history with men, this association is subverted through the time travel portions of the narratives, which are focalized around Claire's experiences of history from within a female body.

Once she is in the eighteenth century, Claire's lived experience begins to undermine the account of eighteenth-century Scottish history conveyed by Frank and Reverend Wakefield. In particular, the narrative calls into question Frank and the Reverend's obsession with genealogy and the life of Jonathan "Black Jack" Randall. Jack Randall is the first individual Claire physically and verbally encounters after travelling through the stones, and though there is a genetic connection evident in his visual similarities to Frank, he is not the admirable ancestor that Frank has been idolizing from the twentieth century. On her first encounter with Jack Randall, in which he attempts to rape her, Claire reflects: "A man I knew only from a genealogical chart was not necessarily bound to resemble his descendants in conduct" (91). Claire knows this, but Frank and the other men who obsess over genealogy in the narrative seem to operate on

[16] My reading emphasizes the gendered divide between written and lived history as set up through the first few chapters of the first novel. However, it should be noted that in the *Outlander* world, time travelling is not restricted to women. In subsequent books, Claire encounters male time travellers.

the belief that there are essential connections between ancestors and descendants. In a larger sense, the narrative's early interrogation of genealogical obsession also calls into question the way dead white men, like the fictional Jack Randall, are often idolized by history without much attention to the cruelties they perpetrated or supported. Through Claire, the time-travel narrative of *Outlander* reminds readers of the gaps and inconsistencies between capital-H History—largely the domain of men in the first half of the twentieth century and earlier—and the embodied histories of women and other less privileged individuals.

Moreover, the *Outlander* series, especially the first novel, foregrounds how female bodies are a disruptive force to the male obsession with genealogy. One of Claire's preoccupations in the early chapters of *Outlander* is her apparent barrenness—she and Frank are trying to add "the next branch" to Frank's family tree (5). Claire is open to the idea of adopting an orphaned child, of which there are many in the post-war period, but Frank is adamantly opposed to this idea, desiring only biological children who will carry on his family blood and name and be, in his words, "a real part of the family" (38). Claire's apparent infertility presents a reminder that while genealogy may be the obsession of men like Frank, women's bodies are not entirely controllable by patriarchy, and thus can operate as disruptive forces to the bloodline. Claire worries about her ability to conceive when Jamie, her husband in the eighteenth-century timeline, muses about his hopes for their children. Yet, as it turns out, it was not Claire but Frank who was infertile. The irony of a man obsessed with genealogy who cannot produce biological children is not lost on Claire. As she explains to Roger in *Voyager*, when she returned to the twentieth century pregnant with another man's child, Frank "knew, or suspected, that he

couldn't have children himself. Rather a blow, for a man so involved in history and genealogies. All those dynastic considerations, you see" (29). While it turns out that it was not Claire's body that disrupted the Randall bloodline, the blame she initially carried over the failure to conceive recalls other historical women like Katherine of Aragon and Josephine Bonaparte who were made to suffer over their apparent inability to conceive and bear sons. Women's bodies, *Outlander* reminds readers, are the means by which patrilineal ancestral charts are created.

Another prominent way the *Outlander* narrative shows women acting as subversive forces to the male obsession with genealogy is through the act of bearing a son whose biological paternity is not reflected in his surname. Seemingly minor subplots like Claire's discovery that Hamish MacKenzie is not the Laird's biological son, or that Geillis Duncan has produced an illegitimate child with her lover, Dougal MacKenzie, repeatedly undermine the surety of patrilineal genealogies. Many of the genealogical charts that Frank and Reverend Wakefield unquestioningly trust in the twentieth century are revealed to Claire in the eighteenth century to be far less straightforward. Women, especially in the time before paternity testing, had a significant amount of power with regard to genealogy, the novels remind readers. Women alone possessed the ability to chart their fertility signs and their sexual activities in order to determine paternity, and even these measures could not always indicate paternity with certainty if a woman had multiple sexual partners around the same time. The fact that modern genealogical charts take the surety of paternity for granted is foregrounded in *Dragonfly in Amber*, which reveals that the genealogy Frank so proudly traced at the start of *Outlander* contains at least one error: he is not the grandson, several generations removed, of Jonathan "Black

Jack" Randall, since the child Jack's wife Mary bore was actually the son of Alexander Randall. On Alexander's deathbed, he begged his brother to marry the pregnant Mary and raise the child as his own. Jonathan Randall, Claire discovers, is homosexual, and is not the biological progenitor of the Randall line that culminates in Frank. This revelation encourages the reader to reflect on the way Frank idolizes Jonathan Randall and takes pride in having a six-times great grandfather of such historical notability. Frank's pride in his ancestor is based solely on faith in the historical document—in this case, a genealogical chart. Just as postmodern historiography called objectivity and fact into question, so, too, has postmodern theory challenged the stability of genealogy. As Foucault wrote in 1971: "It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times" (76). Throughout the subplots of the *Outlander* novels, the narrative highlights the very real and physical roles that women play in disrupting history and genealogy, despite often being marginalized and sidelined in historical texts and genealogical charts.

The Feminist Body in *Outlander*, *Dragonfly in Amber*, and *Voyager*

Despite Diana Gabaldon's insistence that she is not writing as a feminist (*Outlandish* 404), the *Outlander* novels introduce feminist themes and language through a number of female characters. Primarily, Claire's body operates as the narrative's means of producing a feminist critique of eighteenth-century (pre-feminist) gender politics. Time travel is the key device that allows for this critique, taking a female who has benefitted from nineteenth- and twentieth-century feminist discourse and the political and legal changes it produced (voting rights, property rights, choice in marriage, widening

employment opportunities, etc.), and displacing her into a period before these changes took place. The initial event that occurs after she travels to the eighteenth century—when Claire is nearly raped by Jack Randall, an English officer—foreshadows the fact that this critique will be largely concerned with the treatment of women's bodies in the eighteenth century as compared with the twentieth.

Claire is a woman who is empowered about her physical self. Her body is the body of a woman who, in 1946, has taken full advantage of the rights and privileges that first-wave feminists secured for their sex in Britain. Claire is not a woman plagued by what Betty Friedan would later term "the problem with no name"; her life has not been one of domestic confinement, which she signals when musing about never having owned a vase in the novel's opening chapter (7). Moreover, she demonstrates confidence in herself, both vocally and physically. One prominent way that Claire's physical confidence is expressed within the narrative is through her sexuality. Claire enjoys sex, conveying her sense of contentment within her own body. Mere pages into the novel, Claire teases Frank about his inability to bounce enthusiastically on the bed for more than a minute or two. "You'll have to keep it up for longer than that, if you expect ecstatic moans," she tells him. "Two minutes doesn't deserve any more than a giggle" (5). While this exchange reveals the comical side of Claire, it also establishes her as a woman who cares about her own sexual fulfillment. She will not "moan ecstatically" to placate her husband's ego. She requires that he have a care for her needs and desires. Later in the novel, after making love for the first time on their wedding night, Jaime—previously a virgin—asks Claire whether she enjoyed it. When she replies in the affirmative, Jamie explains that another clansman had told him "that women generally do not care for it, so I

should finish as soon as I could" (284). Claire corrects him, noting that a man is probably not the best authority on a woman's physical experience of intercourse, and explaining "the slower the better, as far as most women are concerned" (284). This scene reflects twentieth-century feminist body politics in that it shows a woman who enjoys her own sexuality, as well as a man who is willing to learn about how to please his wife rather than viewing her solely as an object for his own pleasure.[17]

Although she finds herself within a prominently male patriarchal society in the eighteenth-century Scottish highlands, there are pockets of Claire's feminist resistance throughout *Outlander*. For example, after she disobeys Jamie's order to stay put during an expedition and consequently endangers the entire group after being captured by Redcoats, the clansmen are united in an unspoken belief that Claire must be physically punished. These men expect Jamie to physically discipline his wife in order to appease their patriarchal sense of justice and to re-establish the role of husband as master and wife as his property and obedient dependent. However, in the aftermath of her rescue and in the face of the anger of the men, Claire maintains that the real issue is that Jamie sees her as his property when she is not. During their verbal fight, she draws on feminist rhetoric, telling Jamie: "You don't care a thing about me! I'm just your property; it only matters to you because you think I belong to you, and you can't stand to have someone take something that belongs to you!" (386). Jamie remains firm that "ye *do* belong to me" (386), and he plans to go ahead with the punishment of "a good hiding" (392). Still, Claire continues to fight back, this time physically. "I will not allow you to beat me," she tells Jamie (392), and when he advances on her, Claire leaves him with "a bloody nose,

[17] Alas, this relationship dynamic, so wonderfully set up in the wedding night scene, will be repeatedly undermined later in the novels, as will be discussed in the next section.

three lovely gouges down one cheek, and a deeply bitten wrist" (394). Despite fighting back, she is ultimately "half smothered in the greasy quilts with a knee in my back, being beaten within an inch of my life" (394). Still, although Jamie and his male compatriots are able to assert their patriarchal justice on Claire's body, she remains defiant of the wifely obedience this beating was supposed to instill, telling Jamie that if he ever hits her again, "I'll cut out your heart and fry it for breakfast!" (417). He takes this threat to heart and swears an oath never to raise a hand to her again (418).

During her time in eighteenth-century Scotland, Claire encounters several proto-feminist women. One of the most prominent of these is Claire's closest friend at Leoch, Geillis Duncan. While it would be difficult to deal with the many facets of Geillis Duncan here, it would be a grave omission to overlook the way her presence in the novels touches on feminist body politics.[18] Geillis is a strong-willed, vocal, and physically driven character whose narrative arcs frequently touch on the politics of women's bodies. In their first encounter, Geillis reveals herself to be akin to Claire in her knowledge of herbal medicine. Showing Claire some blue flowers that will bring on bleeding in a woman who wants to abort a fetus, she explains that girls and married women in the village seek her out for such remedies (162). Geillis is later convicted as a witch for her practices, in a scene that reveals the frenzied and unreasonable misogyny underlying eighteenth-century witch trials, and she only manages to avoid being burned at the stake by revealing that she is pregnant and by blackmailing the child's father. When she meets Claire again twenty years later in *Voyager*, Geillis has grown increasingly hostile and cynical toward men. Here, shortly before her death, she offers a pointed commentary on

[18] Though it should be noted that there is something undeniably problematic about one of the most outspokenly feminist characters in *Outlander* being represented in later novels as a murderess and a practicing witch who, it is strongly implied, is mentally unstable.

the reduction of a woman to her physical form, asking Claire, "Why are men such fools? Ye can lead them anywhere by the cock—for a while. Then give them a son and ye have them by the balls again. But it's all ye are to them, whether they're coming in or going out—a cunt" (951).

The novels also see Claire bond with another physically empowered woman, Jamie's sister, Jenny. Jenny is, like Claire, a vocal and physically capable character. In *Dragonfly in Amber*, when Jamie suggests that Jenny does not understand the realities of war, she firmly contradicts him, asking, "Who d' ye think nursed Ian when he came home from France wi' half a leg and a fever that nearly killed him?" (586). Her speech is a feminist foregrounding of women's active roles in war, and serves to connect her to Claire's role as a WWII combat nurse. At the end of *Outlander*, in a striking reversal of romance narrative conventions, Claire and Jenny are the ones who set out to find Jamie after he has been taken by the Redcoats. This part of the narrative foregrounds these characters as agent and empowered women, reversing the trope of the warrior hero rescuing the captured damsel. Indeed, one interesting thing about the depiction of the relationship between Jamie and Claire is the fact that although he rescues her at various points, she also rescues him. On her website, Diana Gabaldon reflects on her conscious decision to design the narrative this way, writing: "It's not about one partner making a sacrifice for the other's sake. Throughout the story, they keep rescuing each other" ("Cannibal's Art"). Agent women populate the series, which is likely one reason that the novels have been bestsellers, particularly among female readers. Characters like Geillis, Jenny, Mrs. Fitz, Brianna, Marsali, and others reflect the centrality of female bodies and voices to the series.

The *Outlander* series not only focuses its feminist critique on the eighteenth century, it also extends its analysis to the struggles of women in the mid-twentieth century. While Claire's profession as a healer in the eighteenth-century timeline allows the text to foreground the fact that women played substantial social roles in history, even if they were not allowed to be educated or to professionalize in the same ways as men, her occupations as a nurse and later a doctor in the twentieth century also set her up as a feminist trailblazer in a modern context. Indeed, one of the most prominent feminist aspects of the series is its exploration of women's roles as caretakers of bodies throughout history. Claire's occupational ambition continues to be a prominent feature of her narratives in both timelines. In the twentieth-century timeline of *Voyager*, which takes place in 1968, it is revealed that Claire has gone on to become a doctor. Early in the novel, Roger asks Claire about this process, noting, "It can't possibly have been as easy as you make it sound...There weren't many woman in medicine then—there aren't that many women doctors *now*, come to that—and you had a family, besides" (103). This brief speech contextualizes Claire's occupation in terms of social gender inequalities, reminding readers of the ways in which even twentieth-century women were restricted in terms of what they were encouraged and enabled to do with their lives. Roger's comments also foreground the tension between motherhood and professionalization, an issue with which feminist rhetoric has long been concerned. Though at first she is somewhat dismissive of the difficulties that Roger points to, after his prompting she acknowledges the structures that enabled her to take on the challenge of professionalizing as a doctor, explaining that she "waited until Brianna was in school" and that they also "had enough money to afford someone to come in to cook and clean" (103). As the only

female intern in her program (254), Claire's twentieth-century storyline reminds readers that it was not only in the eighteenth century that women faced gender-based discrimination.

As the narrative of *Voyager* progresses, is becomes clear that while mid-twentieth-century America had many advantages over eighteenth-century Scotland, it was still no utopia for women. In fact, Claire occasionally highlights how twentieth-century medicalization has lost something in its general shift from female healers to male doctors. She notes the "skepticism" and "outspoken horror" that is expressed by her supervisors and colleagues when she uses herbs medicinally, but reminisces proudly that she "had used them occasionally on my modern patients to good effect" (614). The idea is also picked up by Claire's insistence on breastfeeding her daughter, despite objections from other modern women that view the practice as "vulgar and insanitary" (32). Here again, Claire finds empowerment not from modernity but from eighteenth-century culture, recalling the scores of "eighteenth-century babies nursing contentedly at their mothers' breasts" (32). Throughout *Voyager*, Claire's remembrances of the two decades she has spent in the mid-twentieth century since returning through the stones foregrounds the gender-based struggles that a woman in postwar America faced in a sexist and patriarchal society. During this period of her life, Claire experiences pressure to be professionally successful, physically and intellectually capable, and also a perfectly composed wife and mother. The struggle that this entails is encapsulated in a scene that occurs early in the novel. Frank has invited the dean and his wife to dinner, expecting Claire to make everything ready while he is at work. However, on this particular day, Brianna has diaper rash and consequently refuses to sleep. She also insists on feeding more frequently than

usual. Then, the furnace breaks and Claire must summon a repairman, delaying her plans to go to the market. Finally, she prepares dinner, but leaves the kitchen looking "like the result of an incompetent burglary" (36). Trying to get Brianna into the new dress that Frank has provided for the occasion, Claire accidentally scrapes the baby with a pin, resulting in teary outbursts from both of them. Then, after Claire throws on fresh clothes, Brianna promptly spits up onto her. Frank arrives home from work and immediately remarks, "Christ, Claire...Couldn't you fix yourself up a bit? I mean, it's not as though you have anything else to do, at home all day" (38). Despite decades of feminist reform, Claire, as a woman, is still judged primarily by her ability to beautify her body. All other considerations—the effort it takes to run a household and care for an infant—are overlooked. Thus, the novel extends its focus on women's struggles, especially with regard to body politics, to the twentieth century as well.

Nostalgia and Anti-Feminism in *Outlander*, *Dragonfly in Amber*, and *Voyager*:

As seen in the previous section, the *Outlander* series presents a feminist body politic in a number of instances. Especially in the early chapters of *Outlander*, Claire Randall Fraser is the embodiment of mid-twentieth-century post-suffrage ideology about gender in a predominantly eighteenth-century narrative. If one merely picked up these threads of feminist rhetoric and issues throughout the novels, one could make a convincing case for the *Outlander* series as popular historical fiction that enacts feminist historiography. However, such a reading would be insufficiently critical. What this dissertation focuses on is the tension that often exists between the feminist themes in women's historical novels and their capitulations to patriarchal ideology through popular

narrative forms. Accordingly, my analysis in this section is concerned with how the female body also comes to be deployed in nostalgic and, arguably, anti-feminist ways throughout the *Outlander* novels. Despite moments of feminist resistance to physical abuses, as seen in the previous section, with the development of a romance narrative between Claire and Jamie, the *Outlander* novels problematically begin to use Claire's body as a tool for narrative titillation rather than feminist critique. Consequently, Claire's protests and critiques of the abuses of women's bodies diminish as the narrative progresses, and she instead comes to internalize eighteenth-century patriarchal views of women's bodies. Claire's internalization of patriarchal claims over her body and the bodies of others suggests a nostalgic deployment of history, rather than a critical one.

The word nostalgia stems from the Greek word "nostos," which refers to "the return home" (Doane and Hodges 3). Nostalgia is a sense of longing for something lost or absent. There are two major approaches to theorizing nostalgia. Some theorists view this mode of thinking as an expression of discontent with the present and "a diminution of belief in progress" (Radstone 113). In "Nostalgia for Ruins," Andreas Huyssen describes nostalgia as "straining for something lost with the ending of an earlier form of modernity" (7). He writes of contemporary nostalgia as a desire to be able to go back and "imagine other futures" (7). Furthermore, he links nostalgia to a longing for authenticity and immediacy in a postmodern world that has called meaning and truth into question. Similarly, John Su argues in *Ethics and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Novel* that "to 'indulge' in nostalgia need not imply an effort to escape present circumstances or to deceive oneself about the past; rather, it can represent the conscious decision to reject the logic of modernity" (4). In this sense, nostalgia is conceived not so much as an idealizing

of the past, but as "disappointment with the present" (9) and a desire for a sense of possibility. However, there are other theorists who take a less optimistic stance and view nostalgia as a process of naive idealization. Fredric Jameson, for instance, argues that in the postmodern period we have been trained "to consume the past in the form of glossy images" (287). In her theorization of postmodern literature and its relationship to history, Linda Hutcheon argues that historiographic metafiction "does not fall into" nostalgia, thereby positioning nostalgia in opposition to self-reflexivity (71). To add the question of women and feminism to theories of nostalgia as idealization, Janice Doane and Devon Hodges argue that "nostalgic writers construct their visions of a golden past to authenticate woman's traditional place and to challenge the outspoken feminist criticisms of it" (3). Indeed, this way of perceiving nostalgic historiography as a challenge to contemporary feminist ideology is the framework through which I suggest we should read the narrative of Claire's eighteenth-century romance in *Outlander*.

In the *Outlander* series, nostalgia is closely connected to anti-feminist backlash. The return home that is desired in these novels is a return to a pre-feminist state of gender relations. The publication of the first three *Outlander* novels in the early 1990s corresponds with the period that feminist scholars have associated with anti-feminist backlash (Wallace 202; Faludi 9-10). As Andi Zeisler, co-founder of *Bitch* magazine, discusses at length in her study *Feminism and Pop Culture*, the 1980s and 90s saw an increasingly fraught relationship between feminist politics and popular media. During these decades, especially the 90s, much of popular culture espoused the idea that society was in a "post-feminist" era, in which "feminism was widely considered to be 'done'" (Zeisler 121). One way to understand the tension between feminist politics and nostalgia

in the *Outlander* series is through the context of the post-feminist and anti-feminist backlash that flourished in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the establishing novels of the series were written and published. To a large extent, the *Outlander* novels operate as advocates for traditional gender roles and relations, particularly in the ways they depict women's bodies. While there are feminist and historically self-reflexive moments in the novels, the narrative as a whole works to naturalize and romanticize the mistreatments of Claire's body and the bodies of other women. By the third book in the series, feminism becomes an object of scorn and ridicule to Claire—1960s feminists are dismissively othered as "women's libbers" (281) — and she chooses to return to live in the eighteenth century despite the gendered abuses she faces there. This section therefore elaborates upon two key ways in which *Outlander*, *Dragonfly in Amber*, and *Voyager* use the female body in ways that undermine an attempt to read the series as feminist historiography.

1. The novels' treatment of rape and dubious consent

One of the biggest obstacles to reading the *Outlander* series as an example of feminist historiography is its treatment of rape. There are many who will object to this argument immediately, claiming that rape is, in fact, a serious topic in *Outlander*. Such objectors will point out that Jamie's rape at the hands of Jack Randall at the end of the first book is rendered horrific rather than titillating. Jennifer Phillips, for instance, argues that "having the hero of a television and book series, and one who is ostensibly the embodiment of the idealized hegemonic male, become a victim of such a brutal sexual attack is a rarity in literature and television" (66), and goes on to conclude that Jamie thus represents "a complication to models of hegemonic masculine heroism" (66). It takes

Jamie a long time to heal—both physically and mentally, and he will always bear the literal and metaphoric scars of the encounter. Jamie's rape at the hands of Randall is represented as an act of enormous violence and one concerned primarily with power. The novel takes this moment quite seriously, as does the Starz television adaptation, which depicts Randall violently penetrating Jamie from behind while yelling, "Scream! Scream! Scream!" ("To Ransom a Man's Soul"). My argument about the casualization of rape, however, stems from the differences between the representation of male-on-female rape and that of male-on-male rape. While Randall's rape of Jamie is one of the most serious and grave events in *Outlander*, male-on-female rape, on the other hand, is treated throughout the novel and the series as a whole as titillating, or, alternatively, commonplace. It is this distinction that is at the heart of the problem. Rape is rape. However, in the *Outlander* series, only male rape is imbued with traits of violence, abuse, horror, and pain. Rapes of women and threats of rape made toward women, on the other hand, occur with casual frequently, and are often offered to the reader as a source of narrative pleasure. As the narrative progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that there will be little to no commentary in the novels about the attitudes and ideologies that lead men to rape women. Claire is threatened with rape many times over the course of the narrative, and these moments are deployed as spectacle, more to do with narrative pleasure than with feminist body politics.

The second time Claire is threatened with rape in *Outlander*, it becomes a bizarre kind of foreplay. In this scene, Jamie and Claire have gone off to have sex together, but are interrupted by a pair of armed English soldiers who have deserted their regiment. One of these soldiers expresses his intention to rape Claire whilst his companion holds Jamie

back to watch. When his companion suggests that he should have let Jamie finish, since "stoppin' in the middle like that's bad for a man's 'ealth," the rapist responds possessively: "I don't care to come second to any man, let alone a Scottish whoreson like this" (359). The rape he intends to commit is about power. He wants to exert power over Claire by forcibly using her body, and he wants to exert power over Jamie by physically using his woman—his property, in eighteenth-century legal terms—in front of him. However, Claire remembers that she has a dagger in the pocket of her dress, which she can reach, and she thinks she can kill the soldier if she lets him get close enough. As he is "fumbling between my bared legs, intent on his goal," Claire wraps her arms around him and plunges the knife into his back twice, the second time through the man's kidney. Jamie then quickly dispatches the second soldier. This was a far closer peril than Claire previously experienced with Randall, her first would-be rapist. The description of "fumbling between my bared legs" is somewhat ambiguous, but indicates forced sexual contact of some kind. Yet in the aftermath of this trauma, Jamie and Claire quickly resume their own intercourse. As Claire narrates, "we took each other then, in a savage, urgent silence, thrusting fiercely and finishing within moments, driven by a compulsion I didn't understand, but knew we must obey, or be lost to each other forever" (361). Did Claire find the attempted rape arousing? Is the reader meant to? Jamie senses that having sex immediately after an attempted rape is somehow wrong, since he immediately apologizes: "I'm sorry for using ye as I did just now. To take you like that, so soon after...like some sort of animal..." (362). But Claire doesn't seem to mind and soothes him. In referring to their "compulsion," Claire's narration of the encounter also suggests that in this instance coitus is based largely on patriarchal possessiveness. Claire's words

suggest a mutual desire for Jamie to reassert himself as her mate and exert his own dominance over her body after the threat from the English soldier. Her reaction to this attempted rape suggests that she is aroused by the prospect of being sexually dominated. On its own, a predilection toward sexual submissiveness might not be a problem. However, the fact that Claire's arousal seems to stem at least in part from the association between domination and rape suggests the lightness with which the narrative treats male-on-female rape. Here, as in other scenes throughout the novels, the narrative deploys rape not as a critique of eighteenth-century sexual politics, but as erotic narrative spectacle.

In contrast, when Jamie is raped near the end of *Outlander*, he cannot stand to be touched afterwards, especially by Claire. The vastly different treatment male and female bodies receive within the narrative reveals the extent to which women's bodies are predominantly used in the novels for their entertainment factor rather than as sites for exploring the politics of gender and power. Indeed, even Jamie does not seem able to understand his rape in relation to the bodily threats Claire is presented with on a regular basis, sometimes even by Jamie himself. This problematic disjunction can be seen clearly in *Dragonfly in Amber*, when Jamie is seen dealing with the trauma of his rape. Attempting to explain his feelings to Claire, he recounts some of his ordeal, including being told by Randall, "You'll go to your death with your arse burning from my pleasure, and when you lose your bowels, it will be my spunk running down your legs and dripping on the ground below the gallows" (156). This statement is graphic and visceral, rendering the rape both horrific and disgusting through its foregrounding of bodily fluids and base anatomical features. Yet in the very next chapter, mere pages later, when Claire tries on a new dress, Jamie tells her, "Lord, woman, have ye no notion what ye look like in that

gown? It makes me want to commit rape on the spot" (167). That Jamie can joke about wanting to rape Claire at the same time that he is dealing with the post-traumatic stress of his own rape reveals that women's bodies occupy a significantly lesser status than male bodies in this society, and in this narrative. Moreover, the fact that Claire views this statement as a compliment suggests that she has shifted her view of rape since her arrival in the eighteenth century, and has internalized the view of women's bodies as objects to be used sexually by men.

Dragonfly in Amber also features a curious juxtaposition of Jamie's sexual fantasies about Claire and his experience being raped by Jack Randall. During their reconciliation after a fight, Jamie expresses his contradictory feelings to Claire. He tells her: "I want to fall on my face at your feet and worship you...and still I want to force ye to your knees before me, and hold ye there wi' my hands tangled in your hair, and your mouth at my service" (310). He expresses adoration for her body and a simultaneous desire to subordinate her body for his sexual pleasure. His speech continues, explaining his desire to "kiss ye hard enough to bruise your tender lips, and see the marks of my fingers on your skin" (311). After rousing himself through this speech, Jamie concludes with the command, "You'll lie wi' me now...And I shall use ye as I must. And if you'll have your revenge for it, then take it and welcome, for my soul is yours, in all the black corners of it'" (312). Here, as at other points throughout the series, Jamie's rough treatment of Claire's body in a sexual context is render romantic and is meant to be titillating for the reader. Yet it is fascinating that Jamie is represented without any awareness of the connections between his desire to use Claire's body and Jack Randall's desire to use Jamie's body. This complete lack of textual connection between the sexual

subordination of a woman's body and that of a man's is made clear when only a few chapters later, Jamie refers to what Randall did to him in similar language to his description of what he wants to do to Claire. In this later chapter, Jamie is trying to emphasize to Claire his need to exact revenge on Randall despite the consequences. "Jesus God, Claire!" he exclaims, "You'd try to stop me taking my vengeance on the man who made me play whore to him? Who forced me to my knees and made me suck his cock, smeared with my own blood?" (386). That Jamie's example of being sexually abused and humiliated is being forced to his knees and made to perform oral sex on Randall, when he has recently told Claire that he desires to force her to the same act, reveals that sexual aggression and violence are only coded as negative in the series when they are homosexual; sexual aggression and violence expressed by men toward women are treated comparatively lightly within the narrative. Jamie's desire is not expressed from a place of mutual pleasure, but from a desire to exert power through sex. He did not ask Claire to pleasure him orally. His fantasy is not about being given pleasure, but about demonstrating power—he wants to use "force" (310). The similarities between Jamie's sexual tastes and Randall's are, at times, striking. The primary difference that renders one titillating and the other horrific, it seems, is that Jamie's desires are heterosexual whereas Randall's are homosexual. Seen this way, the series can be understood as divorcing male-on-male rape from male-on-female rape, associated the former with horror and the latter with pleasure.

In *Dragonfly in Amber*, there is also a scene wherein rape is threatened in a performative manner, which culminates with Claire expressing titillation at the idea of being raped by Jamie. On the eve of the Battle of Prestonpans, Jamie and Claire are with

the men from Lallybroch who will fight for the Jacobite cause when a sixteen-year-old English boy named John Grey encounters their camp. Jamie, the leader of the men, wants to extract information about the English troops from the boy, but Grey is unwilling to comply. When asked why he ventured into their camp, Grey reveals that he thought to rescue the English lady—Claire—from them. When Jamie realizes that Grey thinks Claire is a captive rather than his wife, he decides to use her body in order to manipulate Grey. Jamie pretends that he is going to rape Claire if Grey doesn't tell him about the English soldiers. Claire describes how Jamie "twisted my arm roughly behind my back" (612), "kissed me with a deliberate brutality" (613), and "tore the fabric of my gown and shift, baring most of my bosom" (613). Claire fights back as best she can, but this is not pretend resistance; she is not acting as Jamie's willing accomplice. As she explains, "I was struggling in good earnest now" (613), as her naked body is exposed in front of their entire camp. Grey agrees to the interrogation, after which Jamie reveals the trick he has played. When Jamie and Claire reunite later in private, Claire is still upset over the treatment of her body. Jamie apologizes for treating her roughly, but rationalizes that tricking Grey was better than torturing him. At this, Claire concedes that Jamie's method was the kinder option. Claire's acceptance here is somewhat understandable. It becomes problematic, however, when she tells Jamie, "you've made a good start at ravishing me...You may as well come and finish the job properly" (624).

This scene, as the previous one with the English deserters, raises the issue of the rape fantasy. Although her first experience with an attempted rape in the narrative was represented as a peril, Claire is increasingly depicted as being aroused by the idea of rape. Janice Radway, Sally Goade, and other romance novel critics have tried to understand the

role of rape in popular romance narratives through Molly Haskell's theory that "female fantasies about violence and rape are exploration fantasies born out of anxiety and fear rather than wish-fulfillment fantasies originating in sexual desire" (Radway 141). Haskell argues that since women are unable to prevent being raped, a woman who entertains fantasies about rape does so in order to think through how she would act in that situation, attempting to give herself some sense of power or control over an uncontrollable situation (Radway 141). Yet this way of understanding narrative representations of rape and female readers' uses of those representations does not adequately explain what happens in the *Outlander* novels. For Claire, the first-person narrator and ostensibly the female reader's pole of identification within the text, rape is something that repeatedly induces her sexual arousal. Another way of understanding these scenes is through the framework of feminist theories of BDSM. In "The Fantasy of Acceptable 'Non-Consent,'" Stacey May Fowles argues that feminist reactions against rape fantasies and female sexual submissiveness are instances of "kinkophobia." She writes of her own desire, as a self-identified feminist, to be "allowed to participate in the fantasy of my own violation," and she laments that "it's pretty evident that the feminist movement at large is not really ready to admit that women who like to be hit, choked, tied up and humiliated are empowered." However, feminist criticisms of BDSM and, in particular, practices of female sexual submission question the extent to which these desires reflect "internalized cultural ideals of masculinity and femininity that equate them with dominance and submission, respectively" (Snyder-Hall 576). In other words, many feminist critics hold that the rape fantasy originates from a woman's acceptance of patriarchal ideology that positions her body as a sexual object and the property of her male partner. In this sense, a

modern woman's rape fantasy may be understood as a nostalgic longing for pre-feminist gender roles that reject modern feminist discourse.

One might argue that these instances of rape, rape threats, and rape fantasies between Jamie and Claire are not "truly" rape since they are married, though even this argument is problematic in light of feminist lobbies to criminalize marital rape. However, Jamie is shown as a rapist in a non-marital context as well, and the narrative works hard to naturalize even this incident. In a subplot of *Voyager*, when Jamie and Claire are separated by nearly two hundred years of time, Jamie is an outlaw working on an estate under an assumed name, Alex, when he meets the daughter of his employer. Lady Geneva is betrothed to a man she does not want to marry, and she appeals to Jamie (Alex) for sympathy. In echoes of one of Claire's more feminist speeches from *Outlander*, Geneva objects to the idea of being treated as property—particularly in terms of the sexual services her new husband will expect from her. Wanting to exert some measure of control over her body and her sexuality, Geneva asks Jamie to have sex with her so that her first time will be of her own choice and desire rather than force. However, Jamie doesn't like Geneva, and he refuses. Desperate, Geneva attempts to blackmail him with a letter from Lallybroch that exposes his true identity. Jamie unhappily agrees to have sex with her, but he does so as brutally as possible. As he begins to touch her, he feels his lust build and acknowledges "its power" (213). Geneva begins to hesitate, verbalizing her non-consent by saying, "Wait a minute...I think perhaps..." (214), but Jamie enters her anyway. She says: "Stop it! It's too big! Take it out!" (215). Geneva's repeated requests to stop are ignored, the narrative clearly shows: "'No,' he said definitely, and shoved" (215). Although Geneva was the instigator of this sexual encounter, Jamie's refusal to

stop when she withdraws consent is, to a contemporary reader, an instance of rape. The narrative emphasizes his agency in the scene by describing "his body ruthlessly usurping control" (215). Still, despite the violence of this representation, the scene ends with Geneva whispering a reminder to Jamie that he told her sex was better after the first time, implying that she wants to try again (217).

Despite Geneva's interest in having sex a second time, it is difficult to avoid reading this scene as an instance of rape. However, later portions of the narrative attempt to cast the event in a different light, attempting to exonerate Jamie from blame, further demonstrating the narrative's light treatment of male-on-female rape. In one of Claire's point-of-view chapters shortly after Jamie's encounter with Geneva, Claire is reading a romance novel. In her novel, the heroine is having a sexual encounter and starts to protest as "she felt the increasing pressure of his desire making its presence known between her legs" (256). This description metatextually recalls the scene between Jamie and Geneva, however Claire is entirely dismissive of the heroine, remarking: "Fine time to start making protests" (256). The only purpose of this scene is for Claire to act as a model for the reader of *Voyager*. Claire's commentary on what she reads naturalizes the violence of the sexual encounter in her novel, and retroactively tells the reader of *Voyager* how to interpret the story of Geneva and Jamie. Through this metatextual moment, Gabaldon urges readers to think, as Claire does, that the protests of the romance novel heroine upon being ravaged are not to be taken seriously. Claire's dismissive comment reflects the patriarchal idea that a woman has no right to refuse a man intercourse once he is aroused. Even more problematic is the fact that later, when he recounts this event to Claire, Jamie changes his story and claims that he was the powerless one. He tells Claire: "She...wanted

me. I should have found a way—should have stopped her, but I could not (941). However, this is a diluted explanation of what happened, because Jamie did have a way out. Geneva verbalized her wish to stop—more than once—and it was he who chose to continue against her protests. Still, the narrative makes efforts to treat this incident lightly.

Later in *Voyager*, Jamie even voices his understanding and empathy with a rapist. When a well-to-do woman is found raped and murdered, Jamie's Chinese associate Mr. Willoughby—more correctly, Yi Tien Cho—is suspected. Struggling with the disappearance of his associate and the charges being laid against him, Jamie reflects to Claire:

> I couldna think at first that Willoughby could do such a thing—how could any man?...And yet...Perhaps I can see...He was alone—verra much alone...And when a man is alone that way—well, it's maybe no decent to say it, but making love to a woman is maybe the only thing that will make him forget it for a time. (939)

The ease with which Jamie transitions from the idea of rape and murder to that of "making love" is deeply problematic. His speech privileges a patriarchal point of view, attempting to naturalize the forced physical assault of a woman as being almost a spiritual thing for a man—a way to find momentary peace and comfort. His words also serve as an attempt to justify Jamie's behaviour toward Geneva. His speech is a gross romanticization of an event that is brutal, violent, and unjustifiable to contemporary feminist discourse and to most contemporary legal systems. Claire—the embodiment of twentieth-century modernity in the narrative, who has returned to the eighteenth century from a time of intense feminist discourse, the late 1960s—says nothing to problematize

this moment, revealing that has come to accept patriarchal ideology and its claim of ownership over female bodies.

The novels also feature sexual encounters between Jamie and Claire that fall into a grey area that is best referred to as "dubious consent." These encounters raise questions about the novels' treatment of marital rape and the view of the female body as male sexual property. Yet these moments of dubious consent are usually presented as romantic and titillating moments in the texts. If twentieth-century feminist politics insisted that "'no' means 'no,'" Gabaldon's novels seem keen to abandon this sense of a woman's right to refuse access to her body in favour of romanticizing eighteenth-century men as being so rugged, so masculine, and so virile as to be incapable of taking no for an answer. This is a common theme among nostalgic narratives. As Janice Doane and Devon Hodges explain, "in the imaginative past of nostalgic writers, men were men, women were women" (3). In the *Outlander* novels, this nostalgia for the way women were commonly treated by their husbands prior to feminist legal reforms constitutes a problem for contemporary readers who espouse feminist principles.

In a scene mid-way through *Outlander*, Jamie makes clear to his new wife his belief in the legitimacy of a husband's right to his wife's sexual services, regardless of whether she consents. Claire, however, fights him off and makes him see that his actions are reprehensible. In the scene, Claire and Jamie have been having an argument, and in the midst of their tryst, Jamie begins making sexual advances. Claire resists both physically and verbally. She describes how "there was nothing either gentle or undemanding about that kiss, and I found against it, trying to pull back from him" (431). She tells him "I don't want to sleep with you," and when he retorts that *sleep* is not what

he wants, she says more clearly, “I don’t want to make love with you, either” (431). However, Jamie continues advancing on Claire, telling her, “You’re my wife, and if I want ye, woman, then I’ll have you, and be damned to ye!” (431). In the contemporary context in which this novel was written and continues to be read, this scene is nothing short of marital rape. In the last decades of the twentieth century, second-wave feminist discourse on the body led to the criminalization of marital rape and the recognition that a wife’s body could not legally be forced by her husband. Even Claire, though her twentieth-century life predates this legislature, knows that Jamie’s argument is morally unsound, despite being sanctified by the eighteenth-century legal system. “Do that,” she tells him, “and you’re no better than your precious Captain Randall!” (432). At this, Jamie stops. A few pages later, seemingly brought to see the error of his ways, he asks permission: “Will ye have me?” (435). At this point, Claire assents. However, Jamie’s enlightenment about sexual politics does not last long. On the next page, Jamie tells Claire: “I mean to use ye hard, my Sassenach...I want to own you, to possess you, body and soul...I mean to make ye call me ‘master,’ Sassenach” (436). Claire tells him “No!...Stop, please, you’re hurting me,” (436) but he replies, “Aye, beg me for mercy, Sassenach. Ye shallna have it, though; not yet” (437). Throughout the encounter, Claire’s language is filled with language usually associated with rape and abuse. She speaks of his “invading, battering presence” (436), she refers to his thrusting as an “assault” (436), and she refers to feeling pain more than once. However, the narrative complicates the scene further by suggesting that pain gives way to “pure sensation” with Claire crying out “Yes…Oh God, Jamie, yes!” (437). She then goes on to describe how “he thrust harder and faster, as though he would force my soul as he forced my body” (437). Is this rape?

Claire uses the language of "force" and "assault." Yet she eventually does utter "yes" in the context of sexual pleasure. Does that mean it is not rape, even though she previously said "no" and "stop"? Even Stacey May Fowles, in her attempt to redeem BDSM from charges that it is similar to abuse, notes that "for BDSM to exist safely, it has to be founded on a *constant* proclamation of *enthusiastic* consent" (n.pag; emphasis added). The ambiguity of this sexual encounter between Jamie and Claire illuminates the way the narrative romanticizes marital rape, eliding the differences between abuse and passion.

A similar scene occurs in *Voyager* after Claire learns that Jamie married Laoghaire during her twenty-year absence. The sexual encounter that follows is represented in violent terms. There is kissing and biting until Claire has a "quicksilver taste of blood in my mouth" (529), and he pins her to the bed with his weight (530). To some extent, Claire seems to assent to sex, noting, "He was most mightily roused. So was I" (530). Yet in the climax of the encounter, Jamie problematically cries out: "'Bitch!' he panted. 'Whore!'" (530). The suggestion that Jamie's roughness is due to the depth of his love is somewhat inadequate to describe what is happening in this scene. This is an utterance of hate, of fury, and it recalls the mingling of hatred and lust in Jamie's treatment of Geneva Dunsany earlier in the novel. There seems to be mutual desire here, but there is also an uncomfortable tone of misogyny in Jamie's actions and his speech. How is a contemporary woman reader to understand these scenes of dubious consent? Do the novels force the woman reader into a masochistic subject position wherein her access to pleasure from the narrative can only come from a belief in her own subordination? In addition to the blatant romanticization of male-on-female rape throughout the novels, the narrative also represents Claire, presented initially as a twentieth-century woman full of

vocal and physical confidence, increasingly accepting the notion that her husband's sexual fantasies and urges take precedent over her own. This is a far cry from the woman who, early in *Outlander*, insisted upon her own sexual needs and desires being considered by her first husband and, later, her second.

2. Justifications for wife-beating and the light treatment of corporal punishment

The potentially problematic nature of some of the violence that occurs between Jamie and Claire is reflected in a question put to actress Caitriona Balfe, who plays Claire in the Starz adaptation of the series. In an article featuring interviews with Balfe and author Diana Gabaldon, *Film Review Online* includes a soundbyte in which Balfe is asked to address the scene in *Outlander* wherein Jamie physically punishes Claire for her disobedience. Balfe initially refers to the historical context, asserting that "you have to look at it in the mind frame of 1743" and that "it's very hard as a modern person to kind of see that this is ok under any circumstance, but in 1743 this was a very justified form of punishment that a husband would mete out" (Sloane). Yet despite expressing a sense that the punishment Claire endures is at odds with contemporary Western ideology, Balfe goes on to recontextualize the event as a brief impediment in a romance narrative, saying: "It was really important that, even though she [Claire] may not have been able to accept what he [Jamie] did, there had to be a coming to an understanding of his reasons for it, and that really allowed her to find a way to forgive him" (Sloane). Balfe's understanding of the scene as part of Claire's coming to understand Jamie reflects the fact that, in the *Outlander* narrative, it is Claire's feminist ideology, not Jamie's patriarchal ideology of possessiveness, which is undermined. While Balfe's efforts to downplay criticism of the

act into a conversation about compassion and forgiveness in relationships is interesting, far more intriguing is an editorial note at the end of the article that reads: "We have made a correction the Soundbytes Section to read 'spanking' rather than incorrect reference to 'flogging'. Thanks to those who pointed it out." This note, although brief, illustrates the process of negotiated reading that allows contemporary women readers to enjoy *Outlander* despite the conflict that arises between narrative pleasure and modern feminist body politics. A negotiated reading makes justifications for actions that, in the contemporary period, would be characterized as abusive. The rhetorical choice of "spanking" over the more correct "flogging" reveals that enthusiasts of the *Outlander* series are actively engaged in a process of selective reading.

Jamie's punishment of Claire in *Outlander* highlights a key moment when contemporary ideology, particularly regarding physical abuse and women's rights, is completely at odds with eighteenth-century ideology. In the narrative, Jamie physically punishes Claire for disobedience despite her repeated protests, pleas, and attempts to physically defend herself. *Film Review Online*, as well as actress Caitriona Balfe, engage in what might be called a negotiated reading of the scene, evident in the language they use to discuss Jamie's actions. Balfe rhetorically side steps naming the act as violence, referring only to "what he did." The article, however, cannot completely avoid naming the act, and it is enormously significant that while it was initially referred to as a "flogging," the text was later edited to refer to it as "spanking," indicating an attempt to use language to change the understanding of the act. In her analysis of the DVD commentary by Ronald D. Moore and one of the writers of the episode, Matthew B. Roberts, Yvonne Leach points out that the adaptation of this scene also attempts to

downplay the connotation of abuse in Jamie's actions. She transcribes Moore's comment that "we stopped calling it the beating scene" and Roberts' comment that "I never mentioned beating. It was always spanking" and concludes that this focus on the language to describe the act indicates that "they both wished to avoid the fact that they were writing a scene about their male hero beating his wife" (141).

In asking what are the physical, rhetorical, and connotative differences between "flogging" and "spanking," one can see how the *Film Review Online* editorial reflects an attempt to contextualize *Outlander*'s violence in an acceptable light through language. Indeed, when one looks to the representation of this scene in the novel, one finds that what occurs is, in every sense, "flogging." According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), the primary definition of the verb "flog" is: "To beat; whip; to chastise with repeated blows of a rod or whip." In contrast, the verb "spank" means: "To slap or smack (a person, esp. a child) with the open hand." Being precise, what Jamie does to Claire is to flog her, not to spank her, since he uses a belt rather than his hand. This is made quite clear in the book, as Claire describes how "he stood up, and picked up the belt" (392). Jamie himself refers to what he is about to do as "a good hiding" (392), which, notably, is listed as a synonym for "a flogging, thrashing, beating" in the OED. The next morning, relaying the events of the night before, Claire explains: "My reluctant acquiescence had lasted precisely as far as the first searing crack of leather on flesh" (394). Resisting Jamie's sense of justice, she physically fights back, giving her husband "a bloody nose, three lovely gouges down one cheek, and a deeply bitten wrist" (394). Still, despite her attempts to fight off what can only be described as a physical assault, Claire states that ultimately she was "half smothered in the greasy quilts with a knee in my back, being

beaten within an inch of my life" (394). The editorial decision to alter the diction of the article reflects the negative connotations associated with flogging which are not necessarily attached to spanking. Spanking, especially in the wake of the popularity of E. L. James' *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011), is now commonly associated in popular culture with kinds of sexual play broadly labelled BDSM. However, feminist theorists of BDSM repeatedly emphasize the centrality of consent to the practice, noting that "the presence of consent is what differentiates BDSM from abuse" (Snyder-Hall 578). If one looks to the description of the scene in *Outlander,* what occurs between Jamie and Claire is not consensual sexual play, nor is it play fighting. Claire makes no verbal or physical signs of assent; she does not agree to the act being performed on her body.

After this incident in *Outlander,* the narrative makes several efforts to justify corporal punishment, including wife-beating. That it does so, and that Claire comes to accept these justifications, reveals the nostalgic and anti-feminist impulses of the novels with regard to women's bodies. In *Outlander,* Jamie offers Claire several justifications for corporal punishment. When he asks, "Didn't your uncle beat you, then, when you needed it?" Claire is driven to laughter by the suggestion. She responds that her uncle thought it was best to reason with disobedient children—a parenting philosophy that reflects contemporary ideology even if it is not entirely characteristic of the time in which Claire would have been reared. Jamie, however, remains unconvinced, asserting that the lack of beating explains "defects in [Claire's] character" (624). In addition to Jamie's assertion that physical abuse builds character, the narrative makes several attempts to show that corporal punishment brings families together. At one point, Jamie talks to Claire about being beaten by his father, but he characterizes corporal punishment as an

act of love—a sign that his father cared enough about him to punish ill behaviour (625). This idea is reiterated in *Voyager*, when the punishment of Jamie's nephew, young Ian, is shown to be a family spectatorship event. The whole scene is rendered in a comical tone—the elder Ian snorts in "amusement" at one point (501) and Jenny suppresses giggles (502)—suggesting that corporal punishment is normal, justified, and can even have the effect of bringing families closer together. Hearing Jamie wax poetic about the virtues of corporal punishment, Claire then asks whether they will beat their own children. Jamie replies, "You reason with them, and when you're through, I'll take them out and thrash them" (*Outlander* 625). Claire raises no objection. Instead of Claire's modern ideas about reason being preferable to physical violence operating as an enlightening force, the novel instead brings Claire to understand and accept the beating of women and children as a standard part of life. This is an extremely problematic instance of the novel expressing nostalgia for patriarchal ideology and a pre-feminist state of gender relations.

Dragonfly in Amber further establishes Claire's internalization of eighteenth-century ideology surrounding physical punishment. When Jamie feels compelled to beat Fergus for disobeying his orders and bringing Claire home late, Claire reacts not by questioning Jamie's affinity for disciplinary lashings, but rather by requesting that she be beaten instead (260). This is a signal of the shift that has occurred since the previous novel. Whereas in *Outlander* Claire verbally and physically resists being physically punished, by *Dragonfly* she asks to be beaten. Her acceptance is further established when Claire later asks Jamie to beat her in order to absolve her from an infidelity. Her request follows the revelation that in order to bargain for Jamie's freedom from the Bastille,

where he had been imprisoned for duelling, Claire allowed King Louis to sexually penetrate her.[19] Jamie reminds her that when he beat her "in justice" previously, she threatened to kill him. But despite her previous objections to being treated like property, and despite the fact that her infidelity was entirely for Jamie's benefit, she still assents to being physically punished. Instead of flogging her, however, Jamie takes her sexually, roughly, chanting: "Never another but me! Look at me! Tell me! *Look at me, Claire*!" (518). This incident makes clear that Claire has accepted the view of her body as her husband's property. In an essay on the politics of gendered violence, Margo Wilson and Martin Daly analyze the patriarchal ideologies that underpin violence against women: "As in [spousal] homicide, so too in wife-beating: the predominant issues are adultery, jealousy, and male proprietariness" (340). Yet male proprietariness is represented in the *Outlander* series as a sign of love rather than abuse. Indeed, throughout the novels, Jamie lightly and often flirtatiously refers to his desire to beat Claire or to exert sexual force over her when she is not silent, chaste, and obedient. He repeatedly laments his vow to never beat her again. This is done to comic effect, the narrative asking contemporary readers to view wife-beating and sexual violence lightly—something highly problematic to a feminist reader.

One way to understand the representations of Claire's body being sexually submissive in instances of dubious consent and being physically punished for disobedience is through the framework of Christian Domestic Discipline (CDD) and, as R. Claire Snyder-Hall terms it, "the ideology of wifely submission." Snyder-Hall's 2008 essay investigates the beliefs and practices of women (and men) who embrace the idea

[19] The narrative makes it explicitly clear that he does not continue to the point of ejaculation out of fear of siring a bastard heir

that God has ordained women to be beneath men, generally, and wives beneath husbands, specifically, in terms of gendered social power. As she explains, CDD involves the practice of wives submitting "to their husbands 'in everything' as commanded in Ephesians, or get punished, most often with spanking" (567). Snyder-Hall contextualizes the recent increase in published, female-authored texts that advocate and explain the benefits of wifely submission as an expression of women's disappointments with the world that the feminist movements have created. She notes that feminism is a movement that "has cleared the way for women to pursue careers but has not relieved them of their traditional responsibilities in the home; that has removed the patina of chivalry but left the realities of misogyny and objectification intact" (572). Indeed, her characterization of the appeal of CDD among contemporary women echoes the argument that nostalgia is an expression of discontent with modernity. Thus, I suggest that we can understand the ideology of wifely submission as being linked with nostalgia through the idealization of traditional gender roles, and I further suggest that the *Outlander* series may be understood as a representation of this ideology through fiction. In repeated instances where the narrative depicts Claire and Jamie growing closer through her physical submission, the *Outlander* series presents wifely submission in a positive light, reflecting the extent to which the historical romance it depicts is nostalgic for traditional, pre-feminist gender roles. Though she does not refer to *Outlander*, Snyder-Hall's comments resonate significantly with the problematic uses of women's bodies that I have raised in my analysis. Though attempting to approach CDD and wifely submission without judgment, Snyder-Hall is firm on one key point: "Spanking a woman against her will or insisting on

sex when she is not ready currently does and should continue to constitute domestic violence and rape, respectively" (583-4).

Reading the *Outlander* Series: Politics, Pleasures, and Disappearances

While the disappearances of women and female embodied histories in the realm of capital-H History is a problem to feminist politics, the idea of disappearing can also be a pleasurable one. In the context of reading romances, escapism—a kind of disappearing—is often cited as one of the principle pleasures. In *Loving with a Vengeance* (1982), one of the seminal second-wave texts on women and romances, Tania Modleski explores the way that "disappearing" into a romance narrative can represent a woman reader's desire for "that state of self-transcendence and self-forgetfulness promised by the ideology of love" (37). The idea of disappearing into a transcendent, passionate love is a repeated idea in the *Outlander* series. In one description of their lovemaking in *Outlander*, for instance, Claire recounts: "My cry mingled with his, and we lost ourselves finally in each other in the last moment of dissolution and completion" (437-8). From one point of view, the desire for this kind of transcendent experience of love coincides perfectly with the aims of feminism. To lose one's self in love can entail a shuffling off of the trappings of socialization, including normative ideas about gender and identity. However, the depiction of Jamie and Claire's relationship in the foundational books of the *Outlander* series cannot solely be understood in terms of this idealized kind of love.

A contemporary reader who espouses feminist principles but also enjoys the *Outlander* series is likely to experience cognitive dissonance when reading the novels.

Cognitive dissonance refers to the experience of holding two contradictory beliefs simultaneously. In the *Outlander* series, this tension is experienced by a reader who believes that women are not property and that abuses of their bodies are morally wrong, but who believes that Jamie and Claire have a passionate, transcendent love. Since Jamie frequently uses Claire's body in ways that, to contemporary feminist politics, constitute abuse, the reader's views are in conflict with one another. In order for such a reader to experience pleasure in a narrative that challenges their ideology, s/he must either assimilate to the ideology of the text or perform a negotiated reading. In either case, something has to disappear. In an assimilationist reading, the reader will "alter her belief structure to accommodate that ideological model presented in the reading" (Goade 211). In this strategy, a contemporary reader might accept the idea that wife-beating is justifiable, at least in the circumstances presented in the text. As Sally Goade explains of teaching a course on romance reading, "several of the students...were indeed able to set aside their aversion to the rape in *The Flame and the Flower*, accepting the novel's presentation of the act as a mistake, and finding themselves enthralled with the eventual union of the hero and heroine" (211). The other way to perform a negotiated reading is for the reader to minimize or eliminate a problematic narrative event in his/her memory of the text. As Goade explains of a student reading *Outlander*, "when she 'read something that [she] did not like' in the book, she 'pretended that it didn't happen or forgot about it'" (210-11). The same strategy was at play when readers wrote to *Film Review Online* requesting that the word "flogging" be replaced with "spanking" in the article on the controversial scene. Despite the fact that what occurs in the book and in the television adaptation is technically a flogging, readers and viewers substitute the

connotations of "spanking" in order to be able to enjoy the narrative without directly challenging the contemporary feminist ideology that holds that such behaviour is entirely reprehensible and immoral. In this way, what is actually on the page disappears in the reader's mind.

In *The Outlandish Companion* (1999), Diana Gabaldon offers insights into her creative process as well as the reception of the *Outlander* novels. In one section of the *Companion* titled "Controversies," she discusses some of the more critical fan mail she has received over the years. On the issue of "wife-beating," Gabaldon says it is "the single biggest topic of controversy about the books" (401). Indeed, one finds this controversy reflected in the wide-ranging responses to the books on *Goodreads*. Although admitting that the wife-beating scene in *Outlander* has raised the ire of some readers, Gabaldon maintains that "most readers find it hilarious, erotic, or simply very entertaining" (402). She identifies the two main objections readers have raised. First, readers say that the novel's depiction of wife-beating ruins their ability to sympathize with Jamie. Secondly, they argue that Gabaldon should not have depicted wife-beating in this manner because "women who are in abusive relationships will read this and conclude that it is okay for their husbands to beat *them*" (402). Gabaldon's response to this controversy is to assert that her novels do not contain political agendas and should not be required to be politically correct to contemporary readers and society. In other words, she advocates for a divide between pleasure and politics. A similar stance is taken up by Catherine Scott in her 2015 book *Thinking Kink*, which criticizes feminist discourse for not embracing BDSM and female sexual submissiveness more fully. Scott asks, "Why does it matter what women like to read or what they like to do in their bedrooms, unless

someone is looking to use that information as an excuse to disempower them?" (102). The answer to this question and to Gabaldon's reluctance to acknowledge the political significances of her texts is a reassertion of that most foundational of feminist slogans: "the personal is political." As Snyder-Hall notes, "personal choices have political ramifications," and furthermore, "our most personal desires may come from the internalization of societal norms" (Snyder-Hall 581).

Is any piece of literature—particularly an immensely popular one—divorced from social politics and ideology? The literary critic must, I think, take the stance that stories are reflections of society, and, simultaneously, that society is affected and shaped by stories. The fact that female readers[20] have responded to Gabaldon with frustration over the wife-beating scene in *Outlander* indicates that they do not want a divide between pleasure and politics. Rather, their comments convey their desire for pleasure and politics to *coincide* within fiction. These readers want to be able to experience narrative pleasure without having to experience cognitive dissonance between their enjoyment of Jamie and Claire's romance and their own feminist-informed convictions about women's rights and body politics. While Claire chooses to disappear from modern society in *Voyager*, many readers are much more reluctant to leave their modern political sensibilities, even when reading historical fiction.

In *Nostalgia and Sexual Difference*, the argument put forth by Janice Doane and Devon Hodges suggests that nostalgic writing that rejects contemporary feminism is a tool wielded by male authors to subordinate women and women's writing. But what if the nostalgic writing in question is authored by a female? Furthermore, what if that nostalgic

[20] Gabaldon insists that she has never received a complaint about the depiction of wife-beating in *Outlander* from a male reader (*Outlandish Companion*, p.403).

text also features some elements of feminist thought, as the *Outlander* books do? The nostalgic and anti-feminist impulses in the *Outlander* series remind critics and critical readers that the body of the author does not have a direct correlation to the politics of the text. In other words, a female author does not necessarily produce a feminist text. This is a deceptively simple point that feminist literary critics do not always remember. For in its drive to bring female-authored texts into the canon and into academic discourse, the methodology of some feminist literary studies problematically equates women's writing with feminist writing, ignoring ways in which women writers sometimes demonstrate internalization of patriarchal ideology and perpetuate conservative ideologies about gender. Often, as my examination shows, women's writing exists in a space of tension between acceptance of modern feminist politics and attraction to the traditional characters and plots that have populated popular narratives for centuries. Historical fiction, being a site where modernity and tradition—present and past—meet for both the writer and the reader, is a genre in which this tension is especially visible. And the female body, so central to feminist theory and discourse, is also the central manifestation of tension between pleasure and politics, tradition and modernity, past and present, within the woman's historical novel.

—Chapter Three—

History and the Third Wave:
YA Readers and the Negotiation of Feminism and Femininity in the Gemma Doyle Trilogy

Removing the Corset: Feminism and the Fetishization of Femininity

In the popular history of feminism, perhaps the most iconic narrative is that of women burning bras and other undergarments in protest of the Miss America pageant in 1968. The corset, girdle, and even the bra have consequently taken on somewhat mythic status as objects of feminist scorn, representative as they apparently are of the repression and control of female bodies and sexuality throughout history. However, this memorable and enduring story, like many historical narratives, is more complex than popular history acknowledges. As many participants in the protest and first-hand witnesses have attested, "no bras were burned at the 1968 protest" (Dow 130). Rather, as Susan Douglas explains: "They set up a 'Freedom Trash Can,' into which they tossed stenographer's pads, hair rollers, high heels, copies of *Playboy*, and, the most titillating symbol of female containment, all those brassieres" (*Where the Girls Are* 139). The exaggeration of the role the bra played in this feminist protest is symptomatic of a popular and enduring misconception—or, at least, myopic perception—about feminism, which is the idea that feminism and femininity are oppositional. The idea is that feminist women reject traditional femininity, traditional gender roles, and all the feminine paraphernalia that accompany those images of patriarchal womanhood. This opposition of feminism and femininity, however, does not have its origins in the 1960s. It can also be observed in the media discourse surrounding the first-wave feminists whose political engagement gained traction in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, political cartoons and other

materials denigrating the women's movement frequently represented suffragettes as unfeminine, ugly, monstrous, and masculine in their attire and demeanour. As Julia Bush notes, prominent women in Britain's anti-suffrage faction created a dichotomy between themselves and the suffragettes by representing suffragettes as unfeminine while they aligned themselves with a "positive concept of feminine gentility" (15). Femininity and all its accessories thus became associated with tradition and traditional gender roles, while feminism became associated with anti-traditionalism and the rejection of femininity.

Given the perceived incompatibility between feminism and femininity stemming from first-wave anti-suffrage propaganda and later media coverage of the second-wave period, it is somewhat surprising to find that the third-wave period of feminist theory and activism has often been defined by its affinity for femininity. From proclamations of "girl power" to iconic media figures like the Spice Girls and Sailor Moon, the 1990s and early 2000s were filled with representations of females that attempted to bridge the gap between femininity and feminism—with diverse and debatable levels of success. On the one hand, these appropriations of femininity have led many feminist critics and theorists to express concerns about superficial commercial appropriations of feminism for capitalistic ends. For instance, in *Where the Girls Are,* Susan Douglas terms the rhetoric of beauty product advertising "narcissism as liberation" (245), and in *Feminism and Pop Culture,* Andi Zeisler writes skeptically about "the way that 'girlie' and 'girl power' were adopted as shorthand for a kind of diet feminism that substituted consumer trappings for actual analysis" in recent decades (110).[21] Yet the way that third-wave feminists utilize

[21] Zeisler elaborates this concern in her more recent, *We Were Feminists Once: From Riot Grrrl to CoverGirl®, the Buying and Selling of a Political Movement* (New York: Public Affairs, 2016).

and play with femininity as a performance of identity, while inextricable from discourses of commercialism and capitalism, also reflects the way the new movement embraces contradiction and multiplicity. As R. Claire Snyder suggests, the third wave is so difficult to define in part because "third-wavers embrace a multiplicity of identities, accept the messiness of lived contradiction, and eschew a unifying agenda" (177). What becomes both intriguing and problematic for contemporary feminist media criticism is the question of how to theorize deployments of femininity that have one foot in each camp—that is, representations of femininity that are by turns critically self-aware and unabashedly commercialized. One finds that the tension between feminism and femininity that so often characterizes third-wave feminist discourse also defines many female-focused historical novels.

Libba Bray's *New York Times* bestselling Gemma Doyle series consists of three young adult novels: *A Great and Terrible Beauty* (2003), *Rebel Angels* (2005), and *The Sweet Far Thing* (2007). The narrative focuses on sixteen-year-old Gemma Doyle who comes of age and makes her debut in England in the 1890s. In addition to its Victorian narrative, the series also incorporates a fantastical narrative wherein Gemma discovers that she has inherited magical abilities that allow her to enter another world called "the realms." Her challenges in both worlds involve rebelling against and coming to terms with social expectations and traditions that threaten to stifle Gemma's emerging adult identity. The series is a prime case study of the tension between feminism and traditional femininity in a third-wave context, as it straddles the contemporary gender politics familiar to its twenty-first-century readers and the traditional definitions of femininity with which its nineteenth-century heroine struggles. At the centre of this tension between

feminism and femininity is the corset and all that it symbolizes, both in its Victorian and modern contexts. The series presents itself from the opening chapter as a Victorian narrative with a feminist slant, with its teenage protagonist lamenting her constricting garments from the opening scene. The explicit and implicit uses of the corset as a symbol of restriction and oppression throughout the novels is crystallized in the final novel when Gemma reflects: "*Should*. That word, so like a corset, meant to bend us to the proper shape" (SFT 564).

Yet, despite its critical stance toward the corset at several points throughout the novels, the series simultaneously makes the stereotypical Victorian lady an object of desire and intrigue for contemporary readers, revealing the extent to which third-wave feminist politics remain enamoured with traditional gender roles. Thus, the idea of removing the corset operates on two levels within the trilogy, and these two levels of meaning are somewhat in conflict. On the one hand, the corset is symbolic of repression, control, and restriction. In this sense, its figurative removal represents the narrative's feminist intervention. Bray "undresses" the surface of the Victorian lady and imagines her interior struggles and development through the lens of contemporary feminist discourse. On the other hand, the corset is used as an image to sell these novels. Each novel features an image of a young woman in a state of undress, and each image obscures the woman's face, focusing the reader's gaze instead on the material and structure of the corset she wears (see figure 1). In these suggestive cover images, the corset is symbolic of traditional femininity and is meant to entice the reader as an object of intrigue and desire. In this sense, the corset operates as a fetishization of both Victorian history and modern perceptions of Victorian femininity. On close examination, the tension between

feminism and femininity appears as a central theme in the Gemma Doyle trilogy, reflecting the tensions experienced by the generation of readers that makes up its target audience. In this chapter, I discuss how this bestselling historical YA series may be read as a reflection of several aspects of third-wave feminist discourse: the negotiation of feminism and femininity, the tension between the third-wave generation and the preceding second-wave generation, and the problematic way that "girl power" is usually limited to white, middle- and upper-class individuals. In this way, the trilogy illustrates the key tensions facing third-wave feminist discourse as it situates itself in relation to histories of feminism and femininity.

Figure 1: Cover images of the Gemma Doyle trilogy

New Historical Modes: Neo-Victorian and Young Adult (YA)

Before turning to the main theoretical exploration of feminism and femininity in the Gemma Doyle trilogy, I want to contextualize the series in terms of two fields of literary criticism to which it belongs, but which have so far failed to consider the series

or, indeed, its similar contemporaries: neo-Victorian fiction and young adult (YA) fiction. The way these novels embody tensions between the pleasurable and the political, the highbrow and the popular, is relevant not only to questions of feminist literature, but to the way literary critics select the texts deemed worthy of academic study. Despite being a bestselling series and belonging to two genres that have received a great deal of critical attention in the past two decades, I have found only two published pieces of literary criticism that deal with the Gemma Doyle trilogy.[22] This lack of attention illustrates the exclusion of much popular women's historical fiction from academic literary discourse communities.

Neo-Victorianism and the Highbrow Hypothesis

The Gemma Doyle trilogy is an example of a neo-Victorian narrative, a mode of fiction that has become increasingly popular since the centenary of Queen Victoria's death in 2001 (King 4). In *Neo-Victorian Fiction,* Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn insist that "just as not all narratives published between 1837 and 1901 are Victorian, so are fictions post-1901 that happen to have a Victorian setting or re-write a Victorian text or a Victorian character do not have to be neo-Victorian" (6). They provide a definition of the neo-Victorian that has been adopted widely by scholars, asserting that: "To be part of the neo-Victorianism we discuss in this book, texts (literary, filmic, audio/visual) must in some respect be *self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*" (4). However, in their definition

[22] Sonya Fritz's "Double Lives: Neo-Victorian Girlhood in the Fiction of Libba Bray and Nancy Springer" and Cheryl A. Wilson's "Third-Wave Feminists in Corsets: Libba Bray's Gemma Doyle Trilogy."

and their selection of texts considered worthy objects of study, there seems to be little room for the consideration of texts that exhibit tension between self-conscious re-interpretation and commercial deployment of Victorian iconography. Other critics echo Heilmann and Llewellyn's highbrow view of neo-Victorian fiction, as Kate Mitchell does when she asserts that the key critical question is: "Can these novels recreate the past in a meaningful way or are they playing nineteenth-century dress-ups?" (3). This question assumes that playing dress-up is always only an unselfconscious activity, a notion that the critical discourse of performance theory complicates. A better question, I suggest, is: how do many neo-Victorian novels engage with history on multiple, sometimes contradictory, levels? The critics who have so far defined the parameters of the neo-Victorian narrative seem to suggest that the only pleasure in the neo-Victorian narrative should be intellectual—even academic— pleasure. However, some neo-Victorian novels, the Gemma Doyle novels among them, can be located at a site of tension between self-conscious historiography and nostalgic, even commercial deployment of the aesthetics, history, and iconography of the Victorian period. Many, if not most, critical studies of the neo-Victorian uphold a division between the highbrow and the middle- or low-brow deployments of Victorian history in fiction, and this is somewhat problematic. The exclusion of many popular texts has limited the way scholars understand how and why twenty-first-century readers consume Victoriana.

The Gemma Doyle series engages in the kind of self-reflexivity that Heilmann and Llewellyn require, but also appropriates stereotypical images and elements of Victoriana to make its narrative familiar, pleasurable, and marketable to YA audiences. The trilogy reimagines the Victorian woman question through the lens of contemporary

YA fiction, self-reflexively considering what it might have been like to come of age as a female in the nineteenth century, and how this relates to girlhood and womanhood in the present century. A *Publishers Weekly* review of the trilogy's final instalment, *The Sweet Far Thing*, emphasizes the way the novels use Victorian technological and social innovations to explore the way adult subjectivities are formed in relation to history:

> Bray has, over three books, widened her canvas from finishing school to fin-de-siècle London, weaving in the defining movements of the era--labor strikes over factory conditions, suffrage, the 'radical' Impressionists just across the Channel, even fashion trends like bloomers for women daring enough to ride bicycles. Gemma is both buffeted and bolstered by her exposure to these developments, and readers experience how they shape her burgeoning understanding of who she is and who she may become. ("The Sweet Far Thing," n.pag)

The trilogy is a particularly fruitful narrative to examine in relation to pleasure and politics, women and history, as it foregrounds questions of young women in the late nineteenth century struggling between the pulls of feminism and traditional femininity.

Jeanette King has argued that neo-Victorian novels "tend to be characterised by their engagement with gender issues" (2), an observation that is upheld when one considers the great number of neo-Victorian YA novels focusing on female protagonists coming of age along with emergent feminist discourse in the late nineteenth century. In addition to the Gemma Doyle novels are the Enola Holmes series (2006-2010), the Luxe series (2007-2009), *Wildthorn* (2009), *Fallen Grace* (2010), *Folly* (2010), *The Madman's Daughter* (2013), and many more. What these texts exemplify, though they are for the most part not yet taken serious by neo-Victorian scholars, is that the tension between past

and present models of feminism and femininity resonates with the tension between youth and adulthood that is the central focus of the YA novel. Furthermore, as Nadine Muller has pointed out, mother-daughter relationships are often foregrounded in neo-Victorian fiction of the contemporary period, such as *Grange House* (2000), *Fingersmith* (2002), and *The Observations* (2006). Though Muller focuses on fiction marketed toward adults, her assertion that matrilineal genealogy functions in the neo-Victorian novel as "a feminist metaphor" that highlights the "(dis)continuities between feminist pasts and presents" (111) is an argument this chapter takes up in relation to the YA neo-Victorian novel. Explorations of sexuality and gender identity are key aspects of both neo-Victorian fiction and YA fiction. Though twentieth-century philosopher and critic Michel Foucault attempted to redress what he called "the repressive hypothesis"—the idea that the nineteenth century was an era of sexual repression and silence—in volume one of his *History of Sexuality*, neo-Victorian critics acknowledge that in the contemporary popular imagination, this vision of the Victorians as sexually repressed persists (Hadley 12).

Some critics insist that the neo-Victorian mode is distinct from historical fiction set in the nineteenth century, and they characterize the former as a more self-reflexive mode, concerned with "the metahistoric and metacultural ramifications" of narratives that are engaged with nineteenth-century history (Heilmann and Llewellyn *Neo-Victorianism* 6). However, this chapter challenges that distinction somewhat, instead considering the ways in which self-reflexivity and nostalgic appropriation can operate—albeit in tension—within the same text. In so doing, I use the term *neo-Victorian* to describe the Gemma Doyle trilogy as I examine the ways in which the novels *are* metahistoric and *do* concern themselves with the relationship between the nineteenth-century past and our

understanding of the present in relation to that history. I contend that, at present, neo-Victorianism suffers from an elitism and highbrow focus that has eclipsed a major body of neo-Victorian work: the YA neo-Victorian novel. The overlooking of popular and YA fiction is evident when Marie-Luise Kohlke laments that "[t]here are still comparatively few neo-Victorian fictions that genuinely explore childhood as a distinct psychological state or developmental stage in its own right" (120). Kohlke characterizes Neo-Victorian fiction as marginalizing childhood, eliding adolescence, and focusing on adult themes, characterization, and consciousness. Yet the conclusions she draws are based on an assessment of only adult literary fiction. Indeed, there are many examples of neo-Victorian texts focused primarily and even exclusively on the experiences and consciousnesses of children and adolescents—in children's and YA fiction.

YA Historical Fiction and the "Problem" of Feminism

The Gemma Doyle trilogy also belongs to the young adult category of literary studies. Like neo-Victorian studies, YA studies have flourished in the first decades of the twenty-first century. Moreover, like neo-Victorian studies, YA studies have a vested interest in narrative explorations of gender politics. As Beth Younger explains, YA is "the only genre that portrays and is consumed by a young and primarily female readership" and therefore "deserves feminist critical attention, especially for its representations of young female bodies" (1). While third-wave feminist discourse is not exclusive to young women, it does have a close relationship with the generation of women who grew up alongside the third wave in the 1990s, and thus it should not be surprising to find that third-wave feminist ideas can be seen in many of the novels

targeted at this generation of young women. YA literature is one of the largest and most profitable narrative markets in the twenty-first century. Though its advent is often dated to the publication of S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* in 1967, a boom in the number of adolescents during the 1990s contributed to the increased growth and visibility of YA literature in recent decades (Hill 1, 3). The YA market continues to expand, with approximately half of the consumers of YA books being 18 years of age or older. In fact, a 2012 report suggests that "the largest demographic [is] the 30-44 age group" (Hill 5). Considering this massive and wide-ranging readership, YA novels have become increasingly intriguing to literary scholars. Yet there are still many who consider the genre "illegitimate" (Hill 1). Some sub-genres of YA fiction are considered less reputable than others. As Beth Younger explains, "YA romances receive more negative critical opinion than many other subsets of YA literature" (73). Moreover, YA historical novels that approach history through the lens of contemporary feminist politics receive a great deal of critical ire from both historians and literary critics. Thus, if YA literature is considered by many to be a lowbrow genre, then the YA historical novel—which often also features a romance narrative—is doubly damned. If neo-Victorian scholars are hesitant to take the YA neo-Victorian novel seriously, so, too, are YA scholars. In consequence, this extremely popular sub-genre of both YA and neo-Victorian literature has been under-theorized.

Typical YA protagonists seem ideally positioned for the exploration of history since they are usually "observers not fully integrated into the culture they tend to view with equal parts longing and disdain" (Coats 319). This typical position of YA protagonists mirrors the position of readers of historical novels who are similarly at a

distance, temporally, from the culture they view through the narrative, and who similarly experience a mix of longing and disdain for that culture. However, the studies that have been written on YA historical novels treat the genre with a great deal of skepticism. Noting the fact that YA historical novels—much like YA fiction in general—tends to focus on female characters and issues of gender identity, critics tend to emphasize problems of historical accuracy, legitimacy, and credibility when a historical period is represented through the lens of contemporary feminist politics. Kim Wilson, for instance, calls YA feminist historical fiction "awkward" (64), and Melissa Rabey notes that the feminist rhetoric and ideology present in novels like *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* (1990) and *The Midwife's Apprentice* (1995) could be seen as "injecting modern ideas about women and education inappropriately into historical settings" (3). Avi, the author of *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, has defended the feminist slant of the novel by saying: "It is a legitimate task...of fiction to re-invent the past, if you will, so as to better define the future. Historical fiction—among other things—is about today's possibilities" (qtd in Brown and St. Clair 19). Yet literary critics like Joanne Brown and Nancy St. Clair maintain that feminist revisionist historiography is a problematic mode for YA historical fiction, asserting in response to Avi: "Perhaps an author writing to 'better define the future' would do well to work in other genres, such as contemporary realism or science fiction" (49). Their response reflects their elitist and purist approach to both history and historical fiction, and it overlooks the ways in which postmodern theory has attempted to legitimize historiographical play.

Regardless of critics' hostility toward YA historical novels, the sub-genre continues to be extremely popular among readers. Series like the Gemma Doyle trilogy,

The Luxe series, and The Infernal Devices trilogy (2010-2013) have made the Victorian period a popular niche among YA readers. Featuring older adolescent protagonists, these narratives foreground the parallels between coming of age in the nineteenth century—with the emergence of first-wave feminism—and coming of age in the twenty-first—against the feminist backlash of the 1990s and the emerging, but murky, third wave. Set on the cusp of the twentieth century and depicting the adolescent lives of the generation of women who would be among the first to having equal voting rights with men, the Gemma Doyle trilogy mirrors a time strikingly similar to that of its millennial readers: a time when young women come of age not just in different *decades* than their mothers, but in different *centuries*. The historical tensions between the traditional femininity of the nineteenth century and the emerging New Woman of the twentieth is mirrored by the tensions between women who grew up with second-wave feminist theory and activism and those who have come of age in the third-wave era.

Rebel/Angel: Gemma Doyle and the Tension Between Feminism and the Feminine

Despite the distance of over 100 years between Gemma's time and the trilogy's publication, the novels use a variety of techniques to create a sense of connection between young adult readers in the twenty-first century and the young adult protagonists living in the late 1890s. Indeed, Cheryl Wilson has argued that the Victorian setting of Bray's trilogy allows her to reach young female readers who "may be hesitant to recognize the importance of feminism for their own lives" and to offer "a version of feminism that is both accessible and palatable to contemporary adolescent readers" (121). The chapters of each novel are headed like diary entries, and most are written in first-personal narration focalized through Gemma's eyes. Symbolically, this format suggests

intimacy between the reader and Gemma. The diary form also suggests the closeness of past and present through the idea that diary writing is a practice that connects Victorian and modern-day girls. The implication is that although some things have changed, much has remained constant in the realm of girlhood. Moreover, the fantasy element in these historical novels further allows Bray to disrupt the idea of historical authenticity and to bring a feminist lens to bear on the Victorian narrative through the exploration of a magical realm where Victorian girls can exercise power and agency in ways they cannot in the non-magical world. Her novels mirror the contemporary discourse of "girl power" through girl protagonists who literally have magical powers (Fritz 56). In "A Conversation with Libba Bray," published in the trilogy's second installment, Bray explains the parallels she perceives between Victorian and modern experiences of girlhood, and hints at the reasons she wrote about Victorian young women for twenty-first-century readers. She writes: "I think there is still a fear of the strong woman in this culture, and that is why we are seeing this insidious cultural shift away from many of the strides toward independence and equality that have been made in the past thirty years" (10). Characterizing modern young women as facing the same kinds of hostility that her nineteenth-century characters face reveals the extent to which this series is self-reflexive and self-consciously re-imagines the Victorians through a "new" ("neo") contemporary lens. The Victorian woman question—the discourse surrounding the changing roles of the female sex in the nineteenth century—is central to the historical narrative, and connects to the way that, as Bray points out, the early twenty-first century is also being defined largely by discourses about sex, gender, and sexuality.

The rapidly changing 1890s are the setting for the Gemma Doyle trilogy. The entire narrative spans only a single, tumultuous year in the life of its protagonist. The social upheaval that forms the background of the novel mirrors the upheaval within its heroine; at the age of sixteen, Gemma loses her mother, moves from India to finishing school in England, and discovers that she is gifted with magical abilities and is heir to great magical responsibilities. As the narrative oscillates between the world of the Spence Academy for Young Ladies and the magical world called the realms, Gemma oscillates between her yearning for independence, power, and freedom from social expectations and her desire for comfort, social acceptance, and romance. Pulled between rebellion and tradition, Gemma is a character who embodies the tensions between feminism and femininity—a tension aptly described by the title of the trilogy's second installment: *Rebel Angels*.

Gemma is characterized as a rebel within the initial chapter of the first novel. After disagreeing with her mother, she bolts off into the Bombay marketplace on her own, aware that being in public without an escort could be considered "scandalous" (11). Once admitted to the Spence Academy, Gemma finds herself increasingly at odds with the kind of femininity she is expected to embody. She is too tall for the uniform she is given, literally signalling that she does not "fit in" at Spence. Repeatedly, she fails to refine the skills that are associated with genteel femininity, such as drawing, embroidery, and crafting. In *Rebel Angels*, she has trouble creating a Christmas ornament, developing enmity with one of her peers who completes the task and makes it seem effortless. Because she does not excel at the domestic arts, Gemma mocks them. She likens comportment lessons to a circle of Hell and asserts that:

> Walking the length of a ballroom with a book upon one's head and a backboard strapped to one's back while imprisoned in a tight corset, layers of petticoats, and shoes that pinch is a form of torture even Mr. Alighieri would find too hideous to document in his *Inferno*. (7)

Throughout the series, Gemma's repetition of mild curse words like "blast" and "bloody" function as signs of her rebellion or non-conformity to the role of a young lady of society. Taught to view romanticism skeptically by her art teacher, Miss Moore, Gemma begins to question angelic images of women around her. In Church one Sunday, she observes a stained glass window portraying the Virgin Mary's awed reverence during the annunciation, and wonders "why there is no passage to describe her terrible doubt" (RA 387). Along with her friends, Felicity, Pippa, and Ann, Gemma views the lives young women are expected to lead as "empty" (GTB 318), and she dreads that her adult life will consist of "careful tea parties and the quiet fear that I don't belong, that I'm a fraud" (SFT 61).

Readers are frequently reminded of the potential consequences of Gemma's rejections of traditional femininity and her rebellious attitude toward her expected social role. Reflecting on her disobedient behaviour at the start of *A Great and Terrible Beauty*, she imagines her actions will land her "in an Austrian convent surrounded by women with mustaches, my eyes gone bad from making intricate lace designs for other girls' trousseaus" (12). While this precise future does not come to pass, her enrolment at the Spence Academy for Young Ladies is remarkably similar to the punishment she has imagined for herself. The headmistress of the school promises to teach her young female pupils "the necessary skills to become England's future wives and mothers, hostesses and

bearers of the Empire's feminine traditions" and instructs them on the motto of Spence: "Grace, charm, and beauty" (54). In *Rebel Angels*, the threat of punishment for failure to perform femininity properly is escalated through the introduction of Bethlem Royal Hospital, an institution that serves as a reminder to Gemma that disobedient women are often labelled mentally ill and are consequently locked away in asylums or treated with invasive and painful procedures designed to make them docile. Finally, the idea of punishment for failure to perform one's feminine role correctly is concretized for Gemma's friend Felicity in *The Sweet Far Thing* through the threat of disinheritance. Felicity, a rebel like Gemma, learns that she cannot inherit the money left to her by her grandmother unless she makes "her debut 'as a lady in fine moral standing'" (52). However, because of a scandal surrounding her mother and her own reputation for disobedience, no one wants to sponsor her at the ceremony. For Felicity, her economic future—and the freedom and independence it symbolizes—are dependent upon her performing traditional femininity sufficient to receive social approval. The gravity of the pressure to conform is also developed through Gemma's shy friend, Ann, who uses sewing scissors to create tiny cuts along her arms throughout the series. Her habitual self-harm stems, at least in part, from the fact that Ann does not fit into the expected, idealized image of femininity. Moreover, being of lower social class than Gemma and Felicity, she has fewer avenues of rebellion. The act of using sewing scissors to cut herself symbolizes the way notions of tradition tied to class and gender are cutting away at Ann's aspirations and killing parts of her interior identity.

In addition to external social pressures compelling Gemma to act as a proper lady, she is also drawn to the acceptance and love she receives when she performs feminine

gentility. Although she continues to make dry and cynical reflections on femininity throughout the novels, there are several points at which she embraces the role she is expected to play. In particular, Gemma works hard to embody the angelic role her father imagines for her. Throughout *Rebel Angels*, he refers to her as an "angel," and Gemma, though conscious of the ways in which she does not fit this role, nevertheless strives to embody it: "I give him a smile, pretend to be his bright, shiny thing of a girl. *Don't break his heart, Gemma*" (347). Moreover, there are several points at which Gemma's derisive attitude toward the role of the Victorian lady is undermined by her own fantasies of becoming one. Although the opening chapter of *A Great and Terrible Beauty* characterizes Gemma through disobedience and rebellion, she also expresses longing for some very traditional things: "I am fully sixteen and want, no, *need* to be in London, where I can be close to the museums and the balls and men who are older than six and younger than sixty" (4). Indeed, her argument with her mother in this chapter centres on Gemma's desire to have what she perceives as the conventional entry into society of a young lady. She idolizes letters from her grandmother in England, which are "filled with gossip about tea dances and balls and who has scandalized whom" (3). When she later arrives in England and is taken to Spence by her older brother, she is lectured on the expected behaviour and skills of "a proper lady." Her response to her brother's lecture, however, is complex. As she explains, "Part of me wants to give Tom a swift kick for his arrogance. I'm afraid to say that another part of me is dying to know what men look for in a woman" (27). Later, in *Rebel Angels*, there is a scene wherein a disrobed Gemma sees a stack of her roommate's magazines and compares herself to the beautiful woman on the cover. Despite the magical powers she now possesses, and despite the life-and-

death choices she must make within the realms, Gemma is nevertheless shaken by "a new fear: that I shall never, ever be this lovely" (108). This scene illustrates the way her desire to be a traditionally feminine English lady is just as strong as her desire to be powerful and independent, despite the seemingly contradictory nature of these two goals.

The tension between her desire to conform to a traditionally feminine role and her desire to rebel against the expectations of patriarchal English society is paralleled by Gemma's experiences in the realms. Although the realms offer power to Gemma and her friends in a way that contrasts the powerlessness they feel in English society, they still experience friction between the roles they are expected to assume and the paths they would choose for themselves. Sonya Fritz has argued that "in the realms, Gemma is able to detach herself from the performance of femininity that she is obligated to give in the real world" (46). However, this is a somewhat cursory reading, for Gemma is also obligated to perform a specific kind of feminine role in the realms where she is known alternatively as Lady Hope and Most High. In the realms, Gemma is constrained by the expectations that others have of her as her mother's daughter. Gemma's mother, a former priestess of the realms, was embroiled in a disastrous conflict many decades earlier, and the inhabitants of the realms look to Gemma to restore order and harmony. Fritz's argument is that it is the double life that gives Gemma her empowerment, that her ability to utilize power in the realms gives her the confidence to exert agency in the real world. However, Gemma does not always have the confidence to choose her own path in the realms. Instead, the two narratives, that of England and that of the realms, move in the same direction as Gemma learns to find middle ground between the roles of rebel and angel—feminist and traditionalist—in each world.

Victorian Undergarments and Third-Wave Sexual Politics

Gemma's repeated criticism of corsets is the most prominent device Bray uses to signal the narrative's alignment with feminist politics. The corset takes on further significances in the YA trilogy as a symbol of the way girls are shaped—both physically and ideologically—into a constructed image of "woman," in this case, the Victorian lady. The introductory description that Gemma gives of herself in *A Great and Terrible Beauty* foregrounds the fact that her elaborate clothing is unsuitable for the conditions of her everyday life. The unreasonableness of British ladies' fashion is emphasized when she describes the sweatiness under her crinolines and the perspiration that wilts her lace collar (3). In future descriptions, she critiques the way corsets and elaborate dresses restrict mobility when running (GTB 69), riding bicycles (RA 108), and playing field hockey (SFT 427). Aside from the mobility problems Gemma and her friends bemoan, their criticisms of corsets also extend to the ideological function of the undergarment. Reflecting critically on some of her peers at Spence, Gemma says: "I find their minds to be as corseted as their waists, with conversations limited to parties, dresses, and the misfortunes or shortcomings of others" (SFT 17). In this moment, she draws attention to the way exterior identity is related to interior development. As Leigh Summers explains in *Bound to Please: A History of the Victorian Corset* (2001), "stays were, as their name suggests, designed to make unruly female flesh 'stay put' and in doing so were also thought to arrest the potentially unruly and recalcitrant female mind" (5). Near the end of the final novel, when she finally vocalizes her aspirations for education and travel to her father, Gemma explains her desire for freedom in terms of rejecting the corset. As she

explains, she does not want to "spend my days making myself small enough to fit into such a narrow world" (795). The corset thus operates both literally and symbolically as a means of moulding females into the image of the proper Victorian lady.

Yet despite these moments when Gemma and her friends renounce corsetry, as the narrative develops its exploration of sexuality, one comes to see how the corset also offers women a measure of control over their sexuality and the bodily image they present. This process of learning to control their sexuality through their corsets reflects Roberta Trites' argument that:

> Adolescent novels that deal with sex, whether they are obviously ideological, usually contain within them some sort of power dynamic wherein the character's sexuality provides him or her with a locus of power. That power needs to be controlled before the narrative can achieve resolution. (85)

Early moments of the narrative establish the discourse of sex as belonging to men, and as being something from which women must be protected, both physically and intellectually. In *A Great and Terrible Beauty,* when she has run away from her mother in the Bombay marketplace, Gemma reflects she reflects on the threat of sexual assault:

> A sudden fear takes root, spreads through me with cold speed, given wings by conversations I've overheard in my father's study—tales over brandy and cigars about the fate of an unescorted woman, overpowered by bad men, her life ruined forever. (12)

Later, her brother Tom interrogates her about what happened in the marketplace and she realizes that the subtext of the conversation is whether her virginity is intact (29). Yet, once she is at Spence in the company of other girls her age, the truth is revealed: young

women *do* know about anatomy, intercourse, and forms of physical intimacy. When they discover a pornographic drawing in a cave on the school grounds, Gemma jokes that the male is "sprung" and Pippa wryly observes of the female: "She's lying back and thinking of England!" (150). This moment reveals the facade of the asexual Victorian lady who does not enjoy sex or fantasize about physical love since Gemma and her friends are clearly aware and curious about sex. Bray's approach to adolescent female sexuality in the trilogy further reflects the way her approach to YA genre conventions is informed by feminist discourse. Roberta Trites has argued that "male and female authors alike who communicate that sex is to be avoided to protect vulnerable females ultimately end up affirming the patriarchal status quo" (95). Bray, however, directly undermines this idea of the vulnerable female who needs to be protected from sex. The novels show these young women donning, adjusting, and removing their corsets to suit their own sexual desires and their quests for social power. At one point, they sneak away from the school and help one another take off their corsets and dresses to go swimming in their shifts (GTB 175). A scene in *Rebel Angels* finds Gemma posing in her undergarments before her mirror, learning how her body can perform different versions of femininity and sexuality (109). In *A Sweet Far Thing*, Felicity has Ann laced tightly into a corset so that she can catch the eye of a man she hopes might marry her. Felicity also has the bodice of Ann's dress lowered. Here the corset is used as a tool for Ann to try to obtain the adult life and identity she desires. There is sexual objectification in the act, to be sure, but there is also female agency. Repeatedly, Bray shows Gemma and her friends manipulating the corset in order to play with their own sexuality.

The history of corsetry in the nineteenth century reflects the way corsets and other structural undergarments cannot be understood simply as instruments of sexual oppression but also exist as tools of women's sexual expression and control. Leigh Summers argues that due to the prevalence of the association between corsets and the repression of Victorian female sexuality, "the corset remains profoundly under-theorized" (2). Providing a detailed history of corsetry, she outlines several ways in which Victorian women participated actively in the manufacturing and wearing of structural undergarments. The fact that so many women wore corsets despite physical discomfort, she argues, "suggests that [the corset] held a range of important meanings for women that have not yet been acknowledged or understood by twentieth-century historians" (6). Indeed, although Gemma and her friends frequently complain about the restrictive nature of corsets, they also embrace them at times. In *A Great and Terrible Beauty*, Pippa even expresses the hope that her mother will gift her with a new corset (221) and tells her friends proudly that her waist is "a tidy sixteen and a half inches" (222). Moreover, as Summers argues, corsets constructed not only femininity, but also conveyed information about class (9). Thus, when Felicity laces Ann into a tight corset and lends her a low-cut dress to attract a potential husband in *The Sweet Far Thing*, Ann is not only performing a particular kind of femininity, she is performing class; she is attempting to "pass" as a lady, both in the gendered and economic senses of the word. Ultimately, the ambivalence the characters reflect about the corset signals the way the corset itself paradoxically objectifies and empowers women. As Summers concludes:

> It would appear that skilful manipulation of their own bodies *via* the corset enable single middle-class women to successfully negotiate a path between prevailing

> and antithetical constructions of femininity, which positioned them as either virginal or dangerously sexual. (122)

In the Gemma Doyle trilogy, therefore, the corset is the central symbol of the tension between feminist rebellion and traditional femininity, and the way young women come of age through their navigation of this tension.

The significance of the corset to the series is further complicated when one considers the tension between the historical context of the corset and its context for twenty-first-century readers. Notably, there is a disjunction between Gemma's verbal disavowal of the corset from the outset of the series and the corset's prominence upon and within the books. Indeed, the corset is the primary means by which these novels—as commercial goods—attempt to appeal to consumers. In a 2013 review for the University of Louisiana at Monroe's student paper, Ashley Lyons describes what drew her to the series:

> I was the type of kid who couldn't leave a bookstore without a purchase or resist a pretty cover. I also have a thing for history, so when I saw a girl with a corset on the cover and read that it takes place in 1895, it didn't take me long to make up my mind. (n.pag)

In a review of *A Great and Terrible Beauty*, *Publishers Weekly* also comments on the prominence of the corset in the cover art, noting that these images might make male readers less inclined to carry the book around, and describing the series as being "aimed at female readers." This idea in particular—that the corsets in the Gemma Doyle trilogy are intended for the *female* gaze—suggests the complex relationship contemporary women have to the history of the corset.

To a contemporary woman, whose first-hand knowledge of corsets comes from Victoria's Secret catalogues and window-displays in shopping mall storefronts, the wearing of Victorian-inspired undergarments is a choice. I suggest that this contemporary understanding of corsetry as a performative activity associated with playful sexuality affects the way the corset figures in historical fiction—particularly female-focused historical fiction. The continued contemporary fascination with Victorian undergarments reveals that modern women do not understand the Victorian period solely in terms of oppression. That many modern women continue to choose to wear modern versions of corsets and choose to read books that have corsets on the covers reveals that there is something empowering—even arousing—about the corset, not just for men, but for women. In this way, neo-Victorian YA novels offer young women readers, who are actively engaged in the project of fashioning their adult selves, the chance to think through the way the aesthetics of traditional femininity can be both empowering and limiting. In the context of the female-centred neo-Victorian YA novel, the corset becomes a symbol that connects contemporary and Victorian young women through the apparently universal adolescent desire to explore an inner self that is always also shaped by regulations from without. Repeatedly in these novels, young women's undergarments represent the ebb and flow of a fraught relationship to traditional femininity. In these novels the Victorian corset is re-contextualized through contemporary body politics and becomes a way for young women readers to "try on" traditional femininity while always retaining the option to "untie" themselves from it. The Gemma Doyle novels oscillate between representing girls excited about balls, dresses, jewellery, and courtship, and representing girls—often the very same ones—deriding the signals of traditional

Victorian femininity. In turn, the books are aimed at an audience of girls and women who experience those same contradictory impulses—girls and women who find the corset both great and terrible.

In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Young Women and Matrilineal History

The exploration of matrilineal history is another way in which the Gemma Doyle trilogy explores the tension between traditional femininity and progressive feminist politics through the juxtaposition of past and present. While "history" is often evocative of wars, the rising and falling of dynasties, scientific and technological discoveries, and other large-scale events, it can also be used in a more microcosmic, personal sense. Gemma's struggles to understand her mother's history and to situate herself within the aftermath of that history parallel the way young women in the twenty-first-century struggle to understand women's history on a larger scale and to situate themselves within the aftermath of two tumultuous waves of feminist theory and activism.

The title of this section references Alice Walker's 1983 essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" wherein she uses the idea of her mother's garden to express the way daughters inherit creative gifts from their mothers. Yet while this idea of matrilineal inheritance is present in the Gemma Doyle trilogy, as it is in third-wave feminist discourse, the relationship between daughters and mothers—both biological and historical—is also the site of a great deal of generational tension. The mother's garden is still invoked in the Gemma Doyle trilogy, but in its more Biblical sense, with young women searching for gardens that their mothers have ruined through sin and poor choices. In the novels, the mother's garden is evoked both literally and figuratively; it is made manifest through the gardens of the magical realms Gemma can enter due to her

inheritance of magical abilities from her mother, and also through numerous references to being as a daughter of Eve, socially denigrated as a sex and carrying the guilt for humanity's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. As Ann explains when Gemma gets her first period, "It's our punishment as daughters of Eve. Why do you think they call it the curse?" (RA 63). In both of these senses, Gemma experiences the strain of being a daughter whose life is coloured by the choices of her mother, much as third-wave feminist discourse is often fixated on differentiating itself from the choices and icons of second-wave feminism. As Elizabeth Kelly notes, "many feminists from both the Second and Third Waves have characterized this new theoretical tendency as a "revolt against mother" (234).

The young protagonist's struggle against authority, parental or otherwise, is a central characteristic of YA literature (Trites 54), and rebellion against the mother—rooted in the tension between feminism and femininity—is central to the Gemma Doyle trilogy. One of the first things Gemma tells readers at the start of *A Great and Terrible Beauty* is that she is not "getting on very well" with her mother (2). As she goes on to explain, "there was a time when we did everything together, and now, we can't even walk through the bazaar without sniping at each other" (8-9). Although Gemma eventually moderates her affinity for the roles and rules and traditional English ladies, the tension she experiences with her mother at the narrative's opening stems from their different views of the pleasures and pitfalls of traditional femininity. Gemma is eager to be sent back to London so that she might attend finishing school and become a debutante, but her mother is against the idea on feminist grounds: "Would you like to be paraded around the ballrooms of London society like some prize horse there to have its breeding capabilities

evaluated?" (5). Gemma's fondness for tradition at the start of the narrative represents her yearning for the things that have been forbidden or barred by her mother. When her mother dies and Gemma is left wearing the necklace her mother always wore, she describes this token of femininity as "a remembrance of my mother and my guilt" (22). Femininity becomes problematic for Gemma at the moment her feminist mother is no longer there to rebel against. Suddenly, Gemma's yearning for finishing school and her debutante season are replaced by scathing critiques of comportment lessons and corsets. When she learns that her mother attended the Spence Academy—and that her mother preceded her as a priestess of the magical realms—Gemma's journey becomes one of navigating tradition and rebellion, femininity and feminism, in relation to her mother's history and her own position as part of her mother's legacy.

The generational tension between Gemma and her mother is paralleled by third-wave feminists and their second-wave foremothers, but it also resonates historically with the idea of the New Woman emerging from the Victorian "cult of motherhood." The memory of Gemma's mother is held up as a tool by which Gemma is measured by others throughout the series. Yet the way Gemma's mother is remembered reveals the extent to which the Victorian cult of motherhood—part of the backlash against early the suffrage movement—elides many of the more complex aspects of her identity. Gemma's father refers to her by her mother's name at several points, and he remembers his late wife as an angelic creature. When her father tells people about her mother, Gemma reflects:

> None of this is true. My mother was many things: strong yet vain, loving at times and ruthless at others. But she was not this confection—a self-sacrificing saint who looked after her family and the sick without question or complaint. I look at

> Father to see if anything betrays him, but no, he believes it, every word. He has made himself believe it. (256)

Part of Gemma's growth in this coming-of-age narrative is learning that her mother's history is more complex than she once thought. For instance, she learns that her mother, whom she has known as Virginia Doyle all her life, was actually born Mary Dowd. Gemma discovers that her mother had magical powers and could enter the realms, but also that her mother was corrupted by that power. When Mary and her friends accessed the realm, they attempted to increase their power by sacrificing a young gypsy girl. While Gemma's mother realized the moral depravity in time to stop herself, her friend Sarah went through with the act and became a dark sorceress, renaming herself Cercei.[23] Read as a feminist allegory, Gemma's mother's history cautions against women allowing their quest for equality to turn into a quest for supremacy. If in life Gemma's mother pushed her to see the limitations of a traditionally feminine role, in death, she pushes her to see the pitfalls of the quest for power and independence. At the conclusion of the first novel, Gemma reflects: "The mother I remember was as much an illusion as the leaves we turned into butterflies on our first trip to the realms" and she realizes she will "have to let her go to accept the mother I'm only just discovering" (394).

The trilogy also foregrounds generational conflict through the antagonistic relationship between Gemma and Cercei/Miss Moore. In many ways, Cercei/Miss Moore can be read as an allegory of a radical second-wave feminist as seen through the eyes of the third-wave generation, embodied in the series by Gemma. Both characters want the same thing, essentially: to have access to power, independence, and free choice. Where

[23] This character goes by three names throughout the novels: Sarah Rees-Toome as a young girl, Cercei as a dark priestess of the realms, and Miss Moore when she poses as a teacher at Spence to get close to Gemma.

they diverge is in the acquisition and execution of that power. When given power over the realms, Cercei seeks to rule over all creatures, including men. In contrast, when given that same power several decades later, Gemma chooses to make the power of the realms accessible to all. In this way, the trilogy suggests the way third-wave feminist discourse rhetorically positions itself as more polyvocal and democratic than many of the radical branches of second-wave discourse that preceded it. However, the narrative also works to blur the lines between these two women—these two generations—and their approaches to power. Indeed, by introducing readers to the sympathetic Miss Moore in *A Great and Terrible Beauty* before revealing her identity as Gemma's nemesis, Cercei, in *Rebel Angels*, Bray challenges readers to confront their assumptions about good and evil uses of power. As a teacher at Spence in *A Great and Terrible* Beauty, Miss Moore conveys thinly veiled feminist lectures to her young female pupils. She explains to them that female healers and midwives were once persecuted as witches, and she challenges them to think critically about what they have been socialized to think of as "romantic." She is presented as a mentor to Gemma, a narrative choice that makes the revelation that she is also Gemma's rival for power in the realms especially compelling and resonant in terms of feminist generational conflict. As the narrative progresses, Bray increasingly builds reader sympathy for Cercei/Miss Moore, suggesting that she is not so much evil as power-hungry. In *Rebel Angels*, which takes its title and epigraph from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Miss Moore provides a sympathetic interpretation of Lucifer, telling Gemma: "It's a terrible thing to have no power of one's own" (277). Gemma's process of coming to empathize with Cercei/Miss Moore—even though she makes different choices for herself—is identical to the process Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards set for third-

wave feminists in their third-wave text, *Manifesta*. Baumgardner and Richards call for young feminists to attempt "to understand the choices our mothers made, knowing they were made in a context we will never experience" (214). In this way, many feminist commentators seek to diffuse the idea of generational conflict in favour of complex and honest debate between multiple feminist viewpoints—regardless of age and generational delineation.[24]

The narrative of the Gemma Doyle trilogy follows exactly such a progression from generational conflict to collaboration. As she learns more about the history of the previous generation of priestesses, Gemma's critiques of the Order increasingly resemble third-wave critiques of second-wave feminism. Miss McCleethy, a lead member of the Order who makes several attempts to compel Gemma to give the Order control of the realms, represents the same radical views and hunger for power that is present in Cercei. Faced with mounting pressure from McCleethy, Gemma questions her on the choices of the previous generation of priestesses. When she asks why the Order "never shared its power," McCleethy's answer teems with radical passion: "It is ours to have. We've fought for it. Sacrificed and shed blood for it." Gemma's response, however, is a reflection of third-wave feminist critiques of some branches of radical feminism, noting that in the quest for women's power, the Order has "denied [others] any chance to have a part of the magic, to have a say" (536). Ultimately, both generations must work together to restore harmony to the realms. For the final battle, the older generation—Miss Nightwing, Miss McCleethy, and Miss Moore/Cercei—fight alongside the new generation—Gemma, Felicity, and Ann. However, the technical details of how Gemma

[24] See Diane Elam's "Sisters Are Doing It to Themselves"; Judith Roof's "Generational Difficulties; or, The Fear of a Barren History"; and Cathryn Bailey's "Unpacking the Mother/Daughter Baggage: Reassessing Second- and Third-Wave Tensions."

ultimately makes the power of the realms equal to all are quite vague, reflecting—perhaps inadvertently—the critique that third-wave feminist discourse can be characterized by its rather general and sweeping claims (Kelly 234). In the end, the narrative shows that Gemma finds contentment and belonging within both worlds—the world of debutants and ladies, and the world of magical power—in a way the previous generation did not.

Sisterhood Under Siege: The Limits of Solidarity

Generational tensions are also intertwined with questions of sisterhood and solidarity. YA fiction often explores the development and sustainment of friendships, and in the Gemma Doyle trilogy, the exploration of friendship is also connected to feminist themes through implicit considerations of the concepts of sisterhood and solidarity. However, sisterhood has its limits, both in feminist discourse and in fiction. In particular, second-wave feminist discourse was criticized in subsequent decades for presenting a homogenous picture of "women" and of the issues they faced. Thus, claims of "sisterhood" and "solidarity" in feminist rhetoric have been challenged on the grounds that these terms "alienated many black and working-class women who did not see gender as the central site of their oppression (Hollows 6), and also that they "enabled white middleclass women to ignore their own complicity in race- and class-based oppression" (Lyshaug 78). Taking these criticisms of earlier feminist movements into account, third-wave feminist discourse has often been wary of the term "sisterhood" and focuses instead on individual experiences, noting the importance of situation and context to the issues raised. However, this move from sisterhood to individual situation carries the risk of becoming, once again, too focused on limited notions of "woman," "sexism" and, indeed,

"feminism." In reviewing several of the key texts of third-wave discourse, Elizabeth Kelly discusses the limits of the autobiographical and the anecdotal. She writes: "There's nothing inherently wrong with the notion of deploying the personal narrative as a springboard to theory—but in order to do so successfully, one must move beyond the personal, as these texts too often do not" (236). Feminist discourse continues to face the complex challenge of articulating a political movement that is both unified and diverse. As Brenda Lyshaug succinctly puts the question: "How can feminists acknowledge and accommodate important differences among women without giving up the unity on which feminism's viability as a political movement depends?" (78). The treatment of sisterhood in the Gemma Doyle trilogy reflects a second-wave use of the concept, and reveals the limits of sisterhood and solidarity; however, in the dissolution of sisterhood that occurs at the trilogy's conclusion, it also exemplifies the problems that occur when sisterhood is abandoned in favour of individualism.

Aside from Ann and Kartik, Gemma's circle of friends consists of wealthy upper-class people, suggesting the extent to which sisterhood and solidarity are tied to class and privilege. Gemma belongs to the upper class of English society, and this fact is reinforced at several points throughout the novels. Early in the first book, when she has returned to England with her family, the "otherness" of the lower classes is established when the Doyles close the curtains of the carriage as they drive through the East end of London to avoid seeing the slums (31). Gemma's brother Tom lectures her on class and how to treat the lower classes nicely, but not as equals (37). Once at Spence, the friendships that Gemma establishes reaffirm class barriers, with all but one member of her circle coming from upper-class backgrounds. Gemma somewhat accidentally befriends Ann Bradshaw,

a scholarship student whose "doughy" figure and "plain" features are "damning," Gemma says, because only "a girl without money who was also pretty might stand a chance at bettering her station in life" (48). Felicity and Pippa, who become the other two members of Gemma's circle of friends, are not only dismissive of Ann and her prospects, they are initially cruel to her, setting her up to look like a thief in the hope that she will be expelled (45). Pippa carries elitist views into the realms as well, eventually asking Gemma not to give any power to the poor girls in the realms because "they're not accustomed to having such power" (SFT 442). By this point, Gemma has seen enough of the margins of English society—including working-class neighbourhoods, "Bedlem" hospital, and an opium den— to recognize that families like hers, Felicity's, Pippa's, and her prospective beau Simon Middleton's are extremely privileged. In *Rebel Angels,* she vows to distance herself from these elite circles, saying: "I would so very much like to wrap myself in the warm blanket of them. But I have seen too much to live in that blanket" (540). However, in the final book of the series Gemma is still cocooned in the privileges of wealth and in her classist ideologies. When she sees Kartik, her Indian friend and ally, give a sovereign to a beggar, she parrots her father's advice to him: "It isn't good to give money to beggars, they'll only spend it unwisely on drink or other pleasures" (451). Gemma thus experiences only minor growth in terms of class-consciousness throughout the trilogy.

The elitism of Gemma's social circle is reinforced through the debutante system that is so central to the final novel in the trilogy. In this YA series, "coming out" marks a climactic narrative moment when the protagonist will formally transition from childhood to adulthood in the eyes of her society. Historically, the "coming out" ball symbolized

that a girl had reached the beginning of adulthood, which meant that she was considered physically and intellectually ready to take on the role of wifehood. The debutante system is critiqued throughout *The Sweet Far Thing* for its perpetuation of superficial appraisals of young women. Yet the system is also tied to the trilogy's exploration of matrilineal inheritance, since each young debutante is sponsored and presented by a woman of the previous generation, with the expectation that she will follow in her sponsor's footsteps in upholding the traditional role of an English lady. Only reputable women who had been presented at least three years prior were eligible to present new debutantes at court (Gosling 38-9), making this system one that enforced both gender and class regulations. "Coming out" also marks a transition for Gemma; though she yearned for finishing school and a debut to mark her as a "decent" and traditional English lady (GTB 4), once she reaches the point of making her debut at the end of the trilogy, Gemma professes only apathy for the ritual. As she says near the end of the final novel, "come Saturday, I shall curtsy before my Queen and make my debut in society while my family and friends look on. There will be supper and dancing. I shall wear a beautiful white dress and ostrich plumes in my hair. And I couldn't care less" (787-8). However, while she says she does not care, Gemma still goes through with the ceremony, indicating that she knows on some level that her class status is essential to her freedom and independence. The symbolic sisterhood of debutantes that she joins at the end of the series is one that is comprised solely of white, middle- and upper-class English women. Though she never directly acknowledges it, Gemma's story illuminates the fact that feminist gender play is something that is accessed through a position of privilege.

In contrast to Gemma's process of developing a feminist identity in an upper-class context, the story of her school friend Ann highlights the way class intersects with gender oppression. Due to her economic disenfranchisement, Ann has fewer options than Gemma, Felicity, and Pippa. She has more difficulty creating an identity that is traditionally feminine yet also allows her the freedom and independence she desires, since she must work for a living. The necessity of employment means that Ann continues to be compelled to shape herself according to others' expectations in ways that Gemma, Felicity, and Pippa successfully avoid. Ann is only able to attend finishing school at Spence because her nouveau riche cousin, Mrs. Wharton, has sent her there to be trained before Ann will take up a position as the Wharton children's governess. Thus, while Gemma, Felicity, and Pippa worry over the constraints that marriage might pose to their futures after Spence, Ann has the additional concern of being indebted to her cousin and being economically required to take up a job she does not want. Indeed, while her upper-class friends endeavour to stave off the marriage market, Ann views the prospect of marriage as freeing. While the others view wifehood as a tedious and confining arrangement, Ann actively pursues Gemma's brother, Tom, in the hope that a marriage to a wealthy man will allow her the same freedoms and privileges that her friends already possess. These subtle differences between Ann and the other girls in Gemma's circle of friends reveal that economic status has a considerable impact on both the performance of traditional gender and the means through which an individual can hope to subvert or rebel against those traditions. At the conclusion of the narrative, Ann must make a choice between being a governess and trying her luck on the stage. Though her career as an aspiring actress is presented positively within the text, it is nevertheless a path that sets

her apart from her upper-class friends. If Ann is to have economic independence and the freedom that comes with it, she must earn it; and because she must earn it, she must always care about what other people think of her. While she previously gave up on her dream of acting because "I can't be who they want me to be" (SFT 423), by the end of the novel she has decided that the stress of an occupation so entwined in expectations and performance is balanced out by the measure of freedom and independence it might provide.

Finally, the conclusion of the trilogy reveals the extent to which class differences impede the idea of feminist sisterhood. In *Feminism is for Everybody*, bell hooks writes:

> Sisterhood could never have been possible across the boundaries of race and class if individual women had not been willing to divest of their power to dominate and exploit subordinated groups of women. As long as women are using class or race power to dominate other women, feminist sisterhood cannot be fully realized. (15-16)

While Gemma does divest herself of magical power—an act that sets her apart from her former nemesis, Cercei—she does not divest herself of her wealth and class privileges. At the end of the trilogy, the two wealthy protagonists, Gemma and Felicity, both leave England: Gemma for New York and Felicity for Paris. They use their wealth and class privileges to make better lives for themselves, lives that will fight against patriarchal restriction. But what about Ann, their working class friend? What about the women locked up at Bethlem? What about the girls and women working in dangerous conditions, like the girls Gemma encounters in the realms who perished in a factory fire? At the end of the novel, Gemma and Felicity escape many of the patriarchal restrictions they have

been fighting against by using their money and class privileges to create new spaces for themselves; however, the systems that keep girls and women subordinated and impoverished still exist, and neither Gemma nor Felicity express intentions of addressing these systems. Rather, once their own freedoms have been assured, they seem to have no need of sisterhood or solidarity any longer. Indeed, the complexities of achieving equality and freedom are elided in Gemma's concluding observation that she is entering a "new world" where people have "the liberty to pursue our dreams if we've the courage to begin" (818). Thus, the novel's ending can be called "happy" only insofar as the reader is willing to focus exclusively on the main protagonist.

This disjunction between Gemma's happy ending and the unresolved inequalities explored through subplots and minor characters throughout the trilogy mirrors the way the feminist movement has been fractured along lines of class and race. The kind of feminist protest represented in the trilogy illustrates the fact that throughout feminist movements, "women from privileged classes were able to make their concerns 'the' issues that should be focused on" (hooks 37). The trilogy ends with the literal breakdown of a sisterhood, with each young woman striking off on her own path. Yet what I am critically characterizing as a breakdown is presented optimistically in the narrative as the end of a struggle and the start of Gemma's new life. Gemma's ability to reconcile femininity and feminism and her success finding a path that feels right to her give the conclusion its optimistic tone. However, as Elizabeth Kelly points out in her criticism of individualistic third-wave rhetoric:

> What 'works best for me' is not, necessarily or always, the optimal solution for all—as anyone acquainted with the histories of colonialism and imperialism, or concerned about equity on a global scale, should readily recognize. (234-5)

Thus, the Gemma Doyle trilogy concludes by presenting young readers with a problematically individualistic sense of feminism that hesitates to go beyond the personal to explore the connections *between* the personal and broader socio-political issues.

Conclusion: Enlightened Sexism or Empowered Contradiction?

Figure 2: YA neo-Victorian novels featuring corsets on the covers

"Undressing" the Gemma Doyle trilogy, to continue the central metaphor of the chapter, reveals the presence of tensions between feminism and femininity that permeate the narrative's engagement with history and with its contemporary YA audience. The series exemplifies the way modern women situate themselves in relation to women's history and feminist history in ways that continue anti-sexist rhetoric, but also express nostalgia for traditional images of femininity. The Gemma Doyle trilogy is not alone in this position between pleasure and politics. Indeed, several other novels published in the

first two decades of the twenty-first century express a similar ambivalence about feminism and femininity. Many signal this interest through the mechanism of the corset, such as Jane Eagland's *Wildthorn*, Kady Cross's *The Girl in the Steel Corset* (2011), and Leanna Renee Hieber's *Twisted Tragedy of Miss Natalie Stewart* (2012), all of which feature corsets on their covers (see figure 2). Others like Anna Godbersen's *The Luxe* foreground the elaborate silhouettes Victorian women created through the use of corsets, bustles, and crinolines (see figure 3). In all of these popular YA neo-Victorian novels, images of a kind of femininity that now belongs primarily to history are fetishized even as the novels also express contemporary feminist ideologies surrounding female agency, intellect, and sexuality. In this chapter, I have argued that these historical novels reflect the current state of feminist discourse, and the ways that young women readers understand themselves in a position between the pulls of tradition and feminist rebellion.

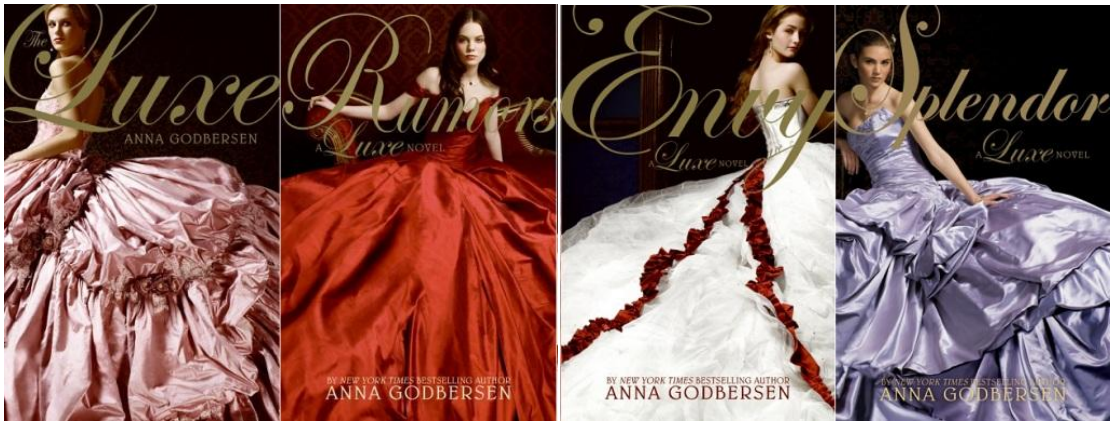

Figure 3: Corseted and bustled women on the covers of Anna Godbersen's *Luxe* novels

However, there is also a more pessimistic way of reading this these novels' expressions of tension between feminism and femininity. Feminist media critic Susan

Douglas' book *Enlightened Sexism* examines, as its subtitle heralds, "the seductive message that feminism's work is done." According to Douglas, enlightened sexism "insists that women have made plenty of progress because of feminism—indeed full equality has allegedly been achieved—so now it's okay, even amusing, to resurrect sexist stereotypes of girls and women" (9). Douglas is skeptical of the idea that "it is precisely through women's calculated deployment of their faces, bodies, attire, and sexuality that they gain and enjoy true power—power that is fun, that men will not resent, and indeed will embrace" (10). Yet, in her criticism of popular narratives that express tensions between feminism and traditional femininity, and in her suggestion that the images and associations of femininity in pre-feminist history are always embedded in sexist, patriarchal ideology, is Douglas implying that modern-day women cannot have a positive relationship to history? Hesitant to draw this conclusion, I suggest instead that third-wave feminist discourse and the popular narratives that reflect it illustrate the fact that modern-day women are unwilling to reject historical femininity and instead are seeking ways of reconciling feminism and femininity, even if that means accepting contradictions. The third wave wants to fetishize the corset and criticize it, too.

—Chapter Four—

Feminist Historical Fiction and Race: The *Gone with the Wind* Legacy since *Scarlett*

White Women and Southern History: Discursive Colonization

Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936) might be called the twentieth century's historical novel *par excellence*. An immediate bestseller, the novel won the Pulitzer Prize for literature in 1937, and "sold more than 25 million copies in 27 languages" during its first fifty years before a "a special anniversary edition sent it back to the best-seller lists in 1986" (Huntziker "Hollywood Themes" 235). In addition to its commercial success, the novel has taken on a central place in the history of the American South and, as Julie Nerad has argued, "has morphed outside the bounds of fiction and has created 'knowledge' of history itself" (155). In academia and in popular culture, the novel has often been discussed for its feminist themes, making it an iconic example of what Diana Wallace identifies as "the woman's historical novel." Feminist critics, including Molly Haskell, have commented on the way that Mitchell's female-centric representation of the Civil War contributed to a historical revisioning of the period (201). However, the novel has also drawn ire from other critics for its romanticized approach to race and racism. As Sharon Talley notes, "there are no field slaves, whips, or chains visible in the prewar scenes of the novel" (216). Moreover, while Scarlett's determination and hard work during the war and postbellum years allow her "to build a new bourgeois life in Atlanta; the loyal 'house niggers' who remain with her, however, earn nothing but the opportunity for continued servitude" (222). Indeed, fans of the novel often focus their

praise on its feminist politics to the exclusion of issues of race,[25] as Margaret Donovan Bauer does in her 2014 book *A Study of Scarletts*. As Bauer states in her introduction:

> My focus in this study is on the character Scarlett O'Hara. I do not spend much time defending the rest of the novel. Others have addressed the issue of historical accuracy, the extent to which is perpetuates plantation mythology, and its depiction of African American characters. (2)

But should one really separate Scarlett from these other issues? What happens when we focus on feminism without attention to race, particularly in a historical novel set during the American Civil War? This division of gender-based and race-based politics in the context of *Gone with the Wind* speaks to its position as a second-wave feminist text. The novel is concerned with the excavation and recuperation of women's histories, but it also exemplifies the whitewashing of much mainstream feminist discourse in the early- and mid-twentieth centuries.[26]

Following the hey-day of *Gone with the Wind* in the mid-twentieth century, the development of postcolonial theory and challenges to the lack of diversity within feminist theory led to a proliferation of discourse surrounding the politics of race and the ways racial and feminist politics intersect. Second-wave feminist discourse was criticized for focusing on white, middle-class women's lives and projecting their experiences upon the sex as a whole, assuming that "those white concerns were the concerns of women everywhere" (Lewis and Mills 4). Feminist critiques of the centrality of whiteness to the

[25] See also Cawelti p. 92; Haskell p. xii; Seidel p.54

[26] As I was writing this chapter, Philippa Gregory published an essay she wrote called "Why It's All Right to Love *Gone with the Wind*," an abbreviated version of which functions as the introduction to a new hardcover edition of Mitchell's novel published by Macmillan in 2016. Her essay and its title speak to the anxieties that still exist around *Gone with the Wind* and the desire of many white feminist readers to defend their love for the book.

movement also extended to issues of representation. As bell hooks has explained, "to stare at the television, or mainstream movies, to engage its images, was to engage its negation of black representation" (208). Hooks' statement extends to representations in fiction as well. The impact of discourse that challenged feminists and popular culture to look beyond the white middle-class can also be observed through the kinds of women's historical novels that were popular in the late twentieth century. The historical mode was particularly useful to authors who wanted to politicize the marginalization of black women's histories and to render those histories visible in the public sphere. The iconic historical novels of this period include Margaret Walker's *Jubilee* (1966), Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979), Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987).[27] As well, Alex Haley's *Roots*, published in 1976, became a successful miniseries in 1977. The popularity of *Roots* was comparable to that of *Gone with the Wind* forty years earlier. The book was an immediate bestseller, and records show that approximately 130 million viewers, "more than half the nation," tuned into the miniseries at some point during its run (Huntzicker "Alex Haley's *Roots*" 271). And yet, despite these acclaimed and popular historical narratives that work to decentre whiteness in histories of the slavery-era South during the 1970s and 80s, the influence of *Gone with the Wind* returned in 1991 with a vengeance through the publication and enormous commercial success of Alexandra Ripley's authorized sequel, *Scarlett*.

As this chapter will show, *Gone with the Wind* has exerted considerable influence over the tone and focus of women's historical novels set in the slavery-era South through its narrative continuation in authorized sequels. As I will argue, *Scarlett* signals the start

[27] Another example is Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), which is a re-visioning of *Jane Eyre* through a feminist postcolonial lens, and which might be considered a more politically engaged parallel to the relationship between *Scarlett* and *Gone with the Wind*.

of a "backlash" in women's historical fiction of the South.[28] This backlash—whether conscious or not—consists of historical narratives moving away from complex representations of race relations and black history that had been produced through postcolonial theory in the late twentieth century toward a nostalgic, romantic mode more in line with Mitchell's novel. This movement re-focused the slavery-era historical novel on the plights of the white women who lived through the Civil War upheaval. In recent decades, the most visible narratives about women's experiences in the Civil War-era South—including black women's experiences—are written by white women. Recognizable, best-selling titles abound, including: *The Kitchen House* (Grissom; 2010), *Mrs. Lincoln's Dressmaker* (Chiaverini; 2013), *The House Girl* (Conklin; 2013), and *The Invention of Wings* (Kidd; 2014). On the other hand, historical novels about this period by black women have been much rarer. Again and again, twenty-first-century literary critics write books and articles discussing the postmodern and postcolonial strategies visible in black writers' historical novels of the South written in the 60s, 70s, and 80s, drawing an almost impenetrable line following Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), and never—or, if ever, rarely—acknowledging the decades since. For instance, Ana Nunes's 2011 study, *African American Women Writers' Historical Fiction*, focuses on five slavery-era historical novels by black women writers that she argues challenge the model set by *Gone with the Wind*: Margaret Walker's *Jubilee*, Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* (1975), Sherley Anne Williams's *Dessa Rose* (1986), Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and Phyllis Perry's

[28] The backlash I identify in women's historical novels of the South beginning with *Scarlett* in 1991 coincides with the 1991 publication of Susan Faludi's *Backlash*. In her study, Faludi argues, "the truth is that the last decade has seen a powerful counterassault on women's rights, a backlash, an attempt to retract the handful of small and hard-won victories that the feminist movement did manage to win for women" (9-10). As noted in Ch. 3, the context of late 80s and early 90s backlash is also relevant to *Outlander*, which, like *Scarlett*, was published in 1991. Interestingly, this was also the period in which Philippa Gregory first rose to literary fame with her *Wideacre* series (1987-1990).

Stigmata (1998). However, it is important to note that only one of these five books was published after 1990. Why have there not been more historical novels about the slavery-era South written by black women in the past twenty-five years? This chapter suggests that the answer lies in the publication of *Scarlett* in 1991, its enormous popularity, and the consequent renewed impact of *Gone with the Wind* on the Southern literary tradition in the decades since.

The reclamation and popularization of African American women's history by contemporary white women writers raises several questions about the project of feminist revisionist historiography through popular historical fiction, particularly with regard to voice and authority. The foremost question is, of course, whether women's historical fiction is a whitewashed genre. In addressing this question, this chapter explores *Scarlett* and several bestselling novels that followed in its footsteps over the past twenty years to consider how the influence of *Gone with the Wind* as a model for the Southern woman's historical novel has systematically silenced black women's voices. Ien Ang has argued that to take difference seriously

> would mean a focus on how the gulf between mainstream feminism and 'other' women is constructed and reproduced, and paying attention to, rather [than] turning our gaze away from, those painful moments at which communication seems unavoidably to *fail*. (193)

Consequently, this chapter asks to what extent women's historical novels of the slavery-era South are invested—through the idea of adhering to a literary *tradition* associated with Mitchell's novel—in eliding difference rather than confronting it, resulting in a popular model of feminism that remains overly simplistic and white-centric.

This is not to say that white people cannot or should not write fiction about people of other races. It is, however, an argument that when they do so, white authors should be aware of the privileges—both social and literary—they are afforded through their race. To further this line of argument, I propose that a fruitful way to explore these publishing trends in historical novels of the South is through the application of social ally politics to an examination of these novels' narrative strategies. After all, popular literature often mirrors and, arguably, even influences social politics. In his aptly titled essay, "How White People Can Serve as Allies to People of Color in the Struggle to End Racism," Paul Kivel elucidates the key aspects to the role of an ally. Foremost among these is the act of *listening*. If we apply the principles of ally politics to literature, this becomes *reading*. The act of listening or reading does not mean that one "accept[s] as true everything people of color say [since] [t]here is no one voice in any community." What it does mean is that a white ally works to "give credence" to the experiences communicated by people of colour (128). A second key aspect to the ally role is introspection: "We should look for ways we are acting from assumptions of white power or privilege" (128). Through this process of listening/reading and then reflecting critically, the systems through which racism has so long worked are made visible and, thus, changeable. Most crucially, throughout his short essay Kivel emphasizes that the role a white individual should adopt in being an ally is a *supportive* role, rather than a dominant one. He writes: "People of color will always be on the front lines fighting racism because their lives are at stake" (128). This is where applying ally politics in a literary context becomes intriguing for my purposes in this chapter. In the context of historical fiction set in the nineteenth-century American South, I argue that people of colour have been largely

excluded, both as writers and as characters—and arguably, then, as readers. Instead, white authors and white protagonists take on a dominant role and popularize a history of the American South that tends to avoid exposing the systematized racism at the centre of the Civil War conflict. Therefore, I argue that contemporary historical fiction focusing on American slavery is an example of racial silencing in popular culture. To borrow a phrase suggested by Chandra Mohanty, it is an example of discursive colonization (50-51).

Examples of this discursive colonization abound in both contemporary historical fiction *and* literary criticism, revealing the extent to which literary discourse remains white-centric. For instance, the noted popular culture scholar John Cawelti, in his article "Searching for Scarlett," provides an overview of the Southern literary tradition, including reflections on its prominent themes and writers. While most of his article focuses on white authors, he does include a section in which he pays lip-service to African American writers. He asserts:

> Up to the present African American novelists have created the most powerful portrayals of slavery and racism in fiction. After the great national impact of Arthur [*sic*] Haley's *Roots* in the 1970s, many black writers, like Toni Morrison, Leon Forrest, and Charles Johnson, published major fictional recreations of slavery and its aftermath. (98-99)

Of course, Cawelti's attempt to assure readers of his awareness of black authors would work better if he hadn't gotten *Alex* Haley's name completely wrong. I suggest that it is enormously significant that Cawelti's article made it through the many stages of peer review and copy-editing without anyone noticing that the name of the author whose novel produced such "great national impact" was recorded incorrectly. Furthermore, in his 2008

book *Calls and Responses: The American Novel of Slavery Since* Gone with the Wind, Tim Ryan goes so far as to suggest that there is not enough white-authored historical fiction of the American South. Noting the prominence of black-authored historical novels of slavery from the late sixties to the late eighties, Ryan writes:

> After more than twenty-five years of such achievements by African American authors, however, the omission of white novelists from the cultural conversation about slavery in the United States has become a limitation. (150)

While I agree that white authors should not be excluded from writing slavery-era historical narratives, my chapter suggests that the problem we see in the contemporary era is not that white authors have been omitted from this discourse, but rather that they have tended to write novels that refuse to deal seriously and thoughtfully with the history of American slavery. The history of Southern literature—and, indeed, literature of the historical South—has been colonized by white discourse. It remains largely dominated by white authors and white critics.

It does not escape my notice that it is somewhat problematic that I, a white scholar, am writing this. However, I do so in an attempt to disrupt the white-centric discourse, rather than add to it. I am mindful of the Combahee River Collective's 1977 reproach of "how little effort white women have made to understand and combat their racism" and their assertion that "eliminating racism in the white women's movement is by definition work for white women to do, but we will continue to speak to and demand accountability on this issue" (170). In order to render the white-centric hold that *Gone with the Wind* and its extended narrative world exert on popular women's historical fiction of the slavery-era South, this chapter examines several popular texts from the past

twenty-five years in chronological order. I begin with an examination of the way *Scarlett* mirrored Mitchell's white-focused romanticization of the plantation and the southern belle to great commercial success. I then move to consider the challenge to the white southern belle posed by Alice Randall's *The Wind Done Gone* in 2001. I consider the way prominent black-authored slavery-era historical narratives in the early 2000s like *Cane River* (2001) and *The Book of Negroes* (2007) challenged the resurgence of the *Gone with the Wind* mythos and the white-centred representations it perpetuates. Then my examination turns to consider the way novels like *The Kitchen House* (2010), *The House Girl* (2013), and *Ruth's Journey* (2014) work to re-establish the *Gone with the Wind* tradition of romanticizing master-slave relations and focusing on white heroines. Finally, I conclude by considering *The Invention of Wings* (2014) as a novel that crystallizes both the necessity and the challenges of white women acting as allies of black women in both social *and* narrative terms. My textual examination in this chapter suggests that the novels that are most popular are often those that demonstrate poor representations of African American characters, particularly women. That is to say, the most widely read narratives of the slavery era remain those that are focused on white protagonists and white struggles. If we accept the premise that contemporary female-focused historical novels are invested in feminist politics, then this chapter asks: what does it mean to be a feminist ally to women of colour through historical narrative?

Scarlett (1991): Re-invigorating The Winds of Tradition

If Scarlett's poor treatment of people of colour—particularly Prissy—during the course of *Gone with the Wind* is one of the primary detractions from her status as a

heroine for contemporary readers, it is nevertheless something that reappears in the 1991 sequel *Scarlett*. Ripley's representation of Scarlett is unaffected by the decades of Civil Rights, postcolonial theory, and race-focused literary criticism of the late twentieth century. Indeed, Scarlett re-emerges over fifty years after her literary debut demonstrating the same verbal and physical abuse of her black servants that characterized Mitchell's novel. [29] In *Scarlett*'s opening chapter, she threatens her maid Pansy: "If you make me miss my train, I'll take a strap to you" (8). Still, Ripley works quickly to soften Scarlett's threat of violence through the implication that it is an *empty* threat: "She couldn't do it, Pansy knew she couldn't do it. The slavery days were over. Miss Scarlett didn't own her, she could quit any time she wanted to" (8). By emphasizing Pansy's supposed agency in the situation, Ripley attempts to have her cake and eat it too. That is to say, she is faithful to Mitchell's Scarlett while also revealing her awareness that readers in 1936 received the character in a social context markedly different from that of readers in 1991. Much like critics who praise *Scarlett* and *Gone with the Wind* often focus on Scarlett's feminist qualities and deliberately exclude considerations of racism in the text, Scarlett herself exemplifies a kind of feminism that is exclusive to white women. As the scene in the train station continues, "she looked around the car for Pansy and her valises. I'll skin that girl alive if she's wandered off to another car. Oh, if only a lady didn't have to have a companion every single time she put her foot outside her own house" (10). Here, Scarlett expresses racist subordination directly alongside her

[29] To make a small defense of Ripley's characterization, the contract to write this long-awaited sequel involved a great number of restrictions and requirements regarding the representation of Mitchell's characters. A few years after the publication of *Scarlett*, when the estate was negotiating with Southern author Pat Conroy to write another sequel, Conroy joked about the restrictions the estate wanted to place against topics like miscegenation or homosexuality. He quipped that his sequel would begin: "After they made love, Rhett turned to Ashley Wilkes and said, 'Ashley, have I ever told you that my grandmother was black?'"(Rich, M.).

lamentation of her own subordinate treatment as a female, yet she does not recognize the parallels between the two.

Ripley's solution to the problem of being faithful to Mitchell's Scarlett while being aware of the racial problems in *Gone with the Wind* is to erase blackness from the text entirely—a feat she works toward through the first half of the novel, culminating in Scarlett's transplantation from Georgia to Ireland.[30] When Scarlett returns to Tara in the second chapter of *Scarlett,* she finds Mammy on her deathbed, delirious and lost in memory. Ripley takes the opportunity to emphasize that Mammy was a happy slave when Scarlett is told, "She's back in Savannah taking care of your mother when she was a little girl. Those were happy times for her. She was young; she was strong; she wasn't in pain" (14). Mammy is, in both Mitchell's and Ripley's novels, an exception to the norms of slavery. This is conveyed in *Scarlett* when Mammy is buried next to Ellen "and not in the slaves' burial plot" (29). Mammy dies, and Scarlett leaves Tara with only one black servant, Pansy. Pansy accompanies Scarlett as she travels first to Atlanta, then to Charleston, and later to Savannah, before being dismissed from her duties as a lady's maid when Scarlett leaves America.

As Ripley works to erase racial tensions from the narrative, she emphasizes Scarlett's proto-feminist qualities:

> Scarlett wished—not for the first time—that taking a drink was not a pleasure from which automatically excluded…She would have enjoyed talking with the men instead of being exiled to the other side of the room for women's talk of

[30] Ripley's erasure of blackness is also noted by Cawelti p.91-2 (though he is writing of the TV adaptation), and by McPherson, p.527.

> babies and household management. She had never understood or accepted the traditional segregation of the sexes" (41).

The use of the word "segregation" in particular evokes racial tensions that are almost completely absent from the narrative. Instead, segregation takes on meaning only in this gendered context. It is in Savannah, when Scarlett connects with her O'Hara relatives, that she begins to loosen her ties with Pansy. This process, too, is coded in terms of Scarlett's increasing feminist independence rather than an increasing awareness of racist social systems. A turning point occurs when Scarlett connects with her distant O'Hara relatives in Savannah, and they advise her to leave Pansy behind when she visits them since "she'd feel out of place with us. We don't have any servants" (344). Thinking about possibly staying with the O'Haras, Scarlett thinks, "she couldn't get dressed without Pansy to lace her stays and fix her hair" (384). As the narrative progresses, the issue of keeping Pansy as a servant becomes tied to feminist concerns rather than racial ones. Scarlett realizes that the sumptuary conventions of traditional femininity are what make a lady's maid necessary. Once she stops wearing a corset, she can live more independently. In chapter 43, near the half-way point of the novel, Scarlett sends Pansy back to Atlanta. Her cousin Kathleen will be her new lady's maid (408). With this plot point, Ripley removes black people from the narrative almost entirely. Mammy is dead, Pansy is gone, and Scarlett's story shifts geographically to Ireland where she is surrounded by white people.

The scarcity of black Irish people is established to comic effect when Scarlett observes black people at the St. Patrick's Day parade just before leaving Savannah. Seeing that she is puzzled, her cousin Jamie quips, "Didn't I tell you everyone is Irish

today?" (428). Tara McPherson has suggested that Ripley's strategy of transplanting Scarlett from Georgia to Ireland "become not only a way to avoid representing blackness and slavery but also an attempt, in an era which 'celebrates' multiculturalism, to discern the heritage of whiteness" (530). Similarly, Geraldine Higgins has argued that Irishness in *Gone with the Wind* and its sequels functions to position Scarlett and the O'Haras as "racially ambiguous" (42), and that Irishness "inflect[s] the racial binaries of blackness and whiteness" (46). However, I remain suspicious of such claims since they have, at their centre, a desire to keep a focus on whiteness. No matter the reasons that might be given, there is simply no denying that *Scarlett* perpetuates a trend of erasing blackness in mainstream historical fiction.

While there is very little sympathy for former slaves, Ripley spends a great deal of the second half of the novel building sympathy for the Irish and the oppressions they suffer under the English. Although the reading audience for *Gone with the Wind* and *Scarlett* is by no means confined to the United States, the novels are based in an American historical context and written by American authors. As such, the shift from Georgia to Ireland in *Scarlett* operates as an additional level of exoticism for American readers through not only time, but also geographic distance. This sense of distance and unfamiliarity, however, also works to obscure similarities between the English oppression of Irish people and culture and the white American oppression of people and cultures of African origin. That neither Ripley nor Scarlett ever make the connection between Irish subordination under the English and African American subordination under white rule reveals the extent to which the narrative is white-centered and blind to the racism in

America. Ripley's prose is imbued with great feeling when she describes the plight of the Irish, as when the boat that carries Scarlett and her cousins nears the coast:

> Colum saw Ireland ahead and his heart swelled with love for her and pain for her sufferings. As he did many times every day, he renewed his vow to destroy the oppressors of his country and to restore her to her own people. (447)

Colum later appeals to Scarlett for her support of the Fenian cause by comparing the Irish plight to that of white Southerners. He urges her to "remember your South, with the boots of the conqueror upon her, and think of Ireland, her beauty and her life's blood in the murdering hands of the enemy. They stole our language from us" (611). Yet what is ironic in this narrative attempt to align white Southerners and white Irish as victims of oppression is the fact that Southern slave-owners largely stripped their slaves of their native languages, religions, and cultural practices. Thus, although oppression becomes a prominent subplot in the second half of the novel, it is explicitly *white* oppression that is the focus.

Indeed, the whiteness of Ireland is firmly established from Scarlett's first moments in the country: "When Colum escorted her down the gangplank she realized that she had entered *a completely different world*. The docks were busy…But the men were all white" (447; emphasis mine). As Scarlett herself later describes the Irish: "I don't think they've ever heard of dark skin, much less seen any" (482). One of the first moments of narrative sympathy for the oppressed Irish occurs when Scarlett sees an Irish woman being coldly evicted by English soldiers. Her cousin explains her shock by suggesting she must be unfamiliar with such things, being from America. But Scarlett reflects silently that "she knew worse, much worse" (465). This is one of the only

gestures to the cruel treatment of slaves on plantations, and it is extremely vague. Moreover, Scarlett associates herself with the evicted woman rather than the English soldiers: "Scarlett couldn't think of anything to say. She'd had no idea things like that could happen. It was so mean. The Yankees were worse, but that had been war" (466). Her identification with the oppressed woman reveals the novel's characterization of Scarlett and, indeed, the South as victim rather than perpetrator of cruelties. Much later, when she witnesses a flogging in Ireland, Scarlett (and Ripley) once more fails to make the connection between the treatment of the Irish by the English and the treatment of blacks under white Southerners. "Scarlett didn't want to see some poor devil of a soldier being whipped. She had an idea that flogging was punishment in the military" (720). This description makes it sound as though she has never witnessed a flogging before, and is strangely at odds with her earlier threats to whip and strap Pansy.

Ultimately, the Irish context that Ripley brings to bear upon Scarlett feeds back into the white-centric bootstraps myth of American, and in this case, Southern, heritage. As her cousin Colum says, "It was a noble dream your father had to build a new Tara in this new world of America" (402). To return to Cawelti's white-focused article "Searching for Scarlett," the bootstraps myth is revealed to be part of what makes Tara and Gerald O'Hara such memorable icons of Southern fiction. In language that parallels that of the fictional Colum O'Hara in *Scarlett,* the very real Cawelti writes of how the culture and tradition of the South "was founded by a horde of restless seekers who left their homeplaces behind them in pursuit of dreams of wealth and grandeur" (99). He goes on to describe these individuals in heroic terms, "driven by a restlessness and desperation of spirit which urged them on to success or destruction," and notes that their "ethos of

desperation and extremity…certainly influenced the Confederate willingness to risk everything by seceding" (100). It is worth noting that this description of restless and daring white immigrants who built the South, like the fictional Gerald O'Hara, follows Cawelti's brief overview of African American literary contributions. It is deeply ironic and significant that he goes from gesturing to the representations of slaves—one might say, unwilling immigrants—to a nostalgic and exalted account of representations of the immigrant white men and women who enslaved them. Lost in Cawelti's account, as in Mitchell's and Ripley's representations of Gerald O'Hara and his confederates, is an account of the way these white immigrants built their new world through the oppression of another race. To include those details would be to detract from the heroism of the men who, as the saying goes, pulled themselves up by their own bootstraps.

In *Scarlett*, Ripley emphasizes Scarlett's connection to her father and her O'Hara ancestry even more strongly than Mitchell does in the original novel. As Scarlett prepares to reconnect with her Irish roots, she is described in connection to her father, the great frontiersman of the American South:

> Scarlett's essential self was as much her heritage from her father as was her name. She was impetuous, strong-willed, and had the same coarse, forthright vitality and courage that had carried him across the dangerous waters of the Atlantic and to the pinnacle of his dreams—master of a great plantation and husband to a great lady. (398)

Ripley is undaunted by critics of *Gone with the Wind* who objected to the novel's romanticization of plantation life. Her Scarlett upholds the heroism of Gerald O'Hara and pines for the simple beauty of pre-war Tara. She rejects criticisms of the South, asserting

the harmony with which white and black worked side by side to build the South: "Cruel slave owners, indeed! Sold down the river, my foot! We loved our darkies just like family, and some of them owned us more than we owned them" (632). At a later point, she dreamily remembers how "the field hands would sing when they hoed, you could hear the music in the distance, kind of hanging there in the air" (740). This story of the noble, adventurous, caring, and victimized white Southerner is thus at the centre of *Scarlett* much as it was in *Gone with the Wind*. And while readers, critics, and theorists have defended Margaret Mitchell through the argument that her education predisposed her to certain racist views of history, no such defence seems possible for Ripley and others who, as we shall see, followed in Mitchell's footsteps in the contemporary period.

Strained Sisterhood: Scarlett's Black Sister in *The Wind Done Gone* (2001)

In between the commercially successful and authorized *Scarlett* (1991) and the next authorized pseudo-sequel, *Rhett Butler's People* (2007), the Stephens Mitchell Trust faced a challenge to the harmony of the *Gone with the Wind* narrative world when Alice Randall published *The Wind Done Gone* (2001). Randall, a black woman writer, recreates the world of *Gone with the Wind*, but from the perspective of a character of her own invention: Scarlett O'Hara's black half-sister, Cynara. *The Wind Done Gone* is perhaps the most talked about black-authored historical novel of the twenty-first century due to the media attention garnered when the Stephens Mitchell Trust sued Randall and her publisher for copyright infringement. Numerous critics have commented on the significance of Randall's book and of the lawsuit itself, and the questions raised about the relationship between history, literature, and popular culture. Thomas Haddox writes that

"the issues it [the trial] foregrounded extend far beyond the realm of intellectual property law," noting that it called into question "the definition of history" and "the use of fiction as a vehicle for historical inquiry" (120). Similarly, Ana Nunes has argued that the hostile response to Randall's text "reveals our resistance as a culture to challenge beliefs about U.S. history that continue to reinscribe racism and racial stereotypes" (159). Julie Nerad describes the Mitchell estate as "the guardians of the myth" whose mission it is to protect Mitchell's "articulation of history" (155). Perhaps Sharon Talley sums it up best when she says, "more than just a Civil War novel, *The Wind Done Gone* is a novel *about* Civil War novels" (321).[31] Randall's novel raises questions about how the slavery-era South is remembered in historical fiction, and about who gets to write that history. Through the invention of the character Cynara, Randall interrogates sisterhood—both biological and ideological—and she foregrounds the impact that the idolization of Scarlett O'Hara has on black women, and by extension the impact *Gone with the Wind* has had on black women's historical fiction.

Though many of the events of *The Wind Done Gone* mirror those of *Gone with the Wind*, the use of Cynara as the focalizer of Randall's text reveals the extent to which the race of a narrative's point-of-view character can shape the narrative as a whole—particularly a historical narrative of the slavery-era South. Cynara's narration frequently highlights the absence of blackness in *Gone with the Wind* and Mitchell's light, unrealistic treatment of slavery. Cynara's perspective foregrounds the pain that Mitchell elides in her representation of slaves. Far from Mitchell's Mammy who is "devoted to her

[31] Haddox goes so far as to argue that this novel is written for academics, rather than the general public. He points to Randall's extensive use of allusions that suggest "an intended reader savvy enough to recognize them" (128).

last drop of blood to the O'Haras," (Mitchell 23), Cynara feels the oppression of enslavement and *forced* devotion when she asserts:

> It's a pissed bed on a cold night to read words on paper saying your name and a price, to read the letters that say you are owned, or to read words that say this one or that one will pay so much for you to be recaptured. (35)

Her narration frequently points out the ways in which white characters do not fully understand black characters, as when Dreamy Gentleman [Ashley Wilkes] gives Mammy's eulogy: "He believed her to be a loving beast of burden without sex or resentment. He knew nothing of her at all" (53). Similarly, she notes, "there's something sly and intelligent about Miss Priss [Prissy], but the whites don't see it" (62). While keeping Mammy's weight and stature true to Mitchell's description, Cynara casts Mammy's physique in a new light by referring to her "*protective* flesh" (101; emphasis mine), subtly suggesting a female slave's need for protection from a myriad of abuses that are left out of *Gone with the Wind*. This suggestion of violations against Mammy's body is, of course, compounded by the fact that Cynara is Mammy's daughter, fathered by Planter [Gerald O'Hara]. Randall also works to complicate the relationship between Scarlett and Mammy in Mitchell's text, as when Cynara notes how Other [Scarlett] really does not understand Mammy:

> I could see in Other's face the first moment it came to her the possibility that Mammy did for her not because she wanted to, but because she had to. Maybe Mammy loved her and maybe Mammy didn't. Slavery made it impossible for Other to know. (103)

The naming of the Scarlett character "Other," as well, is part of Randall's project to alter the perspective through which readers engage with the *Gone with the Wind* narrative world, since the term "other" is typically used to describe a non-white individual or entity, particularly in post-colonial discourse. The novel ends with Cynara writing: "The wind done gone, the wind done gone, the wind done gone and blown my bones away" (206), which may be read as an acknowledgement of the lost and forgotten bodies of black people, both in history and in fiction.

As Other's biological sister,[32] Cynara is also the mechanism through which the novel considers what sisterhood means, not only biologically but also in terms of feminism. Cynara notes changes in post-war society, referring to the work of "white women who want to improve the lot of what they are always calling 'our children'" (8). Here she highlights the problem of white women—including first-wave feminists and abolitionists—infantilizing black people, using the rhetoric of motherhood to emphasize that they occupy a position of superior power in the social hierarchy. Randall's narrative implicitly references black feminist theories regarding the way "the major systems of oppression are interlocking" (Combahee 164), a concept Kimberle Crenshaw refers to as "intersectionality." Intersectionality describes the ways that factors like race, gender, class, and sexuality combine to create more complex oppressions for people who are marginalized in more than one category.[33] In *The Wind Done Gone*, intersectionality manifests through Cynara's recognition that, though they are both oppressed as females,

[32] Planter [Gerald O'Hara] is the father of both Other [Scarlett] and Cynara. Other's mother is E. [Ellen O'Hara] while Cynara's mother is Mammy.

[33] Although I would argue that the most popular women's historical novels focus on middle- or upper-class women, historical novels about working class women like female servants can be bestsellers, for example: *Alias Grace* (Atwood; 1996), *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (Chevalier; 1999), and *Year of Wonders* (Brooks; 2002). However, the female servants in popular historical novels of working class women are almost always white, thereby limiting the representation of intersectionality and eliding issues of race.

she has experienced further and more complex oppression than her white half-sister. As the plot progresses, Cynara becomes increasingly obsessed with the differences and similarities between her sister and herself, as when she discovers that Other is also descended from a negro line through her mother's ancestry. This discovery opens up new questions for Cynara about what, if anything, truly separates her from her half-sister, and by extension, why they have been treated so differently by their families, by R. [Rhett], and by society at large: "If she was a nigger like me but got the change to live white, it's too much to bear" (133). A meeting with Beauty [Belle Watling] later in the text prompts Cynara to reflect: "One way of looking at it, all women are niggers. For sure, every woman I ever knew was a nigger – whether she knew it or not" (177). Yet, despite this statement aligning gender-based oppression with race-based oppression, Cynara's experiences and ruminations throughout the novel reflect the fact that "women" are not a homogenous category of beings, nor are they treated as such socially. Thus, Randall's re-framing of the *Gone with the Wind* narrative through the introduction of Scarlett's black half-sister, combined with the invention of Scarlett's own black ancestry, challenges readers on the inclusivity of their (literary) feminist sisterhood. As Ana Nunes points out, the lawsuit against Randall suggests that there are powerful factions of the literary world to whom "Scarlett O'Hara—*the* Scarlett O'Hara—historical icon of *white* womanhood—simply cannot be either *black* or dead" (171).

Although her sisterhood with Other is fraught with tensions, Cynara is utterly obsessed with her half-sister, and this obsession is also part of Randall's metatextual critique of Mitchell's novel. It is through Cynara's obsession with Other that Randall illustrates the extent to which Scarlett O'Hara has remained at the centre of Civil-war-era

historical narratives. When R. [Rhett] proposes to Cynara with a gold and green ring, she reflects: "I can't help liking it, because it looks like something Other would have liked" (89). Later, she notes that while others divide time as "before the war and after the war," she divides time according to Other's closeness with Mammy, as "when Other still lived under my mother's skirts and when she didn't" (99). Thus, Cynara only makes sense of her own life by comparing it to Other's. Half way through the novel (p. 95), Other dies—a narrative move that might suggest Randall's desire to move the story more fully onto Cynara, or perhaps her response to Alexandra Ripley's killing of Mammy at the start of *Scarlett*. However, Other is always on Cynara's mind— and R.'s too—keeping her at the centre of the story even after she is dead. In fact, by the end of the novel, Cynara shows signs of *becoming* her sister when she starts to wear Other's clothes (195). If we read Cynara as Randall's representation of an African American "everywoman" entering and re-framing the text of *Gone with the Wind*, then it seems Randall is commenting on the way Scarlett O'Hara has become an omnipresence even to individuals who despise her for the erasure and romanticization she represents. Some critics of Randall's novel have argued that the novel's potential for disrupting *Gone with the Wind* is hindered by moments where it seems to uphold elements from Mitchell's novel. For instance, Thomas Haddox suggests it is problematic that Garlic [Pork] and Pallas [Mammy] "are just as devoted to the power, prestige, and sacredness of Cotton Farm as Planter and Other ever were" (130). Indeed, the novel is a parody, as signalled by its subtitle, and parody, in Linda Hutcheon's view, "both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies" (101). Given the way I have suggested Randall uses Cynara's obsession with Other to comment on the way Scarlett O'Hara is an obsession even to readers who view her with hostility, I

suggest that these instances of nostalgia in *The Wind Done Gone*—through the parallels it keeps with *Gone with the Wind*—work in the same way: to suggest that even Randall is not immune to the attraction of the characters and world of Mitchell's novel. By paying homage to Mitchell's text even as she criticizes it, Randall suggests the impact *Gone with the Wind* has had on black authors who want to re-frame the South in historical fiction. Can one ever get away from the ubiquitous and beloved Scarlett O'Hara?

Randall's novel and the public debates about African American literary representation that accompanied its publication succeeded in briefly compromising—or at least complicating—the monopoly on popular slavery-era narratives that *Gone with the Wind* and *Scarlett* had held from about 1986, with the book's reissue for its 50th anniversary, into the nineties with the publication of *Scarlett* and its adaptation into a 1994 miniseries. Readers in the first decade of the twenty-first century saw a few popular titles of female-focused slavery-era historical novels written by black authors that posed challenges to the representations of happy slaves, benevolent masters and mistresses, and white belle heroines, most notably *Cane River* (2001) and *The Book of Negroes* (2007).[34] In these novels, as in Randall's, questions of sisterhood and how a white woman may be an ally to women of colour are foregrounded.

Tenuous Allies in *Cane River* (2001)

Around the same time as Randall's *The Wind Done Gone* was raising questions about "authorized" histories and historical fictions of the slavery-era South, Lalita

[34] Two other women's slavery-era historical novels by black writers are Connie Briscoe's *A Long Way From Home* (1999) and Dolen Perkins-Valdez's *Wench* (2010). However, neither attained the popularity that *Cane River* and *The Book of Negroes* experienced. Briscoe's novel has not been re-issued since its paperback release in 2000. Still, as two of only a few black-authored historical novels of the slavery-era South published in the contemporary period, they are worth mentioning.

Tademy's *Cane River* appeared. The novel grew out of Tademy's research into her matrilineal genealogy and became a three-part narrative fictionalizing three of her female ancestors: her great-great-great grandmother, Suzette (b. 1825), great-great grandmother, Philomene (b. 1841), and great-grandmother, Emily (b.1861). The novel is set primarily in the antebellum period, representing plantation life from the perspectives of these women. In her introduction, Tademy overtly juxtaposes her novel to *Gone with the Wind* twice, first noting that she "discovered that most plantations were not like the sprawling expanses of Tara" (ix) and later noting that African American women "were not Mammy or Jezebel or Topsy, the slave images made safe and familiar in *Gone with the Wind* tradition" (x-xi). Through these remarks, Tademy situates *Cane River* as a narrative that rebels against the literary tradition associated with Mitchell's novel, instead aiming to present black women's lives in a more nuanced and realistic manner. The novel captured a mass readership, in part due to its promotion through Oprah's Book Club. Discussing the presence of several African American writers' texts as selected reads, Kimberly Chabot Davis has argued that Oprah's Book Club,[35] which caters to the talk show's predominantly white female audience, "raises important questions about the political consequences of cross-racial sympathy" (142). Davis' argument is that when white readers read African American literature, there is the potential for "a radically destabilizing empathy among white audiences, an emotional experience that could encourage antiracist coalitions by fostering a self-reflective alienation from white privilege" (142). Not only is *Cane River* part of this reading club that encourages cross-

[35] Davis notes that she is speaking of the first incarnation of Oprah's Book Club, which ran from 1996-2002 (142). The project saw a brief resurgence in 2012 as "Oprah's Book Club 2.0." It is worth noting that *The Invention of Wings*, the final text examined in this chapter, was one of the books promoted in "Oprah's Book Club 2.0."

racial empathy through narrative, its own story foregrounds questions of cross-racial female relationships in an antebellum context. Through the relationship between Suzette, her daughter Philomene, and their white mistress Oreline, Tademy considers how white and black women are aligned as an oppressed sex, but also how their racial differences impact their experiences of oppression. In Oreline, the representative Southern belle, Tademy illustrates the ways white women extended charity and sympathy toward their black slaves, but also considers the problematic limits of their empathy and solidarity with black women.

In some ways, the novel shows white and black women aligned as allies in the oppression of their sex. Oreline is dependent on her uncle for all that she has, but she passes down charity to her black maid, Suzette. Readers are told that "every last item of Suzette's clothing from undershift to leggings and shoes had first belonged to her mam'zelle" (4). Furthermore, on Oreline's birthday, Suzette gleefully tells her mother that "Mam'zelle promised to leave some of everything on her plate for me tonight since it is almost my birthday, too" (6). In the second part of the novel, Tademy even uses the word "ally" to describe Oreline's relationship to Suzette and Philomene (153). At this point Oreline is a widow, and she takes in Suzette and Philomene to live with her. The situation echoes that of Scarlett O'Hara returning to Tara after the war and working alongside the remaining former slaves to grow crops. Thus, at times in *Cane River*, white women and female slaves are aligned in their dependence on white men and their disenfranchisement in terms of economics and the law. The shrewd Philomene describes the way Oreline is not so different from the black women she helps, noting: "She can appeal to a husband, but she is in the spider's web along with the rest of us...Waiting for

the spider to get home" (179). Through Oreline's closeness with Suzette and later with Philomene throughout the antebellum period, Tademy suggests a familial bond similar to that which Scarlett O'Hara describes when she says, "we loved our darkies just like family" (Ripley 632).

However, like Scarlett's "love" for her "darkies," Oreline's charity never challenges the social hierarchy or her position of privilege as a white woman. In fact, Oreline refuses to act as an ally to Suzette and Philomene when it would cost her or negatively impact her position. For instance, she refuses to teach Suzette to read, referring to the illegality of the act (13). Moreover, it becomes increasingly clear that Oreline accepts the ideology of the "white man's burden," which is upheld by her uncle and aunt, the owners of the plantation, and that this is what drives her charity rather than empathy. When Suzette becomes pregnant after being repeatedly raped by a white friend of her master, she is reprimanded by Oreline, who assumes Suzette is to blame and asks, "what did you do to make him come to you?" (41). Furthermore, Oreline is enraged that Suzette has kept secrets from her, and threatens her with the only power she has: the power to take away her charity. She tells her: "Don't think for a minute that now that you've been found out you can come to me for anything" (42). Oreline is aware that her position as a white woman is higher in the social hierarchy than Suzette's as a black woman, and although she uses this privilege to provide some aid to Suzette, she does not want to lose her privilege or to challenge the racist social hierarchy. Later, when Suzette tries to keep her own family together by asking if Oreline can request that her husband buy "all of us together" (72), Oreline responds: "I can make no promises, Suzette, but I will try. I don't think you appreciate how much I've done for you already" (73). After

Oreline's husband dies, Oreline sells Philomene's husband. When the outraged Philomene confronts her mistress, Oreline emphasizes the position her race affords her: "You had better watch your tongue...you have been with me a long time, you and your mother both, but do not forget yourself to me" (161). After the Civil War, when Oreline no longer holds the power of ownership over Suzette and Philomene, she tries to hold power over them by casting her charity as a debt: "How can you think to leave me now? After all I've done for you and your family?...Your life could have been very cruel indeed if not for me" (215). As they physically part ways, the different experiences Oreline and Philomene have had due to their racial differences are described in the narrative in terms of psychological and emotional distance, as "putting the two women out of easy reach of one another" (217). Because Tademy's narrative is focalized through black women protagonists rather than through the white Southern belle, the shortcomings of Oreline's charitable actions and the persistence of racist ideologies in her outlook are rendered more visible. Ultimately, the narrative of Oreline and her relationship with Suzette and Philomene explores the differences between charity and empathy, between doing a favour and being an ally. The former is a temporary action, something one gives or does; the latter is a sustained way of thinking and behaving.

Allies and Narrative Authority in *The Book of Negroes* (2007)[36]

Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* appeared a few years after *The Wind Done Gone* and *Cane River*, and enacted a similar historical revisioning that put a black woman at the centre of its narrative. This "relocation" of African American women "from the

[36] Hill is a male author, but his novel is included because it conforms to the key features of "the woman's historical novel." It is female-focused, and places a woman's intimate personal history against the macro-backdrop of the American slave trade era.

periphery to the centre" is a post-colonial and politically charged narrative choice (Oduwobi et al. 385). Moreover, like Alex Haley's *Roots*, *The Book of Negroes* first locates its protagonist in Africa, giving a broader perspective on the slave trade than plantation novels that never delve into how the slaves came to be in the South. In first person retrospective narration, Aminata Diallo tells the story of her abduction from her home in Africa, her enslavement in the American South, her quest for freedom in New York and Nova Scotia, her attempt to return to Africa, and her final move to England where she takes up work among abolitionists. The novel is metahistorical and metatextual through its framed narrative, which foregrounds the importance that slaves and former slaves like Aminata place on the act of telling one's own story. If we read this metatextual narrative through the lens of *Gone with the Wind*'s legacy of whitewashed slavery-era historical fiction, *The Book of Negroes* operates as a counter-narrative, insisting that black perspectives matter—in history, and also in fiction. Reflecting the importance of black-authored narratives of black history, Clement Virgo, the director of the miniseries adaptation of Hill's novel, wrote an essay in *Maclean's* in which he emphasized the rarity of *The Book of Negroes* and its popularity. He writes:

> In Canada, African-Canadian culture is still trying to find a foothold in our collective history. We didn't have a high-profile black Canadian novel that captured the imagination of Canadians until Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* was published in 2007. (n.pag)

On the level of plot, Hill also engages in a nuanced and critical reflection on ally politics, representing various kinds of white individuals who act toward Aminata in ways that they consider helpful, but which also demonstrate their unwillingness to listen (or read), or to

reflect on their own positions of privilege. There are three major moments that the text considers white allies and the problem of words without deeds: through Aminata's second master Solomon Lindo, through the British Loyalists, and through the English abolitionists.

Aminata's first master in America, Robinson Appleby, is a cruel man who rapes her, tries to prevent her from having a relationship with the black man she falls in love with, and later sells her infant son away from her. Her second master, however, presents himself as an ally to her. When she is bought from Appleby by Solomon Lindo, Aminata asks whether he has other slaves. Lindo tells her that "my wife and I prefer to term *servant*" (187). He tells her that in his home, "you will find none of the barbarism of St. Helena Island" (187). Yet despite his rhetorical distancing from slavery, the fact is that he still actively participates in the buying and selling of human beings, and in the administration of the indigo trade. He offers her the opportunity to earn a small amount of money contracting herself out as a midwife, and he teaches her to read "even more than you can read now" (199). At one point, Lindo tells Aminata that they are socially aligned because he is a Jew: "You and I are both outsiders" (188). However, unlike *Scarlett*, *The Kitchen House*, and other novels where white people's struggles are likened to those of black slaves, *The Book of Negroes* takes pains to emphasize the shallowness of Lindo's claim that his position in society is like Aminata's. When he tells her that he purchased her because "I saw the intelligence in your eyes and I wanted to lift you up" (201), he indicates that he sees himself as a saviour, which is something different from an ally. Aminata is quick to undercut the idea of Lindo as either saviour or ally, asking, "then why, I wondered, didn't he set me free?" (202). As the narrative progresses, Hill

emphasizes the problems in the parallel that Solomon Lindo draws between white people who experience social marginalization and black people who are enslaved and disenfranchised. As Aminata notes, "He had told me that Jews and Africans could understand each other because we were both outsiders, but even though the man preferred the term *servant* to *slave*, he owned me and he owned Dolly and now he owned Dolly's baby boy" (209). Solomon Lindo speaks the language of a helper, but acts as a man with a great deal of privilege that he is unwilling to question or jeopardize. Aminata eventually runs away from Lindo, but when she tries to emigrate to Canada years later, she is jailed and finds that her former master, Appleby, has made a claim on her. In his last appearance in the novel, Solomon Lindo comes forward to nullify Robinson's claim, since he was Aminata's most recent owner. Though she is grateful for his help preventing Appleby from taking her back to St. Helena Island, she is still wary of Lindo, reflecting: "I could see that Solomon Lindo was a better class of man than Robinson Appleby. But he was tainted by the very world in which he lived, and from which he too richly profited. I did not want to hate him, but neither could I forgive him" (311).

A similar exploration of the dubious motivations of white allies occurs when Aminata witnesses the hostilities between American and British people leading to the American Revolution. Aminata becomes frustrated by white men's complaints: "*Liberty to the Americans. Down with slavery*. They weren't talking about the slavery I knew or the liberty I wanted, and it all seemed ludicrous to me" (228). Hill foregrounds the irony in American and British aversions to being enslaved when both nations actively participated in the enslaving of Africans. Thus, the novel highlights for readers the irony inherent in statements like: "We shall be free of the British and their taxes. Never again

shall we be slaves" (252). In Canvas Town in New York, after she has run away from Solomon Lindo, Aminata reads to other blacks from Thomas Paine's *Common Sense,* and notes that "They thought it absurd for any white man in the Thirteen Colonies to be complaining of slavery at the hands of the British" (280). She similarly reflects on the words of "Rule Britannia": *Rule, Britannia! Britannia, rule the waves / Britons never never never shall be slaves...*" (236; 237; 238). When it becomes known that Aminata is socially connected in the black community and that she is literate, the British army enlists her help to write "The Book of Negroes," telling her:

> You will spread the word among your people. You will help us register them. In due time, you will collect names, ages, and how they came to serve the British.
>
> We can only help those who have been behind British lines for a year. (286)

But even this British aid is shown to be quite superficial when Aminata realizes that "the British were indeed sending some fugitives to freedom, but were also allowing white Loyalists to bring along slaves" (294). As with Solomon Lindo, the British soldiers are unwilling to interrogate the discrepancies between their words and their actions; though they claim to want to help, they are unwilling to give up their positions as masters and controllers.

The third major group of white "allies" that Aminata encounters are the English abolitionists with whom she works during the framing sections of the novel. As she begins her narrative, Aminata describes the abolitionists who hang about her in London: "Big-whiskered, wide-bellied, bald-headed men boycotting sugar but smelling of tobacco and burning candle after candle as they plot deep into the night" (2). In this description, she calls attention to the wealth and position of these men, pointing to their full stomachs

and plentiful candles, and also to the irony of their use of tobacco—a product with strong ties to slave labour. Though these men are meant to be her allies, Aminata notes that, "at times, I still panic when surrounded by big white men with a purpose. When they swell around me to ask questions, I remember the hot iron smoking above my breast" (6). Telling her story is important not only to Aminata's sense of self, but also to the project of eradicating slavery and combating racism. Near the end of the novel, as her journey brings her closer to the English abolitionists, Aminata tells a high-ranking white man in a British fort in Africa: "You have no idea what I have lived through...You have no idea what they endure, if they will even survive in the ships, no idea of the thousands of humiliations and horrors waiting at their destinations." He replies, "Some things are better not to think about." She says, "Tell that to your captives" (422). This wilful blindness of white people is a recurring feature of the narrative, even among the English abolitionists, and underscores the ways that the narratives of history told by black people inevitably differ from the history white people tell. When she arrives in England, the white abolitionist men want to be the ones to write her story. Aminata is resolutely against this. "I wanted just three things: a blanket, a glass of water, and nobody but me writing my life story" (451-2). When they object, saying: "You will require our guidance," she insists, "My life. My words. My pen. I am capable of writing" (455). In her work in London, she notes: "I would speak about my life to anyone who cared to *listen*. The more people who knew about it, the more would press for abolition" (467; emphasis added). By foregrounding the importance of people listening—and, indeed, of people *reading* her story, Aminata (and, metatextually, Hill) signal the need for a kind of ally politics not practiced by many people within the novel. As her story closes, Aminata

still struggles to keep her story from being changed by the white abolitionists, who "have their own publisher and insist on correcting 'allegations that cannot be proved'" (469). The abolitionists "claim that they have earned the right to publish my story," but Aminata fights this, insisting, "it will be published by the one who lets my words stand" (469). If we consider this novel a work of metafiction, as many critics have, then Aminata's determination to tell her life story and to choose the words through which it is told becomes a powerful, though subtle, indictment of the way that contemporary historical fiction of the slavery-era is predominantly told by white writers and focalized through white characters.

Scarlett Reborn in *The Kitchen House* (2010)

Although *The Book of* Negroes achieved best-seller status in 2007, the year also saw the resurgence of the *Gone with the Wind* narrative with the second authorized continuation, *Rhett Butler's People*. The next decade saw more white-focused Civil-war era novels by white women writers, inspired, I suggest, by the renewed influence of *Gone with the Wind* provided by its second "sequel." The influence of Scarlett O'Hara as the iconic stalwart, independent, white woman of the Civil War era can be seen in the heroines put forth in many of these white-authored female-focused novels. Consider *My Name is Mary Sutter* (Oliveira; 2010) about a midwife who becomes a surgeon during the war; *The Last Runaway* (Chevalier; 2012) about a Quaker girl who inadvertently comes to be involved in the Underground Railroad, and also tries to redeem a slave catcher who is in love with her; and *Blue Asylum* (Hepinstall; 2012) about a plantation wife whose cruel husband has her convicted of madness, but who falls in love with another "mad" person—a former Confederate soldier. The foremost among these novels which put a

white woman against the backdrop of the slavery-era South is *The Kitchen House* (2010), which was a *New York Times* bestseller and saw sustained popularity with book clubs throughout North America.[37]

The Kitchen House tells the story of Lavinia, an Irish orphan brought to a plantation by the owner, Captain Pyke. Chapters alternate, albeit unevenly, between the point of view of Lavinia and the point of view of Belle, the black illegitimate daughter of Captain Pyke, who lives in the plantation's kitchen house and becomes part of Lavinia's surrogate family. *Kirkus Reviews* proclaims that, though the novel is "melodramatic," it "manages to avoid stereotypes" ("Grissom, Kathleen"). Yet I will argue that African American characters in Grissom's novels fall neatly into the stereotypes of the heart-of-gold mammy and the happy slaves immortalized in *Gone with the Wind*. Comparisons between the two novels are readily evident in the text. Lavinia's Irish descent aligns her with Scarlett, and the parallel between the two is compounded by Grissom's repeated descriptions of her heroine's green eyes, a clear allusion to the oft-described green eyes of Scarlett O'Hara. Moreover, the name of the plantation in *The Kitchen House*, Tall Oaks, echoes the name of the Wilkes' plantation, Twelve Oaks, in *Gone with the Wind*. If these textual clues weren't enough, Grissom's publisher makes the connection explicit in an interview included in the paperback edition that describes the book as "*Gone with the Wind* turned upside down" ("A Conversation with Kathleen Grissom," n.pag). What seems to be "turned upside down" is that the white southern belle is raised in the kitchen house among the black slaves rather than in the main house with the white plantation owners. Yet, despite this difference, *The Kitchen House* picks up three main threads from

[37] It was, in fact, the selection of my local public library's book club in May 2016, at which time I was writing this chapter—a testament to its enduring popularity since it was several years old at the time.

Gone with the Wind and *Scarlett*: happy slaves, benevolent masters, and a focus on a white heroine with black characters as *her* allies rather than the other way around. Through the replication of these elements, *The Kitchen House* establishes itself as a twenty-first-century descendent of *Scarlett* and of *Gone with the Wind* in ways that are not very positive in terms of racial politics.[38]

Slaves at Tall Oaks are, for the most part, optimistic and content individuals. In fact, Belle refuses to leave the plantation, even for a chance at freedom, which seems to suggest that the life of a slave is not so bad. Rebelling against Captain Pyke's plan to bestow her with free papers and send her to the North, Belle exclaims: "I'm eighteen now and old enough to know what I want. This kitchen house is my home, and no matter what, I'm not leaving here for nobody. I don't care what they say. I don't want no free papers" (18). While on the one hand, her sense of the plantation as "home" might suggest feelings of empowerment and ownership, Belle's refusal to make her own freedom and physical well-being a priority also suggests that she has internalized and accepted her low position as a black woman in a social hierarchy that keeps her literally enslaved. The fact that Belle doesn't yearn to escape enslavement suggests something of the lightness with which Grissom depicts slavery. Much as Ripley's Scarlett declares that "we loved our darkies just like family" (632), Grissom's Lavinia views Mama Mae, Papa George, and Belle as her family. The representation of Mama Mae is a clear evocation of Scarlett's

[38] The way the material book was put together and presented to consumers reflects its awareness that a white-authored, white-focused book about the slavery-era South might be problematic. On its cover is a quote from Alice Walker: "I recommend *The Kitchen House*. This novel, like *The Help*, does important work." However, the blurb does not appear to be from a larger review, and Walker's comments do not appear to be elaborated anywhere. It may even be a paid recommendation. Regardless, this two-sentence recommendation from Walker is a superficial move that belies the publisher's anxiety that a novel modeled after and aligned with *Gone with the Wind* might be rejected by a twenty-first century readership as too politically incorrect. Luckily for Grissom and her publishers, this anxiety proved unfounded. The novel was a commercial success, proving that popularity is not tied to political correctness.

Mammy. She is described as "a woman of size, although nothing about her was soft. She was a sober woman who moved like a current, and her quickness made it plain that she did not suffer idleness" (7). Her stature and firm but loving temperament echo Mitchell's description of Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* where she is said to be "a huge old woman" who is relentless "as a bloodhound," "with the small, shrewd eyes of an elephant" and "devoted to her last drop of blood to the O'Haras" (22-3). Mama Mae is a motherly figure to both Belle and Lavinia, and, like Mammy to Scarlett, a source of optimism and perseverance. Mama believes in making the best out of a terrible situation, as when she tells Lavinia: "There's not a day go by that I don't say, 'Thank you, Lawd, for sendin' me up to the big house and for givin' me the cap'n for my masta. I know there nothin' right about being a slave, but who I gonna tell that story to?" (25). Although there are suggestions, as in Mama's statement above, that slavery is morally wrong, the main black characters of *The Kitchen House* are loyal to the Pykes, view themselves as part of a family with the white owners of the plantation, and complain very little about the circumstances of their enslavement.

Connected to this representation of contented slaves who are part of a plantation family is the representation of benevolent white masters. From the outset of the novel, Captain Pyke is portrayed as a generous patriarch and caring family man. The narrative develops sympathy for him, never condemning him for the practice of slave owning. For instance, he takes good care of his children, both white and black. Even though she is black, he views his illegitimate daughter Belle "with pride" (46).[39] Early on, the captain rescues one of his slaves, Ben, from a lynch mob after Belle and Lavinia tell him that Ben

[39] Interestingly, though, the narrative never delves into the power dynamics and politics of his relationship with Belle's black mother, who is dead by the start of the narrative. But one wonders if a relationship between a white master and his black slave can ever be benign.

has been unfairly taken (70). In their interactions, the captain listens to the opinions and requests of his slaves, particularly Mama Mae. His complicity in the slavery system is refuted when he rationalizes slave-owning and asserts his innocence as a man who has only made the best out of a situation he was born into: "I never brought them over...My father bought all of them...he needed to get this place started. And you know I need them now to keep it going" (75).

In order to foreground Pyke's goodness toward his slaves, Grissom contrasts him to an evil overseer, Mr. Rankin. Unlike the Captain, Rankin views the black slaves as property to be used. He makes innuendos and sexual advances toward Belle, and is physically abusive to the field hands. Of course, the good Captain fires Rankin after he learns that the cruel overseer has beaten a slave to death (142). The Captain's wife, Miss Martha, though less kind than her husband, is represented as a benevolent mistress who protects her slaves from violence. When four white men begin attacking Belle in a circle in the kitchen, Miss Martha fires a pistol and turns them off the property (112). Will Stephens is another chivalrous white man distancing himself from the cruelty of his peers. He is present when Belle is attacked, but he literally stands back from the men encircling her, though he does nothing to stop the event. His goodness, though, is established when Lavinia overhears him "apologize to Belle for the episode in the spring when Rankin had ahold of her. Will said he had shamed himself by not stepping forward to help her, and he asked her forgiveness" (131). Thus, the novel suggests that some white men, like Pyke and Stephens, are innocent bystanders to the cruelties perpetrated against slaves. But, if we return to the discourse of ally politics, is there such a thing as an innocent bystander in the way that Grissom's novel suggests? Will Stephens is

established as the new overseer, and his methods are markedly different from those of Rankin. As Lavinia explains: "By making some human changes, Will Stephens had won the goodwill of the people in the quarters. Under his supervision, the plantation not only thrived but had exceeded production of past years" (148).

If Will is the narrative foil to Rankin, then Pyke's son Marshall is the foil to his father's model as a kind master. After assuming control of the plantation following his father's death, Marshall, like Rankin, abuses slaves physically and sexually. Yet other white men in the novel object to his treatment, such as his uncle who scolds Marshall out of concern for the health of the slaves (304). At the peak of Marshall's cruel ownership, Lavinia notes a change in Mama Mae: "I looked to Mama for help, but here eyes were down, and I saw for the first time the true extent of her helplessness" (259). This suggests that the previous master, Captain Pyke, was so good that Lavinia never noticed Mama being "helpless" or powerless, despite her literal enslavement. By extension, then, Grissom seems to suggest that slavery is only cruel and unjust when implemented by an overtly violent and sadistic master, and that cruel white men like Rankin and Marshall are the exception rather than the rule.

The third way that *The Kitchen* House defines itself in relation to the model set by *Gone with the Wind* and *Scarlett* is through its focus on Lavinia, the white heroine of the novel. Although, as previously mentioned, the chapters of the novel alternate between the points of view of Lavinia and Belle, Lavinia's chapters are, on average, a dozen pages or more in length, while Belle's chapters are, on average, two pages long. This textual marginalization betrays the superficiality of Grissom's representation of black slaves in the novel. Her reluctance to focus on the experiences and perspectives of black slaves is

discussed in veiled terms in the "Author's Note," which follows the main text. Grissom writes that although she was "fascinated by antebellum history," she "abhorred the thought of slavery and had always shied away from the subject" (367). However, Grissom soon found a way to explore the antebellum South without having to focus directly on slavery:

> When I first began my research I was astonished to discover the great numbers of Irish that were brought over as indentured servants. Then, when I saw advertisements for runaway Irish indentured servants, I realized that some of them, too, must have suffered under intolerable conditions. ("A Conversation with Kathleen Grissom" n.pag)

Much like Scarlett O'Hara, Lavinia turns, time and time again, to her surrogate family of black field hands for aid and support. It is this dynamic, wherein the white belle experiences the primary conflicts of the plot and black characters are secondary helpers, that best illustrates the way the novel problematically marginalizes the struggles of black slaves from its antebellum narrative. For instance, both Lavinia and Belle are sexually abused by Marshall in the novel's second half. Yet it is Belle who comforts and supports Lavinia, despite the fact that Lavinia has more social and economic power than Belle. Later, Lavinia gets mad at another female slave, Beattie, because Marshall has impregnated them both. Mama Mae attempts to shift Lavinia's focus, telling her: "You lookin' through your eyes, you not eve tryin' to look through Beattie's. You know that girl don't have the right to say no!" (278). Yet, much like Scarlett O'Hara, Lavinia is never fully able to recognize the injustices inherent in the slavery system. When Marshall threatens to sell Mama Mae if Lavinia doesn't stop being so close to her, Lavinia is upset

at the prospect of losing a mother figure, but she does not question the right to sell human beings (316).

Furthermore, in the novel's climactic chapters, Lavinia and her daughter are the runaways being hidden in the attic of Belle's cabin by the black field hands—an ironic reversal of the history of runaway slaves that reveals the extent to which Grissom has erased black history in order to keep focus on the plight of her white heroine. At the end of the novel, Lavinia has control of the plantation and determines to be a benevolent mistress. She explains: "The emancipation papers for Papa, Eddy and Fanny, and Beattie and her three boys had been drawn up; I planned to ask them to stay on for the food and shelter I could provide. In time I would give them wages" (363). She frees seven slaves to whom she has a close relationship, but what of the other black slaves on Tall Oaks? Moreover, she places her own economic need above these seven freed slaves, withholding their wages until she can secure the plantation's finances. In this conclusion, Lavinia appears to pick up where Captain Pyke left off, as a relatively caring slave owner, but a slave owner nevertheless. Ultimately, then, Grissom's vision of the antebellum South is one where white individuals struggle to maintain their idyllic plantations and uphold the traditions of their forefathers. Grissom's is a romantic South clearly modelled after the vision of Tara made iconic by Margaret Mitchell and reinforced by Ripley as a symbol of the idyll that intrepid white upstarts can build.

White Saviour Women in *The House Girl* (2013)

Another bestseller that appeared three years following *The Kitchen House*, Tara Conklin's *The House Girl*, exhibits tension between its narrative of unearthing the lost

history of a fictional African American painter and its adherence to the white-centric model of antebellum historical fiction, which places a white woman in the position of a saviour. The novel follows Lina, a twenty-first-century white lawyer, who is tasked with finding a lead plaintiff for a slavery reparations case her firm has taken on. Her investigation leads her to explore the history of a series of paintings credited to a Southern female artist. Her discovery that many of these paintings were actually produced by the woman's black maid, Josephine, suggests the way black women's voices and artistry have been suppressed over centuries. Problematically, however, the novel emphasizes simplified parallels between its free white female characters and the black slave, Josephine. For instance, as in *The Kitchen House* and *Ruth's Journey*, Josephine's white mistress, Lu Anne Belle, is depicted as a benevolent maternal figure to her black slaves. Lu Anne teaches Josephine to read (42), and is described playing with the slave children (87). Overall, the narrative works to parallel Missus Lu and Josephine as women oppressed by white men: "The two of them not so different after all, Josephine realized. All this time, these long, hungry years, each of them alone beside the other" (190). Furthermore, the present-day part of the narrative suggests that corporate capitalism is akin to slavery, with descriptions of Lina and other young lawyers working day and night doing the nitty-gritty for the firm partners, who reap the majority of the benefits of this labour. But this parallel is problematically simplified. Lina is not a slave; she has not been forcibly removed from her home or her family; she is not in physical danger; and she is financially compensated for her labour. Lina is, in fact, in a position of power.

Indeed, white people occupy several positions of power in the narrative, from the white lawyers spearheading the case, to the white mistress Lu Anne Belle who was

credited with the paintings, to the white archivist who controls the circulation of information at the Bell Creek plantation. When Lina visits the Bell Creek plantation, she notices the way African American history has been erased or minimized:

> Nowhere did she see evidence of the cabins that must have housed the slaves of Bell Creek, or any signs at all referencing the others who had once lived here side by side with Lu Anne and Robert Bell, plowing the fields, reaping the harvest, grinding the wheat, cleaning the clothes, picking the blooms. The Bell Center documented these tasks now only in the passive voice: Clothing was laundered. Cheese was made. Meat was smoked. (257)

The novel demonstrates that the narrative of history is controlled largely by white people, yet, although it makes overtures about redressing racist erasures in American history, the novel keeps white people in control of the narrative. Lina, as well as Dorothea, and Caleb—two white people who help black slaves attempt to flee the South in the historical portion of the narrative—receive exponentially more narrative space than Josephine, even though it is Josephine who is at the centre of the narrative and to whom the very title of the novel refers. Of Dothorea and Josephine, the narrative declares: "Worlds separated them" (145). Time and situation also separate Lina from Josephine. Readers are told: "Lina had never considered the issue of slavery reparations before…She was a twenty-first-century white girl from New York—what did she know about the enduring harm of slavery or $6.2 trillion in unpaid wages?" (59). Yet this white woman is the character Conklin has chosen to be the focus of her metahistorical narrative. Thus, while raising questions about how white people can act as allies to people of colour, the novel maintains a white focus that undermines the very problem it foregrounds. Though

Conklin presents the marginalization of black women's histories as a problem, ironically, she re-enacts the marginalization of Josephine in her own narrative. In his review of the novel for *The Washington Post*, Ron Charles despaired: "If only Josephine's stirring tale had been emancipated from the story of her modern-day defender, 'The House Girl' might have run free."

The fact that a white woman is at the head of the excavation of black women's history in the narrative leads one to ask whether in the contemporary period anything has changed about which women have the authority and the platform to make their voices widely heard. Ironically, novels like *The Help* (2009) and *House Girl* foreground the voicelessness of black women even as they continue to speak *for* black women. In her 1991 essay "The Problem of Speaking for Others," Linda Alcoff addresses the debate in feminist theory about who can speak for whom. She argues that "a speaker's location" in society "has an epistemically significant impact on that speaker's claims," and also that "certain privileged locations are discursively dangerous" (7). While she concludes that a speaker's social position does not necessarily invalidate what they say, her essay underscores the tensions and animosities that arise when one woman attempts to speak for others in markedly different social positions. Just as Paul Kivel's essay on the politics of being a social ally emphasizes the importance of *listening*, which I have here modified to *reading*, Alcoff's essay emphasizes that one of the principle tenets of women's studies was that "the advocacy for the oppressed must come to be done principally by the oppressed themselves" (7). Thus, I suggest that Conklin's bestselling novel is also part of the white discursive colonization of slavery-era historical fiction, and that its white-centric narrative situates it in contrast to *The Wind Done Gone*, *Cane River*, and *The*

Book of Negroes. While *The House Girl* raises awareness of the lost representations and histories of African American women, it still operates in the white-centric mode of *Scarlett*, *The Kitchen House*, and, as we shall see presently, *Ruth's Journey*.

Ruth's Journey (2014)… or Lack Thereof[40]

Emerging almost a dozen years after Randall's *The Wind Done Gone*, Donald McCaig's second text authorized by the Stephens Mitchell Trust,[41] *Ruth's Journey*, may be read as an attempt to recode the *Gone with the Wind* world as a white-focused, romanticized vision of the South following the challenge that Randall's novel posed. Peter Borland, the editorial director at the publishing house that produced *Ruth's Journey*, asserted prior to the book's release that "it's a book that respects and honors its source material, but it also provides a necessary correction to what is one of the more troubling aspects of the book, which is how the black characters are portrayed" (Bosman). However, as this section will explore, McCaig's Mammy, Ruth, does nothing to add nuance or complexity to the two-dimensional stereotype of the mammy figure made iconic by Mitchell. Indeed, she is sometimes absent for dozens of pages in the novel that

[40] McCaig is a male author, but his novel is included because it conforms to the key features of "the woman's historical novel." It is female-focused, places intimate personal histories against the macro-backdrop of the antebellum South, and is marketed toward women as an extension of the female-focused *Gone with the Wind* narrative world.

[41] Following the enormous commercial success of Ripley's *Scarlett* in 1991, the Stephens Mitchell Trust commissioned Donald McCaig to write a pseudo-sequel, *Rhett Butler's People*, through which readers can revisit the events of *Gone with the Wind* through Rhett's perspective, as well as gain insight into events in Rhett's life that precede and follow Mitchell's narrative. *Rhett Butler's People* was published in 2007. The publisher of the novel, St. Martin's Press, anticipated sales similar to Ripley's *Scarlett*, evidence by the $4.5 million advance they gave the Stephens Mitchell Trust and the novel's initial print run of over a million copies (Rich, M.). *Rhett Butler's People* succeeded and became a best seller. Interestingly, *Ruth's Journey* did not sell nearly as well as previous authorized extensions of the *Gone with the Wind* narrative world, which might suggest that readers were less inclined to enter the *Gone with the Wind* world if it was to be focused on a black character.

bears her name. Instead, *Ruth's Journey* is the story of Scarlett's white matrilineal line, from her grandmother, Solange, to her mother, Ellen, and finally to Scarlett herself, who appears in Part Three of the novel. McCaig is true to Mitchell's novel in this one key way: he focuses on the way the white southern belle struggled, changed, and persevered during the antebellum, Civil War, and postbellum periods. Even reviewers of the book have noted the peculiar way its titular character often seems to disappear into the narratives of white female characters. Patty Rhule views this narrative structure as a reflection on the position that Ruth takes on: "As with the real mammies, her life and story take a back seat to the children she raises and the families she serves." *Kirkus Reviews* similarly notes the dullness of Ruth's own story, noting that it "should be fascinating...yet McCaig simply uses Ruth as a lens" ("McCaig, Donald"). In an interesting parallel of the novel's structure, *Kirkus Reviews*' discussion of the novel focuses most of its attention on the white heroines. The review goes so far as to discuss how "Solange is a vivid, vivacious woman whose tale is bewitching, but, alas, we must leave her to see through Ruth's eyes soon enough." Even McCaig's own comments about his interest in writing a *Gone with the Wind* novel from Mammy's perspective are curiously focused on whiteness, as when he says: "I was interested in how an African-American slave could play such a tremendously important part in a well-to-do white family" (McClurg). McCaig's own role as a white author has also been called into question. Patty Rhule concludes her review by wondering "what Ruth's journey might have been had a provocative woman of color written it." Similarly, in a piece reacting to the announcement of the book's upcoming publication, Ronda Penrice calls the

authorizing of a 73-year-old white male as the author of Ruth's life story "not just problematic; it's emblematic."

The problems with race in *Ruth's Journey* extend beyond the centrality of whiteness to the very representation of Ruth herself. In *Ruth's Journey*, as in *Gone with the Wind*, *Scarlett*, and *The Kitchen House*, it is suggested that slavery is not so bad, white masters are often benevolent and kind, and slaves are treated like family by their white owners. Hopes of reading a more complex representation of the psychology and experiences of the woman who became Scarlett's Mammy are dashed from the outset. It takes nineteen pages before Ruth even appears in the novel that proclaims to be her journey. The first husband of Scarlett's grandmother, Solange, finds the girl who becomes known as Ruth hiding under a basket with her slaughtered family all around her. Her first actions and words establish McCaig's Ruth as nothing more than a younger and smaller version of Mitchell's Mammy. Readers are told that Ruth "hid her gory hands behind her back and curtsied" and greets the white soldiers: "Welcome to our home, sirs. Our goat Héloïse has good milk. Can you hear Héloïse bawling? I would be happy to milk her for you" (19). This bizarre introduction to Ruth makes it clear that McCaig is not adding depth or complexity to Ruth. She is already servile, already devoted to serving white people, with no signs of self pity or anger or concern for her own situation, just as she appears in *Gone with the Wind*. Much like Belle in *The Kitchen House*, McCaig's Ruth begs not to be sent away from her benevolent white mistress (67), even exclaiming at one point: "I so happy, livin' here, livin' with you and the captain. I one lucky pickaninny, yes I is!" (84). Ruth's acceptance of enslavement appears to be related to her

view of Solange as a mother figure, and herself as part of a family: “I tries to make you happy! You the only family I gots” (84).

Later, when Ruth is bought by a free black man who wants to marry her, an even more troubling scene occurs where Ruth and Jehu—who does *not* emancipate his wife—use the language of slavery during their sexual foreplay:

> Jehu looked at Ruth. “You mine now. I does anything I wants with you.”
>
> She stepped into his broad smile.
>
> She said, “Oh, Master. Don’t you do it to me! I never knowed no man afore.”
>
> She said, “Oh no, Master,” when his fine hands freed her breasts.
>
> She said, “Yes, Master,” when he entered her. (132)

Compare Ruth and Jehu’s role-playing of slavery on their wedding night to this scene from *The Book of Negroes* wherein Aminata is raped by her master:

> “Who owns you?” he said.
>
> “Master.”
>
> “I say who owns you?”
>
> The wiry hairs on his chest scratched my breasts. The stubble on his cheeks bit into my face.
>
> “Master, please don’t—”
>
> “Don’t you tell me what to do,” he said. (161)

The tonal contrast between these two similar scenes is striking, and serves to highlight the strangeness and the artificiality of McCaig’s representations of Ruth verbally and physically accepting enslavement—even appropriating it as sexual role-play. Further demonstrating the lightness with which McCaig depicts slavery is the depiction of threats

a female slave would encounter. After Jehu's death, Ruth finds work as a housemaid. When her master, a widower, gets drunk one night and makes sexual advances toward her, she is easily able to deflect his threat of sexual violence. Reviewer Patty Rhule takes a jab at the lack of realism in this scene, noting that Ruth is "so formidable...that when a drunken master paws her, she beans him with a decanter and demands he sell her to someone else. And he does." At this, Rhule remarks incredulously, "Really?" crystallizing the visible lack of realism with which McCaig treats slavery, despite the novel's supposed focus on an enslaved character.

In the final part of *Ruth's Journey*, McCaig's representation of a naturally servile Ruth flows seamlessly into the Mammy who, as Mitchell describes, "was the terror of the other house servants" (23). When Ellen Robillard marries Gerald O'Hara, Mammy accompanies her mistress and comes to work at the O'Hara plantation. Throughout this section of the novel, she is depicted making efforts to separate herself from field hands and the realities of slavery. Pork and Toby talk to Mammy about the way slaves are whipped. Mammy doesn't comment: "I leaves them gabbin' and goes into Tara House" (267). Ellen protects Mammy and the other household servants from the cruel treatment of the overseer (270). She is an ally, but only to a select few, and for reasons that benefit her. Mammy is hostile toward other black people, reflecting her internalization of racist ideology. When new slaves arrive, she notes: "Them Savannah niggers distress...They should be glad they at Tara, where Master Gerald don't favor no bullwhip and Mistress Ellen got a kind heart" (275). At times, McCaig suggests that Ruth's refusal to see the cruel realities of slavery is a survival mechanism, as when she says: "Plenty times Master Gerald ask me 'bout this colored or that colored and I shakes my head, pretendin' I don't

see nor hear no evil" (293). However, the structure of the novel is such that readers only view events from Ruth's perspective in the third part of the novel—the part that retreads the events of *Gone with the Wind*. Thus, readers are left wondering to what extent Ruth objects—and might always have objected—to her treatment. Did she mean it when she told Solange that she felt part of the family? Did she really love Jehu? If Alice Randall's *The Wind Done Gone* foregrounds the way Other [Scarlett] could not possibly know the real Mammy (103), *Ruth's Journey* may be read as a continuation of that superficial white view of Mammy. McCaig's narrative choices—the absence of Ruth through much of the narrative and the use of third-person narration for two thirds of the book—make it impossible for the reader to know Ruth's mind. Though the ending of the novel suggests her unhappiness—"I goin' upstairs then, walkin' slow like the old, fat nigger I has come to be" (364), *Ruth's Journey* scarcely scratches the surface of Ruth's interiority. While it tells her situational journey, the novel fails to tell Ruth's interior journey. Rather, she is a static figure who witnesses the real exploration at the centre of this narrative: the genealogical journey that leads from Solange Fornier to Scarlett O'Hara.

Dual Perspectives: Abolition and First-wave Feminism

in *The Invention of Wings* (2014)

I conclude my examination of contemporary slavery-era historical fiction on a more optimistic note with a consideration of Sue Monk Kidd's recent bestseller *The Invention of Wings*. Kidd, a white Southern woman writer, achieves a level of serious engagement with intersectional feminism that none of the other white-authored texts discussed in this chapter do. Although I have argued in this chapter that white authors

have tended to treat racial difference superficially, to write white-centric narratives of the slavery-era South, and to follow a mode of nostalgia and romanticization in the tradition of *Gone with the Wind*, Kidd's *Invention of Wings* demonstrates that this tendency is not essential or innate to white writers. Thus, I offer this section to preclude the idea that white authors cannot write the kind of feminist revisionist historical fiction that takes racial difference seriously. In her concluding author's note, Kidd reveals that she kept an inspirational quotation on her desk while she wrote the novel. The quotation, by Professor Julius Lester, reads: "History is not just facts and events. History is also a pain in the heart and we repeat history until we are able to make another's pain in the heart our own" (369). This statement is about empathy, not sympathy; it asserts that putting oneself in another's shoes is the only way that cruelties enacted in the past will change in the future. Empathy, which is at the heart of *The Invention of Wings*, implies the very actions of a true ally: listening (or reading), and engaging in self-reflexivity.

The first notable feature that distinguishes *The Invention of Wings* from other white-authored novels of the slavery-era South is that Kidd does not marginalize black women in terms of textual space in her narrative. The structure of the novel is similar to *The Kitchen House* in that its chapters alternate between the perspectives of a white woman and a black woman. However, where *The Kitchen House* gives its black point-of-view character, Belle, a mere fraction of the narrative space her white counterpart is given, *The Invention of Wings* divides its narrative evenly between the black slave girl Hetty (Handful)[42] Grimke, and the white daughter of her owners, Sarah Grimke.[43]

[42] Handful is the name her mother gives her at her birth—known as her "basket name," while Hetty is the name the white master imposes on her, p.4.

[43] Sarah and Angelina (Nina) Grimke are based on real historical suffragists and abolitionists of the same names.

Moreover, the novel does not resort to stereotypes like the mistress-as-mother-figure, and happy slaves that are familial with their owners. The novel shows the violence—both physical and ideological—that white owners imposed upon their black slaves. The white mistress of the plantation may believe herself to be benevolent, but from Handful's perspective, the mistress' imposition of Christian doctrine and her administration of physical punishment are acts of cruelty. Later in the novel, when the Little missus (Sarah and Angelina's older sister) runs the plantation, she is upset to find a quilt Handful's mother made from bits of fabric stolen as part of her small resistance over the years. In language that echoes Ripley's Scarlett O'Hara, she asserts: "You would think her whole life was nothing but violence and cruelty...We treated her well here, no one can dispute that" (336). But in *Wings*, unlike *Scarlett*, the sentiment is refracted through a black character's perspective, and Handful is quick to note the falsity and guilt underlying Little Missus' defense, realizing that "the quilt had shamed her" (336). By giving Handful equal narrative space and by privileging her perspective on plantation life, Kidd avoids romanticizing the slavery-era South and avoids the stereotypes that accompany such nostalgic narratives.

Furthermore, Kidd does not simplify the relationship between white and black women. When Sarah turns eleven, her parents give her ten-year-old Handful as a birthday present, "your very own waiting maid" (14). Sarah tries to refuse, but her parents view her aversion to slavery as something to be trained out of her. Unable to extricate herself from her slave-owning family during girlhood, Sarah resolves to be helpful and kind to Handful. But this is never a narrative about a white saviour woman; rather, by alternating

between their perspectives, Kidd illustrates the complexity of Sarah and Handful's relationship. As Handful reflects at one point:

> I didn't know for sure whether Miss Sarah's feelings came from love or guilt. I didn't know whether mine came from love or a need to be safe. She loved me and pitied me. And I loved her and used her. It never was a simple thing. (54)

Handful later theorizes the similarities and differences between herself and Sarah: "She was trapped same as me, but she was trapped by her mind, by the minds of the people round her, not by the law...I tried to tell her that. I said, 'My body might be a slave, but not my mind. For you, it's the other way round'" (201). Kidd also represents the difficulty communicating from different social positions. For instance, Sarah has trouble writing to Handful when she learns that Handful has been reunited with her mother. In the passage, she struggles with the inadequacy of language to reach across the space that divides her life from Handful's:

> Strewn about me on the bed were crumpled balls of paper. *How happy you must be now*, I'd written first, then worried she might think I was implying all her miseries were over now. Next: *I was euphoric to receive your news*, but what if she didn't know the word *euphoric*? I couldn't write a single line without fear of seeming insensitive or condescending, too removed or too familiar. (277)

Through these moments of tension or complication in the relationship between Handful and Sarah, Kidd refuses to create simple parallels between white women's gender-based oppression and black women's dual oppression through gender and race. In an imagined meeting between Sarah and the historical first-wave feminist Lucretia Mott, Kidd represents Mott explaining, "Life is arranged against us, Sarah. And it's brutally worse

for Handful and her mother and sister" (275). Learning to recognize difference is a key part of the development of both Sarah's feminist consciousness and her race consciousness.

Through Sarah, and later her younger sister Angelina (Nina), Kidd's novel provides space for readers to reflect on what it means for white feminists to be allies to women of colour in meaningful and impactful ways. Sarah's resistance to the dominant ideology is complicated, because she recognizes her complicity in the system. For instance, she reflects on her request to her mother: "*Give Hetty back.* As if she was mine after all. As if owning people was as natural as breathing. For all my resistance about slavery, I breathed that foul air, too" (16). Sarah exhibits the self-reflexivity that is essential to considering one's own social position and privileges. When Sarah arrives home unexpectedly and finds Handful bathing in her personal bathtub, her feelings reveal that she is still at odds with the ideology in which she was raised and her own personal beliefs:

> I saw then what I hadn't seen before, that I was very good at despising slavery in the abstract, in the removed and anonymous masses, but in the concrete, intimate flesh of the girl beside me, I'd lost the ability to be repulsed by it. I'd grown comfortable with the particulars of evil. (115)

In a scene that echoes one from *The Kitchen House*, Charlotte—Handful's mother—makes Sarah promise to help Handful. "I know you gon make that up to her one these days" (30), she says, "I know you gon help her any way you can to get free" (31). However, unlike Lavinia in *The Kitchen House*, Sarah actually takes this task to heart

and, by the end of the novel, backs up her promise with action, helping Hetty escape the South and slavery.

The novel, then, charts Sarah's struggle to discern how she can change the unjust social systems into which she was born. Sarah comes to view her abolitionist work as just as important as her feminist work, and the two become inextricable, as in this passage wherein Sarah prepares to give an abolition speech in public:

> What I feared was the immensity of it all—a female abolition agent traveling the country with a national mandate. I wanted to say, *Who am I to do this, a woman?* But that voice was not mine. It was Father's voice. It was Thomas'. It belonged to Israel, to Catherine, and to Mother. It belonged to the church in Charleston and the Quakers in Philadelphia. It would not, if I could help it, belong to me. (320)

However, though she acknowledges the work of the Grimke sisters, Kidd isn't overly idealistic; she also depicts Handful reflecting on the ineffectiveness of much of Nina and Sarah's work:

> I thought about Nina, her lecturing to five spoilt white girls, and Sarah being so upset with the way her world was, she had to leave it, and while I felt the goodness in what they did, it seemed their lecturing and leaving didn't come to much when you had this much cruelty to overcome. (228)

In representing the schism between abolition and suffrage, Kidd highlights the way feminism became a racially fragmented movement in the first-wave period. Sarah and Angelina are told by their male abolitionist allies that they cannot forward a feminist agenda because "the slave is of greater urgency" (333). The narrative builds to a crescendo as the sisters question the separation of feminism and abolition. Near the end

of the novel, Nina asks: "Why must it be one or the other" and Sarah asserts: "We can do little for the slave as long as we're under the feet of men" (334). Thus, in *The Invention of Wings*, intersectionality is foregrounded and the interconnectedness of all movements toward equality is underscored.

Conclusions: The Winds of Change

If I have seemed overly concerned about dates in this chapter, it is because I want to paint a picture of the way the narrative features of *Gone with the Wind* have been revived again and again over the past twenty-five years, despite challenges from critics, authors of colour, and white authors conscious of their role as social and political allies. *Gone with the Wind*, published in 1936, was brought into the contemporary period by its first authorized sequel, *Scarlett*, in 1991. Following the magnitude of renewed interest in Scarlett O'Hara and her narrative world, Alice Randall published *The Wind Done Gone* in 2001. Its publication caused a great deal of discussion and critique, which I have suggested led to a few years wherein similarly un-nostalgic historical fictions of the slavery era like *Cane River* (2001) and *The Book of Negroes* (2007) found mass audiences. However, the *Gone with the Wind* tradition was renewed with the publication of the next authorized "sequel," *Rhett Butler's People*, in 2007. A few years later, the appearance of *The Kitchen House* (2010), which draws much of its inspiration from Mitchell's novel, revealed the influence of *Gone with the Wind* over narratives of the antebellum, Civil War, and postbellum South. A few years later, *The House Girl* (2013) represented a white-centred alternative to Randall, Tademy, and Hill's black-centric narratives, reasserting a white woman as the excavator and champion of a nineteenth-

century black woman's history. Soon after, *Ruth's Journey* (2014) appeared, reasserting white control over Mammy's image. Around the same time, Sue Monk Kidd's *The Invention of Wings* (2014), with its subject of relationships between white and black American women during the late nineteenth century, suggested a more thoughtful engagement with inclusive, intersectional feminism and questions of how factors in addition to gender influence the writing of history. And yet, while it is promising to see narratives such as Kidd's, I cannot help but come back to a question I posed at the start of this chapter: where are the historical novels of the Civil-War era South that are authored by black women writers in the contemporary period? I have examined only two here,[44] and mentioned two more in a footnote,[45] because they are all I could find. Black women's voices still appear to be marginalized—even prohibited. If the best-selling historical novels are the ones that define how mass contemporary readerships understand history, the discursive colonization of slavery-era historical fiction by white authors—and especially by the Stephens Mitchell Trust—suggests that historical fiction has not challenged the white-centricity of capital-H history. The trends I have analysed in this chapter indicate that black history has not experienced the same excavation and popularization that women's history has experienced through the proliferation of historical fiction in the contemporary period.

The most insidious thing about the erasure of black voices in Southern historical fiction is the silence with which it is achieved. In her recent book, *Southern Women Novelists and the Civil War* (2014), Sharon Talley includes a section on four contemporary novels that "use strong female protagonists to challenge *Gone with the*

[44] *The Wind Done Gone* and *Cane River*
[45] *A Long Way From Home* and *Wench*

Wind's reflection on the traditional binary construction of race and gender in the nineteenth-century South" (261). These novels are *Jubilee* (Walker; 1966), *On the Occasion of My Last Afternoon* (Gibbons; 1998), *Nowhere Else on Earth* (Humphreys; 2000), and *The Wind Done Gone* (Randall; 2001). This may seem to be a progressive study that seeks to complicate the white-centric vision of the South proliferated by Mitchell's novel. However, as *Jubilee* was published in 1966, only three of the books Talley examines are truly contemporary, and only one of these three, *The Wind Done Gone,* is by a black author. Neither of the two white-authored books features a black protagonist. So to what extent can we really say that contemporary Southern historical fiction has moved on from the model put forward by *Gone with the Wind*? My work in this chapter might be considered an elaboration of Talley's work, but it is a more pessimistic one, to be sure. A chronological overview of popular female-focused historical novels depicting the slavery-era South, such as I have offered in this chapter, illustrates the way novels that foreground critical issues surrounding race and racism are outnumbered—and, indeed, *outsold*—by nostalgic, white-centred ones.

Contemporary feminist readers continue to appreciate the feminist aspects of *Gone with the Wind* and the novels it has inspired and influenced, and that in itself is not necessarily a problem. In Chapter Two of this dissertation, I discussed the way readers of Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander* novels appear to participate in a negotiated reading that allows them to take pleasure in the novels even as they contain sentiments and representations of violence that challenge feminist politics. Readers of *Gone with the Wind* who focus on its feminist aspects engage in a similar process whereby they selectively focus on aspects of the novel like Scarlett's proto-feminist agency in business,

marriage, and Southern society while ignoring less appealing aspects like her racism. However, the problem I have identified in this chapter is one of influence. *Gone with the Wind* is not merely one historical novel; it is one of the most prominent and widely read women's historical novels, and it has influenced scores of similar narratives. One might even say that it is the urtext for the female-focused novel of the slavery-era South. Novels like *Gone with the Wind*, *Scarlett*, *The Kitchen House*, *The House Girl*, and *Ruth's Journey* contain aspects of feminist ideology, to be sure, but it is a white, middle-class feminism that is concerned primarily with the individual rather than challenging the social systems that keep inequalities in place.

The popular woman's historical novel is a mode of the historical genre that explicitly engages with feminist ideology, yet it has been slower to engage with intersectional feminist ideology, which takes into account the ways that factors like race, class, and sexual orientation impact one's experiences of gender, sexism, and feminism. The predominant whiteness of these novels suggests that historical fiction's conception of feminism is somewhat "stuck" in the past, in the middle-class white woman's feminism of the early- and mid-twentieth century. Indeed, in the larger picture of contemporary English-language historical fiction, most of the major authors are white and most of their texts focus on white protagonists. This may not be surprising, given that the publishing industry is primarily populated by white workers. A 2014 *Publishers Weekly* survey of 630 industry respondents revealed that 89% identified as white/Caucasian (Milliot). As the magazine noted of that statistic, "the dearth of minority employees directly affects the types of books that are published." This chapter has focused on the lack of African American representation in the popular woman's historical novel by investigating the

erasure of blackness in the slavery-era historical novel—a historical context in which one would most expect to find black women foregrounded. However, the critical aspects of my argument about the lack of racial engagement in pop culture feminism and in popular historical fiction also extend to other individuals of multiracial and non-white racial backgrounds. As this chapter has demonstrated, the effects of discursive colonization are particularly troubling in historical fiction, where the question of who is permitted to speak affects not only literary representation, but historical memory, too.

— Conclusion —

New Directions and a Reconceptualization of "Movement"

In studying popular women's historical novels from 1990-2015, I have tried to forge a path between two seemingly oppositional points of view: either that these narratives are escapist romanticism or that they are subversive postmodern historiographies. My analysis has considered the ways in which popular women's historical novels are both political and pleasurable, and the ways they illustrate, simultaneously, feminist and anti-feminist ideologies. Feminist politics and narrative pleasures often have a tense relationship, as I have pointed out throughout these case studies. Just as these novels can be feminist and anti-feminist by turns, so can women readers occupy multiple contradictory reading positions. In my introduction, I called attention to the fact that a woman writer, even if she espouses feminist beliefs in her personal life, does not necessarily produce feminist texts. Equally important is the idea that a woman reader, even one who considers herself feminist, does not necessarily read exclusively as a feminist. What this means, then, for contemporary women's historical novels and for feminist literary criticism more broadly, is that we must stop assuming a clear line of separation between what is a feminist text/reader and what is a pleasurable text/pleasure-seeking reader.

Contradictory desires and ideologies can be found within many, if not most, popular women's historical novels. Through these contradictions and tensions, indeed by the very lack of closure implied in a contradiction, contemporary women's historical fiction undermines the idea of postfeminism—the movement that suggests

feminism's work is done. Feminist work has led to education, employment, private property, legal and civic rights, and bodily rights for many girls and women in the Western world. Yet, contemporary women continue to create and consume historical narratives that, while maintaining the necessity of many of the rights and freedoms feminism has garnered for them, also seem to suggest a longing for aspects of historical femininity that have been, to some extent, rejected or vilified by modern feminist discourse. Repeatedly in the novels I have analysed in this study, female characters express pride in being considered prized by a father or husband, comfort in taking up a traditional role in a traditional nuclear family, and delight in successfully making their exteriors match the social expectations for feminine appearance. Contemporary writers and readers of female-focused historical fiction thus interrupt the idea that feminism has successfully brought women *forward* into an era where they are socially and personally fulfilled by insisting on going *back*, imaginatively, into pre-feminist historical periods. My study of the feminist and traditionalist tensions within popular women's historical novels suggests that contemporary feminist writers and readers look to history through modern eyes in order to articulate forms of womanhood that blend feminist politics with pleasures that have often been considered anti-feminist.

It is clear from the proliferation of historical narratives and critical texts on the historical genre that the contemporary fascination with history is both profitable and relevant to our current social politics. While I have used two major lenses to view historical fiction, feminism and popular culture, other studies have viewed the genre through different combinations of theoretical lenses and critical contexts. Ruth

Hoberman's *Gendering Classicism: The Ancient World in Twentieth-Century Women's Historical Fiction* (1997) considers the extent to which Ancient history is coded as masculine and examines the strategies female writers employ in order to be able to engage with that history. Lisa Fletcher's *Historical Romance Fiction: Heterosexuality and Performativity* (2008) examines the heterosexism she argues is normalized through historical romance novels by authors like Georgette Heyer, John Fowles, and A. S. Byatt. Nancy J. Peterson's *Against Amnesia: Contemporary Women Writers and the Crises of Historical Memory* (2001) brings a postcolonial lens to bear on women's historical novels by authors like Louise Erdrich, Toni Morrison, and Joy Kogawa. While the body of critical and theoretical work on historical narratives grows, there are many further areas to be explored, and I would argue that this is especially true with regard to historical narratives in the realm of popular culture. Adaptations from text to screen, for instance, are common within the historical genre, and many of the bestselling women's historical novels of the past twenty-five years have been adapted for film or television, including four of the major texts/series featured in my study: *Scarlett* (1994), *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2003; 2008), *Outlander* (2014-present), and *The Book of Negroes* (2015).

I have argued that the literary battle of the brows is extremely evident within the criticism and valuation of historical fiction. However, the hierarchy between the highbrow and the popular seems to be growing less visible in historical film and television. There are numerous examples of popular historical dramas that also garner praise from critics and win major awards. At the 64th Emmy Awards in 2012, three out of six nominees for best television drama were historical series, four if you include *Game of*

Thrones.[46] Furthermore, from 1990-1999, at least seven and arguably nine of the ten Academy Award winners for Best Picture were historical films.[47] In the first fifteen years of the twenty-first century, historical films like *Gladiator* (2000), *Chicago* (2002), *The King's Speech* (2010), *The Artist* (2011), and *12 Years a Slave* (2013) have continued to be popular and to accumulate awards and critical praise.

The historical is also a major genre in contemporary television. On November 4th 2016, Netflix released *The Crown*, the first season in a planned six-season historical series depicting the life of Queen Elizabeth II from her marriage in 1947 to the present. The series is widely reported to be Netflix's most expensive original production to date, costing £100 million to produce (Singh; Halls). The fact that Netflix's biggest financial investment is a drama that is primarily historical (though the final seasons will focus on the contemporary period) signifies the immense popularity of the genre, and its present centrality to the economics of the entertainment industry. Indeed, popular and critically acclaimed historical dramas are numerous at the moment, and they engage with wide-ranging, though still primarily Western, histories. Popular historical television series produced in Britain, the U.S. and Canada include *Mad Men* (2007-2015), *Murdoch Mysteries* (2008-present), *Boardwalk Empire* (2010-2014), *Downton Abbey* (2010-2015), *Call the Midwife* (2012-present), *Reign* (2013-present), and *Vikings* (2013-present). Indeed, Anita Singh suggests that *The Crown* is designed to fill the absence of the recently ended *Downton Abbey*. Even shows that are fantastical or that blend the

[46] The historical nominees were *Boardwalk Empire*, *Downton Abbey*, *Mad Men*, and, arguably, *Game of Thrones*. The non-historical nominees were *Breaking Bad* and *Homeland*, which won the Emmy.

[47] *Dances with Wolves* (1990), *Unforgiven* (1992), *Schindler's List* (1993), *Braveheart* (1995), *The English Patient* (1996), *Titanic* (1997), and *Shakespeare in Love* (1998). Of course, it is arguable that the 1990 winner *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989) and the 1995 winner *Forrest Gump* (1994) are also historical narratives, though they are set in the more recent past. *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) is the only Academy Award winner for Best Picture from 1990-1999 that is not in any way a historical film.

historical with other genres such as *Game of Thrones* (2011-present) and *Westworld* (2016-present) engage with history by appropriating period aesthetics and mirroring conflicts and social structures that are iconic to particular eras.

As I have argued elsewhere,[48] one remarkable aspect of the appeal of historical dramas is the ancillary consumer products the series generate. *Mad Men* inspired three capsule collections with Banana Republic, a makeup collection with Estée Lauder, and a collection of Mattel dolls. Similarly, *Downton Abbey* generates ancillary income through a themed collection with 1928 Jewelry and a tea collection with The Republic of Tea. Recently, in November 2016 Lot 18 Wines released a collection of four *Outlander* themed wines named after the main characters: Claire Randall, Claire Fraser, Frank Randall, and Jamie Fraser. Products such as these are designed to enable viewers to incorporate the aesthetics and accoutrements of historical dramas into their modern-day lives, suggesting the economic and social power of nostalgia and the contemporary consumer's desire to incorporate the past into the present. Thus, popular historical narratives—whether textual or visual—are significant because of the extent to which they permeate the mass culture of the present, even beyond the page or the screen.

Given the current mass popularity of historical narratives, both textual and visual, it is clear that feminist discourse cannot engage with historiography without also engaging with the realm of popular culture and consequently with the messiness of contradictory feminist and nostalgic desires. To conclude, then, the woman's historical novel and its relationship to both feminist politics and narrative pleasures associated with tradition pushes toward a re-conceptualization of "movement." In feminist discourse,

[48] Kennedy, Victoria. "Mad Men and Images of Women: Imitation, Nostalgia, and Consumerism." *Cinephile* 11.1 (Summer 2015): 7-13.

movement is generally thought of in terms of forward motion or progression: the second wave builds upon the first and moves the discourse forward toward equality. In history, too, the idea of progress and teleology favour a view of moving in one direction, straight ahead, toward an improved future. This idea of progress is emphasized in the popular aphorism derived from a George Santayana quotation warning that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.[49] Repetition, we are told, is the opposite of progress. However, movement, in its most basic sense, does not encompass only one direction; movement can consist of changing direction multiple times, of doubling back, or even of making intersecting paths where past movement and present movement meet. What popular women's historical fiction reveals, above all, is that feminist political movement is not a straight and narrow path. Old ideas, old patterns, our history and our nostalgia for that history cannot be easily discarded. Rather, new ways of being and understanding "woman" will be brought about through a dance of back and forth, through the movement of consciousness between old and new, familiar and radical.

[49] The exact quotation is: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (Santayana 82).

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