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MARILYN MONROE'S STAR CANON: POSTWAR AMERICAN CULTURE AND THE SEMIOTICS OF STARDOM

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THE SEMIOTICS OF STARDOM

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DISSERTATION
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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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THE SEMIOTICS OF STARDOM

Although Marilyn Monroe was one of the most famous American film stars, and a monumental cultural figure, her film work has been studied far less than her biography. Applying C.S. Peirce's semiotic categories of icon, index, and symbol, this research explains how Monroe acquired meaning as an actress: Monroe was a powerful, but simplified, public image (an icon); an indicator of a particular historical and social context (an index); and an embodiment of significant cultural debates (a symbol).

Analyzing Monroe as an icon reveals how her personal life, which contradicted her official publicity story, generated public sympathy and led to a perceived intimacy between the star and her fans. Monroe's persona developed through her roles in films about marriage. *We're Not Married* (1952) and *Niagara* (1953) expose the pitfalls of marriage. In response to fan criticism of Monroe's aggressive persona in these films, however, Darryl F. Zanuck, in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953), consciously distanced Monroe both from her aggressive persona and her implicit criticism of marriage. Monroe's films, in particular, *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), *Bus Stop* (1956), and *Some Like it Hot* (1959), also revealed the tensions inherent in postwar understandings of female sexuality. Monroe's role in her final completed film, *The Misfits* (1960), both acknowledges and resists her status as a symbol. This film unites Monroe's screen persona and off-screen life in resistance to conventional values: her character embraces divorce, lives with a man who is not her husband, and openly criticizes men who betray trust. This film most extensively interweaves Monroe as an icon, an index, and a symbol. In so doing, it reveals how Monroe embodied the contradictions inherent in both postwar culture and Hollywood stardom.

KEYWORDS: Marilyn Monroe, Postwar America, Hollywood, Stardom, Film

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February 17, 2016
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To Wes and Avalee

Last but not least, to my husband Wes, who has been by my side for this whole journey, sometimes reading quietly, sometimes cooking or cleaning, and, for two weeks, walking three miles a day through Beverly Hills, I owe a lifetime of gratitude. And to my daughter, Avalee, whose life so far has always been colored by the turmoil of her mother's finishing a PhD program, I'm glad to have you love me anyway.

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Introduction.

An amazon.com search of books released about Marilyn Monroe in the last three

months of 2015 produces 127 titles. These titles include calendars and planners, and after

the fifth page of results (about 60 titles), the books possess only a slight connection to

Monroe, a mention here or there. Nevertheless, the fact that even 50 books with the

primary subject of Marilyn Monroe were released in the last three months of 2015, more

than 53 years after her death, is telling. These books span a variety of genres.[1] Among

them are books about Monroe as a photographic subject, a biography, an exposé

regarding Monroe's "murder," a play, a trivia collection, a beauty guide, a collection of

newspaper coverage and gossip, and two fantasy novels. Even those titles we might

expect to reveal something about Monroe as a film actress fail to examine how Monroe

the actress shaped her films. *Marilyn Monroe: A Life in the Movies* (Knight) is a video-

enhanced e-book which features clips from her films, short reviews, and film trivia.

Marilyn Monroe: The Quest for an Oscar (Turiello) contains 200 photos in its 324 pages,

and seems to make its case for Monroe to be posthumously awarded a lifetime

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[1] It bears noting that many of these titles are e-book only editions, and several are under
50 pages long. A handful of these titles are books published by reputable presses in print
editions. Steve Crist's collection of André de Dienes's photographs of Monroe, published
by a significant publisher of art texts, is one of the most reputable titles recently released.
Michelle Morgan has written other books about Monroe, and her recent collaboration
with Astrid Franse is also a reputable title on Monroe as a photographic subject. For
another recent title on Monroe as a photographic subject, see Willis. Neither Ryan's
recent biography of Monroe, nor Jack's analysis of Monroe's "murder," are available in
print editions, although Jack's title is available in several languages. Elton Jones's play,
The Unremarkable Death of Marilyn Monroe, was presented at several theaters in the
UK, and is now available in a print edition. Dita von Teese's glamour guide is a popular
print title, but Monroe is not its sole subject. For a trivia collection, see Peters, and for a
collection of newspaper clippings, see Reynolds. Lucy Holliday's novel is the second in a
relatively popular fiction series. For another fiction title, see Shakespeare's e-story.

achievement Oscar based on her current popularity, not her acting. Even *The Silver Age of Hollywood Movies, 1953-1963, Vol. 1: Marilyn Monroe* (Ashley) discusses Monroe's "Movie Career" in two chapters—one on her "drama coaches" and one on her films—but discusses her death over seven chapters.

Although well over 100 books have been written about Monroe, none, remarkably, analyzes her body of film work or addresses what she contributes to the meaning of her films. The majority of these books are biographies that set out to explain the details of Monroe's life, often in an attempt to clarify the circumstances of her death.[2] Many feminist authors have written about Monroe as a victim of patriarchy, for example, referring to her appeal as "breast fetishism combined with Lolita lechery" (Haskell 255).[3] Several trivia books are coffee table ephemera providing casts, synopses, and trivia, but no critical analysis of the films.[4] Although some important academic monographs have analyzed Monroe as a cultural icon, these books focus on our current understanding of Monroe rather than on what made her important to her contemporaries.[5]

In order to fill the gap in existing scholarship on Monroe, I want, with the aid of Peircian semiotics, to investigate how the canon of her work, in its historical and cultural context, gives meaning to her star persona. C. S. Peirce classifies signs, based on their relationships to the objects they represent, as icons, indexes, or symbols. According to Peirce, the *icon* resembles the thing it represents (such as the image used to indicate

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[2] The most notable biographies are Zolotow's, Spoto's, McCann's, Leaming's, and Banner's. Martin and Rollyson consider Monroe's acting training.

[3] See also Steinem, and the portions of books by Rosen, Basinger, Jordan, and Dyer's *Heavenly Bodies* that address Monroe.

[4] See Buskin, as well as Conway and Ricci, for details on all of Monroe's films. On individual films, see Clark, Curtis, and Goode.

[5] See Baty, Churchwell, and Juncker.

whether a restroom is for men or women), the *index* is a trace left by the thing it represents (such as a footprint), and the *symbol* represents its object through arbitrary convention (such as red meaning stop). As an icon, an index, and a symbol, the star possesses three distinct meanings, and the interaction between these meanings is crucial to understanding a star's performances and analyzing her films.[6] Peirce's triad provides a heuristic that integrates publicity, cultural context, and audience reception into analysis of a star's films.

I apply Peirce's triad to Monroe's star canon. A star canon encompasses not only the star's full body of film work, but also the necessary contexts for understanding the full import of those films. A star canon study encourages comprehensive examination of the star's significance as an image, as a record of a specific time and place, and as a symbol. To understand Monroe's films, we need to understand her public image, her cultural context, and her place in the studio system at the end of the classical Hollywood era. Through this investigation, I intend to show how Monroe's star persona enables her films to interrogate crucial aspects of 1950s American culture.

Monroe was a powerful, but simplified, public image (an icon); an indicator of a particular historical and social context (an index); and an embodiment of the public's habitual ways of understanding her (a symbol). The icon is the "official" story of the star, simplified and often sanitized by studio publicity departments. Monroe's meaning as an icon can be found in the most frequently reprinted images of her, as well as in the most frequently repeated details of her life. While her films provide an index of Monroe, she

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[6] No previous study has applied Peirce's semiotics to the study of stars, though Peirce has been meaningfully used in the work of Wollen, de Lauretis, Silverman, Doane (*Emergence*), and Mulvey (*Death*). See also Ehrat's philosophical study.

also serves as an index within her films' narratives by pointing to significant cultural issues, such as shifting gender roles or changing understandings of female sexuality. Through her roles, Monroe participates in the films' work of resolving on a fantasy level the dilemmas surrounding shifting mores. As a symbol, however, Monroe's off-screen life (which includes all the ways she disrupts the "official" story associated with her as an icon) collides with her screen roles, often contradicting apparent narrative resolution, such that she complicates the meanings of her films at the same time as she solidifies them.

People frequently refer to Monroe as an icon. While scholars as diverse as Richard Dyer and S. Paige Baty have analyzed the most familiar, iconic images of Monroe, the tropes informing Monroe's publicity remain largely unexamined. Chapter Two explores how Monroe's frequently repeated "official" story presents her in a series of narratives reduced to shorthand. Rather than reflecting any "truth" about Monroe, these narratives appealed to audiences because they provided points of identification for fans, who developed intimate attachments to her. These attachments were anchored, I believe, in Monroe's failure to achieve a "normal" pattern of marriage and family life. Through her failures, Monroe seemed to embody postwar Americans' pervasive anxiety about domestic normality.

When we attend more closely to the star's film performances in relation to her off-screen life, we gain a better understanding of how she facilitates conversations across ideological divides. To that end, my investigation of previously unexamined production materials and letters from fans reveals that, through a persona that contested dominant mores and through screen performances that defied the values overtly expressed in the

scripts, Monroe's stardom contributed to cultural conversations about marriage and fulfillment, gender roles, sexuality, and censorship in ways critical of the status quo.

Chapter Three traces how Monroe's persona developed through her roles in films about marriage. Monroe's early films challenged popular marital advice. In her first starring role, *Niagara* (1953), she played a murderous wife, and through this role, depicted a dark underside of marriage. The characters she played in two other films made the same year, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *How to Marry a Millionaire*, ostensibly (based on the films' titles) wanted to marry for money, but married for love instead. Through these roles, Monroe elucidates the contradictions between the "togetherness" model and the "scientific" approach to mate selection espoused by postwar "experts." In response to fan criticism of Monroe's aggressive persona in *Niagara*, in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *How to Marry a Millionaire*, Darryl F. Zanuck consciously distanced Monroe both from a potentially aggressive persona and her implicit criticism of marriage. Although *Blondes* advances a feminist message about the power of female friendship, and *Millionaire* affirms the breadwinner/homemaker ideology of the companionate marriage, the happy endings of these films contrast with the tone of much of the period's marital advice, which often referred to marriage as a "nightmare."

In keeping with the period's conservative response to Alfred Kinsey's findings on female sexuality, Monroe's roles in *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), *Bus Stop* (1956), and *Some Like it Hot* (1959), which I examine in Chapter Four, on the surface reflect male fantasies of passive women. Monroe's performances, however, undermine these fantasies with alternative fantasies for female spectators of uninhibited sexuality. Monroe's sexy

persona inflected her film roles in an era when characters, according to the mandates of the Production Code Administration, still slept in separate beds.

Monroe increasingly challenged conventional mores. Her film roles and her unconventional personal life shaped her into a symbol of sex and stardom. As Chapter Five argues, Monroe's role in her final completed film, *The Misfits* (1960), both acknowledges and resists her status as a symbol. This film unites Monroe's screen role and her persona in resistance to conventional values: her character embraces divorce and lives with a man who is not her husband. This film most extensively interweaves Monroe as an icon, an index, and a symbol, but in so doing it reveals the conflict between these aspects of Monroe's cinematic meaning and of the postwar culture it reflects. In so doing, it reveals how Monroe embodied the contradictions inherent in both postwar culture and Hollywood stardom.

Monroe's persona—consisting of publicity about her, her physical appearance, her personal life, and her star canon—significantly shaped how fans understood the meanings of her films. Regarding *The Misfits*, John Huston remarked, "It is about people who sell their work but not their lives" (qtd in Goode 57). Huston's comment could also aptly describe this star canon study of Monroe: it is about how Monroe sold her film work, not her life.

Chapter 1.
The Actress Without Films: Accounting for Marilyn Monroe's Star Canon

A 26-foot tall statue of Marilyn Monroe, white skirt billowing high enough to

shade tourists, first appeared in Chicago in July 2011. J. Seward Johnson's "Forever

Marilyn," a statue recreating the iconic scene from *The Seven Year Itch*, has been called

"beyond-kitschy" (Roeper) and "as tawdry as a peep show" (Schmich). When the statue

was unveiled, critics pondered the behavior it inspired in average citizens: "men were

standing dwarfed between the giant legs of the fake Marilyn, shooting photos of her

crotch while one stuck out his tongue to mime a lick" (Schmich). Johnson's version of

Monroe, according to Mary Schmich, indicates she is little more than a pair of "giant

underpants" in the twenty-first century imagination.

[1] As a twenty-first century public icon, Monroe has been reduced from a popular

film actress with a significant impact on 1950s American culture to a series of lurid

images simplified for twenty-first century public consumption.

Seward's statue derives from what is arguably the most (in)famous publicity shot

of Monroe, which is actually a series of shots taken in 1954 by hundreds of professional

and amateur photographers invited by director Billy Wilder to capture their own image of

Monroe's underpants and thereby generate interest in the film version of *The Seven Year*

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[1] When the statue was moved to Palm Springs, California in May 2012, however, she was
welcomed with open arms. Tourists still wanted to look up Monroe's dress, but there was
no concomitant criticism of this behavior. Instead, according to Tim Ellis of Palm
Mountain Resort and Spa, "Palm Springs is a different place, we're a little more open
minded than the Midwest, but I think when people actually see her, they're going to smile
and take her picture" (McMillan). The statue is currently part of an exhibition honoring
Johnson in New Jersey.

Itch.[2] This stunt is just one example of the efforts the studio publicity machine undertook to brand Monroe as a sexual sell. However, because the star is not only the studio-constructed brand, but also an individual with a distinct personal life and a character in film narratives, such efforts required continual maintenance. In addition to the "official" publicity that the studio generated about her, stories of the star's personal life, circulated by gossips and general interest magazines, complicated Monroe's meaning for audiences. Thus, unlike the sexually available "Girl" the publicity stunt suggested, Monroe was married to Joe DiMaggio at the time, whom the stunt angered (many attributed the couple's divorce to this displeasure). Monroe's film roles, too, were colored by her public persona, both official and unofficial, such that her performances could often shift the film's meaning as built into the script. Thus, in addition to the fact that this famous shot never appears in a Marilyn Monroe film because the censors wouldn't allow Monroe's panties to be visible on the cinema screen, Monroe's knowing looks in *The Seven Year Itch* contradict the naïveté of her scripted double entendre, mocking the man who believes she doesn't understand her sex appeal.

And yet, this one image has in many ways defined Monroe in the public consciousness. The phrase "Marilyn Monroe moment" has entered popular parlance to describe the moment when the wind lifts a woman's skirt. Because Monroe is no longer alive to generate competing narratives, or to star in new films, any aspects of her star persona that contradict the sexual availability of her studio-constructed brand are rarely considered as part of her legendary stardom. Why has Marilyn Monroe been so easily

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[2] Photos of four different stages of Monroe's skirt-blowing sequence appeared in the *New York Journal American* and *New York Post* on September 15, 1954; the same images appeared in the *Los Angeles Daily News* the following day (Billy Wilder Papers).

reduced to a pair of giant underpants? Her film work is largely ignored or seen as a fluke created by the stellar directors and costars with whom she worked. Such oversight plagues the scores of biographies about her, which consider Monroe's personal life but rarely interrogate how much of what we know about that personal life is colored by official studio publicity. Similar oversight often plagues star studies, which carefully analyze the star as a text, but, in so doing, often focus on studio publicity or fan reactions to the exclusion of film performances and narratives.

Critics have failed to take Monroe seriously as an actress or a film star with specific cultural resonances as the result of two trends. First, despite the rigorous work done in star theory, the scholarly approach to understanding stars remains limited mainly to tracing how the Hollywood studios created the stars or, using similar evidence, to uncovering the stars' biographical and sociological fascination. In addition, Monroe is a female star who seems to many to be merely a visual object who was a victim of the system. Stardom is complex and consolidates many varying meanings. To understand the impact Monroe had on postwar culture, an impact that undergirds her enduring legacy, we must consider the meanings she generated by contradicting her official biography in her personal life and the pat narrative resolutions of many of her films through her performances.

Any perception of Monroe as *just* an object and *just* a victim is misguided. Not only did Monroe form her own production company, but, after much struggle, she negotiated for a contract that gave her some official control over her film roles through director approval. More than that, many of her roles were created specifically for her, and when she failed to report to work, productions shut down. Although her methods of

exercising her agency as an actress and laborer are not above reproach, she certainly is not a passive figure victimized by the system. Comparing her official publicity, distributed by the studio, to the unofficial publicity of gossip and news items about her personal life reveals the complexity of Monroe's star persona. Such complexity enabled her, through her film performances, to contradict the roles she played so as to question or undermine the films' resolutions. Monroe's film performances thus reflected and contributed to the audience's often unarticulated struggles with rapidly changing social conditions and cultural mores, including the contradictory narratives circulating at the time about marriage, gender and sexuality, censorship, and privacy and anti-Communism. Her very short film career—neatly contained within the 1950s, with her first starring role in 1952 and her last starring role in 1961—illustrates the impact of her stardom and the dynamics of the decade's shifting mores. Therefore, Monroe's body of film work forms her own unique star canon.

Monroe's canon perhaps becomes an even more significant aspect of her star persona, or her meaning as generated across a variety of media texts, when we consider that she often played variations on the same basic character. Barbara Leaming calls Monroe "a brand name" (93), and Graham McCann states that "'Marilyn,'" for example, "means 'the figure created in a given set of films'" (87). According to Carl Rollyson, "No film actress has ever been better at playing a type, and mythic figures thrive on an exact, vibrant repetition of a role, so that the community (in this case, a movie audience) can follow along in an almost ritualistic pattern" (6).

As a brand, the actor contributes a somewhat stable core to her films, in that the audience can predict the kind of character the star will play. As Barry King points out,

while anything that appears in front of the camera "is by that fact invested with meaning," stars undergo a process of "hypersemioticisation;" in other words, through techniques such as close-ups, which magnify the star's importance and suggest a great degree of intimacy with the star, the star's very presence contributes additional layers of meaning to the film's narrative ("Articulating" 173, 175). Because of this, King asserts that stars act according to "personification," or as if the character the star is playing is in some way consonant with the star's off-screen self ("Articulating" 168). Therefore, King suggests, stars often willingly comply with frequent typecasting because it enhances their marketability—only this star can play this role because the role is, essentially, the star's personality ("Articulating" 176, 180). As a result of this "branding," McCann explains, "the audience arrives to watch a well-known star, armed with certain preconceptions about the performer derived from knowledge of past appearances, generic conventions, advertising campaigns, and critical reviews" (25).

However, all brand identities shift over time, and when the brand is a person, those shifts occur in conjunction with shifts in the personal life of the star, which escapes official control.[3] *Boston Globe* film critic Ty Burr recognizes Monroe's "collaboration in and enjoyment of the business of self-reinvention" (177). A prototype for those that followed her, Monroe was never content to mean just one thing to her audiences. Monroe appealed to her contemporaries because her persona both maintained a few consistent characteristics throughout the years and changed with the mores of the day.

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[3] The scandal that broke around Tiger Woods and his mistresses in December of 2009, for example, shifted the identity of his brand as well as those associated with him, such as Nike.

Audiences read Monroe's off-screen life (including publicity and gossip) into her

on-screen roles, and, in so doing, shifted their interpretation of the films' overall

meanings.[4] Thus, audiences interpreted Monroe's personal life using information

deduced from her screen roles, and they interpreted her screen roles using information

gathered from her personal life. Critics have recognized that stars' screen roles and off-

screen lives inflect one another, and that, if the role "fits" the star, it will echo the star's

off-screen publicity.[5] (Even a poor fit can be compelling if it demonstrates the range of

the star.) However, while "the *role*," as Christine Gledhill points out, "is relatively

formed and fixed by fictional and stereotypical conventions," the way the star's presence

inflects the role is often beyond the control of scriptwriters and directors ("Signs" 215).

Through their canon of work, stars, moreso than other actors, engage in "a high level of

nonverbal communication," as Jeanine Basinger calls it, when they call upon past

performances to establish character traits without spelling out the character in scripts

(*Star* 75-6). As they come to accrete a series of meanings that do not need to be spelled

out in a film's script in order to be obvious to an audience, stars thereby increase their

worth to the studio. These roles also embody the work begun by the publicity process.

However, the interaction between a star's filmic and extra-filmic persona does not imply

that a star who makes several films over the course of several years will always mean the

same thing. As subsequent chapters demonstrate, Monroe's star canon captures both the

actress's enduring characteristics and her continual dynamism. Each of her films becomes

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[4] Richard Maltby establishes the idea of the "antinomian text," one "that 'sophisticated'
and 'innocent' audiences alike could watch at the same time, without realizing that they
were watching different movies" (443).
[5] See Dyer, "Resistance," and King, "Embodying."

important as a means of understanding her appeal over time and her relationship to rapidly changing postwar culture.

Monroe exerted considerable control over the outcome of her performances, a little-known fact that supports careful attention to her films as a body of work. Although her star persona was largely "manufactured" through her new name, new look, and extensive acting and diction lessons, Burr suggests "she became big enough to understand that she was bigger than her studio, and that someone *that* big should be the author of her fame rather than its victim" (173). Once she acquired access to the movie-going audience, Monroe worked diligently to successfully maintain their interest. As the author of her fame, Monroe first had control over personnel in 1954's *River of No Return*: she demanded Jack Cole as choreographer and chose Robert Mitchum as her leading man. She also discussed script revisions with director Otto Preminger, thereby shaping her screen role (Leaming 90). More importantly, Monroe was an actress who dictated her own performances. She improvised scenes and created her character as she saw fit for the first time in 1956's *Bus Stop* (Leaming 213). Director Josh Logan confirms that Monroe's "feeling about the whole story" led he and screenwriter George Axelrod to consider Monroe's interpretation when rewriting her scenes (qtd. in Rollyson 102). "Only very rarely have actors had the opportunity to influence a film so directly," insists Rollyson, "and Logan's supreme trust in Monroe, built on his belief that she was 'one of the great talents of all time,' has been occasionally matched by other directors but never surpassed" (102). Monroe continued to influence her roles not only in front of the camera, but also in the writing and editing stages. Billy Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond incorporated Monroe's suggestions into her entrance in *Some Like it Hot* (Leaming 314).

Monroe's luminous screen presence also caused directors to choose her successful takes for the final cut, even to the detriment of other actors (Banner 328).

Monroe also exerted a great deal of economic influence. As early as 1952, "it was estimated that Marilyn's name on a movie increased the gross by at least $500,000" (Zolotow 114), and by 1956 "every film that was made without Marilyn earned at least $1,000,000 less because her name was not on the marquee" (Zolotow 244).[6] Monroe's ability to generate revenue for the studio provided bargaining power when she walked out on her contract in April 1954, the same month she earned a top performer award from *Photoplay* magazine, the most popular fan magazine of the era. Monroe refused to work because the studio had failed to consult her on the script, a power that was not part of her contract. After holding out for over a year, Monroe garnered director, though not story, approval in a "new $400,000 contract for four pictures in seven years" that was, according to one industry veteran, "one of the greatest single triumphs ever won by an actress against a powerfully entrenched major studio" (qtd. in Manning 96). Later, Monroe was also paid $200,000 for two films she never made so she would not sue the studio (Leaming 327; Banner 322, 336). Finally, although Fox fired Monroe in 1961, it has recently come to light that she signed a new, one million dollar contract with the studio just before her death (Marshall 47).

Theorizing Stardom

Despite Monroe's considerable accomplishments within the Hollywood film industry, respect from academic film scholars has not been forthcoming. The field of academic star studies provides a number of useful approaches, and Monroe has been

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[6] Monroe's 1951 contract with Fox gave her $750 a week, with a raise every six months until her salary capped at $3250 per week (Banner 176).

examined, at least briefly, from nearly all of them. Nevertheless, the majority of star

studies that address Monroe reach the same conclusions as the majority of biographies

about her, all of which underestimate the extent of her impact: that her personal life is far

more interesting and important than her film work, that she was exploited and victimized

by the studio, and that audiences were drawn to her films only for the spectacle of her

incredible figure.

Perhaps because stardom is, to a large extent, based on the allure of uncovering

intimate details about larger-than-life figures, star studies in general manifests a greater

interest in the personal and biographical than in the filmic. Moreover, the rubrics

associated with a star studies perspective often limit the examination of star films to the

way a particular film reflects or discounts the established tenets of the star's persona. Few

star studies, therefore, also consider the way the star's persona affects the acting of the

rest of the cast or the tenor of the film. Because the majority of star studies take little

interest in the influence the star exerted over the film products, they also fail to consider

how the star's entire body of work contributes to her persona.[7]

Star studies benefits from several methodological approaches examining various

aspects of Hollywood stardom. The earliest approaches to star studies were content to

testify to the ineffable nature of stars and were therefore little more than odes to these

deities. Most famous of these early analyses, perhaps, is Roland Barthes's worship of

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[7] Critics have studied star canons to some extent, but these works tend to have limited analysis of the films and how the stars shaped them, instead focusing on how films made stars. Notable exceptions include Adrienne McLean's work on Rita Hayworth, Murray Pomerance's work on Johnny Depp, Richard Dyer's work on Lana Turner, and Andrew Britton's work on Katherine Hepburn. Scholars have produced fascinating studies of the star as a cultural product; see Marybeth Hamilton on Mae West, Charles Maland on Charlie Chaplin, Rachel Mosely on Audrey Hepburn, and Paul Smith on Clint Eastwood. This study is concerned with analyzing the film canon through cultural history.

Garbo's face as "plung[ing] audiences into the deepest ecstasy" (56). More recently, Burr

has referred to the stars as *Gods Like Us*, uniting the celestial and mundane aspects of

stardom. Academic studies, however, have better articulated the aspects of Hollywood

stars that endeared them to audiences and secured their legacies. The tendency within

these studies has been to privilege in very limiting ways a single aspect of the star's

appeal.

In the foundational work of star studies proper, Dyer analyzes three aspects of

stardom. First, he examines a star's relationship to society. "Why," he asks, "do stars

signify; i.e. what kind of social reality are stars?" Then, Dyer explores how fame, through

the images associated with it, influences and affects the general public, the same way as a

statesman might: "what do stars signify; i.e. what meanings and affects do the image of

stardom and the images of particular stars embody?" Finally, Dyer considers the

characters stars create and the nuances of star performances, pushing scholars to ask,

"How do stars signify; i.e. how do star images function within film texts themselves?"

(*Stars* 2). Dyer's first two questions, those primarily concerned with the ideological

influence of stars, have been the most influential.

Richard de Cordova's history underscores the role the needs of fans played in the

star system's development and demonstrates that stars are in many ways the products of

their particular audiences. The "picture personalities" of the early teens became, once

Hollywood recognized the necessity of capitalizing upon them, the stars "manufactured"

by the studios. While the star system is often characterized as a kind of assembly line

developed by Hollywood for manufacturing revenue-generating stars, de Cordova points

out that this system "produces a product that is in fact highly individuated—the

individual star" (9).[8] Each star, then, appealed to a different market, and thus had a

unique relationship to her society. Despite the somewhat standardized approach to star

build-ups, no studio mogul could guarantee the success of any individual star, a fact that

begs scholars to look beyond the industrial history of stardom for an understanding of

what made a star captivate a particular audience.

Studies of acting and performance also attend to the star's film work, but their

focus is primarily on the language of performance, for example, determining whether a

performance has been more influenced by the theories of Stanislavsky or Strasberg.

These studies therefore draw more heavily on theatrical, rather than filmic,

methodologies. As Pamela Robertson Wojcik notes, attention to star performances is

scant in star studies, which may "make some attempt at analyzing performance traits of

individual stars; but rather than analyze individual performances in terms of acting style,

these analyses tend to extract particular mannerisms or gestures that are repeated across a

body of films as a feature of the star's persona" (7). James Naremore's study on *Acting in

the Cinema* provides the necessary vocabulary for discussing star performances.

Naremore addresses what sets something apart as acting—the performance space, the

way the audience is addressed, mannerisms, the fit between character and persona, and

mise-en-scene (3-4).[9] Although studies of acting must attend to films as their key

evidence, these studies rarely provide a comprehensive analysis of a star's significance,

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[8] Jeanine Basinger applies a similar historical approach to the process used to manufacture a star in *The Star Machine.* She traces this manufacture from discovery, through various alterations to the star's appearance and abilities, through publicity, and finally, if successful, into the fan's hearts.
[9] Other significant studies of star acting include Karen Hollinger's *The Actress: Hollywood Acting and the Female Star* and Alan Lovell's and Peter Krämer's collection *Screen Acting*.

either in terms of the star's agency, how the star's presence contributed to a film's meaning, or our understanding of the star's body of film work.[10] In his biography of Monroe, Carl Rollyson emphasizes Monroe's acting instruction—with Michael Chekhov, Natasha Lytess, and Lee and Paula Strasberg—and how this coaching affected her identity as an actress. When he addresses Monroe's creation of characters through gestures in *Bus Stop* and *The Prince and the Showgirl*, he acknowledges the extent to which her film roles were her creations, but, because his project is primarily biographical, he thinks of these creations as mirrors of her inner life, rather than as crafted performances.

In contrast, semiotic approaches have generated a rigorous methodology for understanding how star performances contribute to a film's overall meaning. King, for example, focuses on "the role of the actor as re-presenter of signs" (167). According to King, when audiences use the actor's physical characteristics and behaviors to surmise the nature of the character she depicts, they are demonstrating that the actor is always already a sign to be interpreted. Semiotic studies, therefore, have most often attempted to establish a lexicon of components that can be used to decode a star's meaning. Dyer, for example, breaks star performance into genre, character name, appearance, speech, gesture, and action. He suggests analyzing these components in conjunction with the film's mise-en-scene, editing, and structure (*Stars* 122-8). This focus on specific elements

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[10] Because of the tendency to think of stars as popular with audiences, but relatively talentless as actors, many successful star performances have been interpreted as the outcome of the efforts of directors. For example, Charles Affron studies the work of Lillian Gish, Greta Garbo, and Bette Davis, but insists that the stellar performances of these actresses were the result of the work of directors, not of the actresses themselves. In contrast, Murray Pomerance's *Johnny Depp Starts Here* focuses with great alacrity on Depp's "theatricality" as an acting style, and traces the way that "theatricality" influences the meaning of particular films.

of an individual characterization (i.e., motivation, voice, gesture, audience foreknowledge) may be too cumbersome for analyzing a star canon in its cultural context. A more valuable aspect of Dyer's work is his recognition that films, as well as publicity materials, are "texts" which can be interpreted to determine how the star generates meaning. Dyer begins his analysis of Monroe in *Stars* by suggesting her mannerisms reveal messages about sexuality and vulnerability, thereby pairing his analysis of her performance with an analysis of her ideological significance (158). Dyer's approach is invaluable for insisting on interpreting the star's meaning within her cultural context. But although Dyer insists Monroe "seemed to 'be' the very tensions that ran through the ideological life of fifties America," he argues she reflected debates on sexuality occasioned by *Playboy* magazine and the Kinsey reports, suggesting she only engaged with postwar American sexual ideology rather than other areas of postwar ideology (*Stars* 36).

The psychoanalytic approach to star studies is informed by semiotics, but shifts emphasis from a code-based approach, or one driven by a concern with how the performances comprise messages, to an interpreter-based approach driven by the interaction between the star performance and the audience interpreting it.[11] The most useful contribution psychoanalytic theory makes to star theory involves the notions of

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[11] The psychoanalytic approach to studying film stars draws upon and develops semiotic thought by interpreting cinema as a complex representation system that can reveal by analogy the workings of the unconscious. Psychoanalytic film criticism, in contrast to semiotic star studies, places a greater emphasis on the way the filmic apparatus (the screen, camera movements, and audience positioning) shapes signification through its effects on the minds of interpreters, albeit unconsciously.

desire and identification.[12] Theorists have considered desire in two realms in relation to

cinematic stardom. Film is, Elizabeth Cowie argues, "the mise en scene of desire," or the

very setting for the unconscious to act out the continual deferral of the desire to know and

the desire to possess absolute love (133). Viewers derive pleasure from looking at stars

and continually desire to see more of them. Because this desire is never satisfied, fans

continue to purchase magazines featuring stories about the star and tickets to star films.

Films can enact viewer desires because they provide a scenario for identification.[13]

According to psychoanalytic film theory, viewers identify with stars because, through the

representation of their successes in filmic scenarios, they seem to represent the viewer's

highest potential (Cowie 90, 106). Stars also suture spectators into film narratives—

viewers identify with stars, or find themselves empathizing with and rooting for film

characters, because of their desire to be unified subjects, and therefore are easily swept up

by the film narrative, which depicts stars as unified characters (Cowie 121).

By theorizing spectator desire and identification, psychoanalytic theory usefully

illuminates the specific problems involved in discussing female stars. The most well

known relationship between desire and stars has to do with the objectification of stars.

Stars are objectified, theorists have claimed, because of the viewers' desire to possess and

control stars. Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," while primarily a

theory of the filmic apparatus, has become foundational to feminist readings of film stars

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[12] According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, desire is the demand (often for love) that persists despite its apparent satisfaction because, in the course of articulating the demand, its conditions shift (Lacan "Signification" 580).

