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Widening the Feminist Lens: Gillian Flynn's Exploration of Female Villainy

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Abstract

Gillian Flynn challenges fiction's male-dominated presence by asserting female presence in number, relevance and agency. Instead of following patriarchal expectations which maintain that female characters must be virtuous, Flynn evokes female villains whose complexities and monstrous actions extend beyond the limits of the Gothic tradition from which she draws. Although Flynn champions female agency within fiction, her efforts meet harsh criticism from mainstream audiences, specifically regarding *Gone Girl.* I assert the backlash stems from audiences' failure to see Amy's character apart from their own expectations of what a feminist character must represent. While feminism in general means supporting efforts for women's equality in all aspects of life, and rightly so, feminism must also be understood as an individualized need since women require different forms of feminist support based on their own, unique context; thus, feminism is both a universal and individual necessity. Flynn demonstrates this feminist duality through her unique explorations of female villainy which widen fiction's feminist lens.

Key words: female villainy, feminism, Gothic literature, subversion.

Introduction

When we think of a hero from a work of fiction be it film, television, book, or comic, perhaps who comes to mind is Thor or Ironman from Marvel or perhaps a literary hero such as Atticus Finch. To ask for a female hero to come to mind may prove more difficult. We can name at least one to be sure, such as Wonder Woman, but the pool of female heroes is noticeably smaller, especially females who do not share the spotlight with a man. In simplest terms, there is a disproportionate number of female protagonists to their male counterpart.

In fact, C. Francemone et al note "In proportional terms, male narrative characters outnumber female characters roughly two to one" (547). Female protagonists like Wonder Woman are not common as Francemone et al have analyzed; they state not only are women underrepresented, but that when they are present, they are depicted stereotypically and in secondary roles which "reinforce negative attitudes toward women through detrimental portrayals" (547). This underrepresentation does not only regard film since, "Research on other media finds similar patterns of underrepresentation" (550). Strikingly, the list of attributes is the same when comparing female hero characteristics to male hero characteristics. Yet, the list of female hero characteristics to typical female characteristics is different from one another, while the differences between a male hero and a typical male is not at all different. For example, according to data from Wim Tigges, one of the traits listed for female and male heroes is the ability to be "silent and restrained." The typical man is also qualified as "silent and restrained," whereas the typical woman is qualified not as "silent and restrained" but "talkative." In another example, female and male heroes are qualified as "active," as is the typical man, whereas the typical woman is qualified in the complete opposite meaning, as "passive" (Tigges 141). Moreover, Tigges notes that women in a protagonist role will most often play "the victim

(patiently suffering or resilient but powerless) or as a "subordinate character (prostitute, barmaid, secretary), usually showing stereotypically 'feminine' behavior" (132). Indeed, a glaring need exists for more female protagonists to be cast and for those roles to offer agency, not just the typical secondary role.

While providing agency to female actors and characters in fiction sounds easy enough, writers must battle not only patriarchal tradition but also fellow feminists. In the last chapter of this thesis, I explore the complexity between feminism as a global meaning and feminism in terms of an individual woman's context. In global terms, one accepted definition of feminism comes from bell hooks: "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression." While hooks' definition is effective on a global scale, communicating this concept into the everyday needs of all women cannot be encapsulated into one phrase, not that hooks' definition asserts this purpose, however. The point is that putting hooks' definition to work will look different for each woman; therefore, aside from an all-encompassing statement, each woman owns an individual definition of what feminism means to her.

Gillian Flynn is no exception in communicating her ideas of feminism on an individual level. Flynn is an American domestic noir novelist who works to disrupt the status quo regarding the inferior ways women are cast in books and film. She has written three novels: *Sharp Objects* (2006), *Dark Places* (2009) and *Gone Girl* (2012). Each novel has also been adapted for television or film: *Sharp Objects* was released as a one-season series to HBO in 2018 for which Flynn adapted the screenplay; *Dark Places* was published in film in 2015; and *Gone Girl*, for which Flynn wrote the screenplay, was released as a feature box office film in 2014 (Hoedel). Flynn has received a combination of over fifty award nominations and wins, including being a *New York Times* best seller for over one hundred weeks (Hoedel, "Awards"). Clearly, Flynn's

work reaches vast audiences, and the application of her individual feminist notions resonate with readers. Though a self-professed feminist, she states clearly that she does not write overt feminist messages in her stories (Oyler). Rather, Flynn does something far more innovative: she writes stories in ways that communicate a global feminist notion but also demonstrates a feminist meaning by challenging that global notion. Flynn's decision to write female characters who behave outside any expectation, including any feminist expectation is, in fact, a feminist act. In other words, readers of Flynn's novels are not able to bask in the feminist glow of her characters. Quite the opposite, Flynn challenges readers to figure out how feminism factors into her captivating stories. As is explained within the context of all three novels, Flynn is heavy-handed in first establishing a familiarity that is traditional patriarchal standards for female characters; this act situates readers to feel comfortable and knowledgeable since experiencing these standards is common- female characters are given secondary roles, are used as love interests, are victims of misogynist abuse and punished or killed when they act outside of traditional expectations. Flynn then asserts an undermining irony that readers feel sharply when they find out they were rooting for female characters who are likeable because they were subjected to patriarchal constraints. These characters manage to break free from those constraints but do so in unrecognizable, anti-feminist ways. Therefore, to accept Flynn's novels means readers must realize female protagonists' likable or empathetic attributes are actually a reinforcement of misogynistic practices or patriarchal traditions while Flynn's writing female characters to be outlandish, menacing villains who do not embody hooks' global definition of ending "sexism, sexist exploitation, oppression" is actually an act of feminism.

Flynn's third novel, *Gone Girl,* is a prime example of the controversy surrounding Flynn's communication of her individual approach to a feminist meaning. Because of the

backlash stemming from Flynn's lead female character, Amy Dunne, Flynn is asked in nearly every interview, regardless of the current project for which Flynn is being interviewed, to address the claims that she or her work is misogynist for her violent depiction of Amy. Flynn responds to critics who disagree with the exceeding violence her female characters embody by stating, "'It's extraordinarily dangerous and actually misogynist to represent only women who are good. Because that puts us in this very small and constricting box.'" She also asserts, "'I believe very strongly that women should be portrayed in all the variations that exist'" (Flynn qtd. in Hoedel). Furthermore, Flynn states the claims of being a misogynist for writing such unlikable women "'just bounces right off'" because "'It's such a ridiculous notion that my novels are misogynist because I don't write the kind of women you want'" (Flynn qtd. in Abbott). Flynn not only challenges traditional notions of female characters but also the way readers define feminism in fiction. In Abbott's interview, Flynn touches the nerve of the dilemma in which feminists find themselves- defining feminism for every woman but defining it through an individual perception. Flynn's refusal to "write the kind of women you want" demonstrates her individualistic meaning of feminism (qtd. in Abbott).

However, Flynn writes complicated stories, so the backlash she receives regarding claims she supports misogyny, on one hand, is understandable. Flynn writes with an individualized feminist meaning, which readers do not expect, and also includes a complex anti-feminist interiority. Flynn does not allow readers to figure out her feminist intentions until midway through her stories or sometimes even later. On the other hand, the backlash holds fast to reader expectations of their own individual definitions and expectations of feminism. In this instance, readers approach Flynn's stories with expectations for Flynn to live up to every feminist reader's

definition of feminism instead of perceiving Flynn's feminist meaning according to her own individual, feminist ideas.

Flynn develops characters from her own feminist viewpoint, situating females as her lead characters, though she writes untraditional characters as they are incredibly unlikable and violent. Amma from *Sharp Objects* is a thirteen-year-old who is a budding serial killer of young girls; Diondra from *Dark* Places is a pregnant teenager who strangles her boyfriend's young sister after a satanic ritual; Amy from *Gone Girl* frames her cheating husband for murder, makes two false rape claims, slits the throat of her prep school boyfriend and uses her unborn baby as extortion for her husband's silence. Flynn's critics label her work as misogynist due to the graphic violence and devious nature of her female characters; however, Flynn's critics fail to make the connection that writing those outlandish and devious characters is an exercise in feminism, for Flynn focuses her stories on female characters who break the bonds of patriarchal expectation due to their relatable as well as their overtly unrelatable character composition. She is an innovative writer who expands female character development. Most impressive, Flynn's work demonstrates a feminism without embodying a popularized feminist message. This aspect is what critics seem to ignore in their negative reviews. Though Flynn regards herself a feminist, she is clear that her novels, and particularly *Gone Girl,* are not stories with a thematic message for women (Oyler). Therefore, Flynn subverts the long-standing tradition of writing female characters who are granted authorial permission to approach only the edge of patriarchal boundaries. Flynn crosses the boundary beyond what is deemed acceptable by patriarchal standards; in this instance alone, her writing is communicated as a feminist act that widens fiction's feminist lens.

In fact, Flynn's writing style hinges on an understanding of feminism in both its general sense as well as within the individual scope. In the global sense, she writes stories featuring female leads with a predominately female cast who, through a complex interiority, communicate a woman's viewpoint. Flynn's novels employ a single female narrator apart from *Gone Girl* which hosts a split, husband-wife narration, though Amy controls the story. In an individual sense, Flynn makes consistent use of subversion that sustains reader engagement. She subverts traditional gender roles and responsibilities in each novel and surprises readers by upending their expectations. While Flynn employs subversion generously, she is also skilled in positioning plot twists in unlikely places, such as within the end pages of *Sharp Objects* and *Dark Places,* and in the center as well as in the last few pages of *Gone Girl*. One reason for Flynn's strong readership may be due to telling stories which can strike uncomfortably close to the domestic space, as she writes from a global feminist viewpoint about mother-daughter power struggles, poverty, lack of father figures and infidelity. Moreover, Flynn does not shy away from gritty details of human relationships and the damage women can do to one another. In fact, she revels in those gritty details whilst maintaining her feminist viewpoint which "challeng[es] the social structures of a patriarchal society which represses and marginalizes women" (Tavassoli and Ghasemi). Flynn approaches her stories through the lens of a global understanding of feminism then builds her stories around self-serving, murderous, anti-feminist females.

Furthermore, Flynn evokes frightening female villains whose shocking and monstrous actions extend far beyond the limits of the monsters from the Gothic tradition she draws from. Flynn's style also uses more than one villain in her stories and intensifies the villainy by implanting monstrous behaviors within unassuming characters. Although Flynn's exploration of female villainy is innovative, she also draws from past feminist movements within fiction, specifically the

New Woman movement and Gilbert and Gubar's feminist literary criticism of Gothic literature. Thus, providing an historical, literary context is important.

New Woman writers were subject to misogynist treatment and felt the threat of punishment for their feminist fiction. The New Woman fiction writers during the Victorian fin de siècle, are considered the first wave of feminists though it "was not the first appearance of feminist ideals, but it was the first real political movement for the Western world" ("Types of feminism"). New Woman writers took to their pens as "agent[s] of social and political transformation," constructing stories to subvert patriarchal standards or misogyny with strands of inked resistance; however, they were continually threatened by anti-feminist female and male writers who worked to sabotage the writers' reputations which could end their careers (Heilman 4).

Women as monsters

Feminist ideas conveyed in New Woman fiction overlap with Gothic literature since the Victorian era was at its end when New Woman fiction was forming. While New Woman fiction empowered women through stories with hyper-femininity and can-do spirit, Gothic literature focused on themes of female entrapment, monstrosity and punishment. However, within the punishments women received, Gothic literature also communicated subversive messages of feminist resistance. For example, Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* is arguably the quintessential Gothic work, for *Jane Eyre* figures punishment as a prominent feature of the novel with Jane and Bertha's imprisonments resulting in varying degrees of monstrosity and madness. Though Gothic literature focuses heavily on female monsters and madness, stories depicting female

monsters also figure prominently in ancient literature. Therefore, Flynn's female villains, who are monstrous, both mimic and resist the archetype of female monsters who have been identified throughout literary history.

Female monsters date back to ancient times, when myths were used to "define cultural boundaries;" this use is still in practice as female villains serve to communicate the cultural anxiety of the moment (McGreevy). Classicist Debbie Felton states regarding the ancient myths "that pervade Western lore today, a surprising number of [monsters] were coded as women" who "all spoke to men's fear of women's destructive potential" (Felton qtd. in McGreevy). Men from classical Greek and Roman mythology were heroes. Yet, these heroes would not have been successful without the help from women. Theseus bested the labyrinth only because Ariadne gave him a tool to guide him out; Madea murdered and damaged her reputation for Jason, only to be betrayed by him and their children's safety threatened; Perseus was aided by the goddess, Athena, in defeating the monstrous Medusa. Known as a gorgon, Medusa was originally considered an exceeding beauty but was punished by Athena. In fact, "Medusa's duplicitous beauty became synonymous with the danger she possessed, cementing the trope of a villainous seductress that endures to this day" (McGreevy). Ancient examples of female monsters demonstrate that women are coded as creatures who either serve with no reward or are creatures who terrify and are considered monsters as the antithesis of femininity.

In terms of monsters figuring in Gothic literature, Karen F. Stein writes that not only do "monsters figure conspicuously" but monsters are also a "product of a sensibility that glorifies the self in isolation from society" (125). Stein relates in the Gothic era that a male character who rebels against his typical pattern of behavior to "search for truth" is regarded as noble, which is a "pattern of behavior expressed in the heroic epic" (125). For a woman to assert a search of self,

however, is “deemed bizarre and crazy” and consequently, “the Gothic mode- and in particular the concept of self as monster- is associated with narratives of female experience” (123). Monsters, then, “are particularly prominent in the work of women writers, because for women, the roles of rebel, outcast, seeker of truth, are monstrous in themselves” (123). Furthermore, Stein relates in Gothic narratives, “women reveal deep-seated conflicts between a socially acceptable passive…“feminine” self and a suppressed, monstrous hidden self” (123).

In addition, Stein asserts a physical difference between monstrosity and madness: “The monster is a physical emblem of inescapable stigma, madness is a more subjective aberration” (124). Sara Tavassoli and Pavin Ghasemi complement Stein’s notion of monster as an issue of physicality and figure female monsters as “grotesque bodies…explicitly created to embody contradictions” and further discuss female monsters are “disgustingly strange and unfamiliar and at the same time hauntingly familiar.” This uncanny familiarity functions as “metaphors for repulsive realities that human beings seek to deny and remove. However, writer Theodora Goss notes that the female monster needs not be defined by physicality but is a “categorical mismatch.” Interestingly, both descriptions of females as monsters by physical traits and by being eerily familiar, pair with Flynn’s depictions of her female villains. Flynn’s villains are a mismatch because they do not fit it to society. For example, Amma is aware she has a need to hurt others and spends time alone feeding her masochistic need; Diondra fails to fit in at her new school and keeps only the company of two teenage boys, and Amy is not capable of maintaining a genuine friendship with other women due to her manipulative personality. Yet, Flynn’s three female villains also resemble physical aspects of monstrosity. Amma “embodies contradictions” as a young girl who dresses in revealing and sexy ways when she away from home. One way readers see Amma as a monster may rest with the narration, causing readers to sexualize young

Amma, which is contradiction readers also experience and can acknowledge as grotesque. Pregnant Diondra refers to her baby in utero as a thing as her body takes on the physical changes pregnancy demands. She becomes more agitated and violent as her pregnancy develops. Amy embodies a physical sense of monstrosity when she is covered in Desi's blood and ringed with ligature wounds in addition to her calm, calculated tone. Flynn's varied ways of communicating engaging stories with interesting, monstrous female villains speaks to an individualistic definition of feminism.

In addition to noting the ways female characters are labeled as monsters, Stein also relates defining madness is particularly difficult since it can encompass nearly anything a female literary character performs outside of feminine tradition, including failing to complete domestic duties (125). Furthermore, Mitchell shares that the two "most enduring tropes of the female monster are the witch and the madwoman," situating madness as a commonly conjoined subset of monstrosity. Female characters who are monsters are considered mad, and madness in women is a quality outside patriarchal expectations, so depending on how the writer goes about characterizing a female villain, she may be labeled with only one term, mad or monstrous, but assumed she is both for living contrary to misogynist constraints. Stein notes "regardless of the label [of monster or mad woman], in Gothic literature, women are punished for failing to follow patriarchal constructs, then labeled as Other and stigmatized. Mitchell asserts, however, in any era, the "idea of the female beast is prevalent" and that female monsters have "morphed many times, but the fear she engenders is consistent." As a result, female characters are labeled as different iterations of villainy, with madness and monstrosity being common ways to vilify women in fiction.

Angel in the house

In conjunction with villainous women in fiction being labeled as monstrous, Gilbert and Gubar also discuss the prominent theme of the angel in the house and share from Virginia Woolf the "'angel in the house' is the most pernicious image male authors have ever imposed upon literary women" (20). They state, "The ideal woman that male authors dream of generating is always an angel," creating a woman who adhere to the "noblest femininity" who "'*has no story of her own"* but gives "advice and consolation" to others, listens, smiles,[and] sympathizes" (Gilbert and Gubar 22). Yet, Gilbert and Gubar assert that even when the female characters play the angel in the house perfectly, they are still doomed to death, since "Whether she becomes an *objet d'art* or a saint…it is the surrender of her self- of her personal comfort, her personal desires, o both- that is the beautiful angel-woman's key act, while it is precisely this sacrifice which dooms her both to death and to heaven" (25). Since angel in the house characters must die to themselves to serve the greater male good, it is understood that "to be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead," meaning, if not physically killed for being monstrous or mad, female characters "lead a posthumous existence in [their] own lifetime" (25). Clearly, being a female character in Gothic literature means a life lived on the fringe and in conjunction with death, whether by isolation or corporeal doom, an idea Flynn's stories both establish and reject.

If an angel in the house acting within misogynist expectations is present, there is typically also a madwoman in the attic acting outside those expectations. Gilbert and Gubar contend the madwoman under the male gaze serves to act as a foil; however, when women write the madwoman, she figures as the author's double to act as the mouthpiece for the author. The author can write the madwoman to communicate what she feels is wrong with society (Gilbert

and Gubar 78). For example, Gilbert and Gubar state when men write a female as a witch, it is an act of reinforcing patriarchal structures- the witch as an ugly, unmarried and childless hag. Yet, when women write a female character as a witch, "they are projecting their anger and dis-ease into dreadful figures…women are both identifying with and revising the self-definitions patriarchal culture has imposed on them" (79). Bertha Mason from *Jane Eyre* is arguably the most well-known Victorian madwoman in the attic. Bertha is both monster (and madwoman, as they are typically thought of as interchangeable) in every definition mentioned above. She is the nighttime specter who shrieks and wails (349). Bertha also steals out of the attic to wreak havoc- attacking Richard, tearing up Jane's wedding veil and starting a fire that kills her (359-360). Through Bertha's entrapment in the attic by Rochester, Bronte illustrates the patriarchal consequences for not fitting into male expectations. Moreover, Jane questions whether Bertha's being imprisoned to Rochester's attic is "what happens to the woman who [tries] to be the fleshly vessel of the [masculine] elan?" (Chase qtd in Gilbert and Gubar 361). Virginia Morris seems to answer Jane's question stating, "While the novelists were sympathetic [to women's gendered oppression], they were also Victorians; they could not allow women to get away with murder or destroy the established power structure" (5). Because *Jane Eyre* is situated within the Gothic era, the resolution of the novel affords Rochester to be redeemed by Jane and to come away the hero.

Misogyny and the male monster

In contrast to female monstrosity, the contemporary male monster, the misogynist, victimizes women in his own form. Notice that both 'male' and 'monster' are dropped from the term misogynist. When the term misogynist is used, it is understood as men who hate or are

prejudiced against women, of which the term monster also fits. In addition, the word misogynist is not equipped with monster in its label because males are rarely identified as monsters in fiction; instead, unlikable men are known as "inscrutably interesting, dark, or tormented but ultimately compelling even when he might behave in distasteful ways" (Gay). Therefore, going forward, parentheses will be placed around (female) when discussing misogyny to reflect that women can be misogynists also. Additionally, the parentheses around 'female' not only points out that females can also fit the term but also points out that referring to words as inherently male is a cultural bias. Words or phrases referring to an idea that could mean more than one gender should not default to meaning male. In writing, when phrases or ideas are assumed as male by default can arguably assert that only men in literature own that phrase or idea; furthermore, failing to have a term for women who hate or are biased toward women means that the term misogynist should be used. Stein's article relates what literature has reflected for centuries of storytelling, that, "Males are portrayed as heroes struggling to define themselves and working for personal power and success, in all aspects of human endeavor while females" according to Joanna Russ, quoted in Stein, have only one role, "the protagonist of a Love Story" (126). Gay also refers to the double standard females face in literature regarding likeability; while "an unlikable man is billed as an anti-hero, earning a special term to explain those ways in which he deviated from the norm, the traditionally likable" a woman is labeled as monster. This is not to say that women should not be labeled as monsters; Flynn specializes in creating female characters who are monsters, so yes, females should be written to be monstrous and to be labeled as such. However, the point is for readers to notice the lack of male characters being labeled as monsters when they share monstrous tendencies with women.

Another way to think of men and monsters, is to think of Dr. Frankenstein's monster and how those who know the story or grow up watching the cartoon without having read Shelley's story assume that *Frankenstein* is the name of the monster, not the name of the man who created then abandoned his progeny. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is another example of a monstrous man who evades the label. When Dr. Jekyll's intentionally takes a potion to embody the evil Mr. Hyde so that Dr. Jekyll can experience a freedom to act lasciviously without responsibility. Both men, Dr. Frankenstein and Dr. Jekyll are the real monsters in their stories yet are not labeled as such and put distance between themselves and their creations. Though male characters execute monstrous deeds throughout the ages, they receive labels that reinforce their power, whereas women are powerful but labeled as monstrous because they threaten masculinity. The notion of male monster-who-must-never-be-labeled-as-such so as to reinforce patriarchal walls, is obviously parallel to the power plays of the male misogynist, as he is one who assumes power and control over women in any and / or every aspect of her personal and cultural life. He will not change his behavior in such a way that would take power away from any aspect of his personal or societal success. His misogynistic choices define him as a builder of patriarchal walls, which benefit all men, misogynist or not, and which impede women's access to choices that would benefit women.

Male and (Female) monster identities

Female monsters are prolific through history, dating back to Ancient times, when myths were used to "define cultural boundaries;" this use is still in practice as female villains serve to communicate the cultural anxiety of the moment (McGreevy). Female villainy in Victorian times focused on women reacting to gender constraints in the domestic sphere. In this era, women were

written to be violent but not without their action resulting in death or being relegated to a life of insanity.

Classist Debbie Felton states that regarding the ancient myths "that pervade Western lore today, a surprising number of [monsters] were coded as women" who " all spoke to men's fear of women's destructive potential" (qtd. in McGreevy). Men from classical Greek and Roman mythology were heroes. Theseus defeated the minotaur; Jason captured the golden fleece; Perseus defeated the sea monster. Yet, these heroes would not have been successful without the help from women. Theseus was given yarn by Ariadne so he could find his way out of the labyrinth; Jason heavily relied on Madea, and she became a murderous outcast in return.

Females, by contrast, are not labeled heroes for their major contributions to the men's achievements. Instead, women were either property through arranged marriage, of which the male would gain access to land and wealth by marrying a king's daughter, or women were monsters. The most famous monster from ancient Greek and Roman mythology is Medusa. She was considered an exceeding beauty and raped by Poseidon. She was punished for being raped by Athena. Medusa had enchanting powers that threatened men to such a degree, they could not look at her face without being turned to stone or being bitten by the snakes that adorned her head. McGreevy notes that "Medusa's duplicitous beauty became synonymous with the danger she possessed, cementing the trope of a villainous seductress that endured to this day." Homer's hero Odysseus found himself in battle with monsters Scylla and Charybdis, both female. Odysseus had to figure out ways to outsmart these monsters in order to get past them. Scylla is a monster that horrifies due to her appearance; she has a beautiful face but "monstrous nethers" which Zimmerman argues, points to "the disgust and fear with which male-dominated societies regard women's bodies when they behave in unruly ways" (McGreevy). The menacing

whirlpool, Charybdis, is assigned as female and terrified sailors ‘”with strength enough to swallow a man”’(Zimmerman qtd in McGreevy). Mortal women were also easily labeled as monsters in ancient times when they “deviated in any way from the prescribed motherhood narrative” (Zimmerman qtd in McGreevy). Today, though, feminist women are retelling the story of female monsters through a feminist gaze by “reimagin[ing] the significance of these monstrous women;” for example, Margaret Atwood retold the story of Penelope and Madeline Miller, who wrote a novel about Circe (McGreevy).These authors are depicting the female monsters’ horrors “as their greatest strengths” (McGreevy). Zimmerman states that “Female monsters represent ‘the bedtime stories patriarchy tells itself’ reinforcing expectations about women’s bodies and behavior” (qtd in McGreevy). Thus, feminist authors are resisting ancient misogynist tales that have permeated Western culture by replacing the male gaze with a feminist lens.

Though her stories are labeled most uniformly as domestic noir fiction to communicate a woman’s marginalized position in a patriarchal-dominated society, Flynn’s body of work has definite markings of Gothic literature regarding her focus on the relationship between woman’s gendered roles and her own set of expectations, separate from patriarchal society’s demands. Flynn takes bold strides in her use of monsters and madness, a popular fin de siècle theme in women’s writing. Flynn also supplies female leads who control the narration, like in *Jane Eyre*. The Gothic lends itself ideally to Flynn’s writing as her work echoes the style of the macabre and the use of subversion, as in Flannery O’Connor and Shirley Jackson’s style, so that readers were typically incorrect when pinning guilt on their perceived villain; subversion is fundamental in Flynn’s work as the driving force of her feminist stories. Drawing from subversive style of Gothic literature, feminist issues figure as a shadowy but omnipresent factor in Flynn’s work.

In terms of monsters figuring in Gothic literature, Karen F. Stein writes that not only do "monsters figure conspicuously" but also monsters are a "product of a sensibility that glorifies the self in isolation from society" (123). Stein relates in the Gothic era, as Gay does in the post-modern era, that a male character who rebels against his typical pattern of behavior to "search for truth" is regarded as noble, which is a "pattern of behavior [that] is expressed in the heroic epic," but for a woman to assert a search of self is "deemed bizarre and crazy" and consequently, "the Gothic mode- and in particular the concept of self as monster- is associated with narratives of female experience" (123). Monsters, then, "are particularly prominent in the work of women writers, because for women, the roles of rebel, outcast, seeker of truth, are monstrous in themselves" (123). Furthermore, Stein relates in Gothic narratives, "women reveal deep-seated conflicts between a socially acceptable passive… "feminine" self and a suppressed, monstrous hidden self" (123). Gothic stories, like Flynn's stories, replace morals with "excessive emotions, sensational experiences and immoral deeds" (Tavassoli and Ghasemi 2). Flynn's female villains fit the label of monster. In addition to discussing the conflicts and emotions that draw out monstrosity in Gothic women, Stein also asserts a physical difference between monstrosity and madness: "The monster is a physical emblem of inescapable stigma, madness is a more subjective aberration" (124). Similarly, Tavassoli and Ghasemi figure female monsters as "grotesque bodies…explicitly created to embody contradictions" and that they are "disgustingly strange and unfamiliar and at the same time hauntingly familiar" that work as "metaphors for repulsive realities that human beings seek to deny and remove." However, writer Theodora Goss notes that the female monster needs not be defines by physicality but is someone who is a "categorical mismatch" (Asma qtd in Tavassoli and Ghasemi).

Regarding madness, Stein states that it is particularly difficult to define "even among medical professionals" since madness can encompass nearly anything a female literary character performs outside of feminine tradition, including failing to complete domestic duties (125). Mitchell shares that the two "most enduring tropes of the female monster are the witch and the madwoman," situating madness as a commonly assumed subset of monstrosity. Female characters who are monsters are considered mad, and madness in women is a quality outside patriarchal expectations, so depending on how the writer goes about characterizing a female villain, she is either labeled mad or monstrous and assumed she is both for living contrary to misogynist constraints. Stein notes "regardless of the label [of monster or mad woman], in Gothic literature, women are punished for failing to follow patriarchal constructs, then labeled as Other and stigmatized. Mitchell asserts, however, regardless of the era, the "idea of the female beast is prevalent" and that female monsters have "morphed many times, but the fear she engenders is consistent." Female characters are villainous when they resist misogynist conventions; they are labeled as different iterations of villainy, with madness and monstrosity being common ways to vilify women in fiction. Women in Gothic fiction, and stories with a Gothic vein as in Flynn's work, are labeled monstrous and assumed mad or labeled as mad and treated as monstrous.

In conjunction with villainous women in fiction being labeled as monstrous, Gilbert and Gubar discuss the prominent theme of the angel in the house and share from Virginia Woolf that the '"angel in the house" is the most pernicious image male authors have ever imposed upon literary women" (20). They state that "The ideal woman that male authors dream of generating is always an angel," creating a woman who adhere to the "noblest femininity" who '"*has no story of her own"* but gives "advice and consolation" to others, listens, smiles,[and] sympathizes"

(Gilbert and Gubar 22). Yet, Gilbert and Gubar assert that even when the female characters play the angel in the house perfectly, they are still doomed to death, since "Whether she becomes an *objet d'art* or a saint…it is the surrender of her self- of her personal comfort, her personal desires, o both- that is the beautiful angel-woman's key act, while it is precisely this sacrifice which dooms her both to death and to heaven" (25). Since angel in the house women must die to themselves to serve the greater male good, it is understood that "to be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead," meaning, if not physically killed for being monstrous or mad, female characters "lead a posthumous existence in [their] own lifetime" (25). Clearly, being a female character in Gothic literature means a life lived on the fringe and in conjunction with death, whether by isolation or corporeal doom.

With an angel in the house acting out misogynist expectations or else, there is typically a madwoman in the attic. Gilbert and Gubar contend the madwoman in the male gaze serves to act as a foil; however, when women write the madwoman, she figures as the author's double so as to act as the mouth piece for the author to shout out in fits of rage or madness what she feels is wrong with society (Gilbert and Gubar 78). For example, they state that when men write a female as a witch, it is an act of reinforcing patriarchal structures- the witch as an ugly (unmarried and childless) hag. Yet, when women write a female character as a witch, "they are projecting their anger and dis-ease into dreadful figures…women are both identifying with and revising the self-definitions patriarchal culture has imposed on them" (79). Bertha Mason from *Jane Eyre,* is arguably the most well-known Victorian madwoman in the attic. Bertha is both monster (and madwoman, as they are typically thought of as interchangeable) in every definition mentioned above. She is the nighttime specter who shrieks and wails (Gilbert and Gubar 349). Bertha also steals out of the attic to wreak havoc- attacking Richard, tearing up Jane's wedding

veil and starting a fire that Bertha does not escape (359-360). Bronte shows through the male treatment of Bertha by Rochester, the patriarchal consequences for not fitting into male expectations. The punishment of Bertha is stated in Gilbert and Gubar's analysis, "Bertha does…provide the governess with an example of how not to act" (361). Moreover, Jane questions whether Bertha's being imprisoned to Rochester's attic is "what happens to the woman who [tries] to be the fleshly vessel of the [masculine] elan?" (Chase qtd in Gilbert and Gubar 361). Virginia Morris asserts that even though "novelists were sympathetic [to women's gendered oppression], they were also Victorians; they could not allow women to get away with murder or destroy the established power structure" (5). Because *Jane Eyre* is situated within the Gothic era, the resolution of the novel affords Rochester to be redeemed by Jane and to come away the hero. Due to patriarchal constructs, "Female villains in the Gothic era, did not benefit from their crimes by finding happiness or peace" (Morris 5).

The notion of male monster-who-must-never-be-labeled-as-such to reinforce patriarchal walls, is obviously parallel to the power plays of the male misogynist, as he is one who assumes power and control over women in aspects of her personal and cultural life. He will not change his behavior in such a way that would take power away from any aspect of his personal or societal success. His misogynistic choices define him as a builder of patriarchal walls, which benefit all men, whether misogynist or not.

In chapter one, I explore two main points regarding how subversion is used to both subvert and highlight female villainy. The first point is Flynn's use of subversion in characterization. Regarding *Sharp Objects,* I analyze Flynn's subversion of the traditional female villain by juxtaposing her with Flynn's new brand of female villain; I also discuss Flynn's subversion of traditional gender roles. The second point focuses on subversion as it is presented

through theme. *Sharp Objects* explores a subversion of traditional power structures, and *Dark Places* focuses on Flynn subverting the literary tradition of male characters escaping punishment. Regarding terms, even though the female villains in both novels fit the literary Gothic sense of monster, my purpose for chapter one serves to foreground how Flynn communicates a feminist message through her method of subversion, so I chose not to discuss monstrosity because it is the primary focus of chapter two.

Chapters two and three are dedicated solely to *Gone Girl.* Chapter two discusses the ways Flynn uses subversion in conjunction with Flynn's narrative structure to secretly prepare readers for a bombshell plot twist. The bulk of the chapter, though, focuses on villainy in the form of monster identities. Desi and Nick are discussed in terms of being misogynist monsters, and I discuss the relevance of how we, as society, attribute maleness as the default understanding of some words whereas meanings attributed to females is commonly gendered. The bulk of chapter two, though, focuses on how Flynn demonstrates Amy's monstrous identity as a feminist message. There are three main points in chapter two: Amy as emerging monster, Amy as monstrous manipulator and Amy in total monstrous identity which serves to break Desi and Nick's misogynist bind, therefore overcoming patriarchy. The overall feminist point in this chapter is that Amy must realize her full potential as monster if she is going to destroy the patriarchal bind Desi and Nick hold on her. To this point, I assert the significance of Flynn crafting Amy's identity as a monster *before* she meets Nick, thereby resisting the Gothic formula of a woman being punished then going mad because of the extent of misogynist punishment.

Chapter three focuses on the critiques primarily the film has received; I touch on the positive reviews but focus on a selection of claims which label *Gone Girl* as misogynist. I provide a revision of Amy's character to reconcile readers' reactions to Amy's monster identity

against Flynn's feminist purpose. I use Copati's analysis of Margaret Atwood's television series *The Testaments* which asserts the main character is misogynist but that she also qualifies as a feminist, albeit a bad one. Thus, the term "bad feminist" from Roxane Gay's essay, "Not Here to Make Friends" is referenced in this chapter as it is in chapter two.

Chapter One: Flynn uses subversion to demonstrate a feminist exploration of character development and theme in *Sharp Objects* and *Dark Places*

Chapter one demonstrates that Flynn successfully widens the feminist lens by mimicking traditional female character tropes to subvert them, thus removing traditional limits from female characterization. Flynn subverts a traditional female villain role in *Sharp Objects* to highlight a different female villain who adheres to no bounds; regarding *Dark Places*, Flynn subverts traditional gender roles to demonstrate a female villain who manipulates, while her boyfriend is the submissive partner.

Through subversion, Flynn stretches the boundaries of feminism using two female villains. Her choice to create novels focused on female villains is an important one since female characters are not given the same breadth of characterization as male characters. Flynn states that readers grow up able to experience a variety of male characters, "from good to bad to everything in between" and that "it's just incredibly important that you show all different kinds of women" (Flynn qtd. in Welsh). One way Flynn demonstrates "all kinds of women" is by establishing a traditional villain type to serve as a red herring for readers. For example, Flynn uses subversion to establish Adora as the murderous villain. Adora is easy to mark as a villain because she follows a traditional female villain trope: the mommy-dearest character who looks and acts sweet to her child in public but treats her child in sinister ways in private. While readers are occupied loathing Adora and suspecting her of the murders of Ann and Natalie, as evidence against her mounts, Amma, the actual murderer of the girls, evades readers' radar. Flynn distracts readers with Adora's villain trope which works because Flynn plays to readers' expectations of what a female villain looks like- Adora lives in an old Gothic mansion in the South, maintains her beauty and is independently wealthy and powerful (Flynn "Sharp" 23,24). Though Adora is

married to a man, she makes the decisions in the house. Adora also suffers from the mental illness Munchausen by Proxy Syndrome (MBPS). Adora's illness manifests as a mother who ignores her children unless they're sick. Adora drugs and poisons her children to induce serious illness so that her daughters have no choice but to rely on their mother to nurse them back to health. Because Camille resisted taking the drugs and poisons from her mother due to sheer childhood stoicism, Adora shut Camille out of her life. Adora resumes her cruel treatment when Camille returns home after nearly a decade of being away (192). One example of her cruel treatment occurs when Adora meets with Camille privately. Adora invites Camille for drinks on the porch then turns wicked, telling Camille she never loved her and that she wished Camille had died instead of her younger sister (148, 149). At the close of this intense scene, Adora lunges at Camille, grabbing her arms and, "with one fingernail, circled the spot on my back that had no scars" and whispered, "The only place you have left…Someday I'll carve my name there" (149). Readers are familiar with this character type; classic thrillers such as *Carrie* and *Mommie Dearest* shocked audiences with cruel mothers as characters, while today's viewers see the trope through works such as the 2010 film *Black Swan* [and Disney's *Tangled*] as well as contemporary small screen reality series such as *Dance Moms* and *Toddlers and Tiaras,* which host evil or overbearing moms who control their daughters (Rosenberg). Flynn layers on the implications of Adora's villainy by constructing clues that intensify until Camille is so overcome with certainty, she is rendered nearly speechless, "I started sobbing before I got more than my name out…I kept sobbing… 'My mother' I said before collapsing again. I was heaving with sobs" (Flynn "Sharp" 230). Then ultimately, in a tremendous show of strength, Camille confesses, "'My mother did it,' [she] yelped into the phone, the words coming out like a

splatter" (231). Readers follow Camille's lead as narrator; after all, she knows Adora best, and there are now enough well-placed clues for readers to feel confident that Adora is the killer.

Flynn continues to layer on the subversion using characterization, this time leading readers to assume Detective Richard Willis will be the one who solves the murder cases since he is the expert. Late in the story, he confides in Camille he not only suspects Adora of the murders but that he is preparing to arrest her (233). Readers trust Richard's credibility and wait alongside him for the crack in the case he needs to make an arrest. As a result, Flynn's use of subversion is successful because readers trust their own set of expectations, which are familiar due to male characters being the ones holding authoritative positions and solving the crimes; Flynn sends readers on a chase that ends, in fruition, or so readers assume, since Adora is arrested for the murders of Ann and Natalie (244). Thus, Flynn employs Adora as a villain, in one way, by maintaining a female villain presence in fiction; Flynn then takes this idea to a more intense level as she presents Adora's conventional female villain type as a subversion which reveals, through a stunning plot twist, Amma, as the killer of Ann and Natalie.

Flynn challenges readers' expected ideas of feminism by expanding the scope of female villainy to include subverting Amma's character as well. Flynn uses Amma's innocent appearance, her gender and her outlandish behavior to hedge suspicion of Amma. Flynn asserts this subversion initially by establishing contradictions within Amma's character that are both reminiscent and contrary to the Victorian trope, the angel in the house. There are similarities between Patmore's poems about Honoria, for whom the trope is based, and the relationship between Adora and Amma (Gilbert and Gubar 22). For example, Adora requires thirteen-year-old Amma to dress in an angelic fashion. Amma appears the picture of innocence by wearing her long blonde hair in "disciplined rivulets down her back…a childish checked sundress, matching

straw hat by her side" (Flynn "Sharp" 42-43). Gilbert and Gubar mention Honoria in that she "has no story of her own except a sort of anti-story of selfless innocence based on the notion that 'Man must be pleased; but him to please / Is woman's pleasure'" (23). Applying Patmore's lines to Flynn's characters shows that Adora is the man who must be pleased while Amma is the woman who is not only supposed to please her mother but should take pleasure in doing so. Amma adheres to her mother's expectation, telling Camille, "'I'm her little doll'" (Flynn 43). Flynn reflects the stereotype of the sweet little girl only to subvert it, revealing the evil that lurks just under Amma's sweet face. Amma communicates to Camille that she only looks like an angel, stating she's "other things" when she's not under Adora's gaze; thereby, Amma follows Adora's expectation so Amma can subvert it, thereby fooling Adora (43). Amma's mother does not know that Amma, like Diondra from *Dark Places,* is an incredibly unlikable character. Some of her known unlikable traits (she is not revealed as the murderer until the very end) are drug use, sex with high school boys, fights with high school girls and Amma arranges for girls in her class to be sexually assaulted by boys (219). Amma is despicable and loathsome, and using Amma's age and innocent look, Flynn widens the feminist lens, putting into practice what she asserts in her interviews, that women must be cast as all types of characters instead of being written as angels or love interests or any sort of traditionally virtuous character since to do so supports patriarchal structures.

In addition, Flynn crafts the patriarchal, gendered stereotype that women could not possibly commit this type of murder and employs several characters to plant this idea throughout the novel. Two local Windgap dads are quotes for Camille's article stating their gendered assumptions: "'some crazy man musta done it'" and "'him…the sick baby killer…might be a homo that did it'" (13, 19-20). Camille's hard-boiled newspaper editor also assures Camille the

killer is not a woman: "'A woman? It's not a woman…This kind of guy doesn't stop'" (81, 80). Flynn offers a professional opinion by way of the detective on the case who states, "'I don't believe a woman would have done these girls this way'" and "'women don't fit the profile for …serial child murderer'" (162, 232). Flynn asserts a feminist purpose by using subversion to show the mistake in assuming criminal behaviors must work along gendered stereotypes; these responses from the characters are convincing, and, arguably, coupled with readers' own aversion to naming a young girl the evil doer, is an anticipation Flynn uses to draw out the suspense.

Another way Flynn creates a subversion within Amma's character is by crafting her as too outrageous and obvious in her villainy to be considered the murderer by the readers. Flynn has a firm grasp of how readers are likely to react to her characters and uses readers' expectations to keep suspicion of Amma away from them. Flynn leads readers to follow the idea that Amma is already bad enough as one type of villain- a cruel, misguided bully- so she couldn't possibly possess an additional villainous perspective; it would be too much for one female character since readers arguably are not accustomed to young female characters whose villainy is this diabolical. Though her mother is unaware, a cross-section of the town knows about Amma's villainy since they share opinions of Amma through candid conversations with Camille. She is told Amma is "'desperate for attention,'" that she has "'a major mean streak'" and is " 'awful'" and " 'truuuuuble'"(219, 133, 86). As a result, Amma's behavior is firmly established through other characters as bad, and because she is so well-known for being bad without receiving repercussion, readers accept her behavior as typical. In other words, no one is reporting Amma's behavior, so however bad it is, readers may perceive the situation as such: if the adults in the town know about Amma's behavior but do not bother to address it, Amma's behavior must not be too serious. Consequently, Flynn frames Amma in such a way that readers feel Amma may be

cruel enough to commit murder, but for most of the novel, readers do not feel confident that she would actually commit such an evil act based on the mean, but not alarming, message readers receive from the townsfolk. Amma's age and gender in addition to Flynn's sly way of guiding suspicion away from Amma by using lesser aspects of her villainy, work in concert to reveal a shocking twist when she is found to be the murderer.

In summary, Flynn reveals her feminist message in *Sharp Objects* by subverting one traditional female villain, Adora, to surprise her readers with a second female villain, Amma, who does not conform to reader expectations. Amma evades suspicion due to Adora acting as a screen in addition to Amma's innocent appearance, gender and outlandish behavior automatically excluding her from being a suspect. By creating two major villains who kill in varied ways, Flynn presents a clear message that women should not be discounted from possessing any degree or type of villainy nor should there exist any limit to the number of female villains in a story. Consequently, subversion of Adora as the traditional villain trope is a message to readers that a traditional female villain is outdated, and new perceptions and possibilities have arrived.

Dark Places also demonstrates subversion using female villainy. Flynn demonstrates a feminist purpose in one sense by subverting traditional gender roles and in another by illustrating a claustrophobic manipulation of the subordinate gender. *Dark Places* creates a centralized female villain, Diondra, whose qualities are masculine, unlike the traditionally feminine features of Adora and Amma. Diondra's boyfriend, Ben, is emasculated by a host of characters throughout the story. In addition, Diondra is also a murderer of Ben's sister and manipulates Ben which is one reason she is an unlikable character. Unlike *Sharp Objects* where readers may have a sense of empathy for Adora and Amma for possessing mental illnesses, Flynn arguably affords

Diondra no empathy for the mean, murdering, manipulating villain that she is. Flynn's second novel shows an even less likable character and injects a broader reach of evil, since more than one character takes part in evil practices.

Diondra is the masculine counterpart to boyfriend Ben's emasculated character; she is masculine in dress and attitude and manipulates Ben using money and sex. Unlike Amma's doll-like appearance, Diondra's appearance has a sharpness to it that is the opposite of feminine. Her head of "brown spiraly curls" are described as "crunchy...sharp" and "sting[ing]." (Flynn "Dark" 49). She wears thick coats of mascara and eyeliner which makes her look hard-edged and defiant. Diondra also dresses in men's clothes; she has feet so large she wears men's dress shoes, and she wears boxer shorts (165). In fact, one reason Diondra was never suspected of murder the night Ben's family is killed is that the shoeprint found in the home is a man's boot print, thereby excluding suspicion of any woman (329). Diondra's masculine appearance is confounding for Ben. He is attracted to her because she has sex with him and provides a life outside his miserable days at school and the farm; yet, she also unnerves him. Ben is uncomfortable with the way Diondra looks at Ben, with her hair down one side of her face, so that only one light blue eye fixes on him, and in a sideways glance, as if she is always watching him , "and…he felt really bone scared" (207). Flynn demonstrates a feminist point regarding characterization, by complicating the way a female character's appearance affects others. Flynn shows that no longer should other characters or readers rely on female characters to provide an expected look that satisfies others. Diondra blurs the gender line by having a harsh, anti-feminine look that sets her boyfriend on edge; her intimidating look and personality may make her all the more repulsive to readers since Flynn resists allowing Diondra to serve patriarchal standards in any fashion.

In addition, Diondra manipulates Ben with opportunity and sex. Ben accepts whatever behavior Diondra acts on him because whatever she gives him is better than what he has without her. Diondra provides Ben with a small sense of belonging, which is more than he is afforded anywhere else, even his home. Ben is the only son, and his dad left them, so Ben learned nothing children traditionally learn from their fathers. Ben's poor, lonely circumstances make him ideal for Diondra to manipulate. For example, Ben feels Diondra soften toward him when she makes him "look pretty" by applying nail polish and lipstick to Ben, so Ben enjoys this time together (50). While girls applying make-up on themselves and their girlfriends is a traditional feminine characteristic, applying make up to make the boyfriend look pretty is not a traditionally feminine practice, especially lipstick, which is applied, in a traditional feminine perspective, to attract boys. This practice is something Ben likes and looks forward to continuing when they run away together; however, Ben is unaware he is being manipulated. Diondra's taking charge of Ben's body is a patriarchal practice. That Ben looks forward to Diondra continuing this treatment when he daydreams about their running away together illustrates a subversion; Flynn subverts traditional treatments of women in fiction by characterizing Diondra as the misogynist who manipulates her boyfriend. Ben is also manipulated by Diondra in terms of what he wears. For example, when Diondra insists Ben wear black, he thinks to himself, "fucking Diondra would have her way as usual" but knows the only way he will have new clothes is to let Diondra choose for him (122). Diondra's controlling behavior shows what the less powerful partner must stomach in order to attain basic necessities. Diondra knows she is the only person who will buy new clothes for Ben, so she treats him as if she owns him. Diondra also emasculates Ben by calling him condescending names like "Tag," as in tag along, in front of her older friends (124). Ben has no friends without Diondra, so he quietly accepts her mockery of him.

Diondra is also manipulative regarding her sexual relationship with Ben. She takes him shopping and tells him he can "work off" the bill "wink, wink" (121). She is also aggressive and punishing with sex. Diondra punishes Ben for getting her pregnant by forcing him to perform oral sex as an apology to her, since she knows he doesn't like it. Ben submits to her will because "He'd knocked Diondra up and now she owned him" (199, 202). She also coerces Ben into having sex with her just so she can be condescending to him within earshot of Trey. When he feels threatened by Diondra and reaches to grab her, Diondra counters and scratches his face, making him bleed (164). Diondra never allows Ben to have the upper hand with her. While they have sex, Diondra emasculates Ben by yelling out so Trey can hear, "'Is that it? Is that all you got for me?"' Ben feels "gutted and depressed" and feels like crying after sex with Diondra. Flynn demonstrates a gender reversal, wherein the woman is the sexual aggressor, and the man is left unsure and unsatisfied. However, the culmination of Diondra's manipulation of Ben regarding sex occurs when she tells Ben he must take the blame for her murdering Ben's sister in addition to the devil-worshipping mayhem she committed in Ben's house the night his family was murdered. Ben accepts this role so Diondra can raise their child (307). Diondra's manipulation lasts for decades even though Ben no longer sees Diondra or their child. Ben goes to jail for Diondra and never confesses that Diondra is the one who murdered his sister. Flynn makes sure readers find Diondra's character utterly detestable which demonstrates that the subordinate gender has no choice under the aggressor's manipulation.

In addition, while feeling disgust for a female character may seem anti-feminist, it is not in the hands of Flynn. In one important instance, she demonstrates feminism through Diondra's villainy, which affords a larger scope of female character types. Comparatively, Ben's character is not reduced in capacity, for he figures prominently throughout the novel. Though his gender

role is subverted, it is important to note that, in this story, outfitting Ben with submissive, more feminine qualities, is not meant to shame Ben. Even though she elevates Diondra's position over Ben in every way, Flynn does not create Ben to be a joke or an idiot. Rather, Flynn illustrates Ben's deep vulnerability which creates empathy.

In summary, Flynn demonstrates in *Dark Places*, that blurring the gender line allows for Diondra's character to be open with villainous possibilities while Ben's character remains submissive to Diondra's demands but likely empathetic to readers because he has no agency.

Flynn's *Sharp Objects* communicates a feminist understanding through a subverted thematic approach. Flynn is successful in her attempt by subverting traditionally gendered power structures. This subversion is accomplished by embedding powerful qualities in female characters who do not traditionally hold power, in addition to embedding impotent qualities in male characters who hold powerful positions.

Flynn employs the minor characters- the stay-at-home mom group- to cast power over characters who are traditionally perceived as strong characters. The mom group is traditionally feminine; they are attractive, married women married to wealthy men. While this type of character is commonly characterized as vapid and shallow, Flynn subverts this stereotype and shows them to have substance. The group gets together to discuss issues they experience as wives and mothers so they can support one another. However, the group turns on Camille, attacking her because she is a feminist. Flynn shows the group as women who have a stereotyped perception of feminism- women who hate men and refuse to have children. The moms' sweet, feminine veneer is peeled back to reveal an anti-feminist attack on unmarried, childless, big city reporter, Camille. When one of the moms cries because she feels pressured to go back to work now that the children are in school, Angie says pointedly, '"Don't let feminists'- here she looked

at [Camille]- 'make you feel guilty for having what they can't have [a baby]"' (Flynn "Sharp"131). Katie sums up the passive-aggressive attack on Camille by stating, "I didn't really become a woman until I felt Mackenzie inside me…that's what women were made for, right? To bear children" (134). Camille's group of friends took to one-upping each other in attacks on Camille's femininity and on Camille as a feminist because she disagreed with them. The crucial point here is that, like Diondra, Amma and Adora, these women are not feminists; the moms are anti-feminist and traditionally feminine, yet Flynn still affords them agency. They do not hold back their opinion about feminism, however misguided their ideas are, just because Camille is in the room.

Moreover, Flynn argues the stereotype that female characters must be characterized in a certain light because they are mothers or, as Camille is concerned, a feminist. Flynn creates this group of women to pride themselves on their traditional femininity who then use that femininity as a weapon to belittle Camille. Flynn subverts the women's femininity to show the anti-feminist underbelly of their feminine veneer. This is an interesting thematic approach to a feminist act on Flynn's part, as she communicates that female qualities can be villainous to varying degrees among female characters in the same work. Of course, this idea makes sense and may even seem obvious to the point of being unnecessary. However, recalling Francemone et al's data, the number of men's characters doubles that of women's characters (547). Flynn uses female characters to subvert virtuous femininity as an act of extending feminist boundaries of fiction.

In addition to Flynn imparting anti-feminist behaviors in her female characters to subvert them and thereby send a feminist message, Flynn's thematic positioning of male characters, as less important than the women's roles, subverts men's typical role. The men share the story with a large cast of women who are more significant than the men; as a result, the male characters

are denied agency. By far, the male character who is the least significant and denied agency in total form is Alan. He serves the role solely as Adora's doting husband. Alan is denied a backstory, readers know nothing of how Adora and Alan met, what Alan did for a profession, whether he is wealthy on his own or relies solely on Adora's money. There is never a conversation written between Adora and Alan. Instead, Alan utters two short sentences to Adora, and in both there is a reversal of typical gendered behavior. For example, Alan takes on a typically feminine role of supportive spouse. On page 121, Alan stands awkwardly, awaiting her arrival, when "Adora flutters past him" without a word. '"How was your day out?"' he asks her, then trails up the stairs after her "to tend to her." Alan has one other utterance to Adora that occurs near the end of the story. He is ousted from the head of the table, the position typically reserved for the father, the head of the family. Instead, at the head of the table, serving as the leader of the family, is Adora. The ham is placed between them, and Alan responds to Adora's raised eyebrows by saying, '" You cut, Adora;"' Flynn makes it clear to readers that Alan's sole function is to remain insignificant and to submit to Adora (234). Similarly, Alan speaks to his daughter only one time, which is during dinner at the end of the story, '"Amma, why would such a creature appeal to you?" "You can be so ghastly;" Amma pays her father no attention and continues to speak (234, 235). Alan is present but without significance. Moreover, Alan is denied agency, even when he tries to claim it. For example, Alan speaks pointedly to Camille, asking her to leave if she "can't make amends" with her mother (165). Alan shows he is oblivious to Adora's lies and a perspective other than hers. He repeats lies Adora has told him and accuses Camille of causing problems in the house (164). He makes a hurtful reference to Camille's scars before ending the conversation: making amends "Might help you heal. Your mind at least" (165). This is the only time in the story Alan asserts himself, and he chooses Camille, not the more

powerful, controlling and manipulative Adora or Amma. Alan's words show no power over Camille, however; she neither leaves the house nor makes amends with her mother. She also stands up to Alan, telling him "Adora is a liar. If you don't know that, you're an idiot" (165). As a result, even Alan's attempt at establishing agency is a failure. He makes no decisions that affect change and is not granted any meaningful position in the story. Alan's character makes clear Flynn's use of subversion in a thematic sense, as she relegates the husband to a powerless position.

Richard has an interesting role in that he is granted some agency but only through Camille's choosing. Unlike Alan, Richard is successful outside of Camille and moves freely within the story; however, he is unable to move forward in the case without Camille's help. Camille enlightens Richard regarding Ann and Natalie being biters, for example. Richard confides in Camille, "Your story about the biting really focused things for me" which allowed Richard to move forward with a search warrant (233). In addition, Camille is the character who connects the drugs found in Adora's bedroom to her own bloodstream, after she is willingly poisoned by her mother (241). Important to Flynn's feminist message, Richard and Camille each come to the conclusion that Adora is a murderer, but they do so on their own. Richard uses Camille's information, but Camille makes progress in the mysteries completely on her own. Further, he doesn't even give her a helpful on -the-record quote for her assignment. Camille asks for a quote, but Richard asks for information from Camile first. When she provides it, Richard refuses to keep his word and instead gives her an unhelpful "grudging quote about a break in the case and an arrest soon" (173). Flynn demonstrates that Camille doesn't need his quote or insight; she has figured her mother as the killer apart from Richard and meets with him to compare notes and accuse him of becoming intimate with her only to get information about her

mother (232). Furthermore, Richard confesses he is falling in love with her, but she does not reciprocate (232). Flynn uses subversion within a thematic approach to demonstrate a feminist act- that Richard is successful due to Camille's agency, not his.

In summary, Flynn's purpose for the male characters, in general, is to show that they are allowed in the story at the behest of the feminist author but are not agents; the plot progresses solely because of the female characters.

Flynn constructs a feminist response to Gothic literature's punishment of women who transgress patriarchal constructs by establishing an anti-feminist theme to subvert it. The women living outside patriarchal expectations, Patty Day, Libby Day and Krissi Cates, are victimized by misogynist men, but Flynn subverts patriarchal privilege so that those men do not escape punishment.

Matriarch Patty Day is punished for not conforming to patriarchal conventions due to being divorced and failing to remain beautiful after decades of a hard life due to her ex-husband Runner squandering their money and putting her family farm in jeopardy. Patty is punished quietly with gossip circles calling her a whore (69). Runner shows up after nearly a year asking for a place to stay, Patty takes pity on him and allows him to stay on the couch. Sneaking a grab of her breasts without her consent, Runner throws a glass at her, calls her a bitch and leaves the house after stealing what money he could find in the house when she refuses his advances (Flynn "Dark" 63). Some months later, Patty comes home to find Runner on her couch; he announces he will be staying with them awhile. When Patty anticipates what Runner is really after, she tells him she is broke to which he threatens her; "'You're never as broke as you say' he said with a leer…it came out menacing, as if she'd better not be broke if she knew what was good for her" (227). He also grabs Patty's arms in anger and tells his daughters, "'Bye girls, you mom's…a

BITCH!'" then kicked over furniture on his way out (229). Runner continues to disparage Patty decades after her murder. He tells his only surviving daughter of the family murders her mom was "such a bitch" and " a cunt" and "a hard woman for not giving him money when he needed it (254).

Runner also victimizes Libby by agreeing to see her after decades of ignoring her only to find that he demands money from her in exchange for the truth he claims he knows about her family's murders. Runner never knew the truth and lured his daughter to him solely to get money from her (210). Sometime later, Libby tracks down Runner and sees him to try to get answers about the night of her family's murders. Runner picks her up, but when she protests, not wanting his hands under her breasts, he throws her to the ground then blames Libby for his action and calls her a baby(251). He then threatens Libby to give him cash and pokes her with two fingers in the center of her chest (254). Libby realizes her father will never change and leaves him for good in his squalid predicament. Flynn casts an anti-feminist shadow, spending a great deal of time characterizing Runner as having the upper hand with Patty and Libby. Notice Patty does not file a police report for the breast-grabbing or Runner's throwing a glass at her. Likewise, Libby does not report her father for threatening her. Runner's offenses go unnoticed and consequently, unpunished. This idea of Runner being able to behave criminally but not get caught reflects the idea of mid-Victorian literature wherein criminals were sought to be understood more than punished (Pettit 283). Runner spends much of the novel dodging payments he owes people and threatening his ex-wife then doing the same to his youngest daughter, Libby. Flynn's characterization of Runner mimics the idea of sympathy for criminals in that he is so pathetic that he seemingly means no harm; he seems to be a petty thief and nothing more.

This aspect of Runner is similar to "characters who receive sympathy from readers during the mid-Victorian period" since Runner was never good enough to be a professional criminal, and mostly male characters of mid-Victorian literature "were not professional criminals; rather, they had faults and a piece of goodness identifiable in spite of their more minor crimes" (Pettit 286). Flynn allows Runner to seem harmless in the beginning of the novel, and though his crimes do not extend beyond threats, Flynn resists this Victorian convention where men can commit crimes and get away with doing so. Women in mid-Victorian literature were largely afforded no better conditions.

Flynn subverts Runner's misogynist treatment by punishing him with a long, agonizing life. While Patty escapes her misery through assisted suicide and Libby pulls herself out of her life-long anxiety and depression, to find peace for the first time in her life, Runner is not afforded any improvement. Flynn punishes Runner by allowing him to stay the same wretch he is from the beginning, only he has no warm home to crash since his family has been murdered. Though he does not meet a gruesome death like the innocent Day girls, he is sentenced to live each day struggling to meet needs of basic existence. Flynn shows revenge for Runner's transgressions against his family without having his character take the focus off the female characters. In addition, though Runner is not by Gothic literature's standards locked in an attic, he is confined to a life of misery and lives alone in an old toxic tank. He has no agency and is out of his mind due to the consequences of addiction. Even though he has a bed at Bert Nolan's recovery house, Flynn resists giving Runner sobriety or any sort of silver lining. Libby leaves Runner inside that empty pesticide tank where he will likely die alone with no one to mourn him. This type of Gothic ending to Runner is more appropriate.

Krissi Cates' dad is a major reason Ben is in jail. Krissy falsely accused Ben of molesting her, and Krissi's friends join in to also accuse Ben. However, Krissi tells her dad she lied, and instead of her dad recanting Krissi's story, he sues the school for a cash settlement (Flynn 215, 217). While the other girls recant their stories, Krissi's dad refuses to allow Krissi to tell the truth. Consequently, Krissi's dad is racked with guilt, but instead of confessing, he projects his guilt onto Krissi and has nothing to do with her, even though he is raising her (217). As a result, Flynn punishes Krissi's dad; his wife leaves him, and he becomes a lonely alcoholic. The irony is thick regarding Krissi and her father: Krissi's father exploited his daughter for profit which results in Krissi spending her life being further exploited by men as a stripper (138).

Flynn subverts Krissi's dad's misogynist behavior so that he does not escape culpability for ruining his daughter's life as well as Ben's. Krissi's father is punished by living in shame as an alcoholic, away from his ex-wife and his daughter (120). Krissi's father does not receive a dramatic punishment, but, like Runner's punishment, it is a slow burn- a successful businessman reduced to a life sentence of poverty, loneliness and inescapable guilt and misery. Finally, being ostracized as a character who is insignificant is also a form of punishment, as he is the father, the character who has a role of authority. Since the real murderers of the girls are discovered at the end of the story, it is assumed that the truth will finally be revealed; thus, Krissi's dad must atone for his criminal behavior toward his daughter and his criminal actions against Ben.

Flynn's first two novels provide a framework which demonstrates how Flynn treats her application of feminism through subversion and female villainy. She follows resistance in the tradition of New Woman and Gothic literature writers. *Sharp Objects* introduces readers to Flynn's double plot twists and double female villains. She shocks with characterization of the heinous villain, Amma. Flynn also uses subversion to trick readers. She uses a traditional female

villain to act as a screen for Flynn's new type of villain. Juxtaposing the traditional villain with Flynn's new perspective shows how Flynn's new villain replaces the outdated, Victorian model. *Sharp Objects* also provides a voyeuristic look at a story with a heavily structured feel. Flynn plays with proximity and asserts a more global feminist meaning by constraining male characters by location as well as illustrating them as men who have traditional titles of power but are not the characters who are effective in gathering clues and solving the crimes.

In summary, Flynn's feminist treatment in *Sharp Objects* reveals a subversion of the traditional female villain trope, the creepy mother in the Gothic mansion with a fresh take on female villainy, the detestable young and sexualized female killer. Adora is used to make readers comfortable as her type of villainy is well-known and expected. Adora's character acts as a screen to distract readers from suspecting Amma for much of the novel. Flynn also develops a feminist exploration of theme in *Sharp Objects*; the male characters own positions of authority- father and detective- but are not the characters who exert authority. Instead, the women in the story manage and complete the responsibilities of the men's positions, rendering the men unimportant. *Sharp Objects* is a novel with a chilling, voyeuristic and mechanical feel, as if Flynn has placed the characters on a chess board and moves them toward and away from one another in startling ways.

Dark Places reveals Flynn's feminist meaning through character development regarding reversals in traditional gender roles. Diondra owns traditionally male attributes as well as physical traits. She is a mean, sexually aggressive and manipulating murderer. Her boyfriend, Ben, is the foil to Diondra with his submissive behavior and quiet demeanor. Ben watches Diondra kill his sister and does nothing to stop her; he also goes to jail for his sister's murder so Diondra can escape responsibility and raise their baby. *Dark Places* also reveals a feminist

treatment through a theme of punishment. While Runner and Krissi's dad cause trouble and pain for their children, Flynn does not let them go unpunished. Flynn subverts the Victorian fiction tradition in which men transgress and evade punishment, while women are held to far more constricting standards and are punished with isolation or death. Flynn leaves Runner and Krissi's dad isolated and drug addicted. Though they are not trapped in an attic, they roam about without jobs, money, friends or family. Unlike Sharp Objects' chilling, calculated moves, *Dark Places* is warm and messy with typical family issues- financial woes, growing pains, bullying and a troublesome ex-husband. This story integrates characters so well that, aside from Diondra, readers cannot separate villains from the non-villains until the very end. Both novels offer readers a clear look at the effectiveness of Flynn's use of subversion. Flynn places the traditional villain with the unexpected brand of female villain which demonstrates Flynn's expansion of the feminist lens.

Chapter Two: Flynn uses Amy in *Gone Girl* to subvert reader expectations and to destroy patriarchal constructs.

The styles and techniques present in Flynn's first two novels are carried into her third breakthrough novel, *Gone Girl.* Flynn applies to *Gone Girl* the voyeurism, double plot twist and end of story plot twist as well as the unnerving chill of Adora from *Sharp Objects.* From *Dark Places,* Flynn applies the readers' sense of sympathy for Ben to the male lead, Nick Dunne, in *Gone Girl.* In addition, Diondra's unnerving, chaotic behavior gives way to Amy Elliot Dunne's cold, calculated revenge in *Gone Girl.*

In Part One of *Gone Girl*, Flynn establishes traditional reader expectations which follow patriarchal constructs. Therefore, readers' first impression of Amy is as a good girl, the Victorian's angel in the house who chronicles her slow decline into suffering in just the right amounts to elicit sympathy from readers. Amy chronicles her sufferings in a diary that later figures as key evidence for Nick's arrest. She mentions pressures regarding getting married, being perfect and succumbing to emotional and physical abuse from her husband, Nick. The importance Flynn illustrates in situating readers comfortably in their assumption is crucial to such a degree that she dedicates half of the novel, 215 of 415 pages, to this agenda which constitutes Part One.

In addition, Flynn constructs Amy's character in Part One to serve as a ruse to the unsuspecting readers by using Amy's diary entries to gain trust from readers. Though Amy's information is written in a genuine diary and hosts private, salacious information on every page (looks like a diary, acts like a diary), and though some aspects are true, the diary serves as a web of lies to implicate Nick in her feigned disappearance. Amy's large-scale and intricately detailed assault on Nick is her means of getting revenge for his affair with one of his young college

students (Flynn "Gone" 233). Amy's insightful and intriguing but contrived diary entries show her to be a wife who regularly chronicles her diary life through the lens of a happily married woman until Nick's misogynist behaviors fracture their happiness and threaten Amy's safety. Like Flynn's subversion of *Sharp Objects'* villains, Adora and Amma, Flynn makes doubly sure readers do not suspect Amy's foul play so that they attribute blame to Nick and sympathy to Amy, as traditional gender roles dictate.

Readers feel satisfied their hunches are correct as Amy's diary entries reveal progressive disrespect of her via her husband. Readers, right up to the last page of Part One, arguably do not suspect Amy has been manipulating them throughout the first half of the novel. Only after getting into Part Two and being told overtly by Amy that she staged her diary to incriminate Nick, do readers see Amy as the misogynist monster she has become (219). Consequently, Flynn shatters readers' expectations by upending traditional abuser-husband and victim-wife formula in addition to introducing a wife who tricks readers into thinking she is a reliable narrator.

Moreover, Flynn creates Amy to have narrative control in the novel which frames readers' expectations; even though Nick narrates his own sections, his narration is a response to the shocking revelations Amy has put in motion via her manipulative diary entries. Lollo's essay agrees, sharing that Amy's narration "controls the direction of the story in a constant push and pull against her husband Nick" (66). Flynn layers Amy's power by sharing her thoughts in her diary, the embodiment of privacy. Vahlne asserts that no matter how a female villain is labeled, be it "hero" or anti-hero," when she has narrative control, she is humanized in the most effective way (8-9). Lollo asserts that the protagonist being a writer is a common motif due to characters, most often men, typically being journalists or detectives and that, the '"usage of different languages, narratives or voices as a subconscious subterfuge"' of readers' expectations," that

"Amy's manipulation of the narrative only makes her ambition stronger" (66). Amy's narrative control is significant due to telling her story through Flynn's feminist lens in which she "create[s] a revolutionary form… to articulate and embody [her] critique of society and its dominant cultural practices through the structure of an unnatural narrative" (Richardson 75). Richardson discusses that unnatural narrative techniques "do not merely elude but clearly violate the norms of realistic representation" (75). Flynn certainly violates the norms of realistic representation by not only establishing a narrator who is unreliable in more than one way but also tricks readers overtly, effectively breaking the fourth wall while simultaneously cultivating readers to participate in voyeurism by reading Amy's secret diary entries. The layering of power within Amy's narrative control coupled with an unnatural narrative structure means readers are directed to believe Amy when she describes anti-feminist pressures.

A major source of anti-feminist pressure is demonstrated through Amy's parents; Rand and Marybeth are "baffled by [her] singleness" as a conventionally attractive, thin, blond, beautiful, Harvard- educated, affluent career woman (Flynn "Gone" 29). This anti-feminist assumption equates a woman's superficial characteristics with her fitness for marriage. Amy narrates that even though she seems to have it all, her parents "think there's something wrong" with her because she is still single (29). Moreover, Rand and Marybeth problematizing Amy is an irony lost on Amy's parents but not her readers: Rand and Marybeth do not acknowledge their passive-aggressive treatment of Amy via their children's book series, *Amazing Amy,* which has paved the path for Amy's obsession with perfection and feelings of inadequacy (29). Though Amy is the inspiration of their book series, her parents situate their daughter as the antithesis to Amazing Amy. She shares in her diary, "whenever I screw something up, Amy does it right" (27). Amy shares examples of choices she made, such as quitting violin and opting out of a

tennis match for a weekend with friends, which served as lessons to millions of readers of *Amazing Amy* as what not to do*,* yet Amy's parents are negligent in never having taught their real daughter how to navigate life (27, 224).

Additionally, Rand and Marybeth provide an answer to Amy's "problem" of not having married yet; Amy pens in her diary, "They've given their daughter's namesake what they can't give their daughter: a husband" (26)! As if this life-long treatment of Amy isn't awful enough, Amy must accompany her parents to the book launch and answer questions on Amazing Amy's behalf, which focuses on Amy's single status instead of her author-parents, the 20th and final book of *Amazing Amy* or any topic associated with the children's book. Instead, she's asked by mostly female journalists, "How does it feel to see Amy finally married…Because you're not married, right?" (27). As a result, Amy's parents create passive-aggressive pressure using their children's book to make their opinion known regarding Amy's single status (27).

These anti-feminist pressures are powerful representations, since it is through Rand and Marybeth's treatment of Amy that Flynn illustrates the media's assumed privilege to ask an unmarried woman in her thirties how she feels about not being married; furthermore, the media situates this question as an oddly competitive comparison between fictional, *Amazing Amy* and 32 year-old, real Amy (28). Author, editor and feminist activist, *Ally Boguhn, shares that not marrying brings on a barrage of questions by friends and family which puts pressure on women to marry. She also shares navigating conversations with friends and family becomes tricky: "*The reality is that once you reach a certain age, the questioning seemingly becomes inevitable. People expect you to get married, and if you don't meet that expectation…things get complicated." Consequently, readers digest the intended effect: Amy's writer-parents inflict emotional harm, and readers agree and sympathize that Amy's real childhood has been treated as a first draft

while the character, Amazing Amy, is clearly the "paper-bound better half;" Amy confides in her diary, "the me I was supposed to be" (26).

Thus, Amy's parents demonstrate an anti-feminist behavior, passive-aggressively pressuring Amy to conform to their expectation to marry. As a result, Flynn frames the readers' perspective in two ways- Flynn alerts readers to the presence of misogynist pressures early in the novel but from both parents, a non-traditional source of misogyny in literature, as typically only the mother or one parent is seen as the misogynist figure. The second way Flynn frames readers' perspectives is that she leans into the expected formula-feminist trope, as Amy's character in Part One follows the expected behavior of a woman and elicits sympathy from readers. This double framing sets up readers' opinions of Nick and Amy so that those opinions crash around them once they enter Part Two.

Also in her early diary entries, Amy recounts the tired phrase she hears from her married friends, who comprise friend circle, "It's not that hard to find someone to marry." Amy writes they are also "dismissive of [her] singleness" (29). As a result of these social pressures and of feeling "so fucking lonely," while her friends "pair off," she succumbs to social pressure by hitting the "endless" dating scene, "perfumed and sprayed and hopeful, rotating myself around the room like some dubious dessert" (28, 29). Flynn establishes this anti-feminist pressure early in the novel, demonstrating that Amy's single status is a problem she must solve. Even though Amy argues back in a feminist way through her diary entry, that she is "right not to settle," within her social circle, she is alone in her defense (29). Readers believe Amy's private thoughts and have sympathy for her professed reservations about marriage. Dr. Lisa Wade, asserts in her web-based article, "Women are less happy than men in marriage, but society pretends it isn't true" that women "do more unpaid and undervalued work of the household," work more hours

than men, and give up their "individual leisure and career goals for marriage." Wade mentions further that, "women, more so than men, subordinate themselves and their careers to their relationship […] and the careers of their husbands." Readers' expectations are framed by Amy's diary narrations in an intimate way which works to bond a connection between Amy and readers in Part One. Amy also contends she is consistently surrounded by bickering and unsatisfied husbands and wives; they seem to bicker to such a degree that Amy does not understand why they are even married (29). Resti and Soelistyarini also discuss a woman's disadvantaged position in marriage. In their analysis of Amy regarding her married status, they state that a woman "open[s] up her future…by passively and compliantly delivering herself into the hands of a new master, which in this case is the husband;" they also reference early feminist scholar, Simone Beauvoir, and her position on marriage stating that "a woman gains better status in society only when she is married." Even though Amy's social standing is powerful due to her Harvard education, wealth and attractive body, according to societal norms, she isn't yet adequate until she marries a man. Moreover, Wade's article supports Amy's concern, relating that, "Compared to being single, marriage is a bum deal for many women. Accordingly, married women are less happy than single women and less happy than their husbands." Amy gives readers the familiar yet complicated issue of the risks and rewards of being a married woman to ponder along with her. The diary entries, though faked as part of Amy's intricate revenge plan, are not meant to surprise readers; they serve to situate readers as a knowing ear, thereby striking a degree of intimacy between Amy and readers, which is precisely the outcome Flynn wants for her readers as they head into Part Two.

Before Part Two can begin, however, Flynn positions Amy to inevitably solve her "problem" of being without a man by marrying Nick. Amy's contrived yet wholly convincing

diary entries pen the timeline of their marriage, each entry a hash mark of mounting disrespect. Amy's entries build strategically so that by the end of the first section of the novel, readers are poised to vilify Nick despite being uncertain of whether he is complicit in Amy's disappearance. Flynn thickens readers' expectations as Amy's diary entries begin with wedded bliss- generous doting, adventurous sex and favorite dinners (Flynn "Gone" 39-40). However, it is also at this point that anti-feminist behaviors come more clearly into focus.

Even amid Amy's newlywed buzz, the audience, privy to Amy's (pseudo) private thoughts, read about Nick's disrespectful behaviors in response to Amy's endearing ways of loving him. For example, Amy confides in her diary that Nick chooses not to call when he stands her up in front of her married friends (55). Amy writes that she not only shrugs off the thoughtlessness on Nick's part, she defends it, writing that she is happy Nick is not a "dancing monkey" like her friends' husbands (55). While readers understand that choosing to stand up a spouse isn't cause for an intricate plan of revenge, they are unaware Amy uses this first instance as a building block in narrating Nick's increasingly misogynist behavior; to this point, Amy is more concerned with readers' response to the disrespect than the act itself, so while Amy writes she isn't bothered by Nick's disrespect, readers *are* bothered because Amy's diary entries reflect her exuberance and vulnerability for a man who not only fails to appreciate her but also disrespects Amy outright.

The diary furthers Amy's spiral into victimization by continuing to smooth over Nick's disrespect- ditching her on their anniversary to take his freshly unemployed co-workers to a strip club until 4am, coming home with a woman's phone number in his pocket then spitting the words "Fuck you, Amy" when she makes a joke during Nick's tirade (69). Readers feel the blows of Nick's insults as Amy, via her diary entries, works to rebound from them without

blaming Nick: "I know I'm supposed to be a good sport…"Nick, I'm on your side here" (69, 68). Amy convincingly leads readers to believe she is too lovesick to see Nick for the misogynist he really is. Through Amy's lens, Flynn crafts Nick and Amy's marital tension to heighten intricately so that anti-feminist aspects are revealed strategically over time. Readers' opinion of Amy at this point has already formed in her favor, yet Amy, being one to "take the extra step that others don't," layers on the quintessential misogynist trope- spousal abuse (220). Amy continues to illustrate herself as a loving, victimized wife, who is quick to take on part of the blame for being abused, which furthers the audience's anger for Nick, "I knew what I was doing. I was punching every button on him" and "He's such a good man, at his core, that I am willing to write it off, to believe it was a sick anomaly" (196). She intersects these excuses with details of Nick's attacks on her: "he took three big steps toward me… and I was falling" and "What scared me was the look on his face as I lay on the floor blinking, my head ringing" (196). Amy's last diary entry in Part One is a foreboding message: "*This man might kill me*" (205). Amy's entries guide readers through her devolving marriage, communicating a powerful underlying feminist theme that nothing misogynist is harmless. Consequently, by the end of Part One, Amy's wounds are exposed and left raw at the hands of misogyny which solidifies readers' buy-in of her fictitious diary entries, positioning readers necessarily for the betrayal they will receive from their darling Amy in Part Two.

Nick's honest narrative control strengthens Amy's faked victimization

Though readers are unaware in Part One that Amy's diary entries are faked events centering around Nick's abuse, Amy's being treated in anti-feminist ways by her parents and friends is not fake, neither are *some* of the misogynist ways Nick treats Amy. Nick's narration

reveals both his patriarchal superiority over Amy and his realization of it; both aspects, then, serve to corroborate Amy's feelings of being hurt, not physically as Amy falsely claims, but emotionally.

Moreover, once Amy is missing and Nick has been questioned by the police, he spends time reflecting on his marriage with Amy. He notes that he did not ask Amy her feelings about moving to Missouri, and worse, he didn't even discuss the idea as an option- he told her they're moving back (100). Nick also realizes that he brought Amy "to the end of everything" when they moved to Missouri: "We were literally experiencing the end of a way of life." Nick recounts the end of his mother's life, the collapse of his dad's independence and battle with dementia, the end of the Blue Book factory in town, even Nick's beloved Mississippi river was "being eaten" by Asian carp, but most importantly, he brought them to the end of their marriage (108). Later, when meeting with his famous attorney, Tanner Bolt, Nick is asked what romantic things he's done for Amy over the last two years, and Nick "couldn't think of a decent thing [he'd] done" and adds, "I wasn't romantic; I wasn't even nice" (211). Nick's narration substantiates Amy's emotional pain in Part One, even though they use different examples. This is important, not in the sense that readers need a husband's corroboration of a wife's story, but in the sense that, after reading Part Two and beyond, readers will know Amy has manipulated them and has faked nearly everything from the first section of the novel.

The basis for Amy's pain is real, however, and Nick's admissions of ill treatment are crucial to readers. When Amy loses credibility with readers in Part Two, they will still believe, as they should, her emotional pain was authentic. Through Amy and Nick's narrations- Amy's contrived and Nick's honest, Flynn directs readers to feel sympathetic for Amy and to vilify Nick. Therefore, the opinions readers form in Part One are formed over time like an intricate

spider web so that readers never see the trope-reversal that awaits them when they turn the page to Part Two.

Of course, Nick's affair is the impetus for Amy's disturbing revenge fantasy-come-true, and readers may wonder why Amy doesn't divulge his affair in Part One, since this would garner the most sympathetic view. Flynn, however, does not want readers to feel sympathy for Amy. Once readers get into Part Two, Flynn wants readers to look back on Part One and feel the sting of being fooled by a female character who openly enjoys admitting to her readers that she has tricked them. One reason is to situate readers in a position to find Amy completely unlikable so that readers feel betrayed by their female narrator. Secondly, Flynn wants readers to see the traditional abuser-victim relationship as antiquated; Amy is the abuser now, and Flynn wants readers to experience the boundaries of female villainy being stretched. As a result, readers will perceive the lead character as a female who subverts traditional expectations at every turn. To set her trick for the readers, Flynn develops Amy to appear nothing if not innocent and naïve- so blinded by love- that readers feel certain in their sympathy regarding her lies. As a consequence to Amy's faked diary identity, Flynn cannot allow readers to realize Amy already knows about the affair because Amy's horrific revenge plan would be divulged as well. Another reason Flynn refrains from having Amy reveal Nick's affair in Part One may be a feminist nod, which positions Nick to bear the burden of admitting his betrayal to the readers; Nick's wrongdoings trickle out from his own perspective, which give readers more time to for their ill opinion of him to intensify. Readers feel the dislike for Nick mount as he lies about who is calling on his disposable phone when it rings in front of Rand and Marybeth and when Andie shows up to have sex with Nick the same night he is questioned about his wife's disappearance (80, 143).

In summary, through Amy's perspective, Flynn constructs scaled, anti-feminist acts in an expected way. As a result, Amy's victimization from anti-feminist and misogynist pressures builds readers' support for Amy and animosity for Nick, even though Nick is the character telling the truth. Flynn maintains unnatural narration as she creates Nick and Amy to "narrate something very strange [and] narrate something very strangely" (75). Flynn pokes fun at readers' sentimental feelings for Amy with the reveal of Amy's surprising brand of unlikable villainy as the novel moves forward.

Amy's monstrosity destroys male misogyny

Flynn strikes a balance in Part One between Amy's poignant but faked victimization with genuine moments where she is denied agency. It seems no matter how hard Amy tries- being Cool Girl, the epitome of every misogynist man's fantasy, then Uncool Girl, the opposite of every misogynist man's fantasy- she cannot get around the patriarchal walls surrounding her. Amy is punished by friends and family for existing as a single person outside patriarchal expectations but also by Nick's apathy and infidelity. Flynn acknowledges the pressures women face to always fulfill everyone's expectations of them, but Flynn allows this only to a brief extent. The focus of the novel explores the lengths Amy must go to free herself from patriarchy. For this objective, Flynn creates Amy as a complex character. She is monstrous, yet her brand if villainy is unassuming for much of the novel. Flynn spins a tricky wen for her characters, particularly Nick, but Flynn also ensnares readers since they expect Amy to get caught and punished as tradition dictates. As stated earlier, history is loaded women who are punished, whether they are angel or villain. This history lives among readers and writers today. Therefore, the female villain takes risks when "refus[ing] to conform to societal norms and gender

expectations that [are] considered inherently dangerous to masculinity and patriarchy" (Vahlne 9). Resti and Soelistyarini further this notion in that male characters must re-center their power, which means the femme fatale "has to be punished at the end of the day." This thinking is a result of patriarchy fortifying its claim that female characters are expected to be "less threatening" than men (Resti and Soelistysrini).

Flynn resists this misogynist trope by refusing to characterize Amy as "less threatening." Amy owns a privileged life and wealth unimaginable to Nick before meeting Amy. When they meet, Amy needs nothing from Nick to survive or succeed; she simply wanted Nick in her life. Since Nick is outmatched, he must work the male-centric power structure into his favor, which he does, and in Gothic literature tradition, Nick punishes Amy (Flynn "Gone" 68). For example, when Nick and Amy move from the only place she's ever known, New York City, to small, depressed New Carthage, Nick's hometown in Missouri, she is isolated and all but abandoned by Nick while he spends his time teaching writing at the community college by day then working in his bar at night (147, 148). Conversely, Harvard-educated Amy is out of work, and she and Nick rent what they can afford, a housing development that flopped, sharing the neighborhood with squatters (95). This situation enables Nick to assert power over Amy. To make matters worse, Amy is pressured to give to her parents and her husband the last of her trust fund, so while she has nothing, Nick now has two sources of income and a mistress. Amy's independence is stripped away, rendering her dependent on Nick which, according to misogynistic constructs, allows Nick to take his rightful place in the power dynamic.

More importantly, Nick punishes Amy when she steps outside her Cool Girl identity. Nick notes in his Part One narration that he "wasn't even nice" to Amy in the last couple years of their marriage (211). However, Part Two establishes that while he couldn't quite touch the nerve

of the issue, he did feel Amy's unhappiness; Nick "tried to figure out how to make her happy…[but] each attempt was met with a rolled eye or a sad little sigh a *you just don't get it* sigh" (211). Amy narrates that being the Cool Girl was the woman Nick wanted and the woman she pretended to be but that it "wasn't sustainable" (222, 224). So, she took a risk and showed Nick her authentic self which resulted in their relationship "collapsing on itself" (224). Amy hated Nick for not accepting her outside her Cool Girl identity, and Amy asserts Nick hated her for "truly believing he had married this creature [this Cool Girl who doesn't exist], this figment of a million masturbatory men" (224). Amy summarizes the shock Nick felt when Amy "asked him to *listen"* and when Amy communicated that she "didn't love blowing him on request" and that she "*did* mind when he didn't show up for drinks with [her]friends" (224). Vahlne notes the Cool Girl is a reincarnation of the original good girl character, '"because they facilitate patriarchy"'(qtd by Lota 16). Similarly, feminist scholar and activist Roxanne Gay's work "Not Here to Make Friends" states, "women are shamed into hiding characteristics that contribute to their formation as fully-realized…subjects" and that "women perform likeability because they lack role models who challenge this performance." Gay's assertions support Nick's losing interest in his wife when she can no longer maintain the Cool Girl façade, and Amy certainly fits the notion that she had no role model to challenge a performed likeability having to live up to the impossible standards Amy's parents set for her. As a result, when Amy dismantled Cool Girl, she threatened the patriarchal structure by expecting her husband to see her as a real person and not "an alien fuck-doll of a girl" as Nick sees his mistress, Andie (Flynn "Gone" 146). For all the lies that Amy contrives in her diary, her confession of Cool Girl in Part Two (post-lie reveal) is genuine in capturing the essence of the double-standard women are held to in traditional relationships. Amy's description is as unfair as it seems: "male characters are not held to the

same standard as female characters" and "audiences are less likely to forgive [a woman's] transgressions than if a male protagonist displays similar flaws" (Gay). In Part Two, Flynn illustrates that invisible patriarchal constructs are so deeply rooted in Nick that he punishes Amy without fully realizing why he's doing so.

Nick is not the only character to punish Amy through patriarchal means. Part Two features love-sick Desi's strategies for punishing Amy when his idealized standards of her are not met. When Desi rescues Amy, she has brown hair, weighs more, and wears glasses and a cheap sundress (Flynn "Gone" 323, 324), a look antithetical to Desi's expectations of his high school sweetheart, another iteration of Cool Girl, and object of his affection ever since (Flynn 325). His digs at Amy are passive-aggressive and make their mark with a sting, '"You look *very…* different…so full in the face"' and '"And your hair is-"' 'he catches himself"' (325). A clear indication of passive-aggression is the use of sarcasm, "veiled hostility" that allows the aggressor to communicate "frustration, anger or disappointment without confrontation" a trait, Amy discovers, that is strong enough to overpower her (Strong). Ostensibly chivalrous, Desi saves Amy by keeping her whereabouts secret and hides her at his estate. Desi is a misogynist, however, so his help comes at a price to Amy's freedom.

Desi not only pecks at Amy for looking like a vagabond after immediately rescuing her, he uses passive-aggressive pressure to direct her responses to his tacit hints, "He leans against his Jaguar and aims his gaze up at the house so that I have to pause for appreciation also" (339). Instead of showing genuine care for Amy, Desi shows himself to be a self-possessed showman who requires a lengthy tour of his mansion "that loops back around so I can ooh and ahh about details I missed the first time" so Amy can shower Desi with compliments, before Amy, his dear friend who's been abused and in fear for her life (according to her false narrative), has the chance

to rest (341). Amy soon realizes she has made a mistake and notes how controlling Desi is, how Amy must "*match [Desi's] vision"* in all her responses (348, 349, italics original). Here, Desi works passive-aggression onto Amy. Strong notes that one form of passive-aggressive behavior is pretending to agree. While Amy does not disagree with the impressive nature of Desi's mansion, that Desi so willfully guides her to complimenting him causes Amy to feel forced into providing the compliments, which in turn, causes her to also feel passive-aggressive; Desi's arm is immediately comfortable around her waist without permission with his "hot breath whisper in her ear" (340, 341). To further his passive-aggressive form of misogyny, Desi restricts Amy's calories without permission, adjusts Amy's hair to his liking and reaches into her blouse to unfasten a button on his own accord. He leaves blonde hair dye and a headband, a tacit direction she must obey (349, 361). Amy notes that if Desi "doesn't get his way, he'll pull his little levers and set his punishment in motion" (362). At this point, Amy fully realizes she is being out-manipulated by Desi.

Amy also notes Desi has her bound by setting, as there is no means of escape from Desi's home; she is without access to a car or cash or even, in a stroke of overt misogynist symbolism, the walls outside his mansion. Though he says he's protecting her, Desi is clearly imprisoning Amy (360). Not only is Desi Amy's "posh jailer" it is revealed that he is obsessive of her in a way Amy does not expect. Amy finds that Desi lies when they tour his mansion, stating he had her room painted her favorite color and that he had a greenhouse filled with her favorite flowers and engineered them to bloom all year, just for her, very recent and unexpected, arrival; Amy notices the room doesn't smell of fresh paint and that the flowers are rooted, not just-planted, causing her to wonder for how many years Desi has prepared to host her, keep her. She is alarmed, though she cannot show it (340). Clearly, Amy has met her master-manipulator match

and realizes she has "made a very big mistake" (341). Consequently, Flynn shows through Desi's character, it is not only Nick who disallows Amy of agency. Though both deserve the misogynist label, Flynn shows nothing redemptive about Desi, while Nick is providing a self-aware chronicle of his deception and the pain he caused Amy. Like Flynn shows varied degrees of villainy in her female characters, she does the same with her male characters.

In summary, Flynn demonstrates intricately and richly, Amy's misogynist entrenchment through Nick and Desi's characters. With these structures present in all men, according to Amy's Cool Girl monologue, Amy will never have enough power to escape misogyny.

Yet, Flynn creates a feminist pivot by not allowing Amy to be defeated by the patriarchal structures that have confined her. What Amy terms her revenge plan Flynn uses, in part, to demonstrate both a woman destroying misogynist constraints held by Nick and Desi and the outrageous lengths she must pursue to free herself from their misogyny. Amy accomplishes this freedom by over-matching her level of misogyny against Nick and Desi's levels of misogyny; as a result, Amy exposes herself to Nick and Desi but also to readers as a (female) misogynist monster.

Amy destroys misogyny as misogynist (female) monster

Because women are labeled as mad and /or monstrous, to attach female to the label of monster seems moot. However, Amy is not a monster solely in the Victorian sense of being a mismatch in society or because she hosts some sort of physical repulsion or because she behaves outside patriarchal expectations; Amy is a misogynist, meaning she qualifies as a monster, but since the term misogyny defaults to being a male practice in literature, the demarcation to

separate male from female misogyny is, unfortunately, necessary. The placement of parentheses, however, reflects Flynn's feminist purpose in writing female characters to assume any character type, regardless of gendered conventions. Thus, the parentheses is a nod of resistance to the oppressive act of gendering nearly anything a woman does, while the male version exists as the expected, default understanding. However, the labels surrounding female violence are many. Sabina Binder proposes that a "specific type of gender performance" be termed as "violent female masculinity" (81). She bases her term in reference to "Judith Haberstam's work on the performance of masculinity and violence…which explores masculinity without men" and "coined the term 'female masculinity…' masculinities that are produced not by men but by women" (81). Halberstam's 1998 work complements Flynn's purpose in taking out constructed gender roles so that all characters, but especially female villains can have full agency in being whatever type of villain their writers desire them to be. Binder quotes Halberstam's criticism of "the norm that [m]asculinity […] has been reserved for people with male bodies and has been actively denied to people with female bodies" (81). Binder also shares that masculinity studies reveal "violence is an effective way to produce masculinity" (82). Additionally, Binder quotes Messerschmidt in that masculinity is a means for men to intensify their behavior "especially when they feel their masculinity is contested or threatened" (82). Flynn does not allow the men in *Gone Girl* to intensify their masculinity when they feel threatened without being punished, a subversion of the Gothic tradition of punishing women who behave outside of patriarchal constructs. As a result, Flynn not only maintains a feminist lens despite the anti-feminist traditions she includes, she extends the boundary of the feminist lens.

Through Flynn's feminist lens, then, Amy refuses to be victimized by misogyny. By subverting traditional perceptions of female monster, Flynn updates the notion which results in

Amy taking away misogynistic power from Nick and Desi by embodying elements of misogyny and dominating them with it. Flynn takes on misogyny in a way that changes ownership of it, which diminishes its power from Nick and Desi in complete ways, not as a temporary "escape through madness" (Gilbert and Gubar 341). Flynn crafts Amy to be a monster who lets loose her power. She uses the full force of her monstrosity within to dominate the otherwise indomitable patriarchal walls that have restricted her agency for too long. By allowing Amy to evolve- or devolve- or both-as monstrous, Flynn widens the boundary of female villainy which underscores the need for a wider scope of female agency in fiction. Readers experience Amy's misogynist monstrosity in the following ways: as emerging monster, as master manipulator and finally as a monster who dominates patriarchy.

Amy as emerging monster

While Flynn makes it clear that Amy is not a redeemable person, readers do not recognize the monster within Amy until the very end of Part Two. When Nick realizes Amy is framing him and that by completing the treasure hunt, he is incriminating himself, he researches Amy's past to look for any hints, clues, any connections between Amy as a monster in her earlier years and the monster he now knows Amy to be. He connects the dots among the truck driver Amy harassed for several months, the childhood friend Amy falsely accused of abusing her and an old boyfriend whom she created an airtight and false rape claim against. Given the large gaps in time among these events, they seem isolated; however, taken as a collective, a new and

Nick shares with Tanner his theory about being framed by Amy and begins by discussing an exchange between Amy and a truck driver. In east coast traffic and early in their marriage, Amy refused to let a trucker in her lane. He responded by speeding up then cutting her off and flipping her off (Flynn "Gone" 254). Amy took revenge by telling Nick to call in the trucker's

license plate. Nick did and thought the issue was moot when Amy spent months reporting this trucker's driving to get him fired; Nick tells Tanner, "She said she'd even researched the truck's routes so she could pick the correct routes for her fake near-accidents" (254). Nick doesn't share the outcome of Amy's revenge plot, but the outcome isn't the concern so much as the idea that Nick is in the beginning stage of realizing his wife's degree of revenge doesn't extend to just him, that Amy has had years of practicing her craft as a misogynist monster. Flynn is incredibly clever in using this example of what seems a typical case of road rage, as usually men are attributed with this reaction. Using the example of Amy starting the one-sided feud then refusing to admit guilt or responsibility and choosing instead to fight it out is an exercise of stereotypical male machismo. Moreover, Flynn includes this part of the story within Nick's narration so that his emerging realization of Amy as monster comes into focus in a startling way. Nick tells the story of the truck driver to his attorney, Tanner, upon finding the incriminating evidence Amy stashed in his sister's woodshed. Nick tries desperately to get Tanner to believe that is a monster through the connection between the woodshed and the truck driver story, but Tanner says this connection is too flimsy (270). All the evidence is laid out for the police to find. The clues that incriminate Nick are the same clues that incriminate Amy if only the police could connect the subverted clues with physical evidence instead of only Nick's word. Amy's complex revenge story leaves Nick reeling and helpless.

At this point, Flynn makes Amy's villainy more tangible with the addition of the truck driver story; readers know that Amy's clues are subversions to what she is really doing to Nick, and readers also witness Nick's struggles with the media, his in-laws and Andie. This is a moment in which Flynn causes a pivot in sympathy from Amy to Nick, since Nick is being abused in an extreme sense by a merciless abuser.

Nick knew of Amy's childhood friend, Hillary Handy, only from Amy's perspective. According to Amy, Hillary became so jealous of Amy during their childhood that Hillary pushed her down a flight of stairs. Amy's parents filed a restraining order against Amy. Nick contacts Hilary to get her side of the story and Nick's hunch about Amy is proven correct. For reasons of which Hilary was not aware, Amy felt insulted by Hilary and vowed revenge. Instead of children arguing or perhaps breaking the friend's toy, young Amy concocts an elaborate scheme to vilify Hilary to extreme measures, resulting in a restraining order and Hilary being expelled from school. Hilary tells Nick Amy spent months intricately planting ideas with other friends about Hilary's obsession with her while spending intimate time with Hilary to cement her trust. After months of setting her trap, Amy executed her play in one quick maneuver by throwing herself down a set of stairs at school and, among incurring other injuries, breaks her ribs (Flynn 292).

Hilary tells Nick Amy could not handle Hilary having more attention or power over Amy, and Hilary never perceived having "slightly better grades" or getting more attention from a mutual friend as indicative of a power trip (292). Yet, because Amy is a misogynist monster, she sees anything that puts her second as a threat, and she has an innate misogynist monstrous desire to re-center herself as the only one with power.

Tommy O'Hara is the last person Nick contacts to learn of Amy's chilling monstrosity. Tommy relays the false rape claim Amy contrived because, as he learns from Amy later, he ghosted her and started a relationship with a different woman. Amy staged Tommy's bedroom with incriminating evidence unbeknownst to him. Amy then seduces Tommy and has sex with him only to collect semen and evidence of penetration to fit her rape claim. She dropped the charges when she felt that Tommy had been thoroughly terrorized (277). Nick understands Amy's degree of monstrosity had grown over the decades and, after the Tommy O'Hara

terrorization, Amy had evolved from an emerging monster to a monster of mastery. This is the height of Amy emerging as a misogynist monster. Nick's fear that Amy has only become more cunning at playing "Old Testament God" is about to come true (276). Moreover, Flynn creates this incident to upend the stereotypical male manipulation of a woman for sex. Amy is the creep who manipulates Tommy for sex. Amy then fools Tommy and shames him for giving into Amy by causing Tommy to implicate himself in her frame-up of him. Amy was hurt that Tommy dropped her without notice and began dating another woman, so she feels she must punish him to remain dominant. Flynn widens the feminist lens in terms of fictional feminism in that women make false rape claims to seek revenge. In reality, "the prevalence of false rape claims in between 2% and 10%" (Lisak et al). Amy acts on a higher misogynist plane than Tommy which recenters Amy as the only one in control. Flynn supplies readers with the false rape stereotype which is a real reason women fear reporting rape and sexual assault; this inclusion is outside the bounds of what is expected from a post-modern female villain. It is likely readers react to Amy's monstrous revenge with heightened anger of their own- at Amy, at Flynn, and perhaps at the story as a whole- which may increase their degree of sympathy for Nick.

Probably the most entertaining aspect of stories with monsters is watching them lose. While in today's action films the monster may win to hype a sequel, for (female) monsters of fiction loss, punishment or death is inevitable. An example of a (female) monster losing in fiction concerns famed Gothic fiction writer Angela Carter. Her female protagonists follow the Gothic formula of women asserting resistance but meet a disappointing end by being punished with patriarchy restored as dominant. An example is Carter's short story "The Fall River Axe Murders" in which Lizzie Borden murders her parents. Carter notes that Lizzie "will not be a free woman" no matter the circumstances, for if she is convicted, she will be in prison for the rest

of her life, and if she is acquitted, the whole patriarchal system in which she is confined" will continue to oppress her (Tavassoli and Ghasemi). Although Flynn leans toward to the Gothic style, she subverts it by resisting the formulaic Gothic ending by refusing an ending in which Amy meets tragedy in order for patriarchal order to regain control.

Flynn also creates drama in this section of the story since Amy's seemingly perfect plan has gone awry; after being beaten and her money stolen at her hideout in the Ozarks to underestimating Desi's claustrophobic level of misogyny, this space in the novel is an opportunity for readers to react to Amy as a (female) monster. Readers so far have been along for Amy's fast-paced escape plan but at this point have a moment to react to Amy as a vulnerable character instead of only witnessing Amy execute her perfect plan. While Amy is trapped with Desi, readers can assess Amy's degree of villainy up to this point and compare their thoughts with what they would like to see happen to her or to Desi.

Amy's plan fails in manipulating Desi for cash and a car, and she realizes she underestimated Desi's degree to misogynistic hold on her and winds up outmaneuvered by him. When she calls and requests his help, Desi meets Amy in a casino outside of St. Louis. When Amy manipulates Desi into thinking it is his idea to ask her to stay with him, thinking she will bilk Desi out of the assets she needs from him, Amy feels confident she can continue to manipulate him further. The moment Amy thinks she is safe hiding out at Desi's is also the moment she realizes Desi has been waiting for Amy to come to him, to stay, for years. As mentioned earlier, Desi punishes Amy by manipulating her into giving him compliments during the tour of his estate. Fear strikes her when Desi shows Amy her room, painted in her favorite colors from high school, and Desi shows Amy the greenhouse with her favorite flower from high school, tulips, engineered to bloom for her all year long. Desi lies, saying he just had the room

painted for her arrival and the tulips planted recently for her stay; however, Amy narrates that she called Desi just 24 hours earlier, and "these are not newly planted tulips, and the bedroom did not smell of fresh paint" (Flynn 341). Amy realizes Desi has planned for Amy to stay with him well before she placed her emergency call to him. She narrates, "I'd forgotten about him. The manipulation, the purring persuasion, the delicate bullying" (362). Amy has spent every moment of her stay there with Desi controlling her. She realizes she is a prisoner, and since she cannot manipulate Desi to give her access away from him, she realizes that his cloying personality from high school, like her degree of monstrosity, has intensified, resulting in a level of misogyny Amy didn't plan for. Without alerting Desi to her revenge plan involving Nick, which would give Desi more control over her, Amy feels she has no choice but to break out of the "posh prison" he has created for her, and to accomplish this breakout, she must do "something very bad" (360, 362). Readers now know from her earlier acts of misogynist monstrosity that Amy's personality is monstrous, and when Flynn ends the chapter in an ominous tone, this time readers will be sure to keep their minds open to what horrors Amy can execute.

While Desi's form of misogyny proves difficult to overcome, due to his apathy toward his wife, Nick's misogyny toward Amy is malleable. Amy's manipulation of Nick sends him on their annual anniversary treasure hunt, where one clue leads to the next. Except this year, Amy crafts clues implicating Nick in her disappearance, and the more clues Nick finds, the further he seems guilty of murdering his wife. Though Amy's clues are easy to figure out this year, they are also covert messages masked in a sing-song style that point to all the places Amy knew Nick and Andie had sex. It's a subtle but arresting nod to Nick from Amy that she knows about the affair and is framing him for her disappearance: Once Nick solves all the clues, he finds himself mired

in airtight implications which is when the line from Clue #1 makes sense: "*So hurry up, get going, please do! / And this time I'll teach you a thing or two"* (227). When he figures out he is being framed, he also realizes the sick fun Amy is having by manipulating him to an incriminating extent: "It's her grand statement…She wants me to know I'm being fucked. She can't resist. It wouldn't be fun for her otherwise" (227). Amy does find her revenge plan amusing. For almost the whole of Part Two, Amy enjoys Nick's future looking more and more grim. The day of her feigned disappearance Amy smiles and enjoys the thought of Nick, her "smug husband lounging around his sticky bar as mayhem dangled on a thin piano wire just above his shitty, oblivious head- and I realized I was smiling. Ha" (219)! Her clues have a bright energy about them, rhyming in couplets and sounding naughty in some instances. Amy happily reviews the lengthy and detailed checklist that outlines her plan for leaving Nick and takes pride in her devious decisions (237). She tells the readers, "I've always thought I could commit the perfect murder. People who get caught get caught because they don't have the patience" (235). Here Amy reveals her thoughts about murder before Nick's affair, the musings of a monstrous woman.

Amy continues manipulating Nick, and he is forced to face the public. Amy has thought of this possibility and made sure her diary entries tell a story of a beloved girl who chose the wrong guy (238). Amy is elated when Nick is caught in the cross hairs of the Nancy Grace type news host, Ellen Abbott. In the public sphere Nick is caught entirely off guard, and public opinion ravages him. Amy knew Nick would not bode well under pressure of the media. He is reacting to the chaotic situation she put him in, and he is unable to think about what to do for himself, which makes him look even more guilty. Amy manipulates Nick also by faking a pregnancy and lying to her neighbor, Noele Hawthorne, that she is pregnant. Noele surprises

Nick with this news during his new conference asking the public for help finding Amy. Amy spent over a year badmouthing Nick to Amy so that Noele would contradict Nick, that Noele does so in front of America, is a helpful touch for Amy.

The most egregious manipulation Amy demonstrates is leaving clues that also show she is still in love with Nick. By the third clue, "Amy was blooming large in [Nick's] mind" (214). Nick felt connected to her again for the first time in over a year. Nick spends about two pages waxing poetic on his love for Amy: "Her mind was both wide and deep, and I got smarter being with her…and more alive, and almost electric" (214). Nick has no idea, though readers are clued in this time, that Amy's sweet notes cause Nick to fall back in love with Amy, while those notes mean nothing to Amy. Nick pictures a sentimental life with Amy and their baby just before opening the woodshed, the location of the last clue. The chapter and the page end with Nick's, "Nonononono" (215). Amy doubly secured that Nick would be found guilty of murdering Amy by the evidence placed in the woodshed that matched credit card purchases taken out falsely by Amy in Nicks' name. An incriminating club handle is missing on a doll, found in the woodshed, that resembles Amy, which is the murder weapon Amy planted at the edge of the river near their backyard. When Nick calms himself after seeing the evidence in the woodshed, he is sickened by the way he let her back into his heart so easily only to subvert what he says is the "moony, girlish state her notes had left me in." He confessed the embarrassment is "Marrow-deep" (229). Nick is finally arrested for the murder of Amy (363). There is nothing Nick can do to help himself; he has been thoroughly manipulated by Amy to such a degree that Amy has even control of his future.

From this point until the end of the story, Amy uses her female identity as a weapon against Nick. This is a degree of monstrosity that supersedes what a male misogynist can achieve

in terms of villainy. Flynn widens the feminist lens here, showing that not only should female characters have the right to be written as devious, malicious, depraved and masculine monster-villains, but that these female villains can also out-monster male characters. Amy still fits the umbrella label as misogynist monster since she has crawled into Nick's mind and viewed her murder from the lens of her husband. Amy has positioned Nick to fear his spouse and for his life, while Amy has all the power, even the police department relies on her evidence to help them solve the crime she has faked (363). Nick is positioned as the damsel in distress who can only be rescued by Amy.

Interestingly, shades of Amy are seen in Flynn, as in this instance, Flynn appears as competitive as Amy in terms of topping any other author's female literary villain, even her own, as Amma and Diondra herald from stories wherein both girls are arrested, and the stories have a closed resolution.

While Amy crafts and enacts her revenge plan, Flynn is also creating Amy to cut down patriarchy at Desi and Nick's roots. Amy's monstrosity is so completely dominant that neither Desi nor Nick will be able to rise against her. She must become unrecognizable to any of the performed selves she's ever been, (Fictional feminist Amy, Cool Girl Amy, Diary Amy, Ozark Amy, Ruined-woman Amy) because those other selves are formed to please the patriarchal structure. Vahlne supports this idea by quoting Gonzales and Rodriguez-Martin that, '"wickedness may be the only way left for [women] to survive whilst maintaining their

autonomy"' (8). Thus, to live outside of bind of patriarchal constraint, Amy must realize the full extent of her misogynistic monstrosity to destroy the patriarchy within Nick and Desi.

Flynn shows an increase in Amy's degree of villainy as a (female) misogynist monster. It is in the final pages with Desi that Flynn shows Amy rising above his level of misogyny in a show of fatal seduction coupled with extreme brutality. Flynn writes Amy to fulfill the stereotypical role of femme fatale in that she plays to Desi's cloying sexual desire for her. Desi manipulates Amy at every turn so that she is powerless against him. However, Desi has been manipulated by Amy since they met and has no idea the monstrous villain Amy actually is. When they first met, Amy knew Desi preferred his girlfriends to be a bit broken so that he could play the white knight, so she lied to him, telling Desi her father molested her as a child (325). When she called Desi to help her stay hidden from Nick, she lied again, laying thick the lies with that Nick might kill her and the (fake) baby (325). Desi is intent on holding her at his estate, for both his misogynist pleasure and her safety, in that order. Since Desi overpowers Amy with his misogyny, Amy creates both a plan for escape and revenge. She plays to Desi's sexual objectification of her and seduces him:

I array myself in Desi's favorite look: delicate flower. My hair is in loose waves, perfumed…I am almost without makeup: a flip of mascara, pink-pink cheeks, and clear lip gloss. I wear a clingy pink dress he bought me. No bra. No panties…despite the air-conditioned chill. I have a fire crackling and perfume in the air, and when he arrives after lunch without invitation, I greet him with pleasure (364).

Amy narrates the pathetic sex with Desi sharing that she "just wants it to be over" (365). After working up fake tears, post-sex, to please Desi, Amy makes martinis and into Desi's mixes three sleeping pills, "Soon he is sleepy, and after that he is snoring" (366). Amy narrates the final

sentence of the page that is also the final sentence of the chapter: “And I can begin” (366). It is chilling, and Flynn heightens readers’ curiosity because they must wait to know what Amy intends since the next chapter is Nick’s to narrate, except Amy shows up at their home during Nick’s narration. Flynn signals a change is ahead since Nick and Amy’s story has converged.

Amy arrives with wrists and ankles raw with rope burns and blood smears across her midsection. She confesses that she feigned rape by abusing herself with a wine bottle then had sex with Desi, and when he fell asleep “she pantomimed slicing his jugular” (388). Amy relates her story to Nick and is proud of what she has accomplished. She has no remorse for Desi; in her mind, since he took away her freedom, he deserved to be punished, and Flynn writes Amy to be consistently outrageous in her punishments. She shows no mercy and is surprised that Nick is not impressed with her plan (388). Since Amy provides that ominous warning that something bad is going to happen to Desi, readers are likely less shocked about Amy murdering Desi than they are Amy’s nonchalant attitude in putting Desi’s murder behind her as if it was a menial task on a list to check mark. Amy had to overpower Desi’s sense of misogyny, so she used seduction and bondage in the femme fatale style but goes further in her villainy than the femme fatale by killing Desi herself, which is not a convention of the femme fatale. Amy kills Desi and incriminates him, a humiliation on his reputation that haunts him after death. Readers see that Amy cannot befriend people, she only uses them for her monstrous gain- Hilary, Tommy, Noele and Desi. Murdering Desi and blaming him for his own murder is a quality outside feminine expectations that threatens patriarchy. That Amy not only threatens patriarchy but destroys Desi’s piece of it, because he refused to give her any semblance of freedom veiled in affection, shows a strong message from Flynn to readers. Flynn creates a female character who will not perform anymore, who will not be imprisoned. The issue of Amy going to a monstrous degree to

attain freedom from Desi's misogyny may be difficult for some readers since Amy is a villain different from the typical female villain who fights back but trades punishment or death for it. Yet, this is the very concept Flynn wants to establish so that female characters can move in any direction their writer imagines, one not tied to patriarchal power over female characters (Abbott).

Amy also destroys Nick's patriarchy but instead of affording Nick a quick death, she sentences him to a lifetime of misogynist treatment, stripping Nick of autonomy and ego. Amy tells Nick her reason for coming home after she is questioned and released by the police. Amy explains she forgave Nick for his affair after his media blitz about how much he loved her, how he is a better person with her and that he begged her to come home (Flynn "Gone" 385). Amy seems totally taken in by Nick's false story about his love for her, yet Flynn never makes a fool out of Amy and does not cease to surprise her readers. Amy speaks to her readers, admitting she will not let Nick go, not after he said all the things she has been waiting for him to say; she is still a monster, but she only seems delusional in this instant, not the ruthless, sinister type of monster she has been throughout the novel. And in typical Flynn fashion, she appears to write this section as falling action; the novel is close to the end, so readers expect Amy's rage to wind down since she wants her marriage back; however, as in *Sharp Objects* and *Dark Places,* Flynn subverts the traditional plot line and adds plot twists at the end. Amy addresses her readers in a confessional manner: "You don't buy it? Then how about this? He did lie. He didn't mean a fucking thing he said. Well, then, screw him, he did too good a job, because I want him exactly like that. The man he was pretending to be…- I love that guy. That's the man I want for my husband. That's the man I deserve" (392).

When Nick tries to convince Amy to divorce him, to be the "badass, take-no-prisoners *woman,*" who would be cheered by women everywhere, Amy only sees Nick's idea as Nick

"trying to wriggle out of [their] marriage…He still thinks he has power" (393). Readers know, however, there is no way Nick will win over Amy. She will not divorce him, and she will not allow Nick to divorce her or divulge her secrets. Amy is right in thinking Nick still has the power in their marriage. Nick narrates, "Amy has to be brought to heel. Amy in prison, that was a good ending for her" (397). However, Nick is unaware Amy has ensured her protection against Nick by again weaponizing sex in the form of "one more spectacular precaution" which she delivers at just the right time (398). In the meantime, they both pretend to be in love again, because Amy convinces Amy he wants to be the man she needs, and at times, it feels real, like when Nick flies in lobster for dinner, and he chases Amy around the house with a lobster like he used to back in New York. But as real as those moments feel, Nick is definitely pretending because, although he stays with Amy, he is secretly meeting with detective Boney and Go to figure out ways Nick can escape Amy (404). Nick is also secretly typing his side of the story during the night when Amy is asleep (409). Amy is also typing her version of their story, though hers is a love story as opposed to Nick's who begins his story calling Amy "a sociopath and a murderer" (408). Flynn maintains Amy's monstrous character to the very end, even though in Nick's story he calls himself the hero (408). When Nick approaches Amy with his manuscript entitled *Psychobitch*, Amy only smiles and says she has something to show him as well, "Oh! What perfect timing…Can I show you something" (410)? There are only three pages until the novel is complete, which is time for one more of Flynn's plot twists: Amy is pregnant (411).

Amy then forces Nick to delete his book and to sign an affidavit that the evidence she planted against him in the woodshed was actually his doing and not Amy's. Nick agrees to all of her demands because she threatens the baby's life if he does not comply. Amy is using her pregnancy and baby as a weapon to control Nick. The battle is now over. Nick capitulates power,

all of it, to save his baby's life. He will do anything she says to protect his child, stating, "I would literally lay down my life for my child, and do it happily. I would raise my son to be a good man. I deleted my story" (412). And so, they move forward pretending to be, in Amy's words, "the world's best, brightest nuclear family" (415). They are kind and loving to one another for as long as they can sustain it.

Because Flynn has written this story, Nick and Amy won't sustain their unconditional love for very long. For what seems a strange but agreeable ending between husband and wife takes yet another sinister turn when, on the day before the baby is to be born, Amy takes offense to Nick's comment about her: "I feel sorry for you…Because every morning you have to wake up and be you" (415). Flynn writes Amy to have the last word with a calm but monstrous reply to readers: "I really, truly wish he hasn't said that. I keep thinking about it. I can't stop." Readers know Amy's words carry power. Her final words are again to her readers and are haunting as if she knows she's been watched this whole time, "I don't have anything else to add. I just wanted to make sure I had the last word. I think I've earned that" (415). Flynn creates an open-ended curiosity and dread in readers, since similar to how Amy cannot stop thinking about what Nick said to her, readers are haunted by Amy jockeying for dominance at the very end, even though she already has all the power; her decision to flex her misogyny on Nick even when unnecessary reflects Amy's need to always reinforce her power. Flynn writes Amy to make one last monstrous comment which causes readers to consider all the possible meanings from Amy's comment. Readers leave the novel haunted and with many questions but no answers regarding what will become of Nick, Amy and their son.

Gillian Flynn creates a masterful novel that employs a female villain who exists outside of patriarchal expectations from beginning to end. Her diary entries in Part One are elaborate lies

meant to fool readers. Amy sets up traditional stereotypes between husband and wife which align with readers' expectations. Flynn upends those stereotypes in Part Two when Amy reveals the whole diary is a lie. Amy exposes her monstrosity at the beginning of Part Two and her degree of villainy only intensifies from there. Flynn employs Amy to demonstrate her major purpose in writing stories with female villains, that these characters should never be limited regarding the extent of their villainy, that they can and should own any available degree of morality or immorality the writer chooses. While this makes sense, the literary tradition of punishing female characters who resist patriarchy has been upheld. In fact, Flynn writes Amy to drown herself "Virginia Woolf style" so the police would discover a body, and the case against Nick would be beyond airtight. Flynn inserts this idea then allows Amy to change her mind, "I have decided I'm not going to die…I can't stomach the injustice. It's not fair that I have to die" (280). Here, Flynn shows the leaning into the trope of a woman being punished with death for daring to punish her husband; then, Flynn subverts that trope by changing the story so the woman will not die, so the woman will punish her husband and get to live. Flynn then pushed the bounds of female villainy even farther by, not only living, but reversing the gender trope of the abused wife who must stay because she has nowhere else to go- no resources, no agency. Amy takes away Nick's agency then makes him stay with her and convinces him staying with her will be good for him. And Nick agrees, promising his sister that he'll be "the best husband and father in the world" (412).

Flynn's arrival as a writer has broadened the way readers and writers perceive female villainy. Enes Gulderen supports the idea of Flynn broadening the feminist lens by asserting that Amy is able to achieve being free from attacks of misogyny because Flynn "has unravel[ed] culturally determined gender roles" and that Flynn's "female characters' main conflict is always based on the inability to perform and subject oneself to binary gender roles dictated by

patriarchy" (219). Furthermore, Ann Heilman shares that women bear the burden of "having to inhabit patriarchal structures while being actively engaged in exploding them" (160). While Amy's crimes are not excusable outside of fiction, Flynn's fictional take on a woman's revenge against the patriarchal system that ravages her time and again, is a powerfully representational sensibility of the lengths women must go to be free from being victimized by misogyny.

Chapter Three: Mainstream reviews of *Gone Girl*, film version

As mentioned, feminism is a widely held belief and one that is connected to both a global and an individualistic definition. Today, feminism is a topic played out in countless iterations in politics, news, and in mainstream television, film and social media. Because American viewers are exposed to various degrees of feminist and anti-feminist ideas and reactions, they arguably have a working definition of what feminism means to women as a whole but also to women as individuals with varying feminist needs. Thus, the in-fighting that takes place among self-titled feminists as well as among people whose ideas clash on social media regarding gender equality issues as a whole is understandable, since people enter discussions or arguments with a singular, personalized and protective definition of what feminism does and should mean for society overall.

Moreover, because the meaning of feminism in America encompasses the evolution of progress for women across the nation and across time, such growth is always and, unfortunately, uneven and biased. As a result, a movement that is immense in number and in cause is rife with disagreement.

The idea, then, of a one-size-fits-all work of literature to encapsulate the many interpretations, cultures, and waves of feminism seems rather an impossible undertaking. Yet, this impossible assignment is what is being asked of Gillian Flynn's domestic noir thriller, *Gone Girl,* even though Flynn did not intend to take on the totality of the feminist movement. Nonetheless, film and book critics and scholars have chastised Flynn and her novel for being anti-feminist to the point of misogyny. The reverse opinion also shares a presence within criticisms; critics hail *Gone Girl* as a champion for a reclaiming of power within her work. More importantly, however, what Flynn accomplishes in *Gone Girl* is far more important than the

pugilistic camp mentality playing out amongst critics. Such criticism demonstrates a lack of perspective as *Gone Girl* is a text that engages in both misogyny and feminism to examine and widen the feminist lens in a dualistic manner. The following paragraphs illustrate the criticism of the novel and film, drawing attention to the sources' focus on *Gone Girl* as only feminist or anti-feminist.

Multiple criticisms of Flynn's novel state it is an anti-feminist work. These criticisms perceive *Gone Girl* as using patriarchal structures which cause the novel to read as a work opposed to feminism. Sandra Widya Resti and Titen Diah Soelistyarini posit *Gone Girl* portrays Amy as a femme fatale "due to her rejection towards traditional gender roles" but fails to promote feminism due to its "affirma[tion] of anti-feminist representation." Resti and Soelistyarini point out that Flynn's brand of feminism fails because it presents Amy, and thereby powerful women, as "dangerous" due to their "ruthless" and "threatening" nature in addition to Amy's use of violence and chaos which can create a "misogynist assumption…and thus create hatred toward women." The authors assert this conclusion based on four criteria: 1. "Nick's attitude toward Amy may represent patriarchal views on gender stereotype[s], in which women are stereotypes as emotional while men are associated with logic." 2. Based on Simone Beauvoir's work *The Second Sex,* Resti and Soelistyarini state that Amy is seen as Other which degrades her. They support this idea by stating that since Amy stopped performing Cool Girl for Nick, he took a lover with whom Nick is happily in love, placing Amy in position to be the Other, marginalized woman, even though she is still married to Nick. 3. Resti and Soelistyarini assert that *Gone Girl* gives in to patriarchy because Amy plays the damsel in distress but only to victimize men. She also thinks of men as tools. 4. Lastly, the authors also assert that because Amy goes back to Nick, Flynn reinforces patriarchal society and "Hence, marriage…[is] the only

place in which the *femme fatale* can be tamed." They purport then that Nick becomes the hero because his participation is necessary to keep Amy's contrived story safe; in addition, Nick is also perceived as the hero because Amy, through a veiled threat, communicates that something unfortunate could happen to the baby if Nick refuses to play along.

Resti and Soelistyarini claim to have read *Gone Girl* with a feminist lens and state that even though Amy is portrayed as a femme fatale, "the novel is…anti-feminist [and a] patriarchy-centered representation of male anxiety towards the power of women;" this statement about male anxiety joins feminist film professor and author Mary Ann Doane's suggestion that the femme fatale is more powerful as a figure that reveals that there is a patriarchal structure in place, one that gives priority to the male subject, than as a figure who shows how to speak from within that structure. She claims that the femme fatale should not be seen as "some kind of heroine of modernity" but rather a "symptom of male fears about feminism" (Mercure 116).

A mainstream critique of the film from Dana Schwartz who writes for the *Observer* also asserts that the film is not a work of feminism, as the title states: "Amy Dunne From 'Gone Girl' Is Not a Feminist." One aspect of interest in Schwartz's review focuses on Schwartz's review focuses on clarifying the meaning of feminism. She begins by making that point that a work is not feminist just because it involves a woman (Schwartz). She makes the distinction between a character who is a feminist and a feminist character. A character who is feminist, Schwartz contends, "is merely a character that'd call himself or herself a feminist within the universe of the film" whereas a feminist character challenges the way gender stereotypes are portrayed on the screen and "allows women to be full, interesting characters." This definition of a feminist character sounds exactly like Amy, but Schwartz makes a distinction that leaves out Amy from her perspective of what makes a character feminist: "Amy might be an *interesting* monster, with

plans and ambitions and a perspective and flaws, but it seems an enormous stretch to call her a feminist." Schwartz takes issue with Amy's manipulation and hatred of the women around her but also that Amy does not outright assert any major feminist cause, "She doesn't fight for reproductive freedoms or call her senators about paid maternity leave. She just…happens to be a woman doing smart, cool violent things." This point runs into her concluding concern which is that "there are people in the world deluded enough to think that's the only way women are ever strong [through manipulation and murder]."

Jill Dolan, a writer from the Princeton-based website, *The Feminist Spectator,* titles her review simply "Gone Girl" and agrees that the film is anti-feminist. This critic communicates two major points; the first point is that the film creates Nick as the hero and vilifies Amy. For example, the critic asserts Nick's hero status begins in the opening scene when he is taking the garbage out and briefly taking in the neighborhood. Dolan sees Nick taking out the garbage as performing the husbandly duty to the nagging wife's demand. Amy is damned due to her superior intelligence and good looks but expressionless face and monotone voice. The critic states, "Her lack of emotion makes her suspect, and the fact that she's smart also works against Amy. The critic continues stating Amy is also vilified due to the self-rape scene which "could be seen to promote rape culture" (Dolan). In addition, Amy self-rapes with a wine bottle "with an ever more frozen demeanor and with an increasingly *Stepford Wives*-style lack of affect." The sting for Dolan is that, "Amy's actions horrify mostly because Flynn and Fincher suggest that this super-smart woman, with all her social advantages, has to resort to manipulating her beauty and her body to get what she wants."

The *Feminist Spectator*'s second major reason *Gone Girl* is not a feminist film is the ambiguity regarding Amy's opinion regarding reproduction. The critic notes that Flynn and

Fincher are "particularly mean-spirited…by setting up a toxic binary" between Amy and her neighbor, Noele, the mother of triplets who is pregnant with another baby (Dolan). In addition, "Amy's ambiguity…about her reproductive capacities is only one of many strikes… against [Amy]…in the film's …misogynist slide toward her damnation." The film creates ambiguity regarding Amy's opinion about being pregnant, focusing on, instead, that Amy uses her pregnancy as collateral to guard against Nick telling anyone the truth about Amy's revenge plan. Further, Dolan states that "the way Amy is villainous hews too closely to stereotypes…-that [women] are self-serving and cold ball-busters who refuse to settle down and have babies." Dolan ends the review stating that she "just can't buy *Gone Girl* as feminist" and ends leaves her readers to think about a film with an unresolved ending which "refuses to tell us who the real villain is."

While anti-feminist claims are shown to be present in the novel and film, pro-feminist aspects also exist. One perspective of situating Flynn's work as feminist is that she creates an interesting female protagonist who is an anti-heroine. Siti Alifah Tamir and Diah Tyahaya Iman communicate that Flynn's creation of Amy as wicked and vengeful is a contribution to the female literary canon. Tamir and Iman reference gynocriticism as their feminist perspective of Flynn's work, stating that "Historically women have been the muted group and men the dominant group" and references Showalter, communicating that "feminist theories need to articulate the area specific to men and put it at the centre of women's writing" (Introduction). Tamir and Iman further reference Showalter to illustrate that "without apprehending the framework of female subculture, one would totally miss or simply misinterpret the themes…of female literature and would…fail to make necessary connections within a tradition" (Introduction). Thus, these authors show that Flynn's work is feminist due to positioning a

female, who is not typical, as the lead as well as situating Amy's revenge as the central focus of the storyline. Even Nick's narration throughout the novel reveals that his character is a reaction to Amy: "What are you thinking, Amy? The question I've asked most often during our marriage…What are you thinking? How are you feeling? Who are you?" (Flynn "Gone" 3). Nick is positioned, for much of the novel, as a man who is defenseless against his enraged wife and must crawl into the mind he had ignored for much of their marriage in order to save himself: "Who is Amy (What is my wife thinking? What was important to her this past year? What moments made her happiest? Amy, Amy, Amy, let's think about Amy)" (73). Thus, Flynn's novel shows a feminist aspect because she breaks the patriarchal tradition of the male focus both as lead character and in the storyline.

Another source that perceives *Gone Girl* as feminist is from Asl S. Ahmadi et al. These authors focus on Amy's ability to upend traditional gender roles. They communicate Flynn's novel "is a distinguished literary work for exploring the questions related to the concept of gender" and state Amy is successful because she works as "the puppet master and not the puppet" (148). Amy does not hesitate to challenge the men who hold dominant power in her world, Nick, Desi and Tommy (Flynn "Gone"149). However, the dominance that allows her to break free from patriarchal structures also makes her unlikable by all the characters in the novel (with exception of Amy's parents) and by the audience. *Gone Girl*'s audiences see both ideas within Amy's character; Amy is problematized in her social circle due to her still-single status but does not want to settle for the sake of doing what's expected of her gender (29). When she finds herself trapped in a loveless marriage to a selfish, unfaithful husband, she strikes back in a way that is far from typical or sane- the stuff that female audiences can cheer for, but only to a degree, for what is a revenge fantasy for audiences becomes reality to Amy, which is too bizarre

for audiences to endorse. Yet, Gay states "women continue to perform likability because they lack role models who challenge this performance." Kameron Hurley seconds this idea stating that men can get away with having flaws and making bad choices, but women can't. Hurley reasons the issue stems from women having been "so often cast as mothers, potential mothers, caretakers, and…assistants…that it's become a-conscious but also unconscious expectation." Thus, Flynn's novel can be perceived as feminist because it takes on a feminist act of subverting the norms of women in fiction being likable and working within patriarchal structures to find success. Amy breaks through this patriarchy in bold and brutal ways and never apologizes for it.

Women are not the only ones who herald Flynn's work as feminist. "Gone Girl' And The Feminism Of Its Many "Strong Female Characters" by *Forbes* film critic Scott Mendelson communicates that *Gone Girl* has made inroads in the film industry in ways different from other films with female leads. Mendelson's article focuses on praising Fincher and Flynn's film because it situates a female lead apart from being a token love interest as the only woman in the storyline. He adds that Flynn's female lead is not the garden variety female action hero that moviegoers are becoming accustomed to seeing. Mendelson states, "what must come next is an increase in quantity so that each lone female character doesn't have to represent the whole gender, which will arguably result in an increase in the diversity of female representation." Mendelson touches on the heart of the backlash Flynn's novel has received; the accusations that Flynn has written a misogynist work arguably comes from critics expecting Flynn to write a feminist work according to their own feminist perspectives. Feminism, as we know, exists on a moving timeline, therefore adjusting with cultural shifts; women also need varied types of feminist support, so what one woman sees as a feminist issue, others may not. Most importantly is Flynn's perspective of her own work. She defends her perspective in a *New York Times*

interview with Lauren Oyler, “This isn’t a movie that’s made for women.” Critics are hyper-focused on locating and analyzing the feminist parts of the story that they miss Flynn’s feminist act of employing female villains as a feminist purpose. Mendelson also notes Flynn’s feminist arc in her inclusion of many women, each with different lifestyles and varied perspectives. It is the women who drive the story; the three most powerful female characters influence the story throughout- Amy leads Nick through the story as he searches for the clues to both exonerate himself and incriminate Amy; Margo serves as the wake- up call Nick needs to take seriously that he will be charged with Amy’s disappearance. Andie is Nick’s realization-in-flesh that he no longer loves Amy and also serves as a plot twist (Flynn “Gone” 226, 159,148). Flynn creates a variety of female characters who react to the protagonist in different ways. In addition, Flynn’s feminist acts are shown not just in the number of women in a work but also the varied ways women react to one another and, particularly, the protagonist. Flynn shows the under belly of women’s feelings, and

While picking apart Flynn’s work and separating it into anti-feminist and feminist camps has value in terms of laying out the evidence, that criticisms forego combining the opposing perspectives in one article, is an injustice to her work. Flynn uses the anti-feminist structures in her novel to point out domestic oppression in obvious ways: The strip club, Nick’s infidelity and, most importantly, his apathy (Flynn 66, 149, 69). Flynn uses these patriarchal constructs to point out the reasons for Amy’s revenge. Moreover, Flynn’s writing style is such that she goes beyond noting Nick’s indiscretions; she creates interiority for Nick’s character that affords differing perspectives based on who is he at different points in his life with Amy. Consequently, audiences have an evolution of feelings for Nick, from finding his behavior disgusting to wanting Amy to get caught to perhaps being confused why he stays at the end. Following Nick’s evolution also

means audiences follow not only Flynn's use of anti-feminist treatments but also how those anti-feminist ideas are addressed. Critics who say they do not condone the violence because feminists do not handle issues with violence and by killing a man By the end, Nick is the spouse trapped in a marriage with impossibly high expectations: "He is learning to love me unconditionally, under all my conditions" (Flynn 414). As a result, Flynn reflects misogyny in a way that is self-destructive, thereby opening the minds of the audience; they are situated too clearly see the wrongdoings of Nick and the harm it causes both himself and Amy as individuals and as a couple. As a result, audiences can leave the film cheering for Amy's ruthlessness and dominance because it is fiction; audiences, as the reviews have noted, do not leave the film satisfied about what they have witnessed since the misogyny they witnessed is too close to the misogyny typical of real-life marriages.

Clearly, identifying Amy as a feminist or anti-feminist is an itch critics must scratch, perhaps due to the complicated way Flynn slips her characters in and out of misogyny and allows for ambiguity to frustrate readers.

An overlooked aspect of Amy's character development is that she is not wholly feminist. In a world, both fictional and real, where patriarchy is a pollutant in the air we all breathe, being even partially feminist is an achievement, since working to dismantle patriarchal standards in any fashion is a risk and a hard-fought battle. In addition, Amy is not only feminist in part but also victim and a shockingly violent monster. As such, Flynn writes Amy to be incredibly complex who demonstrates more than one message; Flynn delves into the ways a recession, job loss, relocation and infidelity affect a marriage. Flynn writes a story about a couple who endures catastrophic damage to their marriage but stays together without that story existing as a tale of romance.

Instead of a focus on the type of feminism they expect, critics must apply Flynn's demonstration of Amy's feminism as she writes it; Amy is a character whose reason for revenge is partially feminist: she vows to punish her husband in outrageous and unrelatable ways, but she also vows to never again follow gendered expectations of performance. Amy's feminist purpose is difficult to note because she achieves her feminist goal of overcoming patriarchal structures in anti-feminist ways: manipulation, extortion, murder. In a significant way, Flynn allows readers to critique Amy's partial feminism. In other words, Flynn does not protect or insulate Amy's character from judgment; after all, Amy is a monstrous villain whom Flynn wants readers to vilify. Flynn makes an important distinction in that it is acceptable to hate the woman in the story because she is a villain, not because she is woman. When critics approach the story as a masterful entanglement of ideas that create a complicated story and an even more complicated Amy, they may understand Amy as a woman who can have a partially feminist purpose without achieving her goal in an expected feminist manner. Flynn is an expert at subversion; that she subverts readers' typical experiences of a female character achieving a feminist goal should be accepted in the same fashion readers accept Flynn's subversion of Diary Amy's traditionally feminine behavior. Those critics who wrote negative criticism of Amy's failure at feminism also overlook the years Amy spent performing within patriarchal tradition for men, per her Cool Girl monologue, for it is a feminist purpose Amy asserts by deciding to never return to a life of performance for Nick (222-23). As a result, Amy knows no matter what type of new life she asserts for herself, performing a patriarchal-enforced gender role will remain standard operating procedure, so she stridently refuses to live as inauthentic. Amy's refusal to perform is a strong feminist point.

What critics are not saying outright is that Amy is not feminist *enough*. The veiled accusations of not being enough- not feminine enough, masculine enough, rich enough, thin enough, black enough, white enough- has a long, ugly history in this country. Perhaps what keeps critics from stating outright that Amy isn't feminist *enough* is that they know to say a woman is not enough is politically incorrect and patriarchal, yet this realization does not keep critics' disappointment from seeping through their own patriarchal walls and into their critiques under veiled phrases such as "Amy might be an *interesting* monster…but it seems an enormous stretch to call her a feminist" (Schwartz) and that one critic "just can't buy *Gone Girl* as feminist" (Dolan). Here, critics who call out Amy as not being feminist (*enough*), communicate that regardless of the amount of feminism Amy does possess, if she presents any degree of anti-feminism, even though it is to move feminist literature beyond its present boundaries, then Amy is not feminist *enough* and therefore seen only as anti-feminist.

In particular, Schwartz's requirements of feminism for Amy also include looking like the feminists who look like all the other third wave mediated feminists- white, wealthy, sexy, smart and very Amy-like, in fact, as long as Amy is also likable. Because, according to the negative critiques, if Amy is unlikable, which includes being monstrous, as Schwartz points out, she is not feminist *enough*. While this requirement of Schwartz's fits with third wave's mediated, fictional feminists, *Sex and the City*, for example, Schwartz's list ignores authors and their characters who are feminists in addition to ignoring the intersectionality feminism third-wavers fought for, such as Moraga and Anzuldua's *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, the collection of essays and fiction that began the revolution of intersectionality in 1981 (Gilley 188). The negative critiques, but especially Schwartz's, fail to include analysis from feminist perspectives other than the critics' own in addition to failing to comprehend the feminist purpose

embedded in Amy's monstrosity. Critics holding up Amy to the expectation of being more feminist than she is suggests a double standard and begs the question: What, in the critics' opinions, is the appropriate amount of feminism a female character must exude to be counted as feminist?

Bad feminist

Since the construction of Amy's character in her many parts: part-feminist, part-victim, part-monster goes overlooked, a beneficial resource comes from Guilherme Copati's 2021 chapter "The Turn of the 'Bad Feminist': Probing Monstrosity in the Shared Universe of *The Handmaid's Tale.* Copati analyzes the ways in which Aunt Lydia from Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments*, is a bad feminist. The similarities between Atwood's lead character, Aunt Lydia, and Amy Dunne are striking; Copati's use of the term 'bad feminist' is a new way of analyzing Flynn's lead character that offers a fresh insight regarding how readers and critics can effectively scratch their itch in their desire to attach a feminist or anti-feminist label to Amy. Terming Amy a bad feminist satisfies both aspects of the feminist dilemma as some see it. Copati's discussion of Aunt Lydia's monstrosity figures in a complementary way to Amy's character, first through

a discussion of the term bad feminist, then via monstrosity as normative configuration, character development and implications.

Copati begins by referencing the definition of bad feminist from Roxane Gay "whose collection of essays entitled, *Bad Feminist*,…first presented the figure to public scrutiny" (272). Gay's self-definition reflects Amy's characterization: "I have certain…interests and personality traits and opinions that may not fall in line with mainstream feminism, but I am a feminist. I embrace the label of bad feminist because I am human. I am messy. I'm not trying to be an

example…I'm a bad feminist because I never want to be placed on a Feminist Pedestal" (273). This sounds like Amy, a self-serving woman who does not care what other women think of her and who owns a partially feminist purpose but does not get her way by virtuous feminist means. Copati also states that being a bad feminist means "exercising one's own awareness of their flaws" (273). Amy admits accepting her "portion of the blame" in performing Cool Girl for Nick for too long which led to both spouses acting on their apathy turned hatred toward one another (223). Furthermore, Copati applies the bad feminist meaning to June's character from *The Testaments.* June is "against the grain. One who has…flipped off the norm" and who is an "egotistical juggernaut, a threat to the success of [order], …a deranged and confrontational individual, someone untrustworthy and unpredictable…someone who puts herself and only herself first" and most notably "someone to be avoided at all costs if one truly wishes to stay alive (284). These descriptors of June as a bad feminist fit Amy's character and seem an ideal way to label Amy since the duality of feminist and anti-feminist is represented. Copati's defining features demonstrate bad feminists need not be virtuous or have a common goal with other feminists to still be considered feminist.

In addition to drawing an understanding of the term bad feminist, Copati discusses monstrosity as it relates to normative configuration. Just as Mitchell mentions in her discussion of Gothic monstrosity that (female) monsters are ambiguous since they morph according to the norms of each era. Copati's states that a bad feminist "operates under the idea of a radical decentering" and that "being a bad feminist is, most of all, being averse to dogmatism, rather than [being] a simple byproduct of a powerful dogmatic position" (287). This is clear as Amy resists definition or predictability. For example, her diary entries are subversions for a gendered plot twist early in Part Two, and she is forced to deviate twice from trapped circumstances, once

from being robbed in the Ozarks and from being trapped in Desi's prison disguised as her new home. Furthermore, Copati notes that when the bad feminist radically decenters patriarchy, that patriarchy can be "crush[ed] under the weight of an emerging centralizing force [which] beckons the emergence of monsters" (287). Halberstam is referenced stating that monsters are "others, are outcasts…who contradict the socially sanctioned norm." Botting, too, is referenced stating that "monsters are the *upkeepers* of the norm;" they are exceptions that allow "structures to be identified and instituted [with] difference providing the prior condition for identity to emerge" (287). Copati closes his explanation of monsters as those who figure norms and "are hailed as sites of terror" whose acts "have spiral[ed] out of symbolic value" and that Aunt Lydia's character has become a fantasmic antithesis to norms (Botting qtd in Copati 287, Copati 288, 288). Similarly, *Gone Girl* centers around Amy's deviation from norms, demanding the other characters react to her behaviors or else. She is an experienced outcast as she was the only woman in her New York friend group who had not married which resulted in her friends and parents problematizing her; in addition, Amy was a monstrous outcast; she knew she was different from the other children in terms of being obsessively competitive and excessively vengeful over typical childhood issues, and as an adult, Amy changes friends often. Amy's monstrous deviation from norms positions her as the ultimate pariah at the end of the novel and film since Nick, Margo, Boney and Bolt want nothing to do with her. Boney sums it up perfectly, "You take care of yourself, okay, Nick? Amy I don't really give a fuck about" (Flynn "Gone" 412). Amy gets her way and will continue to get her way, but because her monstrosity is now clear, those who must still deal with her do so only out of fear. Copati winds down his discussion regarding bad feminist monstrosity regarding exclusion, stating characters like Aunt Lydia have

"arguably joined those other characters in that much decried marginal position" which extends the bad feminist invitation to Amy Dunne.

Copati discusses Aunt Lydia's bad feminist monstrosity regarding characterization which is another striking similarity to Amy's characterization. Copati previews his character analysis of Aunt Lydia by sharing Atwood's beliefs regarding women and female characters. Atwood asserts women are human beings "with the full range of saintly and demonic behaviors…including criminal ones. They're not angels, incapable of wrongdoing…Nor do I believe women are…incapable of agency or of making moral decisions" (290). Copati further discusses Atwood's dilemma in facing the sort of "moral complexity" authors run into when writing an idea that meets patriarchal resistance in reality. Copati states writers like Atwood are "limited by presumed notions of guilt and innocence anchored on a perception of systematic oppression and the need to erase individuality to tend to collective claims." Copati states this resistance "reinforce[s] the argument that female oppression continues to be a structural element of patriarchal power relations" (290). Copati carries through Atwood's "moral complexity" by discussing that "every woman-is always eventually positioned in the face of two mutually exclusionary possibilities." One option is to choose the "dominant configuration" meaning "every woman is invited to share in the glory of abiding by the same motives of other women;" the other choice is to resist this "call to conformity" and "become monster" (Copati 292).

In this next example, Copati does not use the term subversion but explains its use through Nicole's character when she questions how women could possibly side with Gilead "and not be some kind of monsters" while the patriarchy within Gilead exists as the normative configuration. As a result, the oppressed women who speak out are the "monstrous otherness" (Copati 296). Similar to *Gone Girl,* Flynn plays with subversions so that Nick and Amy are both labeled

monstrous as well as angelic. One example of the Gilead of *Gone Girl* is the media and the masses whose ownership of Nick and Amy's story dictate their guilt or innocence status regardless of the truth. Though Nick is not complicit in any of the traps Amy disguises as clues, the media assumes his guilt immediately because Nick does not realize yet he needs to locate his wife and appease the media's all-powerful cultural structure. Once he gives an authentic-looking interview that is completely fake, however, the public immediately softens toward him, and that type of dance continues until Amy returns to exonerate Nick (Flynn "Gone" 309).

Aunt Lydia from *The Testaments* is also characterized as a bad feminist monstrosity by being unable to "cross the divide into the side of wholesome feminism" (298). For Aunt Lydia's monstrous label to be removed, she must find a way to re-tell her story in every conceivable facet so there is no room for any monstrous perspective. Aunt Lydia must "prove herself deserving of mercy- and most importantly, of solidarity, and thus only the properness of her position be…integrated into the norm" (298). Copati states "Aunt Lydia's actions are never made to fully match the alternative to being a monster" (298). As a result of the patriarchal power structures in *The Testaments,* if any degree of monstrosity remains within Aunt Lydia, she can never be freed from bad feminist monstrosity status; only when she completely undoes herself in front of everyone can she be judged to be virtuous. Aunt Lydia's status as bad feminist monstrosity is a striking similarity to some of the negative criticism of Amy's characterization. Amy is villainous beyond reader expectations many times over and for that some critics refuse to perceive the other aspects of Amy's character as feminist. Like Aunt Lydia, Amy is unable to be viewed as feminist in any other way than as a bad feminist monstrosity. Amy attempts to convince Nick her revenge plan was rooted in a virtuous way. While Amy has a feminist purpose in leaving Nick, her feminist purpose goes no further. When he resists her spin, she strikes back with her final

monstrous behavior. Amy uses extortion, threatening the safety of their unborn child, to force Nick to comply with her demands that they remain married so Nick can love her unconditionally, under all her conditions (411, 414).

In summary, Amy's character is difficult to digest. Flynn stuffs Amy full of complexities and contradictions that leave audiences still questioning the origins and future of Amy's monstrosity, to which Flynn refuses to supply the answer. However, the analysis supplied up to this point in the chapter attempts to explain the ways Flynn crafts Amy's character, thereby enacting this chapter to serve as an anchor so audiences feel better connected to the story. To review, the praise for *Gone Girl* focuses on Amy resisting patriarchal structures through her diary entries, Cool Girl monologue and a general reclamation of her power. Amy is labeled as feminist as is Flynn. In contrast, the critics who focus on Flynn's creation of Amy's villainy, including her monstrosity, attempt to stretch feminism on a grandiose scale across Amy's entire character when Flynn creates only a small part of Amy's character to reflect feminism. The final point in this chapter to help assuage audience's struggle with the story's looming ambiguities, situates Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* analysis by Copati in relation to Amy's character since Copati's chapter focuses on a new insight regarding (female) monstrosity using Gay's term "bad feminist." Here audiences may couple the critics' need to neatly label Amy's villainy with the examples from Copati to come to terms with the partial yet wholly significant way Flynn treats feminism in her story.

While Flynn closes the story in a haunting way, going back to the critics' reviews of *Gone Girl*, there may exist a deeper layer of consternation than the critics' itch to neatly label Amy as feminist or not. This deeper layer may stem from the infrastructure of Amy's character. Regarding *Sharp Objects* and *Dark Places*, though Flynn's female villains are shocking, when

the stories are finished, readers can label the characters' relationship to feminism in a neatly packaged way: Camille is clearly the feminist hero and Libby the reluctant feminist hero. This way of labeling Flynn's female leads corresponds to Phelan's thematic component regarding character analysis, which refers to "the way characters generate 'statements of significance'" (Phelan qtd in Cohan). Flynn establishes a clear statement of significance in her first two novels. Then there is Gone Girl. Because Flynn is a feminist who writes with a feminist purpose, and Amy easily fits into the fictional feminist trope, audiences assume Amy's thematic component is modern (fictional) feminist who falls victim to the recession and abusive husband. Audiences are still comfortable with the story since there still exists a "statement of significance." When Amy's monstrosity is revealed in Part Two, however, audience's comfort level with Amy's feminism shrinks as Part Two progresses. While the beginning of Part Two holds onto a recognizable "statement of significance" with audiences relating to a woman desiring to take revenge on her husband for betraying her, Amy's feminist reason to exact revenge can become overlooked as mentioned when discussing critics' negative reviews. Audiences may not notice that Nick's affair was not the inciting reason for Amy's revenge plan; it was the last straw that demanded Amy resist Nick's misogyny. As a result, audiences likely shift their opinion of Amy's "statement of significance" regarding feminism from one that is relatable to a type that not only shrinks as Amy's plan becomes more and more bizarre but also less and less relatable. Part Two is the shift from identifiable feminism to Copati's bad feminist monstrosity. Therefore, Part Two may be the point where audiences can no longer identify Amy's feminism in relation to a "statement of significance." Part Three has no identifiable "statement of significance" regarding Amy's feminism until the end when she makes it clear the traditional gender roles upheld by patriarchy are no longer available to Nick. Yet, Amy is too far steeped as a bad feminist

monstrosity that audiences likely cannot register any semblance of a feminist purpose, let alone any "statement of significance."

Copati's discussion of bad feminist monstrosity intersects ideally with Phelan's thematic component in relation to Amy's character. Copati's rendering of the bad feminist monstrosity allows audiences to remember that Amy had a feminist purpose at one point, but Copati's discussion and Flynn's creation of Amy as an unrelatable, bizarre villain reveals to audiences that the original feminist label, relatable and within the confines of expected female villainy, has been replaced with a bad feminist monstrosity. As a result, what feels wrong to some of the critics of *Gone Girl*, what may be too shocking to accept or too new for them to realize, is that Amy's bad feminist monstrosity *is* Amy's "statement of significance."

Amy's state of bad feminist monstrosity leaves her unlikable and stained with (female) misogyny. Audiences leave the story of Nick and Amy feeling dirty for having felt more comfortable supporting Amy when they thought she was being abused. Though audiences are left unable to champion the story's female lead, they can absolutely champion Flynn's masterful, feminist act in creating a thorny work that challenges audiences to lean in despite the barbs to their expectations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, feminism is an immense movement that waxes and wanes throughout generations, politics and time itself. While progress toward a complete end to gender discrimination may never reach total fruition, the importance lies in continuing such progress. Gillian Flynn's impressive work, *Gone Girl,* destroys patriarchal structures through her entwined use of misogyny and feminism as a masterful coupling of resistance that makes its indelible mark on the domestic noir genre while exposing the audience to the relatable and the unrelatable causes and effects of patriarchal confinement. Understandably, Flynn does not take on the entirety of the feminist movement, though she does significantly extend the feminist fiction boundary, ignite controversy, and engender a close analysis of gender expectations. She exposes a wide audience of readers and moviegoers to the idea of gender role reversal as well as amorality being a tool in lessening the patriarchal grip on female characters in fiction.

Lastly, the impression that made an indelible mark on me is the clear, fictional illustration Flynn makes regarding the necessary degrees a woman seeks to gain freedom from oppressive men. Flynn does not shy away from the monstrosity Amy must demonstrate to achieve her goal. Flynn's *Gone Girl* is thoroughly inspiring because of Flynn's masterful writing- her ability to gauge her audience, to anticipate the ways they will react to her ideas; the tension she maintains and the relatable / unrelatable push-pull Flynn creates keeps audiences consistently engaged due to the questions her ambiguity raises.

Flynn's Gone Girl raises questions for me, not regarding the ambiguity of her story; rather, I am curious about the Flynn Affect. The introduction of this thesis revealed that men's protagonist roles double that of women's roles. Francemone's work shows that this "disparit[y] might relate to a fear in the movie industry that female actors are likely to be less of a draw than

male actors (see TED, 2017). Our findings suggest that these fears may not only be exaggerated, but entirely unfounded" (Francemone et al). Furthermore, Francemone et al discovered that audiences enjoy the degree of villainy more than the gender of the villain "since seeing a hated villain at the hands of a beloved hero will elicit greater enjoyment than seeing a moderately disliked villain thwarted at the hands of a moderately likeable hero" (560). In other words, audiences are just as likely to accept a female character as a hero/ villain as a male character (559). In addition, recent true crime novels are re-visioning the way crimes are situated. Two recent works, Hallie Runbunhold's *The Five* published in 2019 and Michelle McNamara's *I'll Be Gone in the Dark* published in 2018 are creating a "feminist version of true crime" (Friers and Traynor 12) These works "refute ideologies that inform the historical record" by giving voices to the "voiceless victims" and "dissolving the line between reader and victim to reduce the voyeuristic, detached feel readers can feel (12). This new way of approaching true crime stories with reverence and agency for the victims may be due to the ways Flynn creates a global and individualistic feminist meaning in her novels.

These newer works lead me to think of my work here as a springboard to continue writing about her work, and I am most curious about writers who have been inspired by Flynn to write in the domestic noir or thriller genres. Paula Hawkins' *Girl on the Train* received buzz about being the next *Gone Girl*, which piques my interest in conducting a quantitative study to find out an actual number then analyze those books to see in what ways they compare and possibly further Flynn's ideas. I am also curious about whether Flynn's brand of female villainy and her signature end-of-story twist has become a formula adopted by writers inspired by Flynn, though I do have reservations about Flynn's techniques becoming a trope. Additionally, at this

time there is no monograph published regarding Flynn's work; however, based on the academic work being written about her, I am sure there will be several.

Ann Heilman's monograph, *New Woman Fiction: Women writing First-Wave Feminism,* begins by defining the New Woman as redefined for 1974: "She is the product of the social evolution which is going on around us…Above all she is striving for equality of opportunity with man to enjoy her full life, and she seeks the right to make decisions for herself, the right to determine her own destiny" (1). Certainly, these rights should be afforded to all women and are ideals Gillian Flynn exercises in her writing. Flynn writes her female characters to exist outside patriarchal expectations, to be villains- violent, sadistic, manipulative, mastermind killers without remorse. As a result, she creates a wider lens for which to view the ways feminism can be acted upon in literature. Her work situates female characters to be the center of the stories, to have narrative control, to have full agency- all characteristics of resistance. Her stories are intelligent, complex, and engaging to academic and mainstream audiences alike; she incites controversy and conversation regarding marital stress and what happens to a couple when both partners stop trying to be their best versions for each other. Flynn engenders question about the ending to *Gone Girl*, the only of her three novels without a closed resolution. Flynn designs ambiguity to bloom largely, the story ending with Nick and Amy's wounds raw and bloody, leaving readers to discover there is blood on their hands, too.

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