[13] Identification in psychoanalysis is "the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image" (Lacan "Mirror" 76). Identification is based upon the recognition of both sameness and difference in the image assumed—either in the mirror, or on the cinema screen, the image the subject identifies with resembles oneself but also seems to be more perfect, because more unified and whole.

because of Mulvey's articulation of the concept of cinematic scopophilia, or pleasure in looking.[14] Mulvey posits that both the camera and the other characters within the film have a voyeuristic (watching the private without permission) or fetishistic (building up the beauty of the female star into a satisfying object to disavow castration anxiety) relationship to female stars. In either case, the filmic situation objectifies the woman ("Visual" 43). Because viewing audiences identify with the camera and the characters on screen, Mulvey argues that viewers also adopt an objectifying stance toward female stars. Although Mulvey does not account for the pleasures of female stars for female viewers, nor for the camera's objectification of male stars, she has paved the way for subsequent theories regarding the kinds of pleasure viewers receive when watching a Hollywood film, drawing at various points on notions of, as Gaylyn Studlar and Mary Ann Doane discuss, voyeurism, fetishism, masochism, and the masquerade.[15] Although such notions maintain rigid gender dichotomies, they nevertheless provide useful heuristics for considering the relationship between stars and viewers.

In contrast, by thinking of film as a fantasy structure housing a number of shifting identificatory positions, theorists such as Elizabeth Cowie and Judith Mayne propose that viewers respond to stars in ways that are not driven by gender binaries.[16] The work done

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[14] To discuss the workings of scopophilia, Mulvey posits three separate "gazes": the camera recording the woman, the audience watching the film, and the characters looking at each other within the film ("Visual" 46-7).

[15] For example, do the viewers submit to the images of the star flooding them by becoming passive spectators, as in a masochistic relation to the star (Studlar, "Masochism" 211, 215)? Or do the viewers revel in the images of (particularly female) stars that flaunt the trappings of gender performativity in order to destabilize gender hierarchies (Doane *Femmes* 26)? Mulvey herself has revised this theory in "Afterthoughts."

[16] See Cowie 71, 114. Judith Mayne likewise recognizes the ambivalence inherent in ever-changing film narratives, and suggests "the cinema functions *both* to legitimize the

toward disproving the hegemonic influence of the patriarchal gaze has resulted in a richer understanding of the ways female stars generate meaning for audiences. While female stars sometimes seem to embody the workings of patriarchy, at other times they demonstrate avenues of resistance to patriarchy accessible to audience members. At still other times stars oscillate between subjection and resistance to society's mores in a way that resembles the viewer's own experience of social existence.

Early feminist film scholars understood female film stars as embodiments of Hollywood misogyny and far-reaching cultural patriarchy; Monroe often served as key evidence of these trends. For example, Marjorie Rosen characterizes the 1950s as a period of "Mammary Madness" (291). She specifically calls Monroe the "butt of all fantasies" (287). Molly Haskell likewise dubs Monroe the symbol of "breast fetishism combined with Lolita lechery," heralding her as "the fifties fiction, the lie that a woman has no sexual needs, that she is there to cater to, or enhance, a man's needs" (255). Haskell admits that Monroe "was giving more to idiotic parts than they called for—more feeling, more warmth, more anguish; and, as a result, her films have a richer tone then they deserve" in that they "suggest the discrepancy between the woman (and young girl) and the sexpot, even as their directors (Wilder and Hawks) exploit the image, through exaggeration, more than they have to" (256). However, she still criticizes Monroe for her apparent "need for love" (259). Rosen and Haskell published their reflectionist studies of women in film in the 1970s, paving the way for further consideration of women as other than objects, a task begun by psychoanalytic critics of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

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patriarchal status quo *and*, if not necessarily to challenge it, then at the very least to suggest its weak limits, its own losses of mastery, within which may be found possibilities or hypotheses of *alternative positions*" (25, my emphasis).

Nevertheless, Mulvey reads Monroe as a prime example of the passive female as "erotic object" in Hollywood films ("Visual" 40). While Monroe may often seem to adopt a passive role, she plays a scheming, murderous wife in *Niagara*, gold-diggers in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *How to Marry a Millionaire*, an independent and sexually aggressive ukulele player in *Some Like it Hot*, and a divorcee who freely chooses to live with an older man in *The Misfits*, among other active roles.

Even into the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, scholars seem unable to accept the full dynamics of Monroe's stardom. Basinger has recently classified Monroe as the kind of star that is an "unreal" woman: "unreal" women "are not really supposed to be models for anyone, because no one could imagine these women to be duplicated in real life; they are too out of the ordinary, too special" (*Woman's* 166). But, pace Basinger, Monroe and women like her were very much models for many women, who copied their clothes, hairstyles, diet, and exercise regimens. Both male and female audiences loved Monroe as more than just a sex symbol. Her difficult childhood, her childlessness, and her emotional vulnerability generated sympathy and love for her. Audiences' sympathy toward Monroe enabled her to engage in assertive behaviors—including breaking her contract and standing up for civil rights—and remain a beloved star. Nevertheless, even as recently as 2009, Jessica Jordan, in her study of the power of screen sex goddesses, isolated Monroe as the sole powerless Hollywood sex goddess, because her "true helplessness and desperation" disempower her (157). But Jordan does not recognize that Monroe's helplessness and desperation were part of her studio-constructed biography, and, moreover, that Monroe's film characters were neither helpless nor desperate. When critics refuse to acknowledge that Monroe was an

empowered woman whom other women admired, they objectify her in just the manner of which they are critical. As Adrienne McLean notes regarding Rita Hayworth, "There are still many working in film studies who would hesitate to grant anything resembling subjectivity and agency to a female star image, much less a star so well known for her commodification, objectification, passivity, and one-dimensionality as a performer and as a pin-up" (4).

Audience studies, in contrast to other approaches to star studies, examine the many ways audiences understood stars. Jackie Stacey has found that Monroe represented for some British audiences the fantasy of a glamorous lifestyle (154), so they copied her fashion and hairstyles (192-3; 203). Other British audiences identified with her "vulnerability and fear" (Stacey 162). Whereas psychoanalytic theory posits that the film's narrative positions the audience in fairly limited ways, scholars engaging in audience studies explore how the audience identifies with film stars as they both follow and resist cultural norms. To determine a star's significance, audience studies scholars consult individuals in the star's original audiences, who have chosen to follow the star for varying personal reasons.[17] Stars do not have a monolithic meaning, and different audiences identify with and react to stars in different ways. At least some of Monroe's fans understood her as more than a sex symbol or a naïve dumb blonde. Focusing only on audience response, however, is limiting in several ways. Representative evidence requires either interviews, which are necessarily based on unverifiable memories, or archived

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[17] Stacey's study of British audiences has usefully elaborated on the ways audiences respond to stars with "'devotion', 'adoration' and 'worship,'" as well as imitation (138, 162). Other studies engaging an ethnographic approach to studying Hollywood stars include Miriam Hansen's *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* and Rachel Moseley's *Growing up with Audrey Hepburn: Text, Audience, Resonance*.

responses, of which few exist. While memories and archived responses may be interesting, neither provides a representative sample or is accurate for diverse audiences.

Another branch of star studies attends to the industrial conditions within which the star labored. Influenced by Marxist principles, these studies shift focus from the interpreting audience to the meaning-generating star and thereby acknowledge that stars have more agency than objects or commodities. Danae Clark, in *Negotiating Hollywood*, argues that most star studies, influenced as they are by either apparatus theory or empirical studies, have privileged the subjectivity of the spectator over the subjectivity of the star, implying that the interpreting spectator creates all the film's meaning (10). Clark instead considers stars as active laborers within a network of industrial forces. She also considers the interaction between filmic and extra-filmic discourse, thereby calling attention to *both* the labor of the actor in creating the performance *and* the labor of the spectator in interpreting and receiving or resisting the film's message. Virginia Wright Wexman points out that female stars, while they are often "understood to play a subordinate and dependent role," are elevated to positions of power through the earnings they make by playing that role (133-4). The power stars have within the industry thereby underscores significant differences between themselves and their film characters.

Monroe's monetary value during her lifetime illustrates the power she had over the studio. In two recent books on stardom's role in branding film personalities, Paul McDonald analyzes the "symbolic commerce of stardom," or the extent to which the film industry is built upon selling star personalities (*Hollywood* 14). In his discussion of Monroe as a "posthumous star," McDonald insists that Monroe's "posthumous value has overwhelmingly outstripped that of her more commercially successful peers" (*Hollywood*

37). McDonald points out that other female stars of the period, such as Betty Grable and Doris Day, appeared on Quigley's list of the Top Ten Money-Making Stars more frequently than Monroe, who appeared on the list only three times (*Hollywood* 37). What this evidence overlooks, however, is that neither Grable nor Day appeared on the list in the same years as Monroe, so she outperformed these stars in box office returns during her peak—the significant difference is that her career is more succinctly contained within a period of about twelve years.[18] Even numerical data, such as a star's earnings over her career, must be interpreted in a way that accounts for the particularities of that career.

Inattention to star performances and the other particularities of the star canon is likely to persist, given the tenets of the newest iteration of star studies, celebrity studies, which focuses more on earnings and publicity than on actual performances. Celebrity studies draws on some of the same techniques as star studies, but also addresses the increasingly mediatized image of today's celebrities and the fact that celebrity often stems from sensational behavior rather than talent.[19] "The term celebrity," according to Christine Geraghty, "indicates someone whose fame rests overwhelmingly on what happens outside the sphere of their work and who is famous for having a lifestyle" (187). Celebrities who acquire fame through means other than their performances, then, cannot

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[18] Betty Grable appears on Quigley's list of Top Ten Money-Making Stars every year between 1942 and 1948, and Doris Day appears on the list in 1951, 1952, and from 1959-1966. Monroe appears on the list in 1953, 1954, and 1956; she was not a star in the 1940s (when Betty Grable's popularity peaked), and she died in 1962 (in the middle of Doris Day's most popular period). For the list, visit: http://www.quigleypublishing.com/MPalmanac/Top10/Top10_lists.html.

[19] Celebrity studies is a burgeoning subfield of cinema and media studies. 2010 saw the formation of a new journal, *Celebrity Studies*, dedicated to issues in this field, and the work of Graeme Turner, P. David Marshall, Joshua Gamson, and Chris Rojek has been influential in the field.

be studied in terms of performance; they must be studied for their personae.[20] Celebrity

studies may help us understand the sensational lives of Hollywood stars, but cannot help

us understand their film performances.

The Star Canon

The rest of this study outlines and applies a methodology for studying a star's

entire body of work, a methodology that I found it was essential to establish in order to

understand why Marilyn Monroe is the most written about yet least analyzed female star.

"Star canon studies" examines simultaneously two aspects of stardom: first the

hermeneutic relationship between the meaning a film star acquires through the composite

of his or her work and public appearances; and, second, the way said meaning affects

interpretation in a specific cultural context. As Edgar Morin points out in his early star

study, the relationship between a star and her roles is recursive: "The characters of her

films infect the star. Reciprocally, the star herself infects these characters" (27). Because

of the interaction between the star's extra-filmic persona and her film roles, "the star is of

course something more than an actress who makes movies. But," Morin insists, "the star

is *also* an actress who makes movies. The ethnography, psychology, sociology, and

economy of the star system, must be completed or illuminated by a 'filmology'" (117).

Similarly, Dyer notes that ideological "concerns are certainly central to film studies, but

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[20] Fame can be, according to Chris Rojek, "ascribed celebrity," or celebrity that is the
result of lineage, such as the fame of the royal family; "achieved celebrity," or the
celebrity that comes from accomplishments in some competitive arena, including
performance, and "attributed celebrity," or celebrity that is the result of the insistence in
media outlets that a given figure is noteworthy, such as the attention to the Kardashian
family (17-18). In two of the aforementioned kinds of celebrity, celebrity does not stem
from skill or performance, but from appearance in the mass media, much of which is
trivial. In combination with the limited professional performances of many of today's
celebrities, the proliferation of twenty-four hour celebrity gossip outlets increases
attention to personal scandal rather than professional performance.

we also need to know how stars function within the films themselves, that is, how the films articulate, carry, inflect or subvert the general ideological/cultural functions" ("Four Films" 216). Bruce Babington, in *British Stars and Stardom*, points out that since film performances constitute the bulk of a film star's work and distinguish them from other kinds of celebrities, the performances, and not just publicity, should be analyzed (23).

Audience research from the 1950s illuminates the draw of film stars in that period. The brunt of the responsibility for the success or failure of their films is largely attributable to the film's stars. Morin asserts, "The names and faces of the stars devour all movie advertisements; the name of the film itself scarcely counts" (1). According to Leo Handel's study of film audiences in 1950, "36% of men and 48% of women (42% [of the total audience]) said cast/stars" made them decide to see a film; the next most popular reason was the story or plot with 36% of men and 23% of women (30% total) (36). Because stories and plots in the studio era were often crafted for specific stars, even those audience members who chose films based on their stories may have actually been choosing the films of a particular star. "It is on [the star's] looks and personality that the picture is primarily sold," Hortense Powdermaker explains, "and he often takes precedence over every other element in the making of the movie. Scripts are frequently written with a particular star in mind; on the set it is his will, whether logically or temperamentally exercised, which is supreme" (35).

The star canon encompasses the star's full body of film work in the contexts for understanding that work. Each star can be understood by aggregating several aspects of her persona and career. Fan magazines and mainstream media, as well as the evidence of the star's roles left behind in films, allow those studying a star canon to access a star's

impact on her contemporaries. Comparing the star's film roles and publicity to other

cultural documents illuminates how the star resonated with her culture. Star canon

scholars examine audience reactions in reviews and contemporary criticism as well as in

film comment cards and letters to fan magazines and to studios. Those studying a star

canon must also consider Marxist concerns about the star's agency in relation to studio

demands and the creation of her roles. Thus, we need to be familiar not only with the

star's persona but also with production details. Finally, it is also imperative to consider

cultural conversations that resonate within a given film's narrative and the way the star

influences the audience's interpretation of these dilemmas. Engaging with these aspects

of stardom simultaneously will ensure that the researcher accounts for the multiple ways

the star creates meaning and considers how that star's meaning changes over time.

Surprisingly, analyses of the *film* canons of Hollywood stars (rather than

biographical analyses of stars) are rare within film studies, perhaps because we are

tempted to think of films as created by the genius of directors. Patrick McGilligan insists

that actors are more than pawns of directors. "When the performer," McGilligan notes,

"becomes so important to a production that he or she changes lines, adlibs, shifts

meaning, influences the narrative and style of a film and altogether signifies something

clear-cut to the audiences despite the intent of writers and directors, then the acting of

that person assumes the force, style and integrity of an auteur" (199).[21] Although the star

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[21] Dyer warns against universally thinking of stars as auteurs: "The fact that the person of the star coincides with a text (the star image, the character, the performance) in the construction of which s/he was only a collaborator or even a mere vehicle should warn us not to elide the star-as-person with the star-as-text and assume that the former is the author of the latter. Although I find it hard to conceive of a star having no power in the decisions made about her/his image or performance, just how much power s/he had and how s/he exercised it has to be determined by looking at specific cases" (Dyer *Stars* 175).

may not be solely responsible for the final film product, she is an important unifying

figure for a grouping of films because the star's performance is crucial to the meaning of

the final product and provides the reason many people saw the film. Just as auteur theory

legitimizes minor movies in a director's canon,[22] the star canon gives significance to a

group of films that seem otherwise unrelated and unimportant.

The few works devoted to the career of a single star tend to focus on audience

response (either based on personal anecdotes or empirical evidence) or on ideological

impact. Several edited collections of essays on individual stars showcase methodologies

for studying stars. They include reflecting on personal memories of the writer's response

to the star's films, analyzing reviews of the films, and reading one film in relation to one

cultural debate.[23] Scholars have examined the ways a star's career reflects her resonance

with a particular cultural issue, such as feminist politics, sexuality, or Hollywood labor

practices.[24] Other scholars have investigated the star in relation to larger concerns in

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As I assert, however, Monroe did have considerable power over her final film products. Thus, while she is not an auteur, it is still worthwhile to think of her films as constituting a unified body of work.

[22] For examples of auteur studies, see Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), Donald Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), Andre Bazin, *Orson Welles: A Critical View* (Venice, CA: Acrobat Books, 1972, 1991), Robin Wood, *Howard Hawks* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1968, 2006), James Naremore, *The Films of Vincente Minnelli* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[23] Good examples of a number of approaches to analyzing a star's entire career can be found in Murray Pomerance's edited collection, *Enfant Terrible! Jerry Lewis in American Film* and Gerd Gemünden's and Mary Desjardins's collection *Dietrich Icon*.

[24] Andrew Britton, for example, examines the ways Katharine Hepburn's performances reflect feminist issues, and Adrienne McLean has written on Rita Hayworth's significance as a Hollywood laborer. Amy Lawrence's *The Passion of Montgomery Clift* discusses Clift's role in ushering in a new masculinity and challenges the notion that he was a victim, while Elisabetta Girelli's *Montgomery Clift, Queer Star*, examines Clift as a subversive signifier after his beauty was marred by a car crash. Tamar Jeffers McDonald,

American political life, without applying these discoveries to readings of the films.[25] A few works have studied the iterations of stars as cultural icons, focusing on how their images have been, and still are, deployed by various groups.[26] None of these works provides an in-depth study of the star's canon.[27] Dyer's 1977 essay, "Four Films of Lana Turner," unites the star's off-screen life with her on-screen roles, as Dyer analyzes Turner's image in four of her films alongside the impact of the film narratives and mise-en-scene. The dearth of attention to stars' films has in recent years been rectified by a BFI series on film stars. Pam Cook analyzes some of Nicole Kidman's films as well as her television and advertisement appearances; Susan Smith analyzes Liz Taylor's beginnings as a child actress, transition to an adult actress, and professional development by closely reading some of Taylor's films.

Some scholars have suggested that a star's meanings are relatively stable, but the star canon studies approach reveals the dynamism inherent in any star's career. For example, Dyer encourages us to think of "stars' appearances as serials," saying, "because stars are always appearing in different stories and settings, *they* must stay broadly the

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in *Doris Day Confidential*, analyzes the origins of the Doris-Day-as-virgin myth as it developed in contrast with knowledge of her as a wife and mother.

[25] For example, see Charles Maland's *Chaplin and American Culture: The Evolution of a Star Image* and Garry Willis's *John Wayne's America: The Politics of Celebrity*, as well as Marybeth Hamilton's *When I'm Bad, I'm Better: Mae West, Sex, and American Entertainment*.

[26] See Paul Smith's *Clint Eastwood: A Cultural Production* and Ramona Curry's *Too Much of a Good Thing*.

[27] Two chapter-length studies that approximate my approach are Ulrike Sieglohr's work on German star Hildegard Knef in his book *Heroines Without Heroes: Reconstructing Female and National Identities in European Cinema, 1945-51* (2000) and Stephanie Gundle's "Sophia Loren, Italian Icon" in *Stars: The Film Reader*, edited by Fisher and Gandy. Both of these chapters develop an understanding of how a star's work and therefore meaning changes over the course of her career.

same in order to permit recognition and identification" (*Stars* 110-111). While it may be true that the star's basic appearance and character types remain roughly the same, it is also true that, because a culture's concerns are not consistent over a course of a few years, the star's meaning is *not* stable and consistent over time. The next section outlines a schema to facilitate analyzing stars' dynamic cinematic and cultural functions alongside but beyond their personae.

Peirce and the Study of Hollywood Stardom

Analysis of a star canon begins by treating stars as signs. "A sign," according to C.S. Peirce, "is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign" (*Collected* 2.135). Peirce's intentionally vague definition applies not only to linguistic phenomena. A Hollywood star is a sign, therefore, because she stands for something to somebody, or calls up an image of something in the mind of those who see her, read about her, or discuss her. Most applicable to the study of Hollywood stars is how Peirce classifies the sign's relationship to its object. Peirce explains the trichotomy of icon, index, and symbol in terms of visual signification and situational context and underscores the interpreting subject's role in making sense of signs.[28]

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[28] Peirce has been employed in the work of several film scholars. Peter Wollen's *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* briefly applies Peirce's icon, index, and symbol to the study of film aesthetics, but this has not been picked up on and expanded by later theorists. Teresa de Lauretis and Kaja Silverman, in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* and *The Subject of Semiotics*, respectively, illustrate the connection between semiotics and psychoanalysis—the subject, and the unconscious, come into being through discourse. Both focus on the way the cinema sutures the subject to a viewing position, and analyze the ways this operation of suturing relies on gender difference. Mary Ann Doane and Laura Mulvey, in *the Emergence of Cinematic Time* and *Death 24x a Second*,

It is important to understand what Peirce meant by icon, index, and symbol. An icon is a primarily visual sign: images, diagrams, and metaphors are all icons, because their own characteristics resemble the object they represent (*Collected* 2.157).[29] The iconic pictorial likeness can be an exact copy of a figure that exists in the world, such as a photograph, or it can be a representation of a figure, such as a widely accepted relational diagram. Portraits, for example, resemble the person or object for which they stand, though they can be more or less accurate and more or less characterized by the artist's interpretation. Similarly, diagrams resemble the information they present in some way: a bar on a bar graph resembles an amount of money, for example, or lines between points on a map resemble the route one would take to reach a destination. Even metaphors, the one kind of icon that is not primarily visual, make meaning by translating something abstract, like love, into an image, like a red rose. When a sign functions as an icon, then, it is an image that means something by standing in the place of something else.

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respectively, use Peirce's concept of the index to suggest cinema's relationship to time. Only recently has Johannes Ehrat suggested that Peirce's semiotics can be used to develop a method for film analysis that does not limit itself to genre or the construction of the subject by the apparatus, but instead advances a more philosophical approach that insists on the viewer's "discovery," through films, of unique experiences of time and narration (11).

Peirce's concepts have proven more applicable to cinema than those of Ferdinand de Saussure primarily because Peirce insists that signs are visual, not just linguistic; see Gilles Deleuze and Wollen.

[29] Peirce suggests that an icon proper can only be a mental image and that "any material image, as a painting, is largely conventional in its mode of representation; but in itself, without legend or label it may be called a *hypoicon*" (*Collected* 2.157). In other words, while images are created through the deployment of representational conventions, they can also be considered icons when they are not bound to an interpretation through text. However, because the distinction between *hypoicons* and *icons* is generally disregarded in elaborations upon Peirce, it isn't necessary to use the excessively complicating term here.

It is important to note, however, that the icon has meaning by virtue of characteristics that are inherent to the sign—whether or not those characteristics actually resemble anything that exists (see Peirce, *Collected*, 2.143). For example, we can recognize an image of a unicorn not because it resembles an existent creature, but because it resembles other representations of unicorns. In this way, iconic signs can actually differ to a large extent from the objects they are supposed to represent because of the force of a series of representations over time. The iconic sign representing the women's restroom, for example, resembles very few of the women who walk into the ladies' room, as most of them are wearing trousers. Nevertheless, we know what the sign means because that image has come to stand in for the generic concept of women—and it has done so, initially, through a likeness.

The icon is also, according to Peirce, a sign that, upon observation, reveals "other truths concerning its object [. . .] than those which suffice to determine its construction" (*Collected* 2.158). By distilling its object to a likeness, then, the icon also suggests characteristics or aspects of its object that would not have been as obvious if they had not been represented in a likeness. For example, a dress pattern makes obvious the ways the sleeve is attached to the garment, which would not be as obvious by simply looking at an image of the completed garment. In summary, then, an iconic sign represents its object through an image, most often visual, that resembles the object or other representations associated with that object. By distilling the object into a few sharply defined characteristics, the icon often highlights information about the object that might otherwise be obscured.

The second kind of relationship between the sign and the object it represents is indexical. Peirce calls the index and the object it represents "an organic pair" ("Logic" 114). Therefore, an index is a sign that stands for its object regardless of whether or not anyone interprets it as such. According to Peirce, two factors can make a sign an index. In the first kind of index, the sign has been caused in some way by its object, for example, as smoke is a sign of fire or fever is a sign of an infection. The indexical sign bears an "existential bond" with the object or person that produced it and thus functions to record a "documentary truth" (Wollen 122, 154). For example, a slug trail glistening on the sidewalk functions as an indexical sign of the slug's presence. In the same way, a photo of an individual is an index—it records his or her presence. The sign functions as an index when it attests to the existence of that which it signifies—the indexical sign is generated by contact between the signified and the sign. The signified also leaves indexical traces in things like signatures, footprints, letters, and films. These traces are not resemblances, and therefore are not icons; rather, they represent the object through "association by contiguity," or because of the contact between the sign and its object (Peirce, *Collected* 2.172).

An index also indicates, or calls attention to, its object—in the same way that an index finger points toward an object to clarify a statement like, "There it is." "A rap on the door is an index," writes Peirce. "Anything which focuses the attention is an index. Anything which startles us is an index, in so far as it marks the junction between two portions of experience" (*Collected* 2.161). A sign functions as an index, then, by directing the attention of the observer to the object it represents. Indexical signs acquire meaning through connection with the object for which they stand, and, in so doing, also

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call attention to that object. In this way, indexical signs compel those who see them to recognize the objects for which they stand.

The final classification of the sign is the symbol. A symbol acquires its meaning not through any characteristics inherent to it, but because of the associations made by the interpreting mind. The symbol depends on a specific cultural context to determine its meaning, which becomes evident in language's symbolic signs: the word that stands for a given object differs from country to country, and sometimes even from region to region; for example, "soda" and "pop" refer to carbonated beverages in different regions of the United States. "The symbol depends," according to Mulvey, "on the human mind for its interpretation, that is on pre-existing cultural, rule-given knowledge" (*Death* 162). Of course, many other objects besides words can function as symbols. However, one must be familiar with the cultural context in order to properly interpret symbols**.** For example, cultural context is key to understanding the difference between showing off a new iphone and showing off a new blackberry—both could be used for communicating with others, but the iphone is a symbol of the casually tech savvy, trendy user, whereas the blackberry is a symbol of the on-the-go businessperson.

Symbols are thus both culturally specific and generic. They are "types, not individuals" (Short, *Peirce's* 222), but the types may be arbitrary, or, as Peirce puts it, "existent in the possibly imaginary universe to which the Symbol refers" (*Collected* 2.143-4). In other words, the symbol, through the force of habit, can become associated with a convention so arbitrary that it refers only to imagined types. Because the symbol draws on arbitrary conventions and can refer to imaginary conditions, it is the most assertive sign function, in the sense that it often stands for an association without much

support or reason. For example, the owners of the aforementioned iphone may have no idea how to use most of its features, but that is not obvious from the logo one sees as they use the phone. The symbol is interpreted in such a way because the symbol often functions as a law, and, according to Peirce, "a law necessarily governs, or 'is embodied in' individuals, and prescribes some of their qualities" (*Collected* 2.166). Symbols "govern" individuals by encouraging them to conform to what is deemed culturally desirable or acceptable—for example, wearing team colors on game day because that has become the symbol of team spirit. In this way, symbols often cause individuals to behave in certain ways.

Peirce recognizes that these distinctions often overlap. For example, in order to make sense, a symbol may also need to consist of an index and an icon, or one may need to indicate what one is referring to and call up an image of it in order to explain the symbolic convention to someone unfamiliar with the context (*Collected* 2.166). Different audiences can interpret the same sign differently. Short explains this overlap: "A foxy odor is a sign of danger to the rabbit but of dinner to the cougar; '$E = mc^2$' is a statement of physical law to the physicist but to the general public it is an icon of braininess; to those who worshipped it, an ancient religious artifact was an icon, even *qua* embodiment, of suprahuman powers, but to the anthropologist it is an index of social organization and cultural development" ("Development" 235).

The way a sign functions at a particular moment, then, depends on the context in which it is interpreted. If, for example, a parent points to an individual being followed by photographers and says, "There is a celebrity," the parent is referring to the symbol "celebrity," which is only clear through the indexical signs of pointing and saying

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"there." However, if the child asks, "What is a celebrity?," the parent might explain by saying, "A person whose picture appears in magazines and on TV" (as opposed to, say, a person who has achieved great successes in humanitarian work), thereby calling up an iconic image in the mind of the child in order to convey the laws of celebrity in that culture. While any given sign might require all three kinds of relationship to convey a meaning, then, the interpreters think of them one at a time in order to make sense of a given situation, or to parse out all the ways a given sign is making meaning at a given moment.

The overlap between the sign as an icon, the sign as an index, and the sign as a symbol outlined in the previous paragraph is essential to understanding the star as a sign. The schema of icon, index, and symbol classifies the sign's relationship to its object. In relation to stars, then, icon/index/symbol classifies how the star has meaning to an audience. The star is one sign, but she comes to mean something to her audiences in a number of ways. The star generates meaning as a simplified public image, but the star also generates meaning by calling attention, both in her extra-filmic life and in her film performances, to specific discourses and scenarios, which audiences then interpret according to the cultural conventions associated both with the phenomenon of stardom and with those discourses.

Hollywood stars are frequently referred to as icons, but Peirce's terminology provides one way of clarifying what that term means.[30] If the icon is a significant image,

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[30] The definition of icon I outline here differs from the definition of icon advanced by art theorists, and yet draws on the same principles. For example, Aaron Betsky suggests that, like Peirce's icon, the art icon "is a symbol in a material form, an object of adoration, and a fetish, and in all of these ways it creates something we can see that condenses and

Hollywood stars must certainly function as icons. Gledhill suggests that stars are "pictorial beings" who, to a large extent, signify simply by what is seen of them ("Signs" 210, 211). Peirce says "an *icon* is a sign which would possess the character which renders it significant, even though its object had no existence; such as a lead-pencil streak as representing a geometrical line" (*Collected* 2.170). The features of the star's face and body often make others notice them before they demonstrate any talent (if they ever do), illustrating one way the star functions as an iconic sign. The Hollywood star functions as an iconic sign when images of her, or costumes or props that have value because she wore or used them in films, photographs, or publicity materials, become the bulk of what is known about her. These images are easy to use and reproduce, don't require or inspire thought, and seem to encompass all that is worth knowing about the star. In other words, stars often mean something to audiences as pictorial representations of themselves, and thus constitute Peircean icons.

Because Hollywood stars have become iconic figures not only through images, but also through repeated stories about their lives, the icon includes the stars' mythologies, or the narratives about them that explain their success. The star becomes an icon, in large part, from the work done by carefully managed publicity. During the classical Hollywood era, 1917-1960, studios "manufactured" personae in order to increase the likelihood that the actor would assume a prominent place in the collective imagination and become a star. Through makeovers and acting lessons, the studios also exercised control over star performances. Studios used their most successful stars both to differentiate their films from those of other studios and to standardize the quality of their

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makes physical the invisible or unnameable forces that control our world. It is an object of art, use, and mystery all at the same time" (23).

own studio products. Stars thereby became part of the machinery in place to predict and stabilize box office receipts. To protect their investment, studios therefore had to exercise as much control as possible over all aspects of the star's life, including carefully managed dates and public appearances.

Brief narratives about the star's life, which often draw on familiar typographies, such as the Cinderella or the self-made man, communicate the star's mythology. Narratives are icons, according to Short, because they bear a resemblance to actual events (*Peirce's* 216). Narratives in support of the star's mythology conjure familiar images of the star's "typical" behavior, appear to represent what the star was "really like," and function as shorthand for what she means. By highlighting only the most simplistic and obvious aspects of the star's biography, these tales reduce the star's meaning to a few easily and frequently consumed details.[31] When gossip columnists like Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons started reporting on the stars' personal lives in the late 1930s, the seemingly "intimate" details they revealed also shaped audiences' interpretations of stars. The star's mythology, or persona, which reduces her complex life to a few textual "snapshots," as illustrated in the next chapter, also constitutes one of the ways the star communicates meaning as an icon.

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[31] Fan magazine writers (as opposed to gossip columnists) published their stories only after undergoing a rigorous system of checks and balances. According to a freelance fan magazine writer, the process associated with publishing a story in a fan magazine was controlled to prevent writers from truly "scooping" anything. Story ideas were approved first by an editor, then by the studio publicity office. Stars were rarely interviewed without a publicity agent present, and reporters were escorted off the lot to preclude any unauthorized snooping. Stars and publicity agents reviewed story drafts, often changing or eliminating details. After all this, the editor then had the opportunity to change the angle of the story and might not even buy it (Slide 84). The studio had a vision of the star's meaning in mind, and manipulated publicity about the star to encourage fans to interpret the star "correctly."

The index is related to a star in two ways. First, films record the presence of the star in a manner similar to the way a footprint records the presence of a foot on the beach. Peirce divides the index into "genuine" and "degenerate" types; the footprint is a type of genuine index (*Collected* 2.160). Star films function in a similar way: because the star was physically connected to the image that appears onscreen, the film conveys meaning about the star to audiences. Note that the star's *films*, and not the star herself, act as the index: the films register the presence of the star. While the star films constitute the genuine index, then, or the sign that records the star's presence and calls attention to her, the star's meaning to her audience depends on the films as indexes of the things she represented. To understand the star's meaning, then, it is necessary to examine the star's film canon as an index that calls attention to the star's presence.[32]

However, the star herself also functions as an index, although the star is what Peirce calls a "degenerate" index, or one that means something to an audience by referring to or pointing out something else (*Collected* 2.160). Star films record the star's mannerisms and gestures, calling attention to, through techniques of lighting and editing, the star's presence. However, within the films, the star functions as a degenerate index through the way her presence says, "Look here!" When viewers look, they see not only a record of the star's performance, but also references to the culture and many of its major social dilemmas. Films thus constitute "documentary culture," or, as Raymond Williams explains, "the body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which, in a detailed way, human thought and experience are variously recorded" (61). Through documented

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[32] Stars have a publicity index and biographical indexes, too—but these are rarely, especially during the classical Hollywood era, vetted by the star in the same way that her performances, though certainly influenced by directors and editors, reflect her own work.

evidence in films of fashions, settings, idioms, and colloquialisms, viewers access the star and the culture she denotes.

Stars and their films are both cultural products; stars and their films both help to disseminate the values and mores of the culture. The star as an index points to cultural dilemmas, and the star as symbol embodies the culture's shifting values. Therefore, between considering the star as an index and exploring the star as a symbol, it is necessary to investigate the role the star plays in illuminating cultural impasses. Stars embody the unspoken rules that govern the behaviors and attitudes of a particular culture; these rules are often referred to as "codes."[33] A culture's codes demonstrate that their producers and consumers held many of the same beliefs and understood the world in similar ways.

Because films divulge social concerns, and because certain issues are acceptable topics of debate while others are beyond negotiation, the star necessarily takes a position within a dialogue about a social dilemma. While the film's narrative may produce one kind of resolution, the star performance can contradict it. For example, Janey Place points out that even if the narrative resolutions of films noirs punish the femmes fatales, what many viewers remember about the performance is the star's demonstration of potency

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[33] My use of the term "codes" comes from work in cultural theory, particularly that of Stuart Hall. As Hall points out, "Certain codes may [. . .] be so widely distributed in a specific language community or culture, and be learned at so early an age, that they appear not to be constructed – the effect of an articulation between sign and referent – but to be 'naturally' given" ("Encoding" 95). These codes are those that reveal to an observer of today the conventions of the past. "What naturalized codes demonstrate," according to Hall, "is the degree of habituation produced when there is a fundamental alignment and reciprocity – an achieved equivalence – between the encoding and decoding sides of an exchange of meanings" ("Encoding" 95). The work of Roland Barthes and Raymond Williams also provides insight into how to understand the relationship between cultural products and ideology.

and uninhibited sexuality. Although the mores and norms of a society are often

amorphous, "the value embodied by a star is," according to Dyer, "harder to reject as

'impossible' or 'false', because the star's existence guarantees the existence of the value

he or she embodies" (*Stars* 22).

The star's role in cultural debates is thereby at least part of what made her a star.

"Cultural frameworks," according to Gaylyn Studlar, "often figure importantly in the

creation of a star who is presold in the sense of being constructed to appeal to an

audience's established interest in controversies, dilemmas, or spectacles that are already

in cultural circulation" (*Mad* 8-9). The star's *image* is, according to Gledhill, the way the

star's persona and film roles "condens[e] and dispers[e] desires, meanings, values, and

styles that are current in the culture" ("Signs" 217). Audiences consider the values stars

seem to represent both onscreen and off, and determine whether stars' behavior is to be

emulated or criticized.[34] The star's image serves as a "moral barometer" for the society,

suggesting to citizens how they should and shouldn't behave (Ellis 95). "The concept of a

'role model' is probably too broad and vague, it is more useful to see the relationship as

pedagogical," writes Robert van Krieken, "encompassing inspiration, philosophy,

examples of how to overcome [. . .] obstacles, emotional sustenance, suggestions for

how to dress and how to behave in various situations" (95).

When the star's film roles and off-screen life call attention to cultural debates, the

star functions as a degenerate index, and also becomes a symbol or *type* of individual.

The star becomes a symbol for fluctuating cultural mores, such as those surrounding

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[34] Different members of the same audience will, inevitably, interpret the star's behavior
differently; thus, what is acceptable to some may be unacceptable for others.
Nevertheless, gossip about stars' behavior helps establish the mores of a community. See
Joke Hermes.

sexual behavior. The star's persona leads audiences to interpret her as a certain "type" that takes a certain position on cultural issues. Dyer argues that "elements such as the rags-to-riches motif and romance as an enactment of the problems of heterosexual monogamy suggest that what is important about the stars, especially in their particularity, is their typicality or representativeness. Stars, in other words, relate to the social *types* of a society" (*Stars* 53, my emphasis). The way a star relates to these types may be established in extra-filmic publicity, which then informs the audience's understanding of the character the star creates. Monroe is certainly associated with the "dumb blonde" type, but thinking of her as the "woman negotiating conflicting demands of career and marriage" type is also productive.

If a filmmaker knows how viewers are likely to respond to a star, he can manipulate that expectation (the result of the consolidation of the star's persona over time) to produce a given effect in the viewers. For example, nothing inherent in a Western star makes him a symbol for American-ness, toughness, and machismo. The star comes to symbolize these qualities because the publicity about the star has created these associations and repeated them to such an extent that they have become habits of interpretation. The process of consolidation works in the opposite way, too: American-ness becomes associated with a certain macho attitude through the workings of the star persona.

Interest in the details of the stars' personal lives is also part of what makes them serve as symbols in the Peircean sense, for through these details, audiences see contradicting identities that indicate, however subconsciously, the tensions inherent in cultural ideologies. No audience consciously chooses to make an individual a star; rather,

something about the star reinforces the values already held by the audience, which then leads the audience to act in ways that support that star. Public acceptance of Monroe's nude calendar photo, for example, suggests that both her honesty about the photo and her attitude toward nudity appealed to shifting cultural attitudes.

Applying Peirce's semiotics to Monroe's star canon helps us explain how a star and her films draw upon the audience's understanding of the world to produce a set of cinematic meanings. Nevertheless, even academic studies of Monroe dwell on her fascinating biography at the expense of explaining *how* and *why* she had such enduring importance. Although analyzing the films that constitute Monroe's star canon can help rectify that situation, isolated analyses of individual films do little to explain the trajectory of Monroe's career.

The remainder of this work will therefore explore Monroe as an icon, index, and symbol. Monroe functions as an icon in two ways. First, the multitude of narratives about her, during her stardom and since her death, repeat the same features. The resemblances of the actual person, "Marilyn Monroe," function as textual snapshots consolidating Monroe's meaning "at a glance." Moreover, the most frequently circulated images of Monroe—perhaps even more ubiquitous than texts about her—highlight features not only of the actress but also of the cultural expectations for femininity, sexuality, and Hollywood glamour. If these iterations of Monroe stand in for the complex historical figure and actress, they also take on their own meaning.

Monroe's films reflect her function as an index and as a symbol. While the films serve as an index documenting Monroe's historical presence as well as the fashions and sayings of the time, Monroe functions as an index of the cultural issues reflected by her

films. Through the way she calls attention to culturally specific issues, Monroe

symbolizes, for example, changing understandings of marriage after the postwar marriage

and baby boom and the shift to a suburban, single breadwinner lifestyle. She also indexes

the changing sexual mores of the time as documented in Alfred Kinsey's studies of

human sexuality. [35] Whatever her personal life and wishes suggested about how she

wanted to be understood, people thought of her as a symbol of sex and of the female star.

Understanding Monroe's persona, therefore, not only helps explain her contemporary

appeal and subsequent status in the cultural imagination, but also deepens our

understanding of her cinematic canon.

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[35] Studies of stars in their social and historical contexts are subject to being charged with reflectionism. Although it is impossible to be completely objective, by thinking of the films as indices to a larger cultural context (which leaves its traces in narrative situations and lines of dialogue), we can at least be certain that we are considering elements of the cultural context with which Monroe's contemporaries would have been familiar. These same contextual materials resonate in Monroe's publicity as well as in audience commentary on the films and fan letters. While there are certainly additional topics that were important to postwar Americans, then, Monroe's films provide a reliable indication of the issues that overlapped with her stardom and generated her appeal for fans.

Chapter 2.
An Intimate Image: Monroe as Icon

In 2012, director Liz Garbus released a documentary about Marilyn Monroe entitled *Love, Marilyn*. This film promises greater authenticity than documentaries of the past because, thanks to her "recently discovered" personal papers, "Marilyn's own voice adds new layers to the mystery." The on-screen text calls these papers "a mosaic of her inner world." The first of Monroe's words recited in the film are hopeful: "What do I believe in? What is truth? I believe in myself. Even my most delicate intangible feelings." Following this, however, Monroe's words bespeak an emotionally fragile woman more familiar to contemporary audiences: "Last night I was awake all night again," and, "Oh damn I wish that I were dead, gone away from here." Moreover, because the perspective of someone so fragile, apparently, cannot be trusted, the film soon complements Monroe's own words with what others have to say about her, including much questionable evidence. For example, Norman Mailer's fantasy that "sex was ice cream to her" appears in the opening sequence, a troubling inclusion, since Mailer admitted to inventing much of his Monroe biography.[1] Anyone with thoughts about Monroe, the film suggests, can communicate, at least as well as she, her "real" identity.

While its opening makes a promise common to star publicity when it implies that viewers are going to get an intimate glimpse of "Marilyn," Garbus's documentary typifies the problem with trying to say anything new about Monroe: her tale has been told

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[1] Mailer states within his biography *Marilyn* that he compiled his story out of "factoids," not research, and likewise admitted as much to CBS's Mike Wallace in a televised interview entitled "Norman Mailer and the Fast Buck" (July 16, 1973). Thus, while Mailer makes it obvious that his biography is not a valid source upon which to build an understanding of Monroe, subsequent uses of his biography do not acknowledge its fictional status.

so many times, using so many of the same details, that it is difficult to avoid repeating the story's familiar tropes. Despite Garbus's use of newly discovered papers, her documentary reiterates Monroe the icon: a woman with exceptional sex appeal, who was exploited by powerful men and tragically plagued by insecurity, mental illness, and heartbreak. Retold in the myriad films and biographies, as well as nearly monthly newsmagazine reports, this version of Monroe's life acquires the status of "truth."[2] Perhaps because the story worked so effectively to endear her to her contemporaries, those interested in capitalizing on the actress's appeal today recycle them.[3]

Monroe's story also reveals how Peirce's definition of an icon—as an image that stands in the place of its object—comes to bear features in common with other definitions of icons as objects (often religious) soliciting uncritical devotion. Any story about Monroe (as with all icons, gods, and goddesses) is at least in part a story about her worshippers. Knowing that Monroe as an icon was constructed, by herself, by her studio, and by her culture, we can use 1950s instances of the iconic Monroe to tell a story about her 1950s fans. This story will help us better understand how Monroe both worked within and challenged the Hollywood star system to create her own star image.

Peirce's concept of the icon, as discussed in the previous chapter, can be elaborated in several ways that are fruitful for interrogating Hollywood stardom. Three of these are relevant to understanding Monroe as an icon. First, the star as an icon is readily

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[2] Examples include the recent film *My Week with Marilyn* and recent biographies by Gary Vitacco-Robles and Lois Banner.

[3] Other studies (see S. Paige Baty and Sarah Churchwell) have considered whether these stories produce the same emotional connection for Monroe's fans today as they did for her contemporaries. The high sums for which Monroe memorabilia is sold, as well as the conversations within Monroe's fans clubs (see, for example, the Marilyn Remembered club on Facebook), suggest that today's fans have intense emotional relationships with Monroe.

recognized, and yet even the visual iconography associated with the star signifies only through resemblance to the star. In other words, the recognizable images of Monroe are constructed, and do not directly present the unmediated star. Second, the icon is an image that stands in the place of the total person of the star, and, in so simplifying the star, highlights aspects of her that might otherwise be overlooked. As we will see, the most common images of and stories about Monroe in the 1950s point up her sex appeal, but also call attention to unexpected aspects of her persona, such as her use of pin-ups and still photography to control her image, or how the Cinderella story inflected her publicity. Third, because they simplify and condense the star's story into something that only resembles the star, narratives about the star, which coalesce into a mythology justifying the star's success, also constitute part of how the star becomes an icon. The common publicity strategy of hinting at the star's multiple identities, in Monroe's case, became pathologized in a way that elicited sympathy for her lack of stable identity and justified the sacrifices she made for stardom.

Through a series of often-circulated images and a relatively simple narrative, Monroe's star persona breeds familiarity by repeating the same details, causing audiences to feel greater intimacy with her. Biography assumes there is a "truth" to uncover about the star; star canon studies insists that the only "truth" we can uncover lies in the public face of the star: her publicity, news stories, films, and fan responses to them. The star canon method, informed by Peircean semiotics, insists that we ask different questions about the star as an icon. We should ask questions that clarify how the star becomes both a visual and narrative icon: what images were printed most frequently, what stories were told about her over and over? How did audiences react to these iconic elements? How did

the elements of the star as an icon cement her stardom? How did the star as icon inflect her films?

Monroe as a Visual Icon

Monroe's pre-stardom modeling work produced images of her that were soon nearly ubiquitous. These images, along with the most famous publicity stills from her film career, constituted a stable nodal point around which the instability of her identity, both onscreen and off-, could coalesce without disintegrating. Biographer Carl Rollyson writes, "Marilyn Monroe's career is one of the finest examples of the way in which human identity in the twentieth century has been defined in terms of the replicated image" ("Replicated" 18). And yet, despite the stability they seem to offer, these images also invite viewers to seek more information about the star, to look for cracks in the apparently seamless identity. These images, like many icons, seem straightforward at first glance but become more ambiguous upon closer examination, thereby allowing audience members with a number of interests to connect to the star through them. As Graham McCann puts it, "the image thus displays the *absence of the absence*—what has gone seems to remain"—or what is really inaccessible, the star, seems accessible (77). Images of Monroe's body and face stabilize her star persona, cementing it to these comparatively simplified icons, thereby increasing her contemporaries' connection to her.

Images of Monroe's body that were frequently circulated in the 1950s include her early pin-up work, her nude photos, and the (in)famous publicity image from *The Seven Year Itch* of her white dress blowing in the subway breeze. However, even these images of Monroe's body are not as simple as they might at first seem. While they all appear to contribute to the common understanding of Monroe as an emblem of 1950s "Lolita

lechery," they are not entirely emblems of Monroe as sex object (Haskell 255). Each of these kinds of images of her body works simultaneously in two directions, at once suggesting a woman who has been objectified and a woman who is very much in control of her public image.

That Monroe's pin-up career began out of her war work should alert us to the possibility that her modeling work, and indeed her entire career, were in part a struggle to rectify female stardom and changing gender roles. During World War II, physically and mentally capable women were central to the war effort. Monroe's pin-up career began out of her work painting fuselages for Radioplane during World War II; army air corps filmmakers and pin-up photographer David Conover came to the plant to document women's support of the war effort. Although she was often photographed in tight-fitting tops or bikinis, and thus sexualized, it does not necessarily follow that these photos always objectified her.[4] Conover photographed Monroe in a sweater in order to accentuate her figure, but at the same time as his photos emphasized her breasts, they also emphasized that she was a woman working to support the war effort, a Rosie the Riveter. As Robert Westbrook has noted, pin-ups provided a reminder of the "average" woman back home whom soldiers were protecting and a model for the women who would take their own pin-up photos to send to the soldiers they knew.[5] Monroe's early modeling work served as both morale-booster and role model, making her more than a sex object.

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[4] Pin-ups during this period also appeared as nose art on bombers, associating these images of women with danger, destruction, and strength. See Maria Buszek, *Pin-Up Grrrls* chapter 5, and Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound*, chapter 4.
[5] See both Westbrook's article and Buszek's book for pin-ups created by ordinary American women.

Many of the earliest pin-up images of Monroe stand out not because they document her exploitation, but because she seems to collaborate with the viewer. Pin-ups of the era are commonly thought of as passive objects, as Kathryn Benzel writes, "a spectacle for public consumption" (3)—think Bettie Page's bondage photos, for example, or even Betty Grable's derriere taking front and center as she smiles over her shoulder.[6] Monroe, by contrast, is photographed in active, natural poses, running on a beach or climbing a rock, looking directly at the viewer.[7] She may be scantily clad in these images, but that does not mean she is completely objectified. As Benzel explains, "Looking at photographs of Monroe, the viewer has the feeling that she will step out of her frame at any moment. In this illusion, the viewer is made to feel less a voyeur and more a participant because Monroe, her pose, her expression, her costume, all encourage interaction rather [than] anonymity on the part of the spectator" (3). Such a reversal empowers Monroe as the photograph's *subject* rather than its *object*.

Evidence confirms that these poses resulted from Monroe's skill as a model and control over her photographic image rather than from a photographer's directing her. Monroe was well known for requiring approval of publicity photos, going so far as to destroy those she didn't like.[8] Thus, she was very much in control of the lifestyle photos

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[6] Grable's pin-up photo became the top promotional photo of the World War II era, a popularity she dramatized when she starred in 1944's *Pin-Up Girl* (Buszek 223).

[7] These images were featured in magazines like *Yank*, *Laff*, and *Stars and Stripes*. Many of them were photographed by Andre de Dienes, and appear in his book *Marilyn*. Donald Spoto includes a photo of Monroe posing for pin-up artist Earl Moran, and Mailer and Guiles include photos from Monroe's early modeling work and some studio cheesecake photos.

[8] See, in particular, the memoirs of her photographers George Barris and Sam Shaw. Bert Stern's *Marilyn Monroe: The Last Sitting* documents Monroe's habit of crossing through photos she disliked. Banner's biography discusses Monroe's modeling work in detail in chapter 4. James Goode provides a lengthy description of the process through which

that appeared in national magazines. Photographer Richard Avedon explains, "She understood photography [. . .] and she also understood what makes a great photograph— not the technique, but the content. And she knew it was up to her to fill the page. She also knew that if she wasn't in the right mood, she couldn't give the right performance for the photograph" (Hattersley 59). Doug Kirkland, who photographed Monroe for *Look* near the end of her career, states that Monroe understood her photos "as a salable commodity. There was this public image she was creating, but she never confused it with her real self, which was a good thing. She referred to the woman in her pictures in the third person, as 'this woman' or 'that girl'" (Hattersley 72).[9] Monroe acknowledges the distinction between her "real self," which was unavailable to the public, and the iconic images of herself, which she created.

Monroe struggled to maintain her agency despite the objectifying impulses of photography and film, even in her nude photos. In 1952, before Monroe had been featured in any starring roles, the public learned that she was the woman in the nude "Golden Dreams" photo taken in 1948 by Tom Kelley and printed as Miss February 1952 in "The Exclusive 'Hollywood' Calendar Line." To stop speculation in the entertainment columns about whether or not this nude was in fact Monroe, she admitted that she had posed nude several years before because she needed money. Even the caption for a small reprint image of the calendar in *Life* read "Marilyn unclothed posed for calendar art when she was broke" ("Hollywood" 101). This story was so convincing to the public that the

Monroe approved publicity shots for *The Misfits*, which went through five different agents before Monroe marked through the ones she didn't like (118).
[9] For a *Life* spread in 1958, Avedon photographed Monroe posing as sex goddesses Marlene Dietrich, Clara Bow, Theda Bara, and Jean Harlow ("Marilyn Monroe in a Remarkable Recreation of Fabled Enchantresses"). The success with which she conveys these other women demonstrates her control over her photographic performances.

nude photo became not a scandal, but just an irrevocable aspect of Monroe's persona. Monroe took credit for the photos, refusing to allow them, and her detractors, to speak for her, making them instead just the result of a modeling job.

The photo, in typical nude spread fashion, exposes the entire length of Monroe's body. Richard Dyer criticizes the art photography tradition in which Kelley worked, noting that "the model is usually required to pose in willfully bizarre positions" in "this unpleasantly dehumanizing tradition of photography – and it was indeed a disreputable form, associated, quite correctly, with the dirty talk of men's locker rooms and toilets" (*Heavenly* 29). While Monroe's body is twisted into less than natural angles in Kelley's photos, they are not as unequivocally dehumanizing as Dyer suggests. In the two most famous photos from this shoot, *Golden Dreams* and *A New Wrinkle*, she is looking at the viewer (albeit beneath lowered eyelids) and seems to be pushing herself off of the canvas, suggesting that she knows she is being watched and that, far from passive, she is about to arise from this position.

Perhaps Monroe's nude photos are associated with exploitation because they became the first *Playboy* centerfold in 1953, with Monroe having no say in the role her nude body played in launching the new magazine. Hugh Hefner acquired the *Golden Dreams* photo for $500 and used the promise of reprinting it to secure advance orders of the first issue of his new magazine (Fraterrigo 20). Although many knew of the image, relatively few had seen it in full color, making Hefner's plan, as Dyer states, "a marketing coup" (*Heavenly* 27).[10] Despite the potentially exploitive nature of Monroe's appearance

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[10] Carpozi reports that the John Baumgarth Company sold six million copies of the Golden Dreams calendar (36).

in the magazine, that appearance nevertheless contributed a key aspect to her persona.

Richard Woodward writes that Monroe's nude photos "were not only the first

photographs of a naked woman that many American males in the 1950s ever saw, they

were almost certainly the first naked pictures of a celebrity" (23). Through her nude

photos, she stood for a fantasy of access not only to success, but also to Hollywood.

Woodward expresses a physical intimacy implied by the photograph, and the possibility

that Monroe might be a potential mate for the average American would inform her

subsequent publicity images.

In fact, the fantasy of Monroe as a possible intimate partner, begun with her pin-

ups and enhanced by her nude photos, is at least part of what makes the publicity stills

from *The Seven Year Itch* such iconic images. Woodward calls Monroe "the outrageous

blond exhibitionist—white skirt twirling around her hips, and portions of her white

panties exposed" (25). The circumstances of how the image was created insist that she be

read as both an exhibitionist and as an available icon. There were hundreds of

photographers, both professional and amateur, present, hinting at a universal access to

Monroe and an ability to take a piece of her home in the captured image. The photograph

itself is intimate, prompting Woodward to write: "She is an urban goddess, straddling the

subway grating while the New York masses, disguised as a gust of wind, look up her

dress from underground; and she is such a generous and powerful goddess that the people

from below, the workingmen who ride the subway, are allowed to have sex with her"

(27-8). The illusion of universal access to Monroe's genitals, in the case of this iconic

image, increases her appeal, and her power over the masses, rather than diminishes it.

Surprisingly, Monroe doesn't lose her appeal as more of her becomes available for public consumption. Not only was this image widely printed, but it was printed as a series of four action shots in many major newspapers, the access from all angles allowing the masses of a number of cities to imagine an intimate interlude with her.[11] She seems unable to saturate the market, indicating that her iconic status stems from the appearance of availability. In the 1950s, people wanted to see more of her and know more about her. While clipping these images didn't improve the chances of sleeping with Monroe, they seemed to bring people a little closer to imagining what it would be like if they did. In so doing, they sustained her appeal.

The *Seven Year Itch* image was printed in national newspapers and magazines, so it must have held some appeal for women as well. The iconic image of Monroe's skirt blowing around her legs can be read as an alternative to the passivity typically associated with the pin-up. According to Woodward, in the image "she is getting off on our getting off, but both parties are aware it's a performance" (28). This image provides an interesting contrast to the reclining Monroe of the nude photos. Rather than lounging, Monroe is active, her face bears a definite expression of delight, and she seems to be in control of the situation, carefully avoiding complete exposure. But she is not ashamed— she is confident, active, playful. Although many critics have interpreted this image as evidence of Hollywood's misogyny, the image also evinces respect for how Monroe reacts to the potentially degrading situations in which she finds herself with skillful

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[11] Four different stages of the skirt blowing upward appeared in the *New York Journal American* and the *New York Post* on September 15, 1954, and the same four photos appeared in the *Los Angeles Daily News* the following day.

aplomb at managing her exposure. In this respect, the image serves as a metaphor for her control over her career.[12]

Given how well known images of Monroe's body are today, it is perhaps surprising to find that many images of just her face circulated in the 1950s. These images of her face in fact more clearly demonstrate Monroe's appeal to both males and females, better serving as icons of her 1950s stardom than her nude photo or the *Seven Year Itch* stills. While her face connotes sexuality because it is the face of Marilyn Monroe, many of the images of Monroe's face used in publicity are not overtly sexual, suggesting that these images appealed to Monroe's contemporaries and cemented her stardom in ways that had nothing to do with sex appeal.

Fan magazines, as well as mainstream magazines such as *Life* and *Time*, frequently used a medium close-up on their covers; these images complemented Monroe's over-the-top sex appeal with approachability and vulnerability. Many of the images chosen for Monroe's cover shots underscore her characteristic sex appeal. This facial expression has been reduced to, as *Time* describes them, her "moist, half-closed eyes and moist, half-opened mouth" ("Something" 88). This description suggests how Monroe's face is iconic in the graphic sense—her eyes and mouth instantly connote sexual eagerness. While a few of the poses suggest an effort at sexiness, any google image search for Monroe's magazine covers reveals that in many more of them she is laughing, and several of them feature a benign smile. Emphasizing Monroe's cheerfulness over her sex appeal is an understandable approach to attracting a female

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[12] Indeed, many of Monroe's female fans today imitate this moment by donning the white dress as a positive, empowering image of female sexuality.

readership for these magazines, but it also serves to create Monroe as a good-natured, fun-loving icon, one with whom both males and females can expect to have a good time.

This happy image of Monroe isn't the only image of her that appeared on magazine covers. Many of them suggest a stillness, almost a "deer in the headlights" look. According to British critic Gavin Lambert, "For all the wolf calls that she gets and deserves, there is something mournful about Miss Monroe. She doesn't look happy. She lacks the pin-up's cheerful grin. She seems to have lost something, or to be waking up from a bad dream" (qtd. in Robinson 143). These images fix Monroe as an enigmatic icon, a source of mystery about whom audience members can freely speculate.

Monroe's face, the focus of many magazine covers, invites intimacy and insists on her subjectivity in a manner resembling the work of the medium that catapulted her to legendary stardom—film. When the face is the sole signifier, it becomes the source of fans' emotional relationship with the star. Gilles Deleuze reflects on the nature of the cinematic close-up, calling it an "affection-image," or an image that communicates an affect, and, in the pairing of "the expressed and its expression, of the affect and the face," Deleuze finds a manifestation of the "icon" (97). Monroe's isolated face, then, unites both the means of communicating and the emotion communicated, making her an icon of not only the affect of desire, but also of fun and mystery. As film theorist Mary Ann Doane notes about the close-up, "Of all the different types of shots, it is the close-up that is most fully associated with the screen as surface, with the annihilation of a sense of depth and its corresponding rules of perspectival realism. The image becomes, once more, an image rather than a threshold onto a world. Or rather, the world is reduced to this face, this object" (91). In the absence of context, the face becomes the sole signifier.

These images of Monroe's face, particularly in her benign smile or blank expression, could encompass so many meanings that fans could see in them whatever aspect of her story most spoke to them. The close-up in a film, or the still image of a star's face that resembles a close-up, gives the audience a chance to purchase and possess intimacy with the star, to speculate about what inspired the look on her face.[13]

While the images of Monroe's body suggest the possibility of "intimate" knowledge of the contours of the star's body, the close-ups of her face hint at the possibility of locating cracks in the carefully managed appearance, of discerning what the star is thinking or feeling by closely examining her facial features. The distinction between who she appeared to be in posed images and glimpses of her pain in candid snapshots was at least partly responsible for Monroe's popularity: because it was clear that the images of her did not reveal all there was to know about her, either of her body or her inner life, audiences sought more information than the images themselves could convey. For this information, they turned to the narratives circulated in the fan magazines and general press.

Monroe's Iconic Mythology

Monroe's mythology, established in publicity and gossip, added an iconic narrative to these iconic images, giving fans a more nuanced star but nevertheless constructing "Monroe" as an iconic figure who only resembled an off-screen person formerly known as Norma Jeane. Monroe seemed to rise to stardom almost overnight,

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[13] Perhaps this explains, in part, the enduring iconicity of Warhol's silk-screened *Marilyns*, which transform a close-up drawn from a long shot publicity image for *Niagara* into a series of reflections on the surfaces of Monroe's face. Warhol's silk-screens capitalize on how frequently Monroe's (ambiguous) face was printed on magazine covers throughout her career.

and, like many who suddenly achieve fame, she was a controversial figure. As Hedda Hopper points out, stories about Monroe appeared in "the public press more often, with more pictures and more prose, than any other personality in the world" ("Marilyn" 36). Some of these stories were generated by the studio, which tried to depict her as a loner striving for success after her orphaned childhood.

What the studio press agents couldn't control, however, were aspects of Monroe's family, her love life, her body, and her psyche. These uncontrolled aspects generated ruptures in the iconic story, and the public most attached to, identified with, and found sympathy for the star because she didn't seem to have a perfect life. As Hopper indicates, "a lot of the things that are being written about her, she says, are far from the truth" ("Marilyn" 36)—but in Monroe's case, much of the studio publicity was more favorable than her "true" biography. Nevertheless, the aura of fabrication constitutes part of Monroe's (and indeed any star's) iconic narrative. Thus, while the official studio publicity constituted one iconic Monroe, aspects of her personal life that contradicted that official story shaped another iconic Monroe. This second iconic Monroe signified a private life publicly lived, a contradictory experience with which fans most identified.

Reduced to a simplified image and narrative, Monroe became someone whose experiences audience members could share. Thus, as Roger Newland writes in *Silver Screen*: "Hillbillies who can't tell you who's president right now could probably recite the details of Marilyn's life." Lauren Berlant writes that "intimacy [. . .] involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way" (1).[14] Star publicity provides the foundation for a

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[14] Theoretical understandings of how fans form intimate relationships with classical stars

narrative that fans can share with the star. The star acquires more stardom if she has "a

distinctive narrative, allowing [herself] to be subjected to constant scrutiny and a demand

for perpetual performance, encompassing [her] private life and personality as well as

[her] public roles" (van Krieken 10). The Hollywood publicity machinery supplied this

narrative, and fans responded to it by making Monroe one of their favorite stars.

Monroe's public persona, as created and maintained in the text supplied by fan

magazines and the mainstream press, allowed fans to identify and form intimate bonds

with Monroe. Christine Gledhill writes that a performer becomes a star when she

develops a persona, or when her personal life "becomes as important as the performed

role" through images and stories circulated in the mass media ("Signs" 213). Star

publicity, as Laura Mulvey insists, is "designed to give the film fan the *illusion* of

possession, making a bridge between the irretrievable spectacle and the individual's

imagination" (*Death* 161, my emphasis). This publicity works to obscure the fact that

most fans will never actually speak with their favorite stars by providing seemingly

intimate knowledge of the star's personal life, a paradox figured in Richard Schickel's

understanding of stars as "intimate strangers."[15] Gossip about the star's personal life

seems to grant intimate access by revealing what is supposedly hidden or secret

information (often sexual in nature) about the star.[16] As Joke Hermes notes, "Gossip

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are underdeveloped if not entirely absent. I have turned to celebrity theory, which
analyzes fan relationships with contemporary celebrities, in cases, such as that of gossip
magazines, where the findings seem to apply. In addition to celebrity theorists cited in the
text of this chapter, see, for example, Lawrence Grossberg; Laura Leets, Gavin De
Becker and Howard Giles; and Gayle Stever.

[15] Similarly, Stephen Heath thinks of stars as operating "in the mode of presence in
absence" (114). See also John Ellis.

[16] See Dyer, "A Star" 136, de Cordova 140, 145, and van Krieken, 10, for elaborations of
the role of sexual secrets in star personae.

magazines' celebrities thus become almost archetypal figures. They embody different

aspects of everyday life: frustration, ambition, (the wish for) parenthood, relations

breaking up. Using the experiences of celebrities and of the occasional 'ordinary person'

in the gossip weeklies, readers build and test scenarios in case the same drama were to

occur in their own lives" (81).[17] The press depicted Monroe as a woman who seemed to

have so much going for her, but who was nevertheless confronting many of the same

personal problems as many of her fans.

From the beginning of her career, studio publicists drew on Monroe's difficult

childhood to provide a story that, although extreme, made Monroe a relatable figure.

Norma Jeane, as Monroe was originally called, tried to please all of her foster parents (as

many as a dozen), despite their contradictory demands—some, for example, forbade

dancing while others encouraged her to develop her performing talents. None of them

generous, they all burdened her with numerous chores, made her bathe in water that had

already been used by the rest of the family, and, at the Los Angeles County Orphans

Home, made her wash all the dishes for only five cents a month.[18] Such mistreatment

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[17] While stars' lifestyles were depicted as largely inaccessible to ordinary people during
the Depression (because they were), establishing that the star is an ordinary person has
long been a goal of publicity machinery. Stories of stars' "ordinariness," argues Joshua
Gamson, "promoted a greater sense of connection and intimacy between the famous and
their admirers" (29). See also Ty Burr and Richard Dyer, *Stars*.
[18] Monroe's upbringing frequently appeared in publicity. See "The Truth about Me" by
Marilyn Monroe as told to Liza Wilson, in two parts, for *The American Weekly*, a
magazine supplement to the Sunday newspaper. The first part, appearing November 16,
1952, recounts Monroe's tough childhood and tells the story of how she got her name;
part 2, appearing November 23, 1952, discusses Monroe's early film roles and her
relationship with Joe DiMaggio. Monroe's former sister-in-law, Elyda Nelson, tried to
debunk the Monroe mythology in "The True Life Story of Marilyn Monroe" in *Modern
Screen* in 1952; Monroe was able to respond to Nelson's claims in the more reputable
Photoplay and through the more well-known journalist Hedda Hopper in January 1953's
"Marilyn Monroe Tells the Truth to Hedda Hopper." This is just a sampling of the nearly

carried over into Monroe's adult relationships; according to the press, she lacked female friends. Jim Henaghan wrote, "There is no star in Hollywood with less friends than Marilyn Monroe," because of Monroe's focus on improving herself, and because she has never been good at making friends with women (67).[19]

These aspects of Monroe's story supported the studio's efforts to cast her as a deserving Cinderella. Like Cinderella, Monroe was an orphan who had been subjected to cruel treatment and manual labor, and like Cinderella, Monroe was isolated from women whose camaraderie she desired, despite the fact that they didn't work as hard as she did. Writers drew on these similarities throughout Monroe's career. In an article that contributed to her iconography before she had any starring roles, Robert Cahn described Monroe as "a blonde apparition in a strapless black cocktail gown, a little breathless as if she were Cinderella just stepped from a pumpkin coach" (15). Once the Cinderella story acquired iconic status, it was easily alluded to in subsequent stories. "Her background provided a story that was an all-time high in Cinderella yarns. The public was ready for Marilyn," noted William Bruce for *Movieland* (62). Both Twentieth Century-Fox's official biography of 1956 (Brand) and a 1959 news release from the Rogers, Cowan, and Jacobs press office invoked Cinderella in their descriptions of Monroe. Monroe's movie roles further reinforced the Cinderella myth by frequently uniting the deserving Monroe with a love match, usually a wealthy one, by the end of the film.

Monroe's marriages both contributed to and diverged from her Cinderella narrative. When she began to appear publicly with baseball great Joe DiMaggio, Monroe

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ubiquitous coverage of Monroe's childhood in early publicity. Every Monroe biography, moreover, in describing Monroe's childhood, explores these details, and nearly every biography reaches a different conclusion regarding how bad it really was.

[19] See also Jane Corwin, 106, and Sheilah Graham, "Hollywood's Lost," 53.

seemed to be approaching her happily ever after, and shared an experience with the majority of American women, who were either married or seeking marriage. DiMaggio, beloved by Americans, was the perfect figure to serve as a Prince Charming to a deserving, kind-hearted Cinderella/Monroe; even after their divorce, rumors circulated about them reuniting. After their divorce, Monroe coupled with Arthur Miller, who, while he was not as beloved as DiMaggio, lived a life as different from the Hollywood celebrity as Prince Charming's from the servant girl. Fan magazine writers framed Monroe's multiple marriages in terms of the universal quest for love. Attempting to secure happiness, "Norma Jean Baker, which later became Marilyn Monroe [. . .] this 'two-in-one' woman," determined "to become just a simple, uncomplicated person, seeking above all else, to love and be loved," and got married (Manning 58).[20] Thus, while the "official" story told about Monroe by the studio underscored her difficult childhood to make her a sympathetic figure, the details that emerged about her adult life made her a more "authentic" figure, as they seemed to illustrate the lingering effects of being an unloved child.

Monroe's failure to make her fairy tale marriages work served to make her a more sympathetic figure. Regarding the DiMaggio divorce, a female writer for *Photoplay* laments that Monroe's history of being "bandied from foster home to foster home" made her romantic failures even more painful (Kutner 62). Cinderella had found her prince only to lose him. Most writers, furthermore, blamed the husbands for these failed marriages. A sportswriter for the *Daily Mirror* states, "It was obvious to us that Joe and Marilyn were mismatched. He is an introvert, she is an extrovert. And he is too cold for

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[20] See also Alex Joyce in *Photoplay*'s July 1957 issue.

such a warm-hearted girl" (Barley 1). The same mindset affected coverage of Monroe's divorce from Miller. *Life* magazine calls the Miller-Monroe marriage "the most unlikely marriage since the Owl and the Pussycat," noting that "the separation was caused by a deeper [problem than infidelity . . .]; Marilyn's work requires her to live amid crowds while Miller needs solitude" ("End" 87). If Monroe was still a worthy Cinderella, these men had proven themselves no Prince Charmings. In fact, because she had not yet achieved her "happily ever after," Monroe's story was still being written.

The Cinderella narrative was not the only narrative that increased sympathy for Monroe. The press also called attention to the idea that Monroe, like many stars, possessed multiple identities. But, in contrast to the stories associated with other stars, Monroe's multiple identities weren't confined to just an onscreen and off-screen identity. Her personal life hinted at a number of contradictory identities. Rather than make the public lose trust in her, these instabilities generated sympathy for the star, even before her untimely death.

Early publicity emphasized that Monroe was nothing like her screen characters. Henaghan describes Monroe as a "lovable fake" "liv[ing] two distinct lives" at the studio and at home (67). This duality helped neutralize her sex appeal by making it characteristic only of her screen roles; the other Monroe was "loveable." Jane Corwin confirms in *Photoplay*: "There are two Marilyn Monroes—a daringly dressed worldly-looking woman; an unsophisticated girl who can cry her eyes out in private because someone has slighted her" (107). When writers indicate both the "worldly" and the retiring woman inhabited the same body, they tempt audiences with a peek at the "reality" behind the Hollywood sheen.

Publicity writers assured readers that neither of Monroe's identities expressed the phoniness typically associated with Hollywood stars. A writer for *Modern Screen* explains that "the glamour girl the public knows" "walks with the awareness of making a public appearance. Every gesture is well-calculated and deliberate" ("There's" 82). However, because of this self-consciousness, this Monroe is obviously a performance. Moreover, Monroe's voice bespeaks the extent to which she is incapable of pretext: her "speech has the intonation of a naïve, questioning child unlike her [Actors Studio] schoolmates, who use their voices with more vigor and versatility because of their Broadway, radio and television backgrounds" ("There's" 82). The Hollywood Monroe is a self-conscious studio creation who still retains some untrained naïveté. "The second Monroe," to confirm how self-conscious the "glamour girl" must be, "is a casual, everyday Marilyn who leaves off her make-up, wears slacks and turtle-neck sweaters and sometimes covers her tousled hair with a bandana. Her speech becomes more matter of fact" ("There's" 82). Making Monroe resemble her fans, this publicity defuses her glamour and sex appeal.

While it was fairly standard practice to represent Hollywood stars as having multiple identities (for example, fan magazines frequently featured spreads of stars at home to illustrate how much their private lives differed from their onscreen lives), the representation of Monroe's multiple identities is distinctive because they became pathologized. Stories about Monroe often feature a series of monikers associated with her: Norma Jean(e) Baker or Mortenson, Marilyn Monroe, Mrs. DiMaggio, Marilyn Monroe Miller.[21] Although audiences were aware of the name changes associated with

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[21] See Monroe, "The Men Who Interest Me . . . By Mrs. Joe DiMaggio."

many Hollywood stars, Monroe's inability to maintain a stable name came to uniquely reflect her lack of stable identity. Monroe's therapist, Ralph Greenson, described her as a typical Hollywood "screen patient," many of whom "changed their names in an attempt to change their identity," thereby officially pathologizing her multiple identities in the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* (252).

Moreover, fans knew of Monroe's mother's mental illness, and that her family upbringing was anything but "proper," and searched for tragic, but expected, signs of mental illness in Monroe. *Time* analyzed Monroe, recounting "her first attempt—'not a very serious one' at suicide" in the late 1940s, and attributing her fragile psyche to "feelings of inferiority [, . . .] panics, anxieties and hallucinations" ("To" 79). Just before her death, Alan Levy speculated about Monroe's mental illness: "As evidence of a troubled state of mind, some of her friends cited her crises with her studio, her sojourns at hospitals and the fact that she was involved in psychoanalysis" (40).

The pathologizing of Monroe's multiple identities, however, elicited sympathy for the difficulties she had to endure, including an ongoing lack of love.[22] Writers consistently underscored that one Marilyn had become multiple Monroes because she just wanted to be loved and would assume any identity she thought might result in love. "Once upon a time there were two women," Dorothy Manning writes about the two Monroes. "Both of them were very beautiful, and both of them wanted, more than anything in the world, to be loved" (Manning 58). The success of Monroe the star

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[22] The narrative of Monroe's pathology resembles what Mary Desjardins has recently called "autopathography," or a narrative illustrating "how illness and pain change the subject's relation to her body" (232).

shocked the lonely Monroe, especially since that success did not produce universal

admiration or assuage her loneliness.

After Monroe's death, writers spoke of Monroe's mental illness as a sign that

suicide had been inevitable. In *Photoplay*, Aljean Meltsir claimed Monroe was "doomed

from birth" (79) and "[creeping] closer to immobility" through physical illnesses,

psychoanalysis, pills, and alcohol (81).[23] Meltsir even reported that two months before

her death Monroe had said, "It might be kind of a relief to be finished" (81). Good

storytelling demands that signs of the story's conclusion be present from the outset. Thus

the publicity about Monroe's multiple identities, which initially evidenced her distance

from Hollywood phoniness, became portents of her premature death, such that Diana

Trilling could write, shortly after Monroe's death, that "the potentiality of suicide or, at

any rate, the threat of extreme mental breakdown had been, after all, conveyed to us by

virtually every news story about Marilyn Monroe of recent years" (127). The very

persistent optimism that she would overcome setbacks and reclaim her success, according

to Trilling, warned of the possibility that she wouldn't.

Monroe's persona reflects the story of a woman who was the "damaged famous."

Sean Redmond writes that the "damage of fame," including mental health problems,

addictions, and bankruptcy, "draws people closer to the injured star or celebrity" (40).

Monroe's series of failures—as a wife, as a mother, as a sober and sane adult—endeared

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[23] Two years after her death, Clare Booth Luce wrote a similar report for *Life*: "Marilyn's fate, like her body, began to take shape while she still lay in her mother's womb. [. . .] An ugly congeries of evil fairies—insanity, illegitimacy, infidelity, promiscuity, ignorance, and poverty—presided over her cradle" (72). Luce continues, "The pattern of anxiety, hostility, and moral confusion that underlay all Marilyn's human relation in later life was indelibly set in these early childhood years" (72). This report demonstrates how iconic this narrative had already become.

audiences to her. The excesses revealed in Monroe's personal life—that her mother

wasn't dead, as she had said, but rather institutionalized, that she had a sex life outside of

marriage, that the nation's premier sex symbol couldn't have a baby—contradicted the

respectability with which the studio was trying to surround the star, but made her a more

sympathetic figure with audiences. "The damaged famous, and the fans of the damaged

famous – who often see themselves as similarly damaged," Redmond continues, "form

resistant, symbiotic 'relationships' that work against the grain of dominant ideology and

the 'artifice' of fame" (40). When the famous seem to fail, that failure attests to their

authenticity, their status as more than their screen roles, and appeals to contemporaries

who are confronting similar failures.

The depth of these "relationships" was expressed in correspondence with

magazines and the star.[24] Many fans reached out to Monroe to try to form an intimate

bond with her. "By 1954," Lois Banner states, Monroe "was receiving as many as

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[24] Most understandings of fan intimacy with stars derives from Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl, who developed the concept of the "para-social" relationship in the 1950s to describe audiences' one-sided attachments to television and radio personae. In relation to film stars, the need to know the "real" private life as opposed to the carefully managed façade is an attempt to compensate for the one-sidedness of the relationship, "either by elaborating the image of the other, or by attempting to transcend the illusion by making some kind of actual contact with him" (Horton and Wohl 48). Horton and Wohl note that when fans communicate their feelings to the star/celebrity through letters, for example, it is outside the para-social interaction. In fact, many theorists dismiss the possibility of acquiring any real knowledge about the stars through thinking about fans' emotional attachments to them. For example, Horton and Wohl note, "Under exactly what conditions people are motivated to write to the performer, or to go further and attempt to meet him—to draw from him a personal response—we do not know" (48). As recently as 2004, Graeme Turner noted, "We still need to know more, though, about the nature of the desire that this fascination expresses. This takes us into territory that is not particularly well developed in the available literature and I'm going to leave that for another occasion" (104).

twenty-thousand fan letters a week, setting a new record among film stars" (*MM* 113).[25]

Hundreds of fan letters to Monroe still exist; Julien's Auction House in Beverly Hills

auctioned three lots in December 2014. However, many of these letters, for whatever

reason, are secreted away by their owners. While I am unable to perform any kind of

statistical analysis on fan letters in the 1950s, or even fan letters to or about Monroe, the

evidence suggests that many fans had a more complex, more intimate relationship with

Monroe than one based simply on the desire to acquire pin-up photos for their personal

collections. Rather, fans used the opportunity to communicate about the star as an

opportunity to also communicate about themselves, finding unexpected common ground

between themselves and Monroe.

A number of writers have advanced the misinformed notion that women could not

relate to Marilyn Monroe, a notion that disregards evidence to the contrary found in

letters from the 1950s and early 1960s. Molly Haskell argues that "women couldn't

identify with her and didn't support her" (254), and Dyer, while noting that "never" is of

course too sharp of a distinction to draw, confirms, by casually asking a few women, that

women wouldn't have been able to see her as resistant to the norms of 1950s sexuality

(*Heavenly* 57).[26] Gloria Steinem says she didn't relate to Monroe in the 1950s: "I [. . .]

walked out of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* in embarrassment at seeing this whispering,

simpering, big-breasted child-woman who was simply hoping her way into total

vulnerability. How dare she be just as vulnerable and unconfident as I felt?" (12).[27]

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[25] In 1952, *Time* reported that Monroe received "more than 5,000 letters a week from smitten admirers" ("Something" 88).
[26] See also Albert Mobilio.
[27] Revising her initial attitude toward Monroe after her death, Steinem points out that women in the 1970s and 1980s related to Monroe as someone with similar stories of

Jennifer Frost reports that letters on Monroe's suicide to Hedda Hopper were primarily

from men, "confirming scholarly conclusions that men, not women, constituted Monroe's

fan base" (210). While Frost accurately captures the dominant scholarly interpretation of

Monroe's fan base, my evidence indicates that many male *and* female fans felt an

intimate connection with Monroe.

Female fans in the 1950s connected to Monroe because of her suffering.[28] Jackie

Stacey's respondents remember copying Monroe's fashion and hairstyle (154). One of

Stacey's respondents, Betty Cruse, remembered: "Monroe appealed to me deeply and

desperately, little girl lost with the body of a desirable woman. She lit up the screen with

her performances, the glamour, her movements were so exciting. Watching her made me

feel she was in some way lonely and vulnerable, she was my cult figure, I felt like me,

she was running away from herself" (162). "The suicide rate in Los Angeles County

jumped 40% during the three weeks of 'hot' publicity given her death. Those suicides

who identified with her," speculates Clare Booth Luce, "may have felt 'doomed,' as she

felt herself to be, to a suicidal solution of their problems. Others, depressed over their

lack of money, fame, youth or sex, may have asked themselves, 'If she, the woman who

had "everything" had nothing to live for, what do I, with so much less, have to live for?'"

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sexual assault, overmedication, and heartbreak (28-9). Now, a kind of intimacy with
Monroe's sufferings is part of what undergirds her lasting legacy.

[28] Because Monroe's appeal to males is rarely questioned, I'm not addressing it in any
detail here. Monroe received a number of letters from grateful soldiers during the Korean
War, and she had an ongoing friendly correspondence with James Haspiel, a member of
the small group known as The Monroe Six, which is documented in Haspiel's book
Marilyn: The Ultimate Look at the Legend. A few letters from male fans will be
mentioned in the subsequent paragraphs, but the overwhelming majority of them are from
female fans.

(78). Clearly, the fan response to Monroe is not as simple as it has been assumed to be to date.

In an era in which it was common for women's experiences to be silenced, cordoned off as "private" matters better left undiscussed, the star apparatus surrounding Marilyn Monroe exploited her private life to make women's matters heard.[29] Female fans responded to stories about Monroe's failure to have a baby, a frequent topic in fan magazines. A *Photoplay* article movingly imagined Monroe saying, "'Someday, when I grow up, I'm going to have a little girl of my own. And I'm never going to leave her, never. Never . . .'" (Dinter 93). This story inspired fans to reveal their own hardships under the guise of communicating with the heartbroken star. "I just read your article in *Photoplay* and it was the most heartwarming story I ever read that actually happened to a real person," wrote one fan. "I understand how much you want a baby. You see, my doctor told me chances were I wouldn't have one when I married, but the dear Lord was merciful. I did have a beautiful baby boy. [. . .] I want to say, Marilyn, please have patience" (Happy 10). Because any Cinderella story must have a happy ending, this fan suggested that Monroe's ultimate success and happiness were inevitable.

Fans also responded to publicity analyses of Monroe's multiple identities. In response to a *Time* report about Monroe's first suicide attempt, one woman wrote, "Turn in your couch, TIME, along with your amateur analyst's badge. That rundown of what makes Marilyn fun hit a new low in taste" (Pehowski 6), and another asked, "Is it really anybody's business (except Miss Monroe's) to be informed about her parentage?" (Citrin 4). Although these two women are upset about the story, they seem frustrated because

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[29] "The problem that has no name," aptly named by Betty Friedan in *The Second Sex*, is part of this silence.

they feel protective: they feel it's unfair to expose Monroe's personal secrets of uncertain parentage and childhood abuses.[30] None of these women questioned the extent of Monroe's psychological trauma; instead, they either saw its exposure as an opportunity to learn about the human psyche or as further exploitation of a battered soul.

After Monroe's death, her female fans expressed their connection to Monroe's Cinderella narrative. In fact, Mrs. Joan Tompkins, who met Monroe at a party, wrote to Hedda Hopper, "Monroe became admired by women too the world over" because of the details of her Cinderella narrative (4). Tompkins explains: "For they know of her hard life as a child and they too could see behind the façade of her acting life. She had suffered as many of them, two miscarriages and the same feelings of insecurity many have. [. . .] It would take a stone heart not to be touched by the story of her life. It was filled with more pathos, misery, drama than any story which she played in the movies" (4-5). This fan suggests that Monroe's personal saga is even more engaging than fictional stories created for the screen. Similarly, Mrs. Maurice Darone wrote that Monroe had many friends she never knew in "the every day, hard working, ordinary people who grew to love her, the little girl who never knew the love of parents and a happy home. I think that is why all hearts went out to her, everyone reaching out to help her, protect her" (4). Monroe's quest for love was at least partly successful, as it garnered her the love of millions of strangers.

The letters written after Monroe's death also attest to the extent of fans' sympathy for her mental disturbances, and the urge to protect Monroe from further exploitation.

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[30] Other writers praised the psychological expose, including a Dr. McIntyre, who wrote that the "character portrait" is "of great value to the psychiatrist in the character analysis of his own patients. Marilyn's success in the tawdry roles to which she has been assigned is not due to her anatomic structure, but is to be explained in that life force which cannot be concealed in any medium" (6). A letter from Bob Hoig gives the magazine "orchids" "for taking that candid stroll down the old id road" (4).

According to Mrs. Tompkins, "Today a star died, but more important a lovely woman died. [. . .] A woman whose beginnings were tragic, who was never allowed to forget these beginnings. Behind that beautiful face I could see a warmth and tenderness which showed in her eyes. [. . .] She had that child like quality of wanting so much to be loved as herself not as a sex symbol" (Tompkins 1-2). Tompkins continues, "Of course there will be those will well say 'Oh the poor thing was really sick.' Oh how cruel humans can be sometimes" (10).[31] Tompkins speaks to her concern that Monroe was never able to escape public reminders of her past, and that people might only show true compassion for her mental state after her death, suggesting that even her brief meeting with Monroe resulted in a great deal of intimate affection for Monroe on Tompkins's part. Indeed, others who had never met Monroe expressed similar sentiments. In particular, one letter a female fan wrote to *Life* reads: "Her life was a tragedy from beginning to end. There is no need to drag her through the mud again" (Adler 21).[32] Monroe's suicide may be largely responsible for the protective stance these writers take, but the fact that they needed to express that stance publicly suggests an impulse to defend someone with whom they felt a great deal of intimacy.[33]

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[31] Hopper kept at least 50 letters that were critical of her report on Monroe's death and/or blamed Hopper and gossips like her for Monroe's death. These letters are available in the Hedda Hopper Papers at the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences in Beverly Hills, California.

[32] A female reader of *Time* expresses a similar sentiment in response to the magazine's tribute to Monroe after her death: "Such venom, such malignity, such vindictiveness, such cold-blooded malevolence must, indeed, have curdled the blood of the author of 'The Only Blonde in the World'" (Corder 3).

[33] Recent works explore the intimacy with fans demonstrated in spectacles of collective mourning. On Princess Diana's death, see for example Adrian Kear's and Deborah Steinberg's collection *Mourning Diana* and Tony Walters's edited collection *The Mourning for Diana*. On Michael Jackson's death, see Diana York Blaine's essay.

Writers often reassessed the contradictions inherent in her star persona, trying to place blame for her alleged suicide. **"**When you are alone and unhappy," Hedda Hopper remarks, "all these incidents could creep into your brain and you might say to yourself, 'what's the use? Nobody loves me. Perhaps I can never find happiness again'" ("Marilyn's" 8). Hopper also blames Monroe's fans for her death: "In a way we're all guilty. We built her up to the skies, we loved her, but left her lonely and afraid when she needed us most" ("Marilyn's" 8). Whereas Hopper draws on the details already established in iconic narratives about Monroe, Monroe's fans seem to have drawn a different conclusion from the same details.

Fans were able to reveal the extent of their emotional connection to Monroe after her death, not as "fanatics," but as people experiencing an emotional connection to another person. Many of these fans recalled details of Monroe's loneliness, unstable identity, and struggles to avoid exploitation both by lovers and by the studio—and concluded that she had been wronged by Hollywood. According to one fan, for example, "It's too bad Marilyn was so human as to have problems. All she meant to most people was money in the bank. Hollywood has no heart—just a big fat dollar sign. [. . .] I'm only sorry that I didn't get 'fired-up' enough sooner to let Marilyn know I was her friend" (Frazer 4).[34] A male fan scolds Hopper: "I hope you are pleased and proud now that you have a new scalp to hang from your belt along side those of your many other victims. It is hardly surprising that the movie industry is collapsing, when it still allows the lives of

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[34] Frazer's response is a typical response to the tragic death of a star, and it is a familiar theme in movies about Hollywood (for example, *A Star is Born*, *What Price Hollywood*, or, more recently, *Birdman*). This demonstrates how perfectly Monroe's narrative intersects with so many star narratives, and hints at the wide applicability of the method in this study. (Frazer's gender is undisclosed.)

talented people to be ruined by gossips and common scolds. I trust you sleep well at night" (Hoffman).[35] While fans only knew of Monroe through films and publicity, they felt compelled to defend her from the very outlets that made her accessible to them.

Although fans were quick to defend Monroe, they admitted that they still didn't know the "real" Monroe. In fact, fans recognized that reports about her were contradictory. A female fan's letter to *Life* magazine after Monroe's death summarizes the contradictions in her persona: "Marilyn Monroe projected the image of a real human being, not just a tinselly imitation. Judging from her movies, I liked her, but newspaper reports made me wonder. But reading her own thoughts and opinions in LIFE substantiated the original impression" (Miller 19). This fan attests to the confusion between the "real human being," newspaper reports, Monroe's own words in magazine reports, and Monroe's film performances—and chooses to believe that Monroe the person was more charming than her film characters. This fan, in other words, was drawn to an image of authenticity Monroe "projected."

If the proliferating Monroes confused Monroe's contemporaries, it is little wonder that Garbus's recent documentary cannot locate a "real" Monroe behind half a century of noise. The very inability to locate a "real" star is part of the basis for stardom, as it is how an icon is constructed. An icon, simplified to be instantly recognizable, begs for more information, more access, more speculation about what happens in the star's private life. The iconic narrative told about Monroe contained just enough contradictions to warrant further discussion, and, because that discussion most frequently resulted in sympathizing with her, made Monroe a star. Combined with her iconic images, which

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[35] Hopper's papers at the Margaret Herrick Library contain eighteen other letters criticizing Hopper for the way she reported on Monroe's death.

were perhaps more provocative because they were alternately overtly seductive, jovial, and enigmatic, Monroe came to represent a number of the most important issues of the day. As one letter writer admitted, "As for me, I liked Marilyn Monroe. I understood her as well as anyone could who didn't actually know her, and I feel a great personal loss" (Frazer 4). This fan understood her because the stories told about her drew on common cultural tropes, and so easily seemed to resolve, if only momentarily, the contradictions of postwar life. As the following chapters will show, fans understood that Monroe, more than a simplified image of sex and glamour, was a touchstone in debates about marriage, gender roles, sexuality, and censorship.

Chapter 3.
"Mrs. America": Marilyn Monroe and Concerns about Marriage

In close succession, Monroe starred in four films specifically about marriage:
December 1952's *We're Not Married*, February 1953's *Niagara*, August 1953's
Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, and November 1953's *How to Marry a Millionaire*. Although
these films end by reaffirming the universal necessity of marriage, they also dramatize
common marital problems at the same time as they draw on Monroe's off-screen identity;
as Monroe was supposed to have said in a 1951 *Photoplay* article, "Let's be honest. A
girl's Number One dream is to be ideally married" ("Make" 92). Monroe, as a single
woman in Hollywood during a time in which most Americans were either married or
seeking marriage, indexed the period's concerns about and attitudes toward marriage. Her
film roles in particular engaged with the advice of family life educators, a cultural context
that the first section of this chapter discusses.[1] Within a year's time, Monroe's roles in
these marriage films changed: her characters initially suggested a realistic understanding
of the problems associated with marriage. Subsequently, they demonstrated a practical
approach to achieving financial security within marriage, and finally they valorized
romance and female passivity. If all of these films, moreover, mock the pervasive marital
advice of the day, how they do so demonstrates differing attitudes toward the postwar
period's restrictive gender roles. The films increasingly valorize marriage and strict
gender roles. This shift coincides with Monroe's increasingly submissive roles, which
transformed her persona from assertive to passive, from calculating to ditzy, and

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[1] Monroe had been married to James Dougherty from 1942 to 1946, but most fans did not
know about this marriage until he published "Marilyn Monroe was My Wife" in
Photoplay in March 1953 (after *Niagara* was released, but before *Blondes* and
Millionaire).

established the characteristics that would carry over into Monroe's subsequent film roles.

Family Life Educators

Monroe's roles in many of her early films as wife or eager bride functioned as an index not just to the proliferation of marriage in the decade after the war but also to the cultural anxiety surrounding unmarried individuals in the 1950s.[2] Typical of much commentary of the period, sociologists Judson Landis and Mary Landis, in *Building a Successful Marriage* (1948), observe: "In our society marriage is not as inevitable for an individual as death, but it runs a close second" (36).[3] As Elaine Tyler May notes, "96.4 percent of the women and 94.1 percent of the men" who "came of age during and after World War II" would wed in their lifetime (23). This translates to a drop in the percentage of single adults over the decade from 23 percent in 1950 to 21 percent in 1960 (Harvey 69). Moreover, most Americans married young; the median marriage age in the 1950s "dropped from 24.3 to 22.6 for men, and from 21.5 to 20.4 for women" (Harvey 69). The drop in the marriage ages often resulted in panic for unmarried women; according to a four-part series in *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1954 entitled "How to be Marriageable," "By their 30th birthday 82 per cent of all American women are married.

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[2] Monroe played many single, sexy secretary bit parts in her early career (see chapter four for a brief discussion of these parts). I am focusing here on her first leading roles, with the exception of *Don't Bother to Knock* (1952), which is not explicitly about marriage. Much of the anxiety surrounding unmarried individuals was related to the homosexual panic that accompanied McCarthyism; see Robert Corber. *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* may in some ways reflect the anxiety about homosexuality: critics have discussed the homoerotics of the disinterested Olympic swim team (see Rushing) and Lois Banner has described Dorothy as a "butch partner" for Lorelei. These areas are ripe for investigation, but they are beyond the scope of this chapter.
[3] Even Margaret Mead recognizes that "the only truly acceptable pattern in American life is marriage, and both husband and wife are supposed to share its pleasures and its burdens. Bachelors and spinsters are both disapproved of and discriminated against" (27). See also Burgess and Wallin, 218.

The woman of 30 who is unmarried has only about one chance in five of finding a mate. Fifty per cent of American women who marry are married by their 22nd birthday" ("How" 46).

For couples in the postwar period, the purpose of marriage also changed from conferring status to providing companionship. Sociologists Paul Burgess and Ernest Wallin explain that the pre-World War II status concept of marriage, in which family members arranged many marriages and divorce was rare, "made mate selection relatively easy. Young people had only to marry within their social set, religion, and ethnic group to guarantee a satisfactory union" because marital satisfaction did not depend on the spouses' personal relationship (28). In contrast, sociologist Paul Landis described "two family philosophies"—"the one rooted in the historic tradition which strongly emphasizes the *dutiful* or *institutional* aspects of family life; the other arises from contemporary individualism, which emphasizes the *romantic* and *companionship* aspects of marriage and family" (151, emphasis in original). Although gender roles under the companionate model were sharply distinct, both parties expected "a reciprocal deep friendship" from their marriages (Burgess and Locke 319). [4]

Because the companionate ideal emphasized romantic love, it was believed to be partly responsible for the increasing number of divorces (around 25%) in the postwar period (up from around 20% in the 1930s and 1940s). Commentators feared that couples divorced when they felt any waning of romance. [5] "As soon as the idea that love should be

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[4] Ernest Burgess and Harvey Locke first identified this shift in their 1945 book, *The Family: From Institution to Companionship*; this book was reprinted in 1950. See also Burgoyne.

[5] Some postwar commentators were more extreme in their estimates of the divorce rate, which exacerbated the panic regarding marriage. For example, in 1953, Lewis Montaigne

the central reason for marriage, and companionship its basic goal, was first raised,"

Stephanie Coontz explains, "observers of the day warned that the . . . very features that

promised to make marriage such a unique and treasured personal relationship opened the

way for it to become an optional and fragile one" (5).

Anxious Americans turned to a group of advisors who capitalized on the fear of

being "abnormal" or of "failing" at marriage. Those who built a career from offering

marital advice, including psychologists, sociologists, and marriage counselors (as well as

university professors), offered a two-pronged approach to the difficulties immature

spouses faced: carefully prepare future couples for marriage, but, if they are already

married, offer extensive guidance on how to negotiate common marital problems. As

sociologist E.E. LeMasters explains, "Parents, and young people themselves, have

increasingly felt the need for outside help in thinking about courtship dilemmas and

preparation for marriage. To provide this help, high school and college courses have been

organized, and a new group of specialists, known as 'family life educators,' has emerged"

(3).[6]

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said that three out of five couples divorced (87). The soaring divorce rate in the 1950s
reflects a similar pattern in the 1920s. In *Great Expectations*, Elaine Tyler May notes that
the rising divorce rate in the 1920s (a 2000% increase) was accompanied by an increase
in the number of marriages, and reflected the increasing expectation that marriage would
provide personal fulfillment. "The marriage crisis was relegated to textbooks during the
1950s," David Shumway explains, but became headline-grabbing in the 1970s, when the
divorce rate of 50 percent threatened to make marriage a short-term arrangement, and
resulted in an emphasis on psychoanalysis as a possible corrective (135).
[6] On experts in the postwar period, see Elaine May, *Homeward Bound*, 29-32. Also see
Terence Ball, who analyzes the relationship between the social sciences and the
government that developed in the postwar period. Peter Biskind suggests that postwar
culture "valued experts, but experts who would join the team and play ball;" in other
words, experts in line with the Cold War consensus (54).

Marriage preparation courses had been taught in colleges since the 1930s, but in the 1950s, they also entered the high school curriculum (Celello 88). According to sociologist Harold Christensen, whose manual was published in 1950 and reprinted in 1958, "seven hundred colleges and thousands of high schools offe[r] special units and courses dealing with preparation for marriage" (4). Between 1945 and 1954, LeMasters tallies 1,031 research studies on marriage, courtship, and the family, the results of which had to be reported to the general public in a manner that would help them form their own successful marriages (13). Instructional marriage manuals for use in classrooms (with titles like *How to Prepare for Marriage, Marriage Analysis: Foundations for Successful Family Life*, *Modern Pattern for Marriage*, *Modern Courtship and Marriage, Your Marriage, Marriage for Moderns*, and *American Marriage: A Way of Life*) proliferated during this period.[7] Marriage advisors also often wrote both regular columns and special features for national women's magazines.[8]

These commentators insisted that happy marriages required work. As marriage counselor and Professor of Family Life Education Oliver Butterfield succinctly put it, "Nearly anyone can fall in love, but to stay in love with someone for all time demands more planning and intelligence than many people seem to possess" (3).[9] The "working at

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[7] One of these manuals, Bowman's *Marriage for Moderns*, was made into an educational film, *This Charming Couple* (1950). The film dramatizes in a more blatant manner than Hollywood fare the importance of choosing the right mate.

[8] Regular marriage columns include: "The Companion Marriage Clinic" in *Woman's Home Companion* beginning in the mid-1940s, "Making Marriage Work" in *Ladies' Home Journal* starting in December 1947, "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" also in *Ladies' Home Journal* beginning in January 1953, "Why Marriages Fail" in *McCall's* in 1953 and 1954, and "Marriage is a Private Affair" in *McCall's* in the late 1950s (see Celello 92-3).

[9] Duvall and Hill call choosing a mate out of love "folly" (42), and Christensen insists that ideas of "the 'soul-mate' and 'love at first sight'" are "immature" (224, 252).

marriage formula," according to Kristin Celello, implied that "any married person who aspired to have a successful marriage could do so by trying hard enough" (8). Moreover, Celello explains, "Conceiving of marriage as work was a means of injecting realism into an institution that Americans increasingly looked to as a primary source of personal happiness. If experts could not altogether prevent Americans from romanticizing marriage, they could at least temper their enthusiasm with a more pragmatic approach to the marital relationship" (40). Advisors encouraged couples to determine compatibility prior to marriage (often using tests provided by their books) and, when married, to "work" to resolve problems related to careers, children, sex, money, in-laws, and religion.

Although marriage preparation courses addressed both men and women, the majority of advice outside of these courses targeted women, for whom, it was assumed, marriage would be a career.[10] Thus, women were expected to, as the advisors put it, "adjust" to the demands of both their husbands and marriage. "Adjustment," according to Landis, "refer[s] to a working arrangement which exists in marriage. This arrangement could be one which is mutually satisfactory or one which is satisfactory to one spouse but unsatisfactory to the other. The term adjustment is used, then, to refer to the state of accommodation which is achieved in different areas where conflict may exist in marriage" ("Time" 169). For women without other careers, or who were financially dependent on their spouses, "the state of accommodation" within their marriages depended on them—they were supposed to please their husbands. Most manuals contained several chapters on factors that influenced adjustment. LeMasters's *Modern*

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[10] For example, the article "How to be Marriageable" told women "it is to the advantage of society, as well as themselves, that they conquer . . . barriers [to getting married, such as being too picky] in order to live fully and happily and make their maximum contribution to our society" (46).

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Courtship and Marriage, for example, features these chapters: "Marital Adjustment,"

"Personality Factors in Marital Adjustment," "Family Background Factors and Marital

Adjustment," and "Social Class and Occupational Factors in Marital Adjustment."[11]

Just as commentators differed about the crucial aspects of a marital relationship—

for example, finances, sexual relations, in-laws, or the wife's career—popular films

emphasized varying difficulties associated with postwar marriages, a point Monroe's own

marriage films makes evident. Monroe's films served, in a way, as family life educators,

but they tended to challenge the advice of these educators or at least mock the idea of an

"intelligent" (rather than romantic) approach to marriage.

Good Reasons that *We're Not Married*

Monroe's first marriage film, the episodic *We're Not Married!* (1952), dramatizes

the fallout when five couples, all of whom think they have been married for thirty

months, learn that the justice of the peace married these couples before his authority to

perform marriages had gone into effect. The film peeks into each couple's married life

and uncovers the problems that plague their marriages, then shows their responses to the

news that they are not married.[12] One couple, the Melroses, happily split upon receiving

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[11] Other manuals with chapters on adjustment include Judson and Mary Landis's collection of essays entitled *Readings in Marriage and the Family*; Emily Mudd's and Aron Krich's collection of essays entitled *Man and Wife: A Source Book of Family Attitudes, Sexual Behavior and Marriage Counseling*; Oliver Butterfield's *Planning for Marriage*; Ruth Cavan's *American Marriage: A Way of Life*; Norman Himes's *Your Marriage*; and Harold Christensen's *Marriage Analysis: Foundations for Successful Family Life*. Many of these manuals also include the "Schedule for the Prediction of Marriage Adjustment" developed by Ernest Burgess, Leonard Cottrell, Paul Wallin, and Harvey Locke; see Himes, Christensen.

[12] While *We're Not Married* in some ways participates in the long tradition of what Stanley Cavell calls "the comedy of remarriage" (a tradition that dates back to Cecil B. DeMille's comedies *Don't Change Your Husband* [1919] and *Why Change Your Wife?* [1920]), the film does not feature the isolation of the couples or the playfulness Cavell

the news that they are not married because it prevents the gold-digging Mrs. Melrose (Zsa Zsa Gabor) from getting a hefty divorce settlement from her much older spouse (Louis Calhern). The other couples all remarry even though two of the four hardly seem happy. The Glad Gladwyns (Ginger Rogers and Fred Allen) are the hosts of the nation's most popular Mr. and Mrs. morning radio program, yet they have nothing to say to each other at home and they argue at the office. While the two initially rejoice that they can escape their loveless marriage, their producer quickly informs them that without marriage, there's no show, so they decide to remarry. The Woodruffs, similarly, stay together, despite Mr. Woodruff's (Paul Douglas) sexually promiscuous past, which haunts his wife (Eve Arden) because it makes it impossible for him to remember what experiences he had with her. He therefore avoids reminiscing, rendering their home life silent. However, he burns the letter saying they aren't married, either because he doesn't want the substantial bar bills that accompany the playboy lifestyle or because he wants the thrill of knowing he's living with a woman to whom he isn't married. The Fishers (Eddie Bracken and Mitzi Gaynor) find out, on the same day the husband deploys for military service, that they aren't legally married and that they are expecting, so they eagerly remarry despite a number of bureaucratic obstacles.

Annabel (Monroe) and Jeff Norris (David Wayne) also happily remarry but must overcome a number of difficulties before they can do so. In confronting these difficulties, the film indexes debates about women's role in marriage. Annabel is competing for the pageant title of Mrs. America, which frequently takes her away from homemaking and

associates with these comedies. Rather than rekindling their romances, these couples jump through bureaucratic hoops to obtain legal rights. The couples in *We're Not Married* frequently bicker, and the film's attitude toward marriage is often cynical.

caring for her infant. The episode doesn't indicate how the couple earns money, but Jeff

is never depicted as the breadwinner; instead, he cooks, cleans, and feeds the baby. When

Annabel is home, it is only to change clothes and do her hair and makeup to prepare for a

public appearance. Although Annabel capitalizes on her hyper-feminine, highly

sexualized appearance, her focus and determination, even if in the pursuit of a pageant

title, suggest that Jeff is right to adopt the homemaker role as she strives for success

outside of the home.

The central joke of the Norrises' episode is that Jeff, whom the justice of the

peace referred to as a "jerk" because of his "foolish ideas about who was going to be boss

in the house," *is* the boss of the house in terms of childcare, cooking, cleaning, and

hanging diapers. Jeff wears an emasculating apron, and the mailman derides him:

"Where's Mrs. Norris, at the office?" Although this joke suggests that it isn't Jeff's place

to care for his child, the film underscores his competence in doing so.[13] By making Jeff a

competent and mostly willing caregiver, the episode challenges the popular advice that,

instead of working outside the home, wives should focus on families. Although Duvall

and Hill admit that "women can work outside the home and carry on their functions as

wives and mothers as well, with no serious damage to their husbands' happiness, their

children's welfare, or their own adjustment," they nevertheless advise women to be aware

of their responsibilities to their families and work outside the home only after the children

are grown (415, 418).[14] Landis and Landis, who studied college student dating, explain

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[13] Postwar marital advisors stressed the importance of children to "successful" marriages: "Nearly every married couple wants children," Christensen reminds his readers, "many people consider reproduction as the central or primary purpose of marriage" (449). See also 438 and Sonya Das, 5.

[14] See also Butterfield, 63; Adams, 23.

that marriage became more difficult in the postwar period because of women's new ambitions: "wives who wholeheartedly accepted their role as passive and who entered marriage with no other expectation" were more suited to marriage than active, ambitious wives (284).

Annabel is an active and ambitious wife; this role capitalizes on Monroe's persona as an ambitious young star. Although winning the Mrs. America[15] title is not a career path (such as a nurse, teacher, or even administrative assistant) and will take Annabel away from the home for only a year, the film treats Annabel's pageant bid as though it were her job: to achieve success, she spends long hours making appearances and raising funds. But the episode also treats Annabel's ambition ambivalently. After Annabel wins the Mrs. Mississippi semifinals, a newspaper headline reports that Jeff is "happy but glad it's all over," but the next scene illustrates, as he cooks dinner and feeds the baby while Annabel prepares for the national competition, that the pageant life that took her out of the home is far from over. Even Jeff's attempts to end Annabel's pageant career by notifying the committee that she is ineligible for Mrs. Mississippi because she isn't in fact married don't deter Annabel. Presumably, Annabel isn't fit for the role of Mrs. America because Jeff is doing the job of Mrs. America. Not being married thus frees Annabel to pursue other goals. She squeals with delight at the prospect of entering the *Miss* Mississippi finals, which, as Jeff's fiancé, she wins. Jeff later happily bounces the child during the remarriage ceremony, demonstrating that he is willing to take on the unconventional role of caretaker in order to keep Annabel.

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[15] The press called Monroe "Mrs. America" when she married DiMaggio in 1954 (Meyers 155). "Mrs. America" also appeared in the 1953 burlesque film *Striporama*, indicating that Mrs. America was a sexualized figure during this period.

While *We're Not Married!* indicates that wives, with the support of their husbands, could work outside the home, the film's production documents reveal how out of step with conventional advice this scenario was. On one of the first drafts of the continuity script, in the margins of the scene in which Annabel and her manager discuss fundraising, is handwritten: "The fact that this is MRS, it's always tougher being married [sic]" (25). While the note directly refers to Annabel's difficulty procuring funds to support her pageant bid, the phrase "it's always tougher being married" applies to the overall tone of the film. Although women, prior to marriage, many experts suggested, might have been competent workers outside the home, as postwar wives they were expected to care for the house and children, which made it "tougher being married." And yet this episode insists that it is worthwhile for wives to pursue goals beyond homemaking.

In the original story for the film, entitled "If I Could Re-Marry," writers Jay Dratler and Gina Kaus explain the transition from informal unions occasioned by hitting the bride with a club and dragging her to a cave, to formal, legal marriages. They refer to the marriage license as "a kind of Good Housekeeping seal of approval"—a trivial badge that makes what would have been "a mere impromptu mating, without social sanction" into a socially approved relation, whether the two are suited to spend a life together or not (1-2). While the working title hopefully imagines "If I *Could* Re-Marry" (my emphasis), *We're Not Married!*, as evident in the title's exclamation point, cynically depicts the joy of discovering an easy out. Annabel was overjoyed when she learned she was not married, as being unmarried provided new opportunities for her, and to keep her, her husband had to accommodate her aspirations. By having the couples remarry, *We're Not*

Married! reinforces the idea that marriage is the appropriate channel for adult relationships, but the Norrises in particular attest to the necessity for both spouses to adjust to changing gender roles. Monroe, in her first marriage film, thus contradicts the advice of most postwar commentators when the film imagines the possibility of being a wife, a mother, and a woman who works outside of the home.

Niagara's Marital Nightmares

While commentators blamed popular films for fueling postwar couples' conception of passionate, romantic marriage, judging from the number of films with a dark perspective on marriage (for example, *Rear Window* [1954]) and films noirs of the period (such as *The Postman Always Rings Twice* [1946], *Strangers on a Train* [1951], or *99 River Street* [1953]), many American films also reflected the pitfalls of marriage. If *We're Not Married!* provides a hopeful outlook on postwar marriages, the same cannot be said for Monroe's next film, *Niagara* (1953), which represents marriage as the postwar American nightmare. Despite *Niagara*'s dark outlook on marriage, *Good Housekeeping* recommended the film, presumably as an example of how *not* to behave for a successful marriage (Harbert 19). As it unites sex appeal with marriage, *Niagara* directs its how-not-to advice at women, who, as commentators warned, could make or break their marriages through their degree of interest in sex. By comparing characters on opposite ends of the sexual spectrum, *Niagara* illuminates the noir-ish cast of the period's marital discourse. This how-not-to advice can also be read as an allegory for Monroe's developing star persona, making *Niagara* a pivotal moment in the way her sexuality was used in films and publicity.

Niagara follows George (Joseph Cotten) and Rose (Monroe) Loomis on a *second* honeymoon, and Ray (Casey Adams) and Polly (Jean Peters) Cutler on a delayed first honeymoon. Both couples are staying at the Rainbow Cabins in Niagara Falls. The Cutlers, a seemingly happy if somewhat dopey couple, serve as a foil for the dysfunctional Loomises. The Cutlers initially engage in typical sightseeing activities as a couple. Soon, Ray's boss, who is eager to welcome the winner of the company's best Shredded Wheat recipe contest, arranges for the Cutlers to accompany him and his wife on group excursions, removing any traces of romance from this honeymoon trip. Meanwhile, Rose arranges a rendezvous with her lover, during which they plot to throw George over the Falls, using his "battle fatigue" to make it look like suicide. After the moment when her lover was to have executed the plan, Rose assumes George is dead and asks Polly and Ray to accompany her to identify the body. When she sees that the body on the morgue table is not George but her lover, she faints and is hospitalized. No one knows George is alive or still at the Falls, until he, seeking Rose, finds Polly in the cabin George and Rose had formerly shared. When George reveals that he killed Rose's lover, Polly tries to convince him to turn himself in. Instead, George stalks and eventually strangles Rose in the town's historic bell tower. Subsequently, in order to escape authorities, George steals a boat without realizing Polly is on board. The boat runs out of gas, stranding the pair with the boat drifting toward the Falls. As the boat nears the edge, George pushes Polly to safety on a rock then careens to his death. The film concludes with Polly and Ray leaving the scene in each other's arms.

Heralded as an example of the noir style, *Niagara* features honeymoons rife with murder and intrigue, reflecting noir's preoccupation with the affiliation between sexual

desire and violence.[16] Drawing on many of the conventions associated with noir—

chiaroscuro lighting, oppressive framing, the extreme high-angle long shot, voice-over

narration, and unstable psyches—but featuring recurring images of bright yellow slickers

and the waterfall's rainbow, *Niagara* is a Technicolor noir, perhaps an apt combination

for a postwar film about postwar marriage.[17] Ideologically, noir represents, as Andrew

Dickos states, "American culture at odds with its most optimistic illusions"—and

marriage was certainly one of those illusions (xiv).[18] Noir depicts America's dark

underside, critics have suggested, because of anxieties engendered by World War II and

its aftermath. Psychopathic men represent maladjusted returning veterans and a postwar

masculinity crisis; femmes fatales represent female resistance to domesticity.[19]

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[16] Dominique Brégent-Heald cites *Niagara* as an example of the border noir, and Jennifer Peterson mentions the film as a Technicolor noir. Although Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward include *Niagara* in their *Film Noir: An Encyclopedic Reference to the American Style*. critics generally suggest the noir style was waning by the time *Niagara* was made. Spicer and Tuska both argue that the style peaked by 1952, and *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) is generally cited as the last noir of this "classical" period.

[17] Although James Naremore asserts that noirs are "stylistically heterogeneous" (168), critics agree on several aspects of the noir style. For catalogues of noir's most common stylistic elements, see Silver and Ward, 3; Naremore, 167; Janey Place and Lowell Peterson, 68; and Spicer, 4.

[18] See also Dimendberg and Tuska. The relationship between marriage and noir films has been addressed by a number of scholars, including Sylvia Harvey, whose article "Woman's Place: The Absent Family of Film Noir" has become the definitive statement on family in noir. See also Dyer ("Postscript") and Spicer for analyses that engage with Harvey. More recently, Phillipa Gates has noted how the female detective often becomes a wife by the end of what she calls "maritorious melodramas," and Thomas Renzi has discussed the surprising similarities between noirs and screwball comedies. These analyses, however, do not situate the marriages in these films within their cultural context and therefore miss the nuances that differentiate these troubled marriages from one another: for example, whether the marriages are doomed because of a nagging wife, rich in-laws, a career woman for a wife, and so on.

[19] On the postwar masculinity crisis, see Richard Maltby and Frank Krutnik. On femmes fatales and domesticity, see Molly Haskell, Julie Grossman, Spicer, and Jack Boozer.

While *Niagara*'s dark representation of marriage is in keeping with noir's challenges to the norms of postwar American society, it is also in step with much postwar marital discourse. Sociologist Henry Bowman, for example, echoed the fatalistic anxiety expressed in films noirs: "Any *type* [of marriage] can be made successful if the couple face and solve the special problems involved. This is not the same as saying that any marriage can be made successful. At times the *if* is practically insurmountable. There are individual marriages that are hopelessly doomed from the beginning" (171).

Popular magazines reflected Bowman's attitude. In the year *Niagara* was released, Samuel Grafton, whose monthly column for *Good Housekeeping* offered advice for "a Reasonably Happy Marriage," cautioned readers: "Almost any marriage is likely to run into its hour of terror" (March 1953, 44); "the American male has heard so much about woman's new freedom, her desire to express her individuality, etc., that he's a little scared of her" (April 1953, 46); and "about every marriage passes at least once through a kind of nightmare phase" (May 1953, 199).[20] February 1953's *Good Housekeeping* featured perhaps the most anxiety-ridden article of all, "How to Stay Married though Unhappy," by Reverend Fulton J. Sheen.[21] According to Sheen, even "when marriages sour and become either physical catastrophes or psychological nightmares; when the husband becomes unfaithful or the wife an alcoholic; when he becomes crude and cruel or she becomes nagging and jealous; when he stays out late or she becomes sloppy; when

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[20] See also *McCall's* eight-part series "Why Marriages Fail," which ended in November 1954.

[21] Reverend Sheen was a well-known figure in postwar America. In 1952, he won an Emmy for "Outstanding Television Personality." His television show, *Life is Worth Living*, claimed to be "sponsored by God," and had ratings nearly as high as *I Love Lucy*'s. Sheen also published several books and hosted *The Catholic Hour* radio show from 1930-1952.

he becomes 'unbearable' or she becomes 'impossible,'" couples have no reason to divorce (59). As in most marital discourse of the period, divorce was not a valid option because it would publicly indicate the couple's lack of dedication to American ideals. After all, "A man who marries a woman thinking he will divorce her when his mood changes," Sheen asserts, "is also capable of marrying her thinking that he might murder her" (116).[22]

Niagara's honeymoon resort setting underscores the film's underlying message about sex's role in getting a marriage off to the right start. As Karen Dubinsky notes, "Niagara Falls was where you went when you had your sexual 'papers,' a place that welcomed the only officially sanctioned form of sexual expression in Western culture— that which took place between two married heterosexuals" (13). But *Niagara* insists that simply having sexual papers is not enough to make a successful marriage. Rather, the film draws on anxieties about sexual adjustment that had been associated with the honeymoon for nearly a century. Since the Victorian honeymoon, according to Dubinsky, the "timid, fragile" woman has been contrasted with the virile and voracious husband (22). By the 1930s, this mindset only slightly shifted to the "recalcitrant, terrified bride" and "blundering" groom (Dubinsky 160). Although Alfred Kinsey reported that about 50 percent of women and 90 percent of men in the late 1940s and early 1950s were sexually experienced before their wedding nights, experts nevertheless continued to give advice as though the participants were sexually innocent, and to reinforce the notion that brides "possessed a vastly slower libido (desiring sex approximately half as often as men did,

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[22] The relationship between romance and murder is also highlighted in a *Saturday Evening Post* cartoon reprinted in *Building a Successful Marriage*. The cartoon features two boys leaving a noir film with the caption, "I shut my eyes during the kissing scene and make believe he's choking her" (Landis and Landis 41).

one said), were slower to climax, and more generally repressed than men" (Dubinsky 218).

The conventional understanding of the honeymoon as the first meeting of sexual opposites made Niagara Falls a terrifying, noir-ish setting even without the film's murder plot. In 1955, for example, psychiatrist Reginald Bennett characterized the honeymoon as an "ordeal," a "ghastly disappointment," and a "hopeless anxious fumbling effort." Imagining the combined effects of exhaustion, alcohol, and inexperience during the first sexual encounters of marriage, Bennett questioned whether marriages could survive the honeymoon ("Honeymooners").

Just as *Niagara*'s setting implies that the honeymoon can be terrifying, Monroe as a femme fatale implies that sex can have a dark side. Because she had attracted so much attention playing secretaries and girlfriends, Twentieth Century-Fox placed Monroe in larger roles that capitalized on her sex appeal at the same time as they reflected the nation's concern over its 25% divorce rate. The manipulative murderess, Rose Loomis, differs greatly from the somewhat naïve, always good-natured roles that form the rest of Monroe's oeuvre. Nevertheless, this film most clearly inflected a debate that would persist throughout Monroe's life and career, a debate Jon Whitcomb named in December 1960's story on Monroe entitled "The Sex Symbol Versus the Good Wife." Was an openly sexual woman always a threat, as suggested by films noirs?

Monroe's first roles and her extra-filmic publicity represented her as extremely sexual, but hinted that her sex appeal was not threatening. In her earliest film roles, she was little more than a body to look at, no real threat to the wives and girlfriends either on the screen or in the audience. Her off-screen publicity confirmed this. One of the earliest

fan magazine profiles of Monroe, 1951's "Pin Up #2," insisted on Monroe's chaste

private life. According to the article, Monroe sleeps in "neither nightgown nor pajamas,"

but "she snubs" the "Hollywood wolves" (23). Thus, despite her early film roles as a

"kept" woman, the star herself knows that "to settle for too little can lead to a wrong

marriage, to promiscuousness, to self-deceit. I've managed to avoid this danger because

my work and other interests keep me mentally and physically occupied" (Monroe,

"Temptations" 44).

Monroe's ability to make her sex appeal nonthreatening became evident when she

admitted to posing nude. Rather than elicit censure, Monroe's nudity was normalized;

Life reprinted the nude photo (albeit in a small insert) in its April 7, 1952 issue, justifying

the pose as the result of a job Monroe took to pay her bills.[23] Later in 1952, *Time* added

Monroe's innocent verbal entendre to her persona, establishing three of her famous

"Monroeisms:" "Asked if she really had nothing on in the photograph, Marilyn, her blue

eyes wide, purred: 'I had the radio on,'" "in bed, she claims, she wears 'only Chanel No.

5,' and she avoids excessive sun bathing because 'I like to feel blonde all over.'"

Nevertheless, Twentieth-Century Fox studio head Darryl F. Zanuck, a bit

infamous for his distaste for Monroe, saw Monroe's sexuality as an indication that she

was a cheap blonde. Despite the public interest in her, he had been reluctant to sign

Monroe and then to re-sign her a few years later because he thought of her as one in a

long line of "casting couch" starlets. Although Monroe's publicity insisted that she was

reserved and avoided the sexual exploits associated with Hollywood, Zanuck made her

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[23] The same basic story, with praise for Monroe's honesty, was repeated in the fan
magazines. See Hedda Hopper, "Marilyn Monroe Tells the Truth to Hedda Hopper," 36,
85; and Sheilah Graham, "Why Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," 97. For more on Monroe's
publicity, see chapter two, this volume.

first starring role *Don't Bother to Knock* (1952), in which she played a psychotic babysitter, a role that associated her attractiveness with insanity.

The way *Niagara*'s initial story treatment describes Rose is key to understanding how casting Monroe reflects Zanuck's distaste for her. Rose is "a handsome, sexy bitch in her late and desperate twenties. She is a woman who won't accept the hand life has dealt her" (Brackett, "Treatment"). Seeking an actress who fit this description, Zanuck landed on Monroe, who, as luck had it, was also less expensive than other actresses and had generated box office returns for her other films (Brackett, *Niagara*).[24] About his casting decision, Zanuck wrote, "For [George's] wife, Rose, I definitely want to use MM." He begrudgingly admitted, "Her performance in DON'T BOTHER TO KNOCK with Widmark brands her, curiously enough, as one of the best young dramatic actresses to have come up recently." He also expressed his personal opinion of her by concluding, "she is just ideal for the role of this slut" (Zanuck). Twentieth Century Fox saw Monroe as suited to play a "slut" and "bitch."

Niagara's poster alludes to a threatening female sexuality in the tagline, "Marilyn Monroe and *Niagara*: a raging torrent of emotion that even nature can't control!" By italicizing *Niagara*, the poster boasts that the film will illustrate the unbridled passion of Monroe's sexuality. That unbridled passion is directly aligned with the Falls themselves, which the poster depicts as streaming from Monroe's lounging body. For centuries, according to Dubinsky, travelers have described the Falls "moan[ing]" while "the 'clinging curves' of water 'embrace' the islands, and water 'writhes,' 'gyrates,' and 'caresses the shore'" (43). *Niagara*'s poster thereby promises a sexual encounter with

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[24] Monroe was on a weekly salary and would earn around $10,500 for the film.

Monroe. At the same time, by combining the honeymoon resort setting and an image of aggressive female sexuality, the poster suggests that the film will address what many postwar commentators treated as a terrifying problem affecting postwar marriages: sexual incompatibility.

Commentators underscored that sexual incompatibility was one of the most common problems leading to marital terror. Many of the most popular marital advice books had titles that emphasized sex's role in marital success, such as G. Lombard Kelly's *Sexual Feeling in Married Men and Women* and Hannah and Abraham Stone's *A Marriage Manual: A Practical Guidebook to Sex and Marriage*. In the foreword to Butterfield's 1953 book *Sexual Harmony in Marriage*, gynecologist Nadina Kavinoky writes: "the damage that can be done to individuals through an unsatisfactory sexual adjustment is recognized by physicians and psychiatrists; it is attested by the high divorce rate and the many lurid newspaper stories of marital strife and failure" (Butterfield ix-x).[25]

Marital advice books frequently stressed that wives bore responsibility for most of the couple's sexual adjustment, but they gave these wives conflicting advice. If wives were sexually experienced and lustful, they would have to learn to control themselves; if they were disinterested in sex, as "normal" women were supposed to be, and found it difficult to achieve orgasm, they would have to work to keep their husbands satisfied and interested in the relationship. Postwar commentators considered the wife's restraint one of the biggest problems plaguing the sexual relationship. Psychologist and marriage counselor Clifford Adams warns that "many married people, particularly wives, suffer

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[25] See also Levine 20 and Christensen 172.

from repression," and that "sexual maladjustment is still a problem for one-third of" well-educated married couples.[26] Male desire differs from female sexual desire, according to Bowman, because sexual arousal "has been trained out of [females]. It has been so overlaid with inhibitions that it cannot find expression" (341). Bowman cites a woman who "for two years after the wedding cried each time intercourse occurred because early in life she had been taught that only 'bad' women were passionate" (343).[27] The restraint encouraged before marriage could not persist into married life, Adams warns, because "when [orgasms are] absent or deficient, it" affects the couple's entire life, "show[ing] up first and most seriously in lack of agreement on showing affection. In descending order, other frequent disagreements relate to table manners, philosophy of life, conventionality, and matters of recreation" (203).[28]

At the same time, however, women were advised not to express too much interest in sex. Those wives who had taken advantage of the period's shifting mores and engaged in premarital sex were in danger of placing too great a sexual burden on their husbands. Sexually experienced wives, according to gynecologist Lena Levine, "having been freed from taboos and superstitions about sex, desire intercourse more frequently, at times even more often than their husbands" (16). Bowman likewise warned: "It is true that some women do find physical satisfaction in their premarital sexual relations. Then their desire

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[26] Clifford Adams, *Preparing for Marriage*, 52, 202.
[27] For a secondary summary of this issue, see May, 126.
[28] Adams provides just one voice in the extensive chorus on female frigidity in the postwar period, a topic that will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

for repetition is aroused and there is created a problem of either promiscuity or control, which could have been avoided" (344).[29]

From her first appearance on screen, Rose demonstrates the out-of-control female sexuality that commentators warned would plague wives who had premarital sex. We first meet Rose smoking in bed. With her naked shoulders visible and her hand fluttering beneath the sheet, Rose's implicitly masturbatory behavior clearly threatens "healthy" marital sexuality.[30] Rose has what postwar marriage advisors called a "problem of . . . promiscuity" (Bowman 344). George tells Polly, "She's a tramp. I'll tell you now so you don't have to ask." She wears a "dress cut down so low in front," according to George, that "you can see her kneecaps." When George recognizes, immediately after she's gotten out of bed with him, that Rose is getting dressed to meet another man, he interrogates her, but she tells him she's meeting "just anybody handy, as long as he's a *man*."

Rose's sex appeal attracted George to her, but she destroyed his life. Until George met Rose, he was happy as a sheep rancher, but Rose, rejecting domesticity, grew "bored with the ranch" and insisted on visiting "bars and nightclubs." While in earlier versions of the script Rose murders George for money, in the film, she acts only out of malice and

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[29] Others also noted the period's changing sexual mores and their impact on marriage; see Butterfield, *Sexual Harmony* and Kelly, *Sexual Feeling*.

[30] Both Rose's sexuality and her nudity push the limits of the Hollywood Production Code. Although the Production Code limited explicit portrayal of sexually suggestive material—"excessive and lustful kissing, lustful embraces, suggestive postures and gestures are not to be shown" (Association 4)—and forbade "nudity in fact or in silhouette, or any licentious notice thereof by other characters in the pictures" (Association 5), it is apparent that Rose is naked beneath the white sheet that covers her to mid-chest, and her nudity is later suggested in the shower. The Production Code was adopted in 1930, but not enforced until 1934, in response to complaints about the morality of movies. It remained in effect until the ratings system was implemented in 1968, but its power had already begun eroding by 1953. See Thomas Doherty, Lea Jacobs, and Leonard Leff and Jerold Simmons.

a desire for sexual gratification. As Richard Sokolove points out in his analysis of the film for Zanuck, "All that Rose wants, apparently, is her physical freedom, not necessarily her <u>legal</u> freedom, which, incidentally, she could also get by divorce. And her physical freedom she could readily have simply by running out on Loomis" (8).[31] Merrill Schleier insists that throughout the film "Rose is [. . .] equated with trash," both in terms of being "lower class" and in the slovenliness indicated by the couple's messy cabin and Rose's spilling out the contents of her purse as she runs from George (34). Much of Rose's trashiness derives from her interest in sexual gratification above all else, and this interest disorders George's life by extension. George is thus unable to combat his battle fatigue and "get organized" not because of the ordeals of war, but because of the havoc the excessively sexual Rose brings to domestic life.

In contrast, Polly, who is conservative and almost girlish, struggles to keep her husband interested in her sexually. We meet the Cutlers as they cross the border. When they announce to the Customs officer that they are on their honeymoon, Ray earnestly adds that he plans to "catch up on [his] reading." Polly, however, expresses her hope to rekindle their sexual relationship when she reminds Ray, "Delayed or not, we agreed to treat it like a regular one, didn't we?" Here, Polly coyly teases Ray, indicating that their honeymoon should not be accompanied by the typical anxieties about sexual initiation, saying, "Well, it should be better. I've got my union card now." The fact that Polly reminds Ray of the purpose of their trip suggests that she takes responsibility for correcting their sexual failures. As Sokolove wrote, Ray's "interest may have become

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[31] In the September 1951 version of the script, Rose's motivation is George's trust fund (16-17), and in the final shooting script, Rose's motivation is the $400 a month she could get from George's sheep ranch (47), but both motivations are omitted from the film.

centered more on his business than on Polly." Echoing marital advisors who made women responsible for marital sexual adjustment, Sokolove explained that, "because she wants to correct it before it's too late, [Polly] has taken the initiative in promoting this holiday, this 'delayed honeymoon.' After all, they have been married for three years, and this development in their relationship is quite possible, and highly probable" (64-5).

To prevent audiences from thinking that the Cutlers' sex life is failing because of Ray's disinterest, Ray frequently compares the bobby-socked and ponytailed Polly to the scantily clad Rose. Ray stares at Rose lustfully several times in the film's opening scenes, and when he watches Rose walk away, he nudges Polly and says, "Hey . . . get out the firehose." Noting Rose's low cut dress, he asks Polly, "Why don't you ever get a dress like that?" (to which she responds, "For a dress like that, you've gotta start laying plans when you're about thirteen"). Despite Ray's efforts to persuade Polly to be sexier, she represses the sexual desire she had alluded to when she mentioned her "union card."

The contrast between Rose and Polly highlights the impossible situation many postwar wives found themselves in: wives should be sexy, but "nice girls" are not interested in sex.[32] When Polly sunbathes in a somewhat modest bikini, Ray prods her to be more sexy, begging her to "inhale" and let him photograph a "profile," not of her face but of her bust. Although Polly turns to her side, she does so begrudgingly and uncomfortably. But before Ray can snap the photo, Rose's shadow falls over Polly. This moment can be interpreted in two contradictory ways, both of which reflect advice for postwar wives. Rose's shadow warns Polly that she is failing to arouse Ray (in the way that the more sexy Rose does), and the shadow also reminds Polly that excessively sexual

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[32] Chapter four, this volume, discusses sexual expectations for women in more detail.

wives are dangerous. By interrupting Polly's posing, Rose, for bettor or worse, prevents Polly from being more overtly sexual.

Rose's shadow over Polly also evokes the shadowy landscapes typical of noir films, and, in so doing, suggests that Polly is trapped in a noir world. This message is reinforced later in the film, when, because the Cutlers have moved into the Loomises' cabin, Polly naps in the same bed where Rose had slept naked. But Rose had reveled in the sunlight on her bare shoulders, while Polly has closed the blinds and climbed into bed fully dressed (Figure 3.1). Although the shadow of the blinds falls over both women, Rose seems to embrace the shadows and shafts of light, while Polly seems disturbed by them. And the scene becomes extremely disturbing, as Polly, lying in the dark, shadowy room, encounters George, whom she thought was dead, looking for Rose. While Rose and George are noir characters facing imminent threats, Polly also inhabits an uncertain world, threatened by George and by the pressures to save her marriage.

Figure 3.1. Rose and Polly compared in bed. From *Niagara*.

Polly proves capable of saving her marriage throughout the film. What's more, Polly is such a capable wife that she often seems to be a substitute wife for George. George and Polly form, according to Schleier, "a temporary couple" in several scenes—

she tenderly bandages his wounded hand in one scene, and George saves her from falling off a rickety staircase. As Schleier points out, the glimpses of a relationship between Polly and George "demonstrat[e] what might have been if George had selected the right woman" (39). Although George is the source of much of the terror Polly experiences, he also catalyzes some of Polly's most "wifely" behaviors.

Polly's relationship with George also more subtly suggests she may have chosen the wrong man. The only scenes in which Polly is intimate with a man occur with George. Near the beginning of the film, Ray and Polly tentatively kiss on the Maid of the Mist. But their peck lacks passion, especially when contrasted with the scene in which, in order to avoid attention after Polly has nearly fallen over the railing, George embraces her for an extended period while sightseers pass. Similarly, the only time Polly is in bed in the film, George is also present. When Polly tells Ray a man was in her room, he doesn't believe her. If we look beyond the obvious—that by telling her she just had a bad dream, he disregards Polly's claims—Ray's skepticism signals how difficult it is for him to imagine Polly as a sexual woman. George, on the other hand, repeatedly places Polly in sexually charged positions, suggesting that he recognizes her sexual potential.

The film also reminds us, however, that women must keep their sexuality in check. George strangles Rose in the bell tower at least partly because her out-of-control sexuality had led her to plot murder. When the tower bells play "Kiss," which was to be the sign that Rose's lover had killed George, this site forces Rose to recall her scheming. However, George must also contemplate his crimes, for when he descends he finds that he is locked in the tower with Rose's corpse. When he finds Rose's lipstick on the stairs, tears well in his eyes, suggesting that what had angered him about Rose—the way she

accentuated her beauty and her sexuality—had also drawn him to her. As George leans

over Rose's lifeless body, he says, "I loved you Rose, you know that." Nevertheless, his

love could not overpower the web of lies and murders set in motion by Rose's sexually

motivated scheming.

Rose ends up dead as a result of being an unfit wife—too aggressively sexual, too

manipulative—and serves as a warning to Polly. George seems to caution Polly not to

emulate Rose's sexuality. When he tries to escape in a stolen boat, he inadvertently takes

Polly along. The boat runs out of gas and, as the situation appears increasingly dire as the

current draws the boat toward the Falls, Polly unbuttons her skirt and throws it overboard,

ostensibly to swim to safety. Because Polly's undressing seems unmotivated, its

importance is more figurative than literal. Figuratively, Polly is finally loosening up,

tearing off her clothes around a man. George grabs her arm, warning, "You can't. You'll

be torn to pieces." When George prevents Polly from undressing further, he seems to

indicate that if she succumbs to sexual passion, it will destroy her, just as it has destroyed

him and Rose. Although Ray encourages Polly to be more sexy, she is more in line with

conventional wisdom, which encouraged wives to be willing sexual partners in private,

but respectable and modest in public.

In dramatizing the impossible balance postwar wives were asked to strike

between having "normal" sex drives and not being dangerously sexual, the film makes

marriage itself noir-ish. As Charles Derry notes, "Polly's reunion with her goonish

husband is [. . .] quite disturbing" (73). Viewers suspect Polly is capable of being more

than Mrs. Shredded Wheat, so her life post-Niagara Falls is likely to resemble the noir

experience described in magazines and marriage manuals—a continual struggle, one

most likely to succeed if she submits to her dull, "well-adjusted" spouse. The real nightmare marriage is Ray's and Polly's because Polly is in an impossible situation, in that she must (as Ray tells her) emulate Rose, the woman who destroys her marriage, her husband, her lover, and ultimately, herself. When Polly tries to emulate Rose, however, George warns her not to do so. In this way, the film exposes what is wrong with the normal marriage and the advice aimed at maintaining its normality. If boredom with the life she was supposed to accommodate after marriage drove Rose to her fatal machinations, how can Polly save her marriage by being more like Rose, without also endangering it?

The star personae of the two female stars further complicate the film's conflicted position on female sexuality. Outside of *Niagara,* Peters made a career of playing sexy or exotic women, including Zapata's (Marlon Brando) wife in *Viva Zapata* (1952) and a female pirate captain in *Anne of the Indies* (1951). Immediately after *Niagara*, Peters played a prostitute in *Pickup on South Street* (1953), a murderess in *A Blueprint for Murder* (1953), and a hard-living supermodel in *Vicki* (1953). In addition, Peters was the longtime mistress and subsequent wife of Howard Hughes.[33] Peters's developing screen persona as a sultry woman colors Polly's role in that audiences would have suspected, just as George did, that there was a sexual woman beneath Polly's demure surface.

Just as *Niagara* mutes the sex appeal associated with Peters's persona, so the sex appeal of Monroe's developing persona, after *Niagara*, would also be muted. Monroe was developing a persona as a sexy woman, but her persona was made non-threatening and naïve by the "dumb blonde" image that shaped Monroe's early career. Rose,

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[33] Peters and Hughes met in 1947, at which time there were rumors of marriage, but did not wed until 1957, after Peters had married and divorced another man.

however, is an aggressively sexual and therefore threatening woman. Because Monroe's persona inflects Rose, her performance as a femme fatale is not convincing.

Many feminist scholars assert that femmes fatales are only "evil" from the male's perspective. "It is the leading female's commitment to fulfilling her own desires, whatever they may be (sexual, capitalist, maternal), at any cost," argues Julie Grossman, "that makes her the cynosure, the compelling point of interest for men and women. Film noir movies work to identify their tough women as victims whose strength, perverse by conventional standards, keeps them from submitting to the gendered social institutions that oppress them" (3).[34] Monroe's performance doesn't seem to fit into this mold—she doesn't seem particularly strong, the audience is not led to identify with her, and her motives are obtuse—her characteristics as a femme fatale are limited to her excessive sexuality. Because that role isn't convincing, Monroe's stint at the femme fatale type was easily ended. When George murders Rose, he also figuratively murders the assertive, manipulative aspect of Monroe's persona.

Audiences soon voiced concerns that Monroe was not appropriate for representing the dark side of marriage or female sexuality. Many women worried that Monroe, who was already associated with sex, would, if she continued in these kinds of roles, make sex, including marital sex, "dirty." Three college women wrote to *Time* just after *Niagara*'s release: "We are average [. . .] American college girls who want to go through life with the belief that sex is a beautiful thing. Marilyn Monroe has done more to lower the standards of womanhood in the eyes of both men and women than any one person in

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[34] See also E. Ann Kaplan's edited collection *Women in Film Noir*; Kelly Oliver and Benigno Trigo, and Jans Wager.

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history" (Egleston et al. 12).[35] The national press also reported that Monroe's sex appeal

was threatening her success. Women's clubs complained to the studio about Monroe's

role in *Niagara*, and "movie-makers were worried about a United Press poll of editors

which revealed that they are tiring of the sort of 'news' Marilyn and other starlets have

been making lately. At week's end, the word was out to Hollywood's press agents: go

easier on the sex angle" ("Go" 102).

Men, too, warned that Monroe's roles did not need to emphasize her sex appeal—

perhaps because emphasizing it demonstrated how she could manipulate them. "I think

that sex was emphasized too much in Marilyn Monroe. The story was very realistic, but

Marilyn's walk, and expression looked to [sic] evident" (Wright). One viewer insists that

Monroe's performance as a femme fatale verged on making her a joke. The audiences at

the three different showings of *Niagara* he attended weren't aroused by what he, as a

chiropodist, identified as Monroe's "pathological," "abnormal" gait, but rather "they

snickered – three times (and they don't know anything about gait!)" (Sauer). Another fan

wrote to *Photoplay* that "Marilyn is a very pretty and a very, very talented girl, but no girl

in Hollywood can get by on just sex appeal." He insists, however, that Monroe should

maintain her sex appeal: "I don't mean that she should hide those gorgeous curves, don't

misunderstand me. But she doesn't have to disrobe to appeal to men. I enjoy looking at

her, who wouldn't?" (Hollingsworth 8).

Audiences sent a clear message that Monroe's lead roles needed to capitalize on

the persona she had been steadily developing playing secretaries and starlets—a

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[35] For others criticizing Monroe's sex appeal at this time, see also Isabel Moore, "Why
Women Hate Marilyn Monroe;" Julie Paul, "Too Much Fire;" and letters to the editors of
Life magazine on June 15, 1953.

nonthreatening sexual persona. Reviewing the viewer comment cards for the film,

Zanuck wrote to Charles Brackett, the writer and producer, "You will note that the only

bad ones are those that object to the sex values of MM. This of course we have to expect

from a certain very minor percentage of an audience and particularly in a picture where

she plays an unpleasant role" (Zanuck).

Nevertheless, the studio thereafter deliberately called attention to the shift in

Monroe's persona. The headline accompanying the general publicity story (meant to be

used in newspaper stories without revision) in the exhibitor's campaign book for

Monroe's next film, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, declares, "The Monroe Reforms,

Changed Marilyn Promised in Film Bow." The article accompanying this headline

explains: "The change in personality has been deliberate, the studio executives decreeing

that her torrid sex appeal should be toned down and Marilyn herself deciding to be more

dignified. However, as [director] Howard Hawks [. . .] says, 'nothing will change

Marilyn's contours'" (15).

If *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes,* Blondes Should Learn *How to Marry a Millionaire*

The sixth and seventh highest-grossing films of 1953, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*

and *How to Marry a Millionaire*, solidified Monroe's stardom. Like *We're Not Married!*

and *Niagara*, these films addressed postwar marriage, but they did so with a humor that

diffused their critiques of family life educators. What's more, the films achieved financial

success despite the fact that, as Michael Abel reported to Zanuck regarding the story of

How to Marry a Millionaire, the film was "not novel," but "basically similar to our

current GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES" (1). Both films explore the woman's

perspective on marriage. *Blondes* mocks the advice that compatibility is more important

than financial security by advising women to focus on moving up the social ladder and to find companionship in female friendship. *Millionaire* disregards any practical approach to marriage and, rather than advocate that women strive to "marry up," advises that they instead be content to marry men who aren't millionaires, in other words, to settle for horizontal rather than vertical movement (underscored by the film's CinemaScope format). Both films encourage women to make themselves into beautiful objects in order to attract and keep even middle class husbands.

Blondes tells the story of "two little girls from Little Rock," Lorelei Lee (Monroe) and her friend Dorothy Shaw (Jane Russell); the former seeks financial security through marriage while the latter desires love.[36] Dorothy accompanies Lorelei to Paris at the request of Lorelei's fiancée, Gus Esmond (Tommy Noonan), while he tries to convince his father (Taylor Holmes) that Lorelei is an acceptable spouse. But Dorothy is a distracted chaperone who falls for handsome detective Ernie Malone (Elliott Reid), whom the elder Esmond has hired to catch Lorelei in a scandal. Although Lorelei is technically faithful to Gus, Malone catches her in a compromising position with Piggy Beekman (Charles Coburn), from whom she procures a diamond tiara. Malone's report causes Gus to rescind his offer of marriage, leaving Lorelei and Dorothy in Paris without financial support. Although the two succeed as performers, they run into trouble when Piggy's wife takes legal action to reclaim her tiara, which Malone ultimately finds in Piggy's possession. After Lorelei is exonerated, she convinces the elder Esmond that she is not a "man-trap," but wisely is marrying for both money and love. The film concludes

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[36] The film updates Anita Loos's 1925 novel in a number of ways. Although the Broadway adaptation of the novella maintained the 1920s setting, the film placed the story in a contemporary setting. In the novella, men strive to educate Lorelei; in the film, Lorelei assumes the role of the marriage expert.

with a double wedding uniting Lorelei with Gus and Dorothy with Malone, but its final image is of the two women exchanging a knowing look.

The film aligns Lorelei with postwar family life educators: she considers it her "job" to teach Dorothy how to select a mate. One of the central jokes is that Lorelei insists that Dorothy, not she, is the stupid one. "Dorothy's not bad, honest. She's just dumb," she explains to Gus.

> Always falling in love with some man just because he's good looking. I'm always telling her, it's just as easy to fall in love with a rich man as a poor man. She says yes, but, if they're tall, dark, and handsome, she never gets around to vital statistics until it's too late. That's why I'm her best friend, I guess. She really needs somebody like I to educate her.

In the context of contemporary warnings that top "husband-wife grievances" included "w[ife]'s poor management of income" and "h[usband]'s insufficient income" (Burgess and Wallin 586-7, 94), it makes sense that Lorelei wants Dorothy to marry a wealthy man. "It's just as easy," Lorelei advises, "to fall in love with a rich man as a poor man." Norman Himes explains this paradox: "There is an old saying that a woman should not marry a man for his money, but she should never let it stand in the way. It is relatively easy for most of us to reject the idea of marrying for money, but are our choices based on love, common experience, and similar backgrounds any sounder?" (58).[37] In stating that marrying because of romantic love is no wiser than marrying for money, Himes implies that it might in fact be better to marry a rich man than a poor one, as such a move would at least eliminate financial concerns. Because we tend to associate Lorelei with Monroe's later film persona, which was certainly naïve, if not, as Sugar says in *Some Like It Hot*,

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[37] See also Christensen 256, Butterfield 4, and Das 63.

"just dumb," it is easy to overlook the extent to which the film actually confirms her assessment of herself as "smart" about marriage.

Dorothy, however, advises Lorelei to marry for love. *Variety* characterizes Lorelei as "a girl who likes diamonds" and Dorothy as "a girl who likes men" ("Gentlemen"). Lorelei warns Dorothy, "I hate to think where you'll wind up. You're wasting all your time on unrefined persons without any money." But Dorothy, who scoffs at the idea of a loveless marriage, represents the companionate ideal—marriage based on friendship and "togetherness." However, as Coontz points out, this kind of marriage "was still so new that [many Americans] weren't sure they were doing it right" (235). The two women therefore represent two aspects of the changing marital ideals: "Lorelei must be seen as just an exaggerated form of the role assigned all middle-class women in Fifties culture," expected to spend their husbands' money, "while Dorothy," Maureen Turim argues, "complements this role by being transformed by romantic love," thereby rejecting the idea that marriage is a business relationship (106).

That Lorelei tries to help her friend achieve financial success through marriage is just one of many feminist aspects of the film. Most obviously, as Lucie Arbuthnot and Gail Seneca explain, the two women are "initiators in their relations with men," and their gold digging is a strategy for success (Arbuthnot and Seneca 117).[38] And "'gold-digging,'" as family life educator Christensen sees it, "is woman's way of 'working' a man for all she can get" (248).[39] Although Lorelei pursues cash, both the women treat expensive consumer items, such as furs and diamonds, as props for what they are actually

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[38] Kirsten Pullen discusses the "female friendship, camaraderie, and intimacy" between Monroe and Russell that is apparent in publicity shots taken, but not used, in *Life* magazine's photo spread on the making of the film (50).
[39] Landis and Landis (75) and S. Duvall (21) explicitly warn against "gold digging."

"selling," reveling in, as Turim puts it, "the fantastic power of being able to discard a commodity of so great an exchange value in order to expose a more precious commodity, the sexually cultivated self-aware female body" (102).

The film also demonstrates the opposite of what Mulvey has famously called "the male gaze." Although the two women in the film are clearly spectacles for male attention, "Monroe and Russell," as Arbuthnot and Seneca note, "refuse to signal submission by averting their eyes; rather, they return the look" (116). In both the "Two Little Girls from Little Rock" number and the "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" number, Sabrina Barton notes, "shot/reverse shot editing, conventionally used to subordinate female objects to a male look, turns parodic when we catch sight of the small, bespectacled Gus, cringing before the powerhouse of red-sequined female sexuality exploding on stage. [. . .] it is always Lorelei who controls Gus from the stage, not vice versa" (127).

Having female characters gaze back at men is one way that *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, like most Howard Hawks films, plays with gender roles. Male critics frequently comment, with vitriol, on the off-putting nature of the male characters, indicating how unsettling they find the film's role reversal in which the women control the men. Robin Wood sees the men in the film as machines (171), and Todd McCarthy calls them "toy popguns opposite the double-barreled dames" (509). When Lorelei looks at Piggy, she sees a diamond rather than a face, making him, as Ed Sikov notes, "even more of an object than she is" (79).

In this world, men are passive and women are aggressive. Turim characterizes Dorothy's sexuality as "excessive" in its "freely expressed lust" (105). By always chasing

men, Dorothy seems to reverse gender roles.[40] When Dorothy freely pursues the

disinterested Olympic team, she typifies behavior condemned by Robert Coughlan in

Life's 1956 special issue on women: "spotily and sporadically, but increasingly, the sexes

in this country are losing their identities. The emerging American woman tends to be

assertive and exploitive. The emerging American man tends to be passive and

irresponsible. [. . .] They are suffering from what the psychiatrists call sexual ambiguity"

(109).

According to the film's logic, however, Dorothy and Lorelei are simply making

the most of the difficulties of being women. From the film's first scene, we know that

Lorelei and Dorothy are successful entertainers who are capable of providing for

themselves, as many women were during World War II.[41] When they are stranded in

Paris without the aid of Esmond's letters of credit, they also refuse Malone's aid. That

they provide for themselves by selling their talent in an attractive package underscores

the similarities between sanctioned self-support and gold-digging. It also indicates that

having a man (and giving up their independence) is only worth it if he improves their

financial situation.

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[40] Many critics have commented on the juxtaposition of Russell's large frame with
Monroe's small one, noting that Dorothy "virtually never moves in the constrained
fashion of the 'lady'; she strides, arms swinging at her sides, shoulders erect and head
thrown back" (Arbuthnot and Seneca 117) and that she "look[s] like a butch partner for
Lorelei" (Banner 201).

[41] Two million women left the workforce at the war's conclusion, and, although wives
and mothers worked, by 1960, more than half of the working married women worked
only part time (May 75). See also Brandon French. Although women were capable of
working, and even of working in the same fields as men, the cultural consensus was that
marriage should be a woman's primary career. Even anthropologist Margaret Mead,
writing in *Life*'s 1956 special issue on women, agreed that, while women are as capable
as men, they "prefer marriage to any other way of life" (27).

The film's most memorable scene, the "Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend" number, visually underscores Lorelei's position as a woman navigating two conflicting camps of advice. The curtains open on a stage filled with sharply contrasted red, pink, and black décor; the color scheme makes the stage's close space both womb-like and sordid. Adolescent ballerinas wearing flowers in their hair and full skirts of pink tulle embody unabashed romanticism as they gracefully waltz with gray-haired gentlemen in tails. This first shot also indicates that romance is not the only perspective on love this number presents: women in black leather shorts, bikini tops, caps, and straps (costumes reminiscent of bondage-wear) hang bound to the furniture, forming human candelabra beneath a human chandelier (Figure 3.2).[42] The human furniture in this setting suggests that domestic life makes many wives extensions of their homes, fetish objects for the husbands who hold them in domestic bondage. But the costumes of the dancers in pink, who represent romance, also allude to bondage-wear. In fact, the pink tops of the adolescent girls feature the same cross-chest banding as the costumes of the women who form the chandelier. This S&M-like attire visually suggests that it is just a small shift from being bound by romance to being dominated and objectified by a spouse. Because Lorelei wears the same pink as the dancers and sits at the base of one of the human candelabras, she is visually connected to both camps, indicating how similar are the opposing ideologies of romance and exploitation.

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[42] Banner notes that these women "evoke Bettie Page, the innocent girl with black hair and white skin who starred in the day's underground sadomasochist films" (253).

Figure 3.2. Human chandelier. From _Gentlemen Prefer Blondes_.

Lorelei begins the number by rejecting men who offer red heart-shaped cutouts,

repeatedly singing "no" while tapping each of them with her fan. This operatic trill (the

only part of the famous song that is dubbed by Marni Nixon rather than sung by Monroe)

and Lorelei's fan "referenc[e] eighteenth-century aristocratic women who used fans to

flirt" (Banner 253). This reference to the subtle flirting of aristocratic women minimizes

some of the crassness of Lorelei's refusal of "the heart." Because "a wife is usually

accorded the social position of her husband," as Landis and Landis explain, "marriage is

a simple and effective way for her to achieve a desired social position" (44). If marriage

is how women achieve status, Lorelei's pink dress underscores that she rejects romance

because of her femininity—as a woman, she can't afford to be swayed by romance.

The lyrics seamlessly unite the advice of marriage educators with the consumerist

impulses of the affluent era:[43] "A kiss may be grand, but it won't pay the rental on your

humble flat. / Or help you at the automat. / Men grow cold as girls grow old, and we all

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[43] "Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend" was written in 1949 by Jule Styne and Leo Robin
for Carol Channing's performance in the Broadway production of _Gentlemen Prefer
Blondes_, and thus accurately represents the concerns of the postwar period (rather than
the 1920s, when Loos wrote the original story).

lose our charms in the end. / But square-cut or pear-shaped, these rocks won't lose their shape. / Diamonds are a girl's best friend." Lorelei also educates adolescent girls, who gather around her: "There may come a time when a hard-boiled employer thinks you're awful nice. / But get that 'ice' or else no dice!" Lorelei exercises control over the adoring men by pulling on the diamond-studded straps they tantalizingly hold out to her. Because Lorelei accepts only this final offer of diamonds, this sequence suggests that women can make the most of their situations by insisting on the terms of their bondage in marriage. Lorelei's costume indicates her own diamond-studded bondage: she wears two diamond bracelets in the position of handcuffs and a diamond choker around her neck. She ends the number clinging to one of the human candelabras while a crowd of men wave diamond-studded straps in her face; this shot indicates that she will submit to a degree of "domestic bondage" for the right price.

When Lorelei insists she's in love with Gus, the film stops short of agreeing that women should marry for money. As she puts it: "He never wins an argument. He always does anything I ask—and he's got the money to do it. How can I help but love a man like that?" Lorelei's delivery of this ironic line reveals how seriously she, and perhaps the audience, could take such a statement. Although she admits to the elder Esmond that she wants to marry Gus "for your money," she convincingly articulates her reasons:

> Don't you know that a man being rich is like a girl being pretty? You might not marry a girl just because she's pretty, but my goodness, doesn't it help? Would you want your daughter to marry a poor man? You'd want her to have the most wonderful things in the world. Why is it wrong for me to want those things?

Esmond has to admit, "Say, they told me you were stupid. You don't sound stupid." In a line Monroe wrote for herself, Lorelei responds: "I can be smart when it's important. But most men don't like it."

Blondes argues that women need to be "gold-diggers" if they are to succeed in the postwar marriage economy. Although they submitted them to the Breen office for approval, filmmakers never recorded a bridge of "Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend" with the lyrics, "It's not compensation / It's self-preservation" (PCA files).[44] Nevertheless, these lyrics most clearly state that Lorelei's behavior is justified. The conflicting positions on money and marriage are "resolved" in the film's double wedding, when, as David and Christine Andrews explain,

> the diamond that Lorelei has often equated with compensation for a short-term affair becomes the diamond in her wedding ring, the symbol of love *qua* long-term emotional commitment. Thus the closing sequence of the musical shifts the inflection of the phrase 'diamonds are a girl's best friend' by indicating that it holds true for committed marriages as well as for temporary flings. (65)

Dorothy and Lorelei exchange knowing looks in the final shot, indicating that, while the film is ostensibly about marrying off two assertive, gold-digging women, it is really about female friendship.[45] Working toward a common goal, Lorelei and Dorothy have earned financial security by manipulating men.

If *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* is a joke that exposes women's financial dependence in marriage and thereby advances a feminist position, *How to Marry a Millionaire* works to make women the complicit butts of that joke. Both in its narrative and in the effects of the CinemaScope format, *Millionaire* advises women to be content to move horizontally by marrying someone within their own social class, thereby stopping women from aspiring to "marry up." Although *Millionaire,* like *Blondes*, is structured around the

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[44] The Breen office deemed these two lines, along with some additional verses elaborating on situations where women should be cautious to protect their finances, acceptable according to the Code; they were removed for some unknown reason. (By way of comparison, note that the Breen office objected to the lines "But if you are busty / Your trustee gets lusty" [PCA files].)

[45] See Kathleen Rowe.

conflict between marrying for love and marrying for money, the film depicts gold digging as untenable.[46] As Sokolove stated in his report to Zanuck about *Millionaire*, "The point, apparently, is that love, not money, brings happiness, but both are good to have" ("How" 1). Whereas *Blondes* illustrates how assertive women could be, *Millionaire* focuses on what Lisa Cohen has called 1950s "spectacles of domesticity"—both Hollywood visions of domestic life and domestic life as a spectacle enacted by private citizens (267). *Millionaire* makes the domestic spectacular, moreover, by showing off women's bodies. The film's CinemaScope format possesses an aspect ratio (2.25 to 1) that resembles a dollar bill; in this way, the film's form underscores its content by visually connecting women's financial security, however meager that may be, to their ability to make themselves husband-attracting spectacles.

Millionaire begins when *Mrs.* Schatze Page (Lauren Bacall), a recent divorcee, rents an upscale Manhattan apartment, then invites fellow model Pola Debevoise (Monroe) to room with her. Pola in turn invites Loco Dempsey (Betty Grable) to join them in their plot to snag millionaire husbands. Initially, the women have a hard time attracting suitable candidates, but eventually, Loco meets J.D. Hanley (William Powell), a Texas oilman who, because of his attraction to Schatze, invites all three women to a meeting of the Oil Institute, where Pola and Loco meet unacceptable mates: swindler J. Stewart Merrill (Alex D'Arcy), and married, philandering millionaire Waldo Brewster

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[46] The film reflects two competing versions of the period's Cinderella narrative. One narrative, made most famous by Disney's *Cinderella* (1950), suggests that good-hearted, hard-working women deserve to "marry up," as long as they do so for love, while the other, advanced most adamantly by Philip Wylie, suggests that women use the fantasy of "true love" to disguise their motivations to marry for money and become lazy freeloaders. I have discussed this in more detail in my article, "How to (Marry a Woman Who Wants to) Marry a Millionaire" (*Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 31:4: 364-83).

(Fred Clark). In addition, each woman meets another man. Tom Brookman (Cameron Mitchell), a young millionaire who dresses like a "gas pump jockey," woos Schatze, who resists his advances because she thinks he is poor. Loco falls for Eben (Rory Calhoun), a handsome forest ranger whom she mistakenly assumes owns all the trees in the forest. Pola becomes entangled with Freddie Denmark (David Wayne), the owner of the upscale apartment the women are renting, whose assets are tied up while he avoids the IRS. Loco and Pola do not marry millionaires, and Schatze eventually settles for Brookman, marrying him before she knows about his wealth. In the end, because each woman ends up married to her romantic match, the conclusion of *Millionaire* proves that "filthy lucre loses out to nice, clean sex, and everybody goes to bed instead of to Bergdorf's" ("New" 116).

In the postwar period, people with relatively small incomes could, for the first time, project an image of wealth by purchasing a plethora of consumer goods. Status therefore hinged on making a spectacle of one's purchases. Postwar Americans had greater purchasing power than ever before: "census figures show that between 1947 and 1959 median family incomes rose more than twice as fast as living costs—from $4,000 to $5,400, after taking inflation into account—and that by 1959 roughly 40 percent of the nation's families were in the $5,000 to $10,000 bracket" (Creadick 67). Although the median income in 1953 was $4,242, as *Fortune* magazine reported, sixty percent of the families who made between $4,000 and $7,000 dollars a year were the families of "blue-collar workers" ("Rich Middle" 97). Therefore, while few women were married to millionaires, if they effectively performed the tasks of "household management, shopping efficiently, [. . .] and providing for the needs of an entire family on limited amounts of

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money," they could live a middle-class lifestyle with abundant material goods (S. Duvall 35). Effective household management could even result in the appearance of being wealthier than middle-class. "Money must be translated into socially approved behavior and possessions," explains W. Lloyd Warner, "and they in turn must be translated into intimate participation with, acceptance by, members of a superior class" (21). To avoid financial conflicts, family life educator S. Duvall asks those considering marriage, "*How much do you know about intelligent consumer buying? What books have you read?*" (83, emphasis in original). [47]

Although *Millionaire* appears to be about upward financial movement—the women, after all, aspire to marry millionaires—the film dramatizes both how difficult and how unnecessary that goal is. *Millionaire*, like *Blondes*, makes a female character the marriage expert, although in this case, Bacall plays the educator and Monroe plays the pupil. When Schatze asks her gold digging protégés, "If you had your choice of everybody in the world, which would you rather marry, a rich guy or a poor one?" she echoes Lorelei. But Schatze takes the marriage advice too far; her extreme rules for "intelligent consumer buying" establish criteria for shopping for a man: 1) "gentleman callers have got to wear a necktie," and 2) "a gentleman that you meet among the cold cuts is simply not as attractive as one that you meet, say, in the mink department at Bergdorf's."

While Schatze encourages the women to evaluate carefully the spectacle of wealth potential mates project, her pupils are more interested in demonstrating how much

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[47] Most advice books included chapters on money's role in successful marriages; see, "Finances and Adjustment in Marriage" and "Getting Your Money's Worth" (Landis and Landis), and "Money Matters in Marriage" (Duvall and Hill), as well as Christensen 146-167, Cavan 329-351, Duvall 76-92, LeMasters 401-483, and Himes 193-259.

they can get with just a little bit of money. Loco, is, as Pola points out, "awfully clever with a quarter" and can convert it into four sacks of cold cuts and champagne. Loco's industriousness, her ability to acquire practical items such as aspirin and shampoo caps from men she has just met, indicates her potential to run a home without a large income. Unlike Schatze, she has learned the lesson of "intelligent consumer buying," and can stretch a quarter to increase her purchasing power. When Pola wants Loco to participate in their millionaire endeavor, Schatze asks, "Is she class?" Pola responds, "Is she? Didn't I tell you she's been on the cover of *Harper's Bazaar* three times already?" Not only is she "class," but she's worn the clothes to prove it. [48]

Just as the women in *Millionaire* demonstrate their status through their purchases, "Monroe," explains Mulvey, "with her all-American attributes and streamlined sexuality, [. . .] epitomize[d] in a single image [. . .] economic[s], [. . .] politic[s], and [. . .] erotic[s]. By the mid-50s, she stood for a brand of classless glamour, available to anyone using American cosmetics, nylons and peroxide" ("*Gentlemen*" 216). Thus, both onscreen and off, Monroe suggested that women did not have to be married to millionaires to lead glamorous lives. [49] The film affirms the message that to become desirable as wives, women only needed to purchase intelligently.

[48] Loco certainly represents "high-class" consumer goods. *Harper's Bazaar* represented a high-end consumer lifestyle, featuring garments such as a 1954 advertisement for a "Southwest African Persian Lamb Coat," which retailed for $997. Even lower-end fashions, such as "Cashmere twosomes by Heatherton," sold for between $27.95 and $49.95, somewhere between half or all of a middle-class weekly income.

[49] *Playboy* magazine conveyed a similar message to its male readers: they didn't have to be millionaires to acquire at least some of the items the magazine contained (including, presumably, the women). See Alan Nadel's *Containment Culture* on sex, class, and *Playboy*.

At the same time, the film mocks the marriage education materials flooding the market, many of which claimed to offer couples the most "intelligent" approach to marriage. Although Loco calls Schatze's plan "intelligent," if Schatze had married for love she would have married Brookman sooner, saving herself several months of scrambling to pay the rent. Loco's married date, Brewster, not a bright man, also says he is exercising "intelligence" by crossing into the city via the George Washington Bridge where none of his acquaintances will see him—until reporters photograph the couple as the fifty-millionth car to cross the bridge. Instead of valorizing intelligence, the film affirms the "dumb blonde's" perspective. At the outset, without her glasses Pola can't find the door and walks into the wall. Over the course of the film, she doesn't know she's dating a one-eyed man, trips when she's modeling, "reads" a book that is upside down, and boards the wrong plane. Because she is too stupid to wear corrective lenses, we assume that she is too stupid to exploit a man successfully.

But, despite her stupidity, Pola successfully makes herself the kind of spectacle that attracts a husband. As fashion models, the women in *Millionaire* are accustomed to being on display. Like the fashion show scene of many Hollywood films,[50] *Millionaire*'s fashion show scene underscores the idea that women are objects (Figure 3.3). The scene begins with a shot from over Brookman's shoulder, placing the audience in his position as he witnesses a private fashion show. The camera follows the women walking on a modified catwalk and posing for Brookman. As the camera tracks forward, Pola and Loco remove their outerwear, baring more skin. Pola and Loco cheerfully comply with

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[50] For examples of the fashion show scene in postwar films, see, for example, *An American in Paris* (1951), *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), *Funny Face* (1957), *Designing Woman* (1957), and *That Touch of Mink* (1962).

their objectification. This behavior sharply contrasts with that of Schatze, who glares at Brookman throughout the scene. When she tells her boss that Brookman is a swindler, the boss says he does not tell Schatze "how to put on a girdle," so she shouldn't tell him "how to run [his] business." This exchange indicates Schatze's place: her business is modeling the kind of clothing that will attract a husband, and, presumably, attracting a husband herself. Because Schatze refuses to make herself a complacent object, the scene ends with Brookman declaring, "I don't see anything I want"—he isn't ready to "invest" in Schatze as a wife. Although Brookman doesn't lose interest in Schatze, his parting shot suggests that Schatze has to learn to submit to her objectification—as Pola and Loco do—before a marriage between them can work.
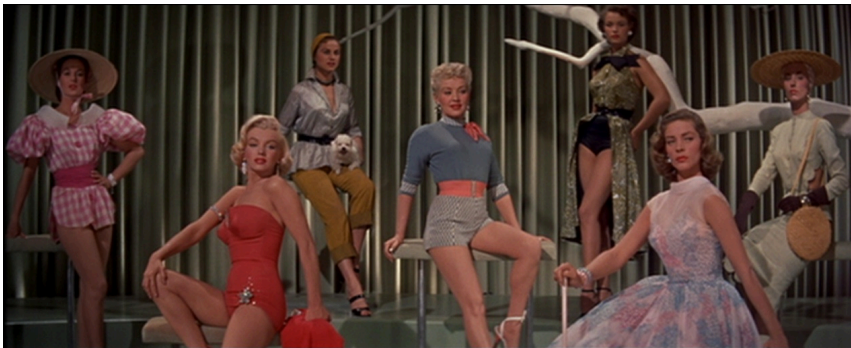
Figure 3.3. A fashion show. From *How to Marry a Millionaire*.

Pola and Loco, on the other hand, demonstrate repeatedly a good-natured willingness to be a spectacle for *any* man. When the women convene in the powder-room during their dinner dates, first Loco then Pola admires herself in a set of four mirrors (Figure 3.4). This scene displays the women from all angles. After the other women leave the powder room, Pola turns to the mirror in four different poses, observing her own profile, hips, behind, and bust while wearing her glasses. Because of those glasses, Cohen notes, she has for a moment "distance from (and therefore mastery) over her own image"

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(280). In this brief moment, Pola considers the way others see her and demonstrates that she is satisfied with the effect of her self-presentation. When Pola removes her glasses, however, she fumbles putting them in her clutch, allowing her to linger in front of the mirrors so that viewers can dwell on her body. If any image of Monroe, especially spread across a CinemaScope screen, is spectacular, quadrupling this image underscores how easily it can be reproduced. [51] This scene raises Monroe "to the nth power," as one reviewer put it (Buskin 155). It encompasses multiple angles in order to better instruct female viewers in emulating Monroe's beauty.

Figure 3.4. Monroe "to the nth power." From *How to Marry a Millionaire*.

The fashion show and the powder-room scenes provide the film's real "how to" instruction. As Ariel Rogers points out: "this massive and repeated image can be read as a command to its female spectator, urging her to conform to this model of glamorous white

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[51] *Millionaire* was the second film released in Fox's new CinemaScope format. Although filmed after *Millionaire,* the Biblical epic *The Robe* was the first film released in CinemaScope because the studio thought its content was better suited for the medium's first appearance—presumably because it was about three men in a Biblical story, rather than three women in a domestic plot (Cohen 276). CinemaScope was the most successful of the 1950s technological innovations aimed at revitalizing a film industry endangered by the 1948 Paramount decree and the increasing domination of television. For an overview of CinemaScope and other technological developments, see Lev, 107-126, and Belton.

femininity" (89). Because the mirrors multiply this image, they call attention to how the widescreen format makes more of Monroe's body visible. "This on-screen manifestation of technology," Rogers notes, "emphasizes both the star's glamour and its means of construction, offering an enhanced view of Monroe's body while simultaneously identifying this possibility as a technological feat" (90). At the same time, the image underscores that the "technological feat" of Monroe's beauty was the collaboration of hairstylists, costume designers, and makeup artists.

If Monroe's beauty is partly the effect of cosmetics applied while standing before a mirror, then women in the audience could achieve the same effect with the right consumer goods. Publicity surrounding the film suggests as much. After praising the reaction Monroe drew from male audience members at the first CinemaScope demonstrations, *Photoplay* addresses its female readers: "What puts the M-M-M in Monroe? You can learn Marilyn's Beauty Secrets in the October *Photoplay*" (83). Female fans appreciated the large spectacle of Monroe's body, which helped them access and emulate her beauty secrets. At the time of the film's release, Monroe and the other stars were models for "how to" become a wife: the young Bacall had charmed older tough-guy Humphrey Bogart into marriage. Grable, the most famous pin-up of the wartime era, was married to musician Harry James, and Monroe, the nation's blossoming sex symbol, was dating Joe DiMaggio, whom she would wed in January 1954. Integrating the form and content of this "how-to" film by showing women "how to" look as attractive as its stars, CinemaScope also showed women "how to" snag husbands.

CinemaScope also made it easy to display stars in horizontal poses that evoked Monroe's lounging nude figure in the by-then famous "Golden Dreams" photo. A *Life*

magazine story about CinemaScope quoted Zanuck's awe at seeing Bacall "on a couch!

[. . .] Her head was at one end of the screen and her feet were touching the other end! She

filled the screen! *She was 64 feet long and in color*!" But the image accompanying this

quote was of *Monroe's* body spread from one end of the screen to the other (Coughlan

81).[52] The caption reads, in part, "Miss Monroe, curves enhanced by curved screen, is 43

feet long" (Coughlan 83).

Two images "make evident and indeed allegorize," as Cohen puts it, "Monroe's

relation to the questions of excess, containment, and visibility that shaped both her star

persona and postwar domesticity" (273): the *Golden Dreams* photo, spread out across

two pages in *Playboy*, and the stills of Monroe from *Millionaire*, "squeezed" by the

small-screen, and "unsqueezed" by the widescreen, to demonstrate how much more

appealing the image is when spread out across a larger space (Belton 144). This

squeezing and spreading of the starlets' bodies was not lost on the film's reviewers. *New

York Times* film critic Bosley Crowther proclaimed:

> The giant panel screen is without equal as a surface on which to display
> the casually recumbent figure of the temptatious Marilyn Monroe. Thirty-
> odd feet of the blond[e] charmer stretched out on a forty-foot chaise
> lounge [. . .] is an eye-filling sight which suits completely the modern-day
> taste for size, and, to that extent, anyhow, warrants this gigantic way of
> showing films. (X1)[53]

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[52] Presumably, Zanuck's well-known distaste for Monroe informed his memory of
Bacall, as opposed to Monroe, stretched out on sofas in the film.

[53] See also Johnson, "3-D." CinemaScope was sold as a form of 3-D. An ad for
Millionaire appearing in December 1953's *Photoplay* sells the film as "big as life and just
as fun" and "you see it without glasses." In this ad, the women pop out of the screen to
beckon the viewer, and Monroe is the biggest and foremost of the three. Widescreen,
however, was not universally discussed in terms of its appeal—many feared that the
intimacy offered by the better view could also pose a threat to audiences. The *New York
Herald Tribune* characterizes the feeling as "being smothered in baked Alaska," a
decadent but nonetheless suffocating experience (qtd. in Buskin 154). As Rogers puts it,
"Widescreen, in short, offered moviegoers an experience portrayed as both empowering

The CinemaScope format thus makes getting married attractive in a larger-than-life way. When Denmark comes home to secure some documents and finds Pola sprawled out on his sofa (Figure 3.5), he does a double-take, and his pause allows the audience to contemplate how attractive marriage could be—imagine Marilyn Monroe, your wife, relaxing on the sofa! Upon seeing him, Pola removes her glasses, exercising, as Cohen puts it, a choice "to go from seeing to being seen" (280). Becoming a spectacle in Denmark's home, Pola transitions from homebody to playmate. *Millionaire* thus anticipates the appeal of *Playboy* magazine, which emphasized, as Alan Nadel explains, "appreciating the seductive potential of women in even the most mundane settings" (131-2).[54] By extension, the film encourages viewers to appreciate the seductive potential of wives.

Figure 3.5. "Thirty-odd feet of the blonde charmer." From *How to Marry a Millionaire.*

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and overpowering, at once rendering the human body on a gigantic scale and threatening to smother it" (75).

[54] *Playboy* magazine, the first issue of which would be published the month after *Millionaire*'s release, draws on the interest in looking at spreads of women and capitalizes on the excess associated with Monroe's persona by featuring her in its first centerfold.

The widescreen frame capitalizes on Monroe's persona as a developing sex symbol. Her nude photo and her status as a popular pin-up of the Korean War period, both of which garnered her support and sympathy from both male and female audiences, demonstrate how female sexuality had become a somewhat acceptable public spectacle. Pin-ups were "representative women," as Robert Westbrook argues, "standing in for wives and sweethearts on the homefront" (596). In fact, ordinary American women posed for their own pin-up photos and sent them to their sweethearts, affirming that men fantasized not only about sleeping with but also about marrying pin-up girls.[55] Films, including *Millionaire*, participated in the marriage and baby boom by reminding men that the same women who had posed for pin-ups were not only willing, but eager, to settle down with them.

If the widescreen frame could project public sexuality, Pola's glasses frame a private spectacle. Saying, "I've never seen anybody in my whole life that reminded me less of an old maid," Denmark convinces Pola to wear her glasses and, in doing so, he not only prevents her from becoming an old maid, but also confines her sexuality to a monogamous relationship. The shot/reverse-shot pattern reiterates Pola's status as marriage material: after she dons her glasses, shots feature the back of her head more often than her face or any of her other features, so that only her future spouse sees her. By encouraging her to wear her glasses, Denmark domesticates Pola, placing her sexuality within a frame that, theoretically, will make her less attractive to other men, more wifely, and more containable. When she refuses to wear glasses, Pola can't see what she's

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[55] Buszek includes some of these photos in her book.

getting into, but when she enters marriage with her eyes open (and glasses on), she can recognize a "compatible" mate (in the companionate sense), and her mate also benefits.[56]

In order to make the shift from public sex image to private spectacle appealing to women, the CinemaScope format reiterates why women *need* men: to furnish a home and to satisfy them sexually. In a static shot, furniture disappears piece by piece from the apartment. Schatze admits that she has sold the furniture to pay the bills, and she bemoans her need for a man to support her, asking, "Where will we sit next week?" Instead of using CinemaScope's width to present expansive landscapes, *Millionaire* uses CinemaScope to show how empty homes are without men to furnish them. The CinemaScope format also underscores how hungry the women are for sexual satisfaction. A series of jokes about meat, in particular sausages, hint at the sexual desires the women have ignored in their pursuit of wealthy mates. The scene in which Schatze explains her plan begins with a close-up of a plate full of sausages long enough to fill the CinemaScope screen, which Schatze later distributes to her sex-starved friends. A shot of the refrigerator reveals that their only food is hot dogs. Schatze and Pola have elaborate dreams of marrying men who bestow endless credit ("charge it," Schatze dreams of saying) and shower them with jewels; Loco dreams of a steaming pastrami sandwich. Catherine Johnson reads Loco's dream as "the truth of the matter: what these women really desire (or should desire) is physical pleasure, not cash" (69-70).

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[56] Marilyn Monroe's mates, onscreen and off, were often "ordinary" men. In 1959's *Some Like it Hot*, in a parody of this trend, she says, "men who wear glasses are so gentle, weak, and helpless," and thus preferable. During a period when masculinity was in crisis, Monroe sent a reassuring message that she *preferred* feminized men. See Albert Mobilio for a discussion of this phenomenon in *The Seven Year Itch* (1955).

The women of *How to Marry a Millionaire*, somewhat ironically given the film's title, learn that the wealth women acquire through marriage results from marrying for love. Neither Loco nor Pola marry wealthy men, but they're both "droolin'" with love; as a result of their romantic marriages, wealth is no longer necessary. While standing at the altar, Schatze also chooses a man whom she thinks "is nothing, a character straight from Characterville." Hanley tells Brookman not to "disillusion" Schatze by telling her about his fortune before the wedding: "She obviously likes gas pump jockeys better than millionaires."

The film's final scene emphasizes the middle-class lifestyles of the newly married couples as they sit at a diner reveling in their "dog-burgers." Schatze is married to a man who doesn't wear a necktie, Loco to an ordinary forest ranger, Pola to a shrimp in glasses with tax problems. While Eben estimates his worth at "about fourteen dollars," and Denmark can't "get his hands on" his wealth, Brookman lists all of his assets ("a little oil, some airline stock, a little steel, some cattle down in Texas, a couple of coal mines in Alabama, a bit of real estate here and there, some automobile stock, the Brookman Building, and Brookman, Pennsylvania"), then pulls out a thick wad of cash to leave a one thousand dollar bill to cover the twelve dollar and seventy cent check.

As the camera zooms in on the one thousand dollar bill, there is a clatter as the women faint. Because, as Belton points out, CinemaScope bore "the shape of money," the thousand-dollar bill indicates Brookman's control not only over his wife's financial situation, but also over her status as a spectacle (223). The widescreen format, emphasizing width, rather than height, and horizontal movement rather than vertical, reiterates the film's plot. Indulging Schatze's efforts at control throughout the film,

Brookman, at the conclusion, wrests control from the women, making these marriages conform to the dominant postwar ideology. Brookman toasts, "Gentlemen, to our wives," and all three men stand, clink glasses, and look down at the floor with satisfaction, so that the final point of identification is the men, who have in the end outsmarted the women. The film ends with a shot of the pleased men, their beers held high, laughing at their women, who have fallen out of the frame, presumably into domestic spaces they have earned for themselves by being pleasing spectacles.

From the Roles to the Persona

Although in both *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *How to Marry a Millionaire* Monroe uses her attractiveness to secure wealthy mates, her ostensive stupidity—she isn't really capable of manipulating anyone—keeps her from being threatening. Both *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *How to Marry a Millionaire* use "dumb blondes" to interrogate the relation between money and marriage, but do so in opposite ways that were equally popular with audiences. Lorelei shares some features with Rose—she uses her sex appeal to manipulate men, she puts her needs first—but she is a charmer rather than an aggressor. Pola is blind and passive. If, like Rose, Pola ends the film on her back, she is not being punished for her aggressive libido but being rewarded for being a pleasing spectacle. When Monroe as Pola falls out of the frame, she becomes in *Millionaire*, as she had in *Blondes*, the partner of a man who owns spectacles, one of which, it seems, is her.

Monroe indexed postwar anxieties about marriage, meaning that both in her onscreen roles and her off-screen life, she was linked with discussions about marriage. Monroe's marriage films confirm her assertions in early publicity that, despite career

success, like all women, she was preparing for marriage, and "a girl [. . .] never knows when or where she may meet the right man" (Monroe "Make" 92). The remainder of Monroe's career would confront marriage's demands on postwar women. Shortly after *Niagara* was released in February 1953, Monroe's first husband, James Dougherty, published "Marilyn Monroe Was My Wife" in *Photoplay*. Dougherty was glad he never became "Mr. Monroe" ("Marilyn" 47).[57] "To Marilyn, [modeling and movies] seemed a better security than marriage" ("Marilyn" 83). And, indeed, Monroe was never able to sustain a long-lasting marriage—she divorced Joe DiMaggio in 1954 and Arthur Miller in 1961.

Many interpreted Monroe's divorces as evidence that she was too focused on her career. Criticizing Monroe's obdurate aspirations, Dougherty laments, "I think she'd give up anything for stardom—she already has" ("Marilyn" 85). Dougherty surmised that the marriage failed because of Monroe's career, and that the fame associated with her career was sure to disrupt traditional gender roles to the extent that it would make marriage difficult. When Monroe indexes postwar marriage, then, she indexes anxieties about the detrimental effects of a wife's career. Reporting on Monroe's divorce from DiMaggio, the press recognized "the conflict in their two careers seemed inevitable" ("Last" 53). Miller, too, understands why Monroe prioritized her career over her marriage to him: "Her stardom was her triumph. How would I feel if the condition of my marriage was tractability, the surrendering of my art?" (483).

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[57] Monroe's other two husbands did not escape that role. Just after Monroe and DiMaggio married, the Japanese press referred to Joe DiMaggio as "Mr. Marilyn Monroe" (Charyn 87). Similarly, during the making of *The Prince and the Showgirl,* just two weeks after her marriage to Arthur Miller, the British tabloids referred to Miller as "Mr. Monroe" and "Marilyn's Boy" (Meyers 160).

Perhaps this is why she was cast as a single woman with little interest in marriage in several subsequent films (*Seven Year Itch*, *The Prince and the Showgirl*, *Some Like It Hot*, *Let's Make Love*, *The Misfits*).[58] While Monroe's early marriage films featured her with goals similar to those of the majority of postwar women—to attract a husband and establish a new phase of life as a homemaker—her off-screen life in many respects contradicted the goals of these characters. The characters Monroe played in later films, as the next chapter discusses, demonstrate how Monroe's persona paved the way for more explicit representations of the sexuality of *unmarried* women.

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[58] Even though Cherie in *Bus Stop* ends up engaged to Beau, she resists this engagement for most of the film.

Chapter 4.
**"It's Kinda Personal and Embarrassing, Too": Monroe, the Kinsey Reports, and
the Double Standard**

Nudity bookended Marilyn Monroe's career. Monroe's first nudity scandal broke

in 1952, before her highly successful starring roles, when the public learned that a nude

calendar featured her image. The image associated with that scandal, which featured not

an unknown model, but a film star, moved out of the realm of garage calendars in 1953

when it helped establish *Playboy* magazine's prestige.[1] Nudity also played a prominent

role in the final months of Monroe's life. September 1962's issue of *Photoplay*, dated

after but clearly printed before Monroe's August fifth death, features an article entitled

"Marilyn Poses Nude—Again!," which asks, "Is publicity – bold and blatant publicity –

all that's left of Marilyn's career?" (Rowland 46). Sadly, this article's title could also

apply to reports of her death, which reiterated that Monroe's lifeless body was found in

the nude.[2] Salacious publicity—in keeping with Monroe's iconic status as sex

incarnate—defines her career. Nevertheless, as we have seen, Monroe's stardom and her

enduring legacy indicate that she meant more to audiences than her status as an icon

communicates. The way that publicity inflected Monroe's film roles—each of which

implies a differently nuanced understanding of sexuality—reveals how she serves as an

index to post-Kinsey America.

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[1] *Playboy*'s upscale audience rivaled that of *The New Yorker* and *U.S. News and World
Report*. In chapter 5 of *Containment Culture*, Nadel elucidates how *Playboy* established
itself as a sophisticated men's magazine.
[2] Monroe's nudity at the time of her death was common knowledge. Without commenting
on the irony of the story about Monroe's nude poses that ran just after her death, a tribute
to her in the November 1962 issue points out that "it was neither friend nor lover, but a
doctor who wrapped her nude body in a blanket and carried it to the mortuary in the back
seat of his station wagon" (Meltsir 78).

Monroe's status as an icon has in many ways been built upon what is assumed to be an uncomplicated portrayal of sex. Her earliest film roles ensured that sex would always be central to her persona, her big break occurring as the result of the publicity tour accompanying her one-minute role in the Marx Brothers film *Love Happy* (1949). Both the role—in which Monroe sashays into the detective office of Sam Grunion (Groucho Marx) because "some men are following" her—and the publicity—in which she was dubbed the "Mmm girl" because of her figure—solidified the sexy starlet image that would continue to shape her roles after she graduated to star. Her 1950 roles as the live-in "niece" of a crooked lawyer in *The Asphalt Jungle* and the dumb actress girlfriend in *All About Eve* introduced her as an actress who brought obligatory sex appeal to her films. Monroe played a sexy ex-WAC who moves into her former army buddy's building in *Love Nest* (1951), a sexy secretary in *Hometown Story* (1951), *As Young as You Feel* (1951), and *Monkey Business* (1952), a prostitute in *Full House* (1952), and a beauty queen in *Let's Make It Legal* (1951) and *We're Not Married!* (1952).

Only after several events of 1953 and 1954 did Monroe fully index the growing national interest in how sexual mores and sexual behaviors differed. At the same time as the nation reacted to Alfred Kinsey's findings on American sexual practices, several events in Monroe's personal life, events that contributed to her persona, coalesced in a way that made it acceptable for her to play women who weren't eager to wed. Early in 1954, she married Joe DiMaggio, but by the time *The Seven Year Itch* was released in 1955, Monroe had experienced a very public divorce. The press implied, in fact, that the film's famous scene of Monroe's skirt blowing above her knees contributed to that divorce. Monroe's sex life, or fantasies about it, drove much of the reporting on her by

the mid-1950s. Three of her films in particular—*The Seven Year Itch*, *Bus Stop* (1956),

and *Some Like It Hot* (1958)—draw on Monroe's persona to interrogate Kinsey's

findings and imagine a society moving from a double standard governing sexual morals

to a single standard.

The Public's Ambivalent Attitude Toward Kinsey's Report

Although a number of previous studies of female sexual behavior had produced

findings similar to Kinsey's, his report generated a unique furor.[3] Kinsey's 1948 report

on male sexual behavior, controversial for its findings on the incidence of male

homosexuality, paved the way for public interest in what he might reveal about women's

sex lives.[4] Kinsey ensured, through a publicity coup that shrouded his report in secrecy

(he made reporters attend weeklong retreats to read advance copy and receive story

approval from the Kinsey team), that the second report would generate interest and

become a bestseller.[5] Even before its publication, the press extensively covered zoologist

Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953), and, after its release, journalists

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[3] Herbert Rosenthal summarizes the studies (written during the 1920s and 1930s) of
Katharine Davis, Lewis Terman, Marie Kopp, G.V. Hamilton, Dr. Robert Dickinson and
Lura Beam, and Dorothy Dunbar Bromley and Florence Haxton Britten. Fritz Wittels's
The Sex Habits of American Women (1951) and Christopher Gerould's *Sexual Practices
of American Women* (1953) were Kinsey's more immediate predecessors. (Gerould
entered his copyright September 11, 1953; Kinsey's findings appeared in the news on
August 20, 1953 and the book was released on September 14, 1953.)
[4] In *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, Kinsey reported that "about 6.3 per cent of the
total number of [male] orgasms is derived from homosexual contacts" (610), but the more
surprising statistic was "that at least 37 per cent of the male population has some
homosexual experience between the beginning of adolescence and old age" (623).
Kinsey's first report became a bestseller 15 weeks after its publication; see "Behavior,
After Kinsey."
[5] According to Anne Freedgood, nearly 100 publications sent journalists to Kinsey's
retreats (22). The Catholic publication *America* reported "that 72 per cent of the evening
papers and 77 per cent of the morning papers gave the story space ranging from a few
paragraphs to multiple-column spreads" ("Kinsey" 30).

compared its impact to that of the h-bomb ("Bombs" 57). Hundreds of stories debated the

merits and dangers of the report, such that a Harvard sociologist, among others, called

society itself "sex-crazy" ("Sex" 14).[6] Kinsey's book indeed reached number three on the

New York Times Best-Seller list just after it was released in September 1953 and stayed

on the list until December, selling over 250,000 copies (C. Lewis 31). Kinsey appeared

on the covers of *Time*, *Life*, *Newsweek*, *Colliers,* and *Woman's Home Companion*, and he

developed a public presence afforded few zoologists despite that, as the magazines joked,

the report was a "least-read bestseller" ("Behavior" 79).

What most Americans knew about the report they derived from the hundreds of

popular magazine and newspaper stories summarizing its findings. Kinsey's findings,

particularly the incidence of premarital sex (about 50% of women) and extramarital sex

(about 26%), were shocking because they revealed the behaviors of the study's subjects,

who were primarily white, middle-class women. The reports in the popular press

underscored Kinsey's insistence that, contrary to the beliefs of many psychiatrists and

laymen, women were rarely "frigid." Rather than confirm that frigidity was a common

problem, the reports reiterated Kinsey's finding that women's sex lives "often become

more satisfactory with age" ("5, 940" 51-2). The press also found noteworthy Kinsey's

finding that "both men and women experience the same pleasure in the sex relation"

(Bergquist 23).[7]

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[6] Similarly, Ivor Williams, in his 1957 *Playboy* article, "The Pious Pornographers,"
argues that mid-1950s women's magazines were sex-obsessed, despite that they
exclusively focused on sexual problems rather than pleasures.
[7] Articles by Herbert Rosenthal, Ernest Havemann, Bill Davidson, and an article in
Newsweek entitled "All About Eve," among others, summarize Kinsey's findings in
similar ways.

The reportage painted a picture of sisters, wives, and mothers as interested not only in sex, but also in pleasure. Some of the reportage praised Kinsey for proving women's interest in sexual pleasure; other reports condemned him for blaspheming American women. A number of writers praised the report for getting people talking about sex. Gallup public opinion polls for both reports found that people overwhelmingly approved of having information about sexual behavior publicly available: 5-to-1 for the male report and 3-to-1 for the female report (379, 381).[8] Many writers even lauded Kinsey for publicly exposing hypocrisy.[9] Bruce Bliven, writing for the *New Republic*, explained that the public uproar over Kinsey "represents one phase of a wide struggle against our monumental public hypocrisy. We still pay lip service to a Puritan idea of monogamy and chastity that probably never existed except in a highly neurotic minority and certainly does not exist today. This dichotomy between what most Americans do and what they say appears in many forms" (18). Bliven found Kinsey's reports reassuring: "For those whose Puritan load of guilt is extra heavy, Kinsey's two books taken together offer a sort of ready-made self-psychoanalysis: your wickedness is not unique as you thought but has been shared by 71 percent of the sample" (18).

At the same time, several prominent psychologists and sociologists criticized both Kinsey's methods and his subjects, whom they discredited as "neurotic" liars (Bergler

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[8] Among authors praising Kinsey, see Hurst, Freeman, *Time*'s cover story on Kinsey: "5,940 Women," and Ditzion. Even some of the writers who criticized Kinsey noted that "a great public service has been done in this report and in the one on male sexual behavior by tearing away the puritanical camouflage which has surrounded the problem of the place of sexuality in our society" (Simpson 66-7). Scheinfeld both praises and criticizes Kinsey in *Cosmopolitan*'s "What's Wrong with Sex Studies."
[9] See Freedgood, Davidson and Mudd, Albert Ellis's introduction to *Sex Life of the American Woman and the Kinsey Report*, and, from the same volume, essays by Wylie and Freeman, as well as psychologist Giedt's study of "Changes in Sexual Behavior and Attitudes Following Class Study of the Kinsey Report."

and Kroger 7). Dr. Karl Menninger, co-founder of the Menninger Clinic, for example, wryly told reporters that Kinsey's book "should have been labeled 'What 5,000 or 6,000 rather talkative ladies told me about sexual behavior of women in the U.S. under certain conditions,'" insisting, "I don't much care what they said because I don't believe them" ("Can" 75). Menninger, like many social scientists, faulted Kinsey for disregarding love and other psychological motives behind sexual behavior.[10] More extreme critics accused Kinsey of undermining the nation's morality and exposing America to Communist infiltration.[11]

Despite such public criticism, several women's magazines advised their readers to compare themselves to Kinsey's subjects, thereby suggesting that Kinsey's findings might alleviate the guilt of women who assumed that their behavior was "worse" than that of their peers. In *Pageant*, Laura Bergquist asked readers, "Can you find some helpful clues about *you?* Can you learn what's a 'normal' sex life for a woman your age? Whether your sexual experience differs from that of other women? Can the report shed light on problems you don't discuss even with close friends?" (16-17).[12] Bergquist's questions underscore the role Kinsey's findings played in shaping the beliefs of American women. Those who praised Kinsey even associated his work with the feminist movement. According to Bergquist, Kinsey exposed "that a single standard is evolving,

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[10] Others who criticized Kinsey for disregarding love include Cantril, Bergler and Kroger, and Montagu. On Kinsey's subjects as liars, see also Banning and Norris.
[11] See, for example, John Chapple's editorial in the *Ashland Press* and Pitirim Sorokin's *The American Sex Revolution*. Miriam Reumann analyzes the relationship between American sexual character and Communist subversion in greater detail.
[12] For others who encouraged Americans to compare their behavior to that of Kinsey's subjects in order to alleviate any guilt they might feel about disregarding publicly claimed sexual morals, see, for example, Bliven. Melody and Peterson reflect on the pivotal role printed discussions of sex played in forming private morals.

and that the sexual freedom once extended only to men—traditionally less controllable in their sex activity—is being extended to women" (20). Marriage counselor Bill Davidson, writing for *Collier's*, noted, "If years had names, 1953 might be called The Year of the Second Emancipation of Women. There have been books to prove the equality of women, books proclaiming the superiority of women [Ashley Montagu's *The Natural Superiority of Women*] and books assailing the brutality of men for preventing women from becoming equal or superior [Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*]" (19).[13] Davidson counted Kinsey's book as one of a handful arguing for gender and sexual equality.

At the same time, as Miriam Reumann explains, critics heralded the male study as evidence of "Kinsey's interviewing skills and scientific acumen," but the female study generated public criticism of Kinsey's scientific methods (99). Commentators often undermined Kinsey's credibility and exposed the culture's conflicted attitude toward female sexuality. "Whether portrayed as a sister, a daughter, a young wife, or a mother," Reumann argues, "the average American woman invoked by the media in relation to the report was a character tailor-made to question rather than endorse the accuracy of Kinsey's numbers" (99). Nevertheless, Kinsey had located subjects who engaged in the sexual behaviors that many would not willingly associate with American women, including premarital sex and adultery. Thus, Kinsey's findings most clearly demonstrated that mores needed to catch up with behavior.

The Kinsey report led Americans to contemplate the sexual double standard, a pivotal accomplishment. While "objections to a double standard have usually implied that

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[13] Other writers also associated Kinsey's work with the feminist movement; see, for example, Batdorff and Groves.

the male should accept the same restraints which our culture has been imposing upon the female," Kinsey's team found that in reality "the double standard is being resolved by the development of a single standard in which pre-marital coital activities have become extended among females to levels which are more nearly comparable to those in the male" (324). *Newsweek* reported that this shift stemmed "from freer consideration of sex matters in our times; the 'emancipation' of the female, increased knowledge of contraception, anonymity of persons living in urban areas, control of venereal infection, draft armies which allow American men and women to observe foreign cultures, and drives against organized prostitution" ("All" 70). Even Margaret Banning, who was confident that Kinsey's subjects were "neurotic," warned that the report "is almost certain to break down belief in virginity, or belief in a woman's desire for virginity" (110).[14]

Kinsey's reports shaped the 1950s, and, although the double standard was not eliminated, the culture's attitude toward female sexuality shifted. Sociologist Ira Reiss described the 1950s attitude as a "transitional double standard," in which "exceptions are made, and the woman who engages in premarital coitus because she is in love or engaged is not condemned. This is still the double standard, for men are allowed to engage in coitus for any reason—women only if in love or engaged" (97). Reiss predicted a shift to a moral standard under which affection would be the sole criterion determining whether sexual relations were morally acceptable (236). The "conflicts and confusions" E.E. LeMasters attributed to slowly shifting mores occurred because, while sexual behaviors

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[14] Others who wrote about the eroding double standard include Batdorff, Freedgood, Freeman, and Wylie. For similar findings that women's sexual behaviors were becoming "looser," see articles by Bender and Widdener released prior to Kinsey's report.

had changed, "*the code has not been changed*—it just is not observed very much any more" (185).[15]

Monroe Embodies Kinsey's Findings

Monroe, as the period's preeminent sex symbol, exposed sexual hypocrisy and promoted a single standard through her films. Several commentators, discussing Monroe in the context of Kinsey's findings, insisted that she only represented a fantasy of female sexuality. Film critic Hollis Alpert argued that women in the movies, including Monroe, represent an unrealistic "Hollywood Siren—the woman who simply by existing, or at most sprawling on a rug or sauntering up a street—is supposed to imply all the vigorous, kaleidoscopic possibilities of human sexuality, past and present" (38). Aligning such sirens with "caricatures out of some evil little boy's imagination," Alpert explains that "not Hollywood alone, but the entire press of the country has made Marilyn Monroe into an animated pin-up, to be looked at, perhaps laughed at, and certainly whistled at" (38). Similarly, in a 1953 analysis of Kinsey's second report, Ernest Havemann writes, "In movies the standard close-up shows the heroine with eyes closed, breathing hard, as she melts into the arms of the hero; Marilyn Monroe is the most publicized movie star of all because she can convey this impression of total passionate surrender even while walking rapidly away" (48, 53).[16] Although these writers insisted that "real" women did not behave like Monroe's screen characters, it is important to note how Monroe represented both the male fantasy of female sexuality *and* the sexual women Kinsey studied.

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[15] For other assessments from the social sciences of the nation's sexual standards, see Christensen, McPartland, Wittels, and Gerould.

[16] For Monroe as a fantasy sexual partner, see Kidd; Banning also aligns Kinsey with overly erotic B movies.

Monroe titillated audiences with sex appeal but, at least in the early years of her career, her publicity insisted on her wholesome off-screen life. Most obviously, Monroe's initial publicity obsessively described her body while insisting on her chastity. One of the earliest fan magazine profiles of Monroe, 1951's "Pin Up #2," highlights her physical characteristics:

> She is five feet five and a half inches tall but men, even when they are looking right at her, always think of her as a frail, tiny girl. She never lets herself weigh more than one hundred and eighteen pounds. Her waist is twenty-three and a half inches, her hips, thirty-four and her bust, thirty-six and a half. Her hair is naturally blonde though 'aided by the studio,' she says. Her eyes are blue-gray. (23)

Monroe's very grown-up proportions and her "naturally blonde" hair (in fact a light brownish-red) place her in the company of previous Hollywood sex symbols such as Mae West and Jean Harlow. However, this article, as well as others comparing Monroe to West and Harlow, underscores that the similarities are superficial, because Monroe resembles a little girl rather than the robust seductresses of previous decades.[17] Monroe thus embodied the culture's ambivalent attitude toward female sexuality.[18]

Unlike the sexuality of her predecessors, Monroe's, at least in the early 1950s, was not associated with self-advancement but with pleasing men. Writers figured it as "natural" for Monroe to devote all her attention to men.[19] In a 1952 story, "I Dress for Men," Monroe ponders, "why most women dress for women[.] I think that's a mistake;

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[17] *Life*'s 1952 article "Hollywood Topic A-Plus" also compares Monroe's figure to Harlow's while insisting that her personality is much more pleasing than hers. For a critical comparison of Monroe and Harlow, see Walker.

[18] Several writers have connected Monroe to an ambivalent attitude toward female sexuality. See "To Aristophanes and Back," Banner, Texier, and MacCannell.

[19] Sarah Churchwell discusses the construction of Monroe's "natural" sexuality in some detail, arguing that the very insistence that her "natural" attitude explained her appeal bespoke a desire to characterize her as "helpless" in order to eliminate any threat her sexuality might pose (42).

for myself it would be, anyway. I happen to like men, so I usually like the same things they like. Therefore, it's a matter of simple logic that, of course, I dress for men!" ("I" 34). By indicating that all women should cater to men, Monroe reaffirmed postwar gender roles. Rather than exercising sexual independence, Monroe depended on men, even to determine her apparel, and thus threatened no one. Men absorb her attention and women should emulate her.[20]

Early stories about Monroe typically hinted at sexual indiscretion while simultaneously denying she had any sex life at all. For example, after aligning Monroe with the sex symbols of the 1920s and 1930s, "Pin Up #2" presents a provocative image of Monroe while still affirming her chastity. According to the article, Monroe sleeps in "neither nightgown nor pajamas," but "she snubs" the "Hollywood wolves" (23). Monroe's physical attributes indicate how she got into the business, not how she behaves out of the spotlight. Thus, despite her early film roles as a "kept" woman, the fan magazine explains she is actually wholesomely lonely and chaste. "Loneliness offers temptations," including going out with men just for something to do, warns "Monroe." But, she has learned that "to settle for too little can lead to a wrong marriage, to promiscuousness, to self-deceit. I've managed to avoid this danger because my work and other interests keep me mentally and physically occupied" ("Temptations" 44). In other words, Monroe is too dedicated to her work to get distracted by casual sexual encounters.

A photo Monroe had posed for in 1948 was the featured nude for February 1952's "The Exclusive 'Hollywood' Calendar Line," but even this didn't irreparably damage

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[20] A story on Monroe's beauty secrets in *Photoplay* October 1953, along with shampoo and makeup ads that ran in the fan magazine in October 1953 and July 1954, indicate that Monroe was treated like any other female star—as someone to emulate (Monroe "My Beauty").

Monroe's reputation. Monroe admitted to posing for the nude photo in an interview with

Aline Mosby of the United Press, whose article "Nude Calendar Beauty at Last is

Identified" appeared in the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* March 13, 1952. Mosby's

article emphasized that poverty had led Monroe to pose, an excuse that *Life*'s article

"Hollywood Topic A-Plus" repeated alongside a small reproduction of the calendar

image on April 7, 1952. Hedda Hopper praised Monroe for her "direct and frank"

answers regarding the pose. According to Monroe, "I was hungry and the fifty dollars I

earned paid my board at the Studio Club. They had been carrying me along way past the

time limit. I did nothing wrong and I am not ashamed to admit I posed for the pictures.

Mr. Kelly took them and his wife was present" (Hopper "Marilyn" 36, 85). Sheilah

Graham stated that the studio urged Monroe to say nothing about the photo, because,

"Libel laws being what they are, they knew that, so long as Marilyn didn't admit she had

posed for the photo, reporters would have thought twice before identifying her as the girl

in the birthday suit. But—'I had to tell the truth,' says Marilyn, half closing her big,

beautiful blue eyes. 'I just had to . . . '" ("Why" 97). Monroe's willingness to admit to

and defend her nudity led the public to adore rather than reject her.

Monroe's openness about her nude poses shifted the approach to her publicity

from denying her sexuality to frankly accepting (and capitalizing upon) her sex appeal

and her sex life. William Bruce, writing for *Movieland*, notes, "The time was right to

crown a new queen of sex in Hollywood. Marilyn had that unique quality in her make-up

that prevented anything she did from becoming sordid" (62). Fan magazines repeated

early "Monroeisms," or comments that combined titillation and naïveté, such as, "'What

do I sleep in? Why, Chanel No. 5,' and 'I never suntan because I love feeling blond all

over'" (Manning 58).[21] Cloaked in double entendre, Monroe could be both sexual and naïve. But she avoided being too blatant about her sexuality. When movie producers asked her to sing a song called "The Girl on the Calendar," she refused "because she felt audiences would feel she was capitalizing on the questionable publicity her real-life calendar set off" ("Too" 60). Thus, although she was not ashamed of her past, she seemed to want to do the morally acceptable thing, and writers praised her for it.[22]

Monroe's shameless sex appeal generated nearly as much ambivalence as Kinsey's reports had. She was a favorite with troops in Korea, who wrote letters thanking her for boosting morale.[23] But, while many praised Monroe for flaunting her assets, even this praise was often conflicted. For example, one fan wrote to *Photoplay*: "Marilyn is a very pretty and a very, very talented girl, but no girl in Hollywood can get by on just sex appeal." In the next line, however, he insisted that Monroe should maintain that sex appeal: "I don't mean that she should hide those gorgeous curves, don't misunderstand me. But she doesn't have to disrobe to appeal to men. I enjoy looking at her, who wouldn't?" (Hollingsworth 8).

On the other hand, many criticized Monroe for capitalizing on her figure. Graham insisted that Monroe had singlehandedly shifted Hollywood's emphasis to sex appeal. She described the "Monroe Doctrine:" "Open your mouth, remove the underwear, pose in the nude, show your legs, show your bosom, split your skirts. V to the waistline, front as

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[21] See also *Time*'s article "Something for the Boys," which establishes three of her famous "Monroeisms" as "natural" statements: "Asked if she really had nothing on in the photograph, Marilyn, her blue eyes wide, purred: 'I had the radio on,'" and "In bed, she claims, she wears 'only Chanel No. 5,' and she avoids excessive sun bathing because 'I like to feel blonde all over'" ("Something" 88).

[22] See also Emmett.

[23] For letters from troops, see, for example, Dietrich, Orlay, and McGarr. For others praising Monroe's sex appeal, see "Letters: Bosomy Babes."

well as back, and never mention anything quietly domestic" ("Is" 37). Graham's

disapproval reflected the opinion of many. Three college women wrote to *Time*: "We are

average [. . .] American college girls who want to go through life with the belief that sex

is a beautiful thing. Marilyn Monroe has done more to lower the standards of

womanhood in the eyes of both men and women than any one person in history"

(Egelston et. al. 12).[24] Hildegard Johnson summarizes these contradictory positions: "For

years, Hollywood has been awaiting a Marilyn Monroe: the essence of sex, a personality

so exciting that column after column of free publicity, photo after photo would be

devoted to recording her latest sayings and doings." Instead, "all the town's heavy

artillery was hauled out to assail her with a walloping barrage of criticism" (H. Johnson

42).

Those who criticized Monroe's sex appeal acquired more fodder when Monroe

posed nude again at the end of her career as part of the publicity for her unfinished film

Something's Got to Give. This time, most interpreted Monroe's act of public nudity as a

desperate move. "The furor was instantaneous," Todd Rowland wrote. "Clergymen

denounced her daring. 'Brazen, wicked and wanton' were the words most used. 'It isn't

photography' sizzled one woman to her friends, 'It's pornography'" (50). This time,

however, much of the outrage came from, as Rowland pointed out, clergyman and other

moralists.

Just as Monroe had made nudity a nonissue, by the end of her career, her

extramarital sex also seemed to be a nonissue. Her public affairs with Yves Montand and

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[24] Others criticizing Monroe's sex appeal include Moore, Paul, Scannell, "Letters: Bosomy Babes," and letters to the editors of *Life* magazine on June 15, 1953, March 22, 1954, and January 19, 1959.

Frank Sinatra elicited more sympathy for her broken heart than censure.[25] For example, in a story on Monroe's relationship with Sinatra, Jack Tracy pointed out, "To Marilyn Monroe, sex and love are as far apart as the Poles. To Marilyn Monroe *love* can exist without *sex.* And if this is so, does it follow that she also believes *sex* can exist without *love*?" (43). Although Tracy recognized this perspective as "unusual," he nevertheless publicly acknowledged that for Monroe, sex without love might be possible, without criticizing Monroe for it. By the early 1960s, fan magazine writers demonstrated that Monroe helped usher in a new era of sexual standards for women.

Despite criticism of Monroe's sex appeal, or perhaps because of it, Monroe possessed great box-office appeal. "Vulgar?" Graham asks. "Of course. But everyone flocks to her films. So . . . " ("Is" 84). Twentieth Century-Fox publicity attributed Monroe's nearly universal appeal to her combination of sexiness and comedy: "Career-wise, the Blowtorch Blonde's torrid sex appeal has been toned down with comedy in the conviction that women will more readily expose their boy friends to her charms via the screen if the girls can giggle while the guys sigh" (Johnson 20th 1).[26] This strategy must have been successful: Monroe was voted one of *Photoplay*'s ten most popular performers in 1954. Monroe's appeal persisted to the end of her career. A 1961 *Photoplay* article reiterated Monroe's charm for both male and female fans: "Ninety-nine percent of the men in this world find her desirable as a woman. They go to see her on the screen. So do

[25] See, for example, "Did Yves Cause Marilyn's Collapse?" and Lyle, "Behind the Yves Montand, Marilyn Monroe, Arthur Miller Triangle."
[26] *Photoplay* explained Monroe's success in *How to Marry a Millionaire*: she "combined sex and saucy comedy to entertain both masculine and feminine moviegoers" ("Announcing" 21).

most women—they're seething with curiosity. That is Marilyn's chief worth" (Rowland 86).

While official publicity insisted that Monroe was concerned only with pleasing men and asked nothing in return, comments she made on her thirtieth birthday suggested that she was an advocate for female sexual pleasure: "Kinsey says a woman doesn't get started until she's thirty. That's good news—and it's factual too" ("Marilyn"). Monroe's films drew on this aspect of her persona to index the concerns of the larger culture; each of her post-1953 film characters represents a different controversy raised by the Kinsey report. Although each of these characters is a sexually experienced woman, the profit-motivated studio system and the Production Code kept the films from fully depicting sexually active, unmarried women. However, as the decade progressed, the Production Code's power diminished, such that Monroe's characters increasingly reflected Kinsey's findings that over half of American women engaged in premarital sex and, implicitly, his call for a single standard governing sexual behavior. Thus, in *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), The (nameless) Girl makes no demands for her own pleasure. In *Bus Stop* (1956), however, Cherie acknowledges her sexual experience and expresses her demands for reciprocal pleasure before she agrees to marriage, and in *Some Like It Hot* (1958), Sugar admits to her past affairs, seduces a man, and rides off into the sunset unmarried. Each of these films increasingly supported Kinsey's claims that (even unmarried) women desired, and achieved, sexual pleasure.

The Seven Year Itch

Best known today for the image of Monroe's skirt blowing above her knees, *The Seven Year Itch* revived Monroe's career after she left Hollywood to negotiate a better

contract and study at the Actors Studio. While Monroe, known only as The Girl, was featured heavily in the film's publicity, the central character in the film is Richard Sherman (Tom Ewell, reprising his role from George Axelrod's 1952-1955 Broadway play of the same name). After sending his wife, Helen (Evelyn Keyes), and child (Butch Bernard) to Maine for the summer, Richard struggles with his sexual fantasies, seemingly brought to life when The Girl, who has moved upstairs for the summer, rings his buzzer to get into the building. Shortly thereafter, she knocks a potted tomato plant from her balcony, an event that spurs Richard to not only fantasize about making love to The Girl, but also to engage in fumbling attempts to seduce her, attempts she resists while maintaining a casual friendship so she can take advantage of Richard's air conditioning. Although Richard and The Girl share two kisses, their relationship never advances (a point where the film deviates from the play), perhaps because he fears his wife may be having an affair with Tom MacKenzie (Sonny Tufts) and therefore demands a leave from his job to join his family in Maine, leaving The Girl behind with his air conditioning.

This plot outline reveals none of the subtleties that make *The Seven Year Itch* a commentary on the sexual mores of the postwar period. The film opens on a scene of "Manhattan Indians" who, staying behind while their wives vacation for the summer, follow an attractive young woman (Dorothy Ford) like a pack of dogs. This scene is immediately echoed in the train station (Dorothy Ford again playing the attractive young woman), where the film compares the behavior of the natives to that of the more "civilized" modern man. "In all that time," the film's narrator states, "nothing has changed." This scene, unrelated to the rest of the narrative, nods to Kinsey's findings in refutation of the sentiment reflected by physicians Edmund Bergler and William Kroger,

"*What Kinsey never takes into consideration is that jungle-sex and cultured sex are two different entities*" (52).

The film also uses a fictional psychoanalyst, Dr. Brubaker, to allude to Kinsey. Richard is publishing a pocket edition of Dr. Brubaker's *Of Man and the Unconscious*, a highly technical book that, like Kinsey's, was an unusual choice for popular reading material. In Axelrod's play, the jacket of Brubaker's book boasts that it is "hotter than the Kinsey report" (71). Although the film does not directly refer to Kinsey, Richard diagnoses himself with the "seven-year itch" in the same way readers compared themselves to Kinsey's subjects. Richard reads that Brubaker claims the seven year itch "strikes 84.6 per cent of the married male population, [and] rises to an alarming 91.8 during the summer months." As he notes this statistic, Richard compulsively scratches himself.[27] But although Richard has the itch, unlike Brubaker's subjects (as well as Richard's boss [Donald MacBride] and his handyman Kruhulik [Robert Strauss]), Richard resists the urge to scratch.

Richard does not acknowledge Kinsey's key finding regarding the difference between male and female sexuality: that men's sex drive peaks around 16 and then steadily declines, while women's slowly ascends to its peak in the late twenties and early thirties but remains consistent into the fifties and sixties (Kinsey et al. 714-15). Perhaps most damaging to the postwar male ego, already made fragile by white-collar work and the togetherness model that insisted husbands help with childcare and domestic labor, Kinsey writes that "the steady decline in the incidences and frequencies of marital coitus, from the younger to the older age groups, must be the product of aging processes in the

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[27] Brubaker studied 18,000 subjects; Kinsey reported statistics on just 5,940 women in his second report.

male" (353). Richard is about to turn 39; his wife is 31. Richard soliloquizes, "Helen is worried. I just know she is. . . . She probably figures she isn't as young as she used to be. She's 31 years old. One of these days she's going to wake up and find her looks are gone – then where will she be? Well, no wonder she's worried. Especially since I don't look a bit different than I did when I was 28. It's not my fault that I don't. It's just a simple, biological fact: women age quicker than men." This speech disavows another simple, biological fact. Although he may look young, his sex drive is declining when Helen's is ascending, and therefore the seven year itch may be hers.[28]

Even Richard's fantasies make it overwhelmingly apparent that his age impacts his potency. In each of his three fantasies about young women unable to resist his "strange animal thing," he passively reclines while a young woman throws herself at him. After he rebuffs each woman, however, utter exhaustion sweeps over his face, and, in the fantasy that draws on the famous beach scene in *From Here to Eternity*, he even limps into the tide, unexplainably dragging his right leg behind him (Figure 4.1). The "extraordinary" "animal" magnetism Richard thinks he possesses stems from his psyche, not his body; his wife, even in *his* fantasies, only bemusedly remarks, "The only extraordinary thing about you is your imagination."[29] His body betrays him in reality, too. When he first meets The Girl, his neck audibly cracks as he gazes up at her ascending the

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[28] Kinsey's team found that 26 percent of women committed adultery by age 40, most doing so in their mid-thirties (416).

[29] The film's reference to Richard's "animal" magnetism may provide another subtle hint that the film is mocking the response to Kinsey, who was accused of treating human sexual behavior as if it were animal behavior. For example, Bergler and Kroger write that Kinsey's "most dangerous fallacy is the confirmation of the postulate that the 'human animal' (Kinsey's favorite term) is a machine-like figure who discharges sex *without* the element of tender love. This is exactly the attitude of the neurotic man, who views woman merely as an instrument of coitus; it is exactly the attitude normal women justifiably complain about" (185).

stairs and again when he looks up at her on the balcony. These cues make it apparent that the sexual appetites of young women threaten his aging body.[30]

Figure 4.1. Exhausted Richard. From *The Seven Year Itch*.

The Girl's sparsely drawn character capitalizes on Monroe's persona in a number of ways. She seems to embody sexual availability, a character trait that is attributed to her by drawing upon Monroe's previous sexy roles and the publicity stunt for the film that allowed the average New Yorker to see a movie star's undies. The Girl's work as a model draws directly on Monroe's biography: The Girl's "artistic" photo appears in *U.S. Camera*, a magazine that featured Monroe on its cover in 1946. Moreover, explaining the "blonde in the kitchen" whose name he doesn't know to MacKenzie, who has stopped by to retrieve Ricky's paddle, Richard remarks, "Maybe it's Marilyn Monroe."

The Girl's work as a television spokesmodel enhances Richard's understanding of her as walking straight out of his fantasies. [31] The combined force of The Girl's seeming

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[30] See Steve Cohan for a connection of these phenomena to "the burden of breadwinning" (64).

[31] A number of critics have suggested that The Girl is a non-entity in the film; Lucy Bolton, following Bruce Babington and Peter Evans, suggests that she might even be a figment of Richard's imagination (Bolton 97, Babington and Evans 229). My analysis will show how Monroe very clearly performs a woman troubled by the double standard but torn between the benefits of having sex appeal and the drawbacks of being thought of as a walking sexual fantasy. See also: "The Seven Year Itch" in *Weekly Variety*,

availability and her association with consumer goods mocks the period's abundant

consumerism. Photography and television saturate the environment with the sexual sell,

to the extent that Richard's erotically charged paperback covers (e.g., *Little Women*

wearing plunging necklines) use the sexual sell to attract readers.[32] Public commentators,

reflecting on *Playboy* magazine's impact on sexual mores, feared that consumerist

impulses drove sex. The film hints at an anxiety about sexual encounters that resemble

consumer exchanges.[33] The Girl is so immersed in consumer culture that she plugs

Dazzledent toothpaste twice, and Richard uses the commercial's dialogue to steal a kiss

from her on Lexington Avenue. As Richard Armstrong notes, they are "unable even to

converse" (or seduce) "without invoking the throwaway culture in which all America is

immersed" (74).

While The Girl is more than a product of Richard's imagination, Monroe's

presence in the film as an *unnamed character* underscores the predicament of the movie

star as a fantasy figure for the masses. "She's an angel," James Harvey writes, "and that

full-hearted speech she makes to the beady-eyed Tom Ewell about his desirability ('If I

were your wife, I'd be very jealous of you') makes her mission on earth clear. She has

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Armstrong, Barton, Harvey, J. Lewis, Mobilio, Piercy, and Sinyard and Turner. In the
film *Insignificance* (1985), Nicholas Roeg's fictional "Monroe" (Teresa Russell) states
that The Girl is "a figment of this guy's imagination."

[32] According to John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman, "By the late 1940s, publishers had
discovered that sex sells, and were redesigning their covers accordingly. Bantam issued
its first 'beefcake' cover in 1948, promoting *The African Queen* with a naked man
emerging from the water. In the same year, Popular Library produced its famous 'nipple
cover' to entice readers to purchase *The Private Life of Helen of Troy*" (280).

[33] In *The Lonely Crowd*, David Riesman laments that other-directed individuals use sex to
rate themselves among their peers, and therefore always seek the next best thing (see in
particular 145-8). Both Tolson and Solomon associate Monroe with consumerism, and
Kathrina Glitre places *The Seven Year Itch* within a cycle of "consumer comedies" that
began in 1955 (133).

come to us [. . .] not only to turn us on but to shore us up, provoking our lusts, but then redeeming them by her innocence" (66). On the other hand, the film makes clear that her sex appeal is not inherent, but is rather a performance. She abruptly shifts into a hooded eyes and rounded mouth performance when reenacting her toothpaste spot for Richard, and just as abruptly resumes a wide-eyed, smiling appearance. Monroe's performance within the film, and her performance within the performance, underscore the extent to which the screen goddess "Marilyn Monroe" is a construct.

One threat associated with the Monroe fantasy is that it may be nothing more than a fantasy. While critics note that the film draws on Monroe's persona to construct Richard's out-of-control fantasies, they less frequently comment upon how The Girl looks and behaves outside of Richard's fantasies. For example, in Richard's Rachmaninoff fantasy, The Girl wears a gold and black tiger-print evening gown, avoids making eye contact with him, and speaks in a deep voice. The Girl, however, actually shows up at his door in a pink linen shirt and matador pants, with a wide-eyed smile. Even when she dresses for the champagne party, she wears a white summer dress. The Girl "who ultimately joins him," according to Sabrina Barton, "fails to follow his script"—putting her beyond his control, just like his wife in Maine (130). Moreover, her expressions, rather than oozing the sex appeal of Richard's fantasies, suggest how intent she is on having fun (Figure 4.2). Because Richard cannot abandon his seduction script, he doesn't recognize that The Girl is spending time in his apartment for air conditioning, not sex.

Figure 4.2. The Girl just wants to have fun. From *The Seven Year Itch*.

  Several images in the film hint that The Girl is more a nightmare than a fantasy. Richard meets her when her falling tomato plant almost injures him, and he develops a psychosomatic thumb twitch after spending one night with her in the same apartment. Because *The Seven Year Itch* is, in Kevin Ferguson's words, "an oral film" replete with images of food—soya bean burgers, burnt cinnamon toast, and potato chips dipped in champagne—we can read The Girl as threatening to "consume" Richard. When she feels the cool air from the subway, according to Ferguson, "Her pleasured response 'Isn't that delicious?' is basically a question of taste. The idea that the Girl can 'taste' the air blowing up her skirt echoes the film's other scenes of consumption" (44). Thus, The Girl warns Richard, and the viewers, not to mistake her good nature for uncomplicated availability. "At the moment over the subway grate," Ferguson explains, "when she seems to be the most revealing, open, and sexualized, she lets drop a disguised hint about her consuming nature" (45). While Ferguson may be overstating the extent to which The Girl intends to "trap" Richard, The Girl will do whatever is necessary in order to stay cool for the summer.

  If The Girl's use of sex threatens to consume Richard, it does so only because postwar men saw shifting sexual mores as a threat. The Girl isn't interested in marriage, as "nice girls" were supposed to be. "People keep falling desperately in love with me,"

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she complains. "They start asking me to marry them. All the time. I don't know why they do it." She is relieved, therefore, when she finds out Richard is married: "I think it's wonderful that you're married. I think it's just elegant. . . . I mean, I wouldn't be lying on the floor in the middle of the night in some man's apartment drinking champagne if he wasn't married." When she explains that marriage would mean "I'd have to start getting in by one o'clock again. … That's the wonderful part about being with a married man: no matter what happens, he can't possibly ask you to marry him, because he's married already, right?," Richard misinterprets her statement as an invitation to an uncomplicated affair, cranks up the Rachmaninoff, and leans in for a kiss, which she rebuffs with a comment about liking Eddie Fisher.[34]

That The Girl must repeatedly stop the advances of men is a form of sexual brinkmanship highlighting a threat associated with female sexuality in the postwar period, the potential for refusal.[35] Robert Moskin, in a vitriolic article in *Look* in 1958, complained, "Who controls this increased premarital sex activity? The young American female. . . . The boy is expected to 'get all he can,' and the girl is expected to regulate him" (77).[36] Nora Johnson presented the woman's perspective for the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1959 when she wrote about the men who divided girls into "good" and "bad," and

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[34] While the joke at the time would have been that Fisher, a pop singer not a classical musician, illustrated the age and taste gap between Richard and The Girl, the allusion perhaps takes on an irony after Fisher's marriage to Debbie Reynolds in 1955 ended with his scandalous affair with Elizabeth Taylor.
[35] See Jill Dione's unpublished dissertation, *Body Image: Fashioning the Postwar American*, for an elaboration of the various threats of female sexuality in the postwar period, as well as chapter five of Nadel's *Containment Culture*.
[36] See also Norris, Reiss, and Morse.

expected "good" girls to give in as soon as they were "pinned or engaged" (59). She

explained that such a shift

> would require the girl to be an angel of civilized and understanding
> behavior at first, pacifying her man by a gentle pat on the knee at just the
> right time and keeping him at bay – and yet interested – in a way both
> tactful and loving (the teen-age magazines devote a lot of space to this
> technique and recommend warding off unwise passes by asking about the
> latest football scores), and then, once the pin has been handed over, to
> shed her clothes and hop into bed with impassioned abandon. (N. Johnson
> 59-60)

Exercising a similar kind of brinkmanship, The Girl threatens to control both her

own and the man's desires. Richard is unable to control himself around her. When

Richard over-pours her champagne, "the sexual metaphor is given an even more

submissive twist," Albert Mobilio points out, "as [Richard] himself sips off the excess

from her dribbling glass. The emasculated 'nice guy,' [Richard] not only can't control his

glee in the presence of a sex goddess but he's more than willing to clean up afterward"

(56). Although The Girl knows what Richard wants, she feigns naïveté, walking a

tightrope between avoiding sex and staying in the air-conditioned apartment. When he

asks her to leave, for example, after he has knocked her off the piano bench with an

attempted embrace, she maintains his interest by telling him he's "being silly," while

nevertheless stopping his sexual advances.

But The Girl is too "hot" for Richard to resist, so "hot," in fact, that she has to

keep her "undies in the icebox" and contemplates soaking her sheets in ice water.

Director Billy Wilder's use of the antiquated term "icebox" (this scene is not in the play)

puns on the site of female frigidity. In order to avoid sleeping with Richard, The Girl—

directly reflecting Kinsey's data, which shows that "frigidity" is more feigned than real—

goes to great lengths to create the (artificial) effect of frigidity. A female physician whose

research was generally ignored by the medical community reported in the *Medical Woman's Journal* in 1950 that frigidity was a "normal" response to the "thoughtlessness" and "emotional hurts" caused by partners, not a psychological or gynecological disorder (qtd. in C. Lewis 53). Kinsey confirmed her finding: while physicians and psychologists conventionally believed that up to 75 percent of wives were frigid, Kinsey found that only 10 percent of women were, and only temporarily (Bergler and Kroger 159, Kinsey et al 357).[37] In the context of Kinsey's findings, The Girl makes clear that it is simpler to sleep with a man than to employ extreme, and extremely flawed, measures to cool off her underpants and her bed.

This false "cooling" of a "hot" woman also alludes to the problems of censorship. Because the Production Code stated: "Adultery and illicit sex, sometimes necessary plot material, shall not be explicitly treated, nor shall they be justified or made to seem right and permissible" (Association 3), Richard and The Girl could not consummate their relationship, a crucial difference between the film and the play.[38] Wilder regretted having to make the film under these terms. "On Broadway," he said, "the guy has an affair with the girl upstairs, but in the picture, he only gets to imagine how it would be to go to bed

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[37] See also Hitschmann and Bergler; Lewis, C.; and Cryle and Moore. Kroger and Freed argue that "in many cases, frigidity 'represent[ed] the natural behavior of the highly moral and cultured woman [. . . for] it is the direct characteristic of the respectable woman not to feel sexual pleasure but to reject everything sexual as indecent or at best to submit but passively to the male'" (526).

[38] Established in 1930 (but not fully effective until 1934), the Production Code Administration strove to uphold public morals while avoiding censorship from outside the industry. To ensure that their films would receive a seal of approval, filmmakers followed Production Code provisions on the treatment of crime, sex, language, costuming, religion, and "national feeling," among other topics. However, screenwriters commonly note that both they and the censors upheld the letter of the Code but often skirted its spirit. See, for example, Stephen Weinberger's article "Joe Breen's Oscar." Until 1953, films without the seal were not exhibited in major theaters. For discussions of the Production Code, see Jacobs, Doherty, and Leff and Simmons.

with Marilyn Monroe. And just the *idea* of going to bed with her has to terrify him, or it won't get past the censors" (qtd. in Chandler 178).[39]

Wilder attributes the film's lack of sex to Richard's guilt, pairing The Girl's brinkmanship with Richard's fear of cultural sanction. While Richard tells The Girl, "There's nothing to be ashamed of. Under this thin veneer of civilization, we're all savage," she muses on how much money she's spent on a fan that doesn't work, contemplates sleeping in sheets soaked in ice water, and decides to ask to sleep at his apartment. Although her request to sleep over after his statements about the very "natural" attraction between them might be taken as accepting his implicit overture, he loses his nerve, and tells her, "This may be a little too savage." While Richard initially agrees that it should be acceptable for her to sleep in his apartment, he fears being caught: "There's such a thing as society you know, laws, rules, I don't mean I necessarily believe in them, but after all, no man's an island."

It is perhaps more interesting to consider what wasn't censored than what was.[40] While the inset shot of The Girl's "Textures" photo shows her in a bikini, the dialogue suggests that she is nude: "I was, uh, it was one of these, artistic pictures," she explains as she lifts the right shoulder of her shirt. "It was called 'Textures,' because you could see three different kinds of textures: the driftwood, the sand, and me," she tells Richard,

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[39] See also Winton and Phillips.

[40] The material cut from the film because of censorship adds little in the way of scandal. Two scenes—one where the plumber reaches into The Girl's bathwater to retrieve a wrench he has dropped, and one in which The Girl says, "I feel sorry for you men in your hot pants"—were cut. Breen negotiated for only two shots, not three, of The Girl's skirt blowing in the subway breeze, and advised producer Frank McCarthy to eliminate reference to glands, and to cut away before MacKenzie rolls over onto Helen in Richard's hayride fantasy (McCarthy).

whose bulging eyes suggest he sees more than her polka dot bikini.[41] Before we see the

inset shot, we imagine a nude photo. In addition, the film clearly implies The Girl is

sexually experienced, even though she is unmarried. Lucy Bolton calls attention to "the

ubiquitous sexual references [. . .] ('Do you really think you can get it open?')" that

"undermine any 'wholesomeness' about The Girl's sexuality that she herself might

constitute" (117). The Girl's shameless attitude toward sex and nudity sharply contrasts

with Richard's guilt. Because the censors focused on the affair and Richard's fantasies,

Monroe's performance could communicate the casual attitude toward sex that the Code

forbade. This role paved the way for Monroe's next role, as the openly experienced

Cherie of *Bus Stop*.

Bus Stop

While *The Seven Year Itch* communicates The Girl's sexual experience through

innuendo, *Bus Stop* openly accepts female sexual experience. *Bus Stop*, based on a

William Inge play, was adapted by George Axelrod, the author of *The Seven Year Itch*,

and directed by Joshua Logan.[42] In the film, Monroe plays Cherie, a world-weary

"chanteuse" who works at a Phoenix nightclub. Bo Decker (Don Murray) is in Phoenix to

participate in the rodeo. Bo's mentor, Virgil (Arthur O'Connell), tells him it is time to

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[41] Breen wrote to producer McCarthy: "We would like to suggest you substitute
something less pointed than the line by the girl, 'I was nude'. Perhaps you might consider
using something to the effect of 'I didn't have too much on'. This is important in view of
Richard's later reaction (page 42) to the girl's picture. As presently described, it is an
unacceptable reaction to nudity, but, if the element of nudity were removed, we think it
would be acceptable" (Breen).
[42] Jeff Johnson argues that "the play is democratic, its sexuality equally distributed
among all the characters, while the film goes out of its way to neutralize everyone but
Monroe, all the overt sexuality safely wrapped up in her image" (74). Johnson insists that
the film therefore cannot send the same message of gender reversal "that makes the stage
version more subversive, relevant and powerful" (74).

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meet a woman, as he has been alone on the ranch throughout his adolescence, advice Bo takes to heart when he sees Cherie singing and claims her as his "angel." While Cherie is initially attracted to Bo, his manner of courting her—charging into her bedroom in the morning and reciting the Gettysburg Address, lassoing her, and abducting her on a bus to Montana—understandably cool her affections. Only at the eponymous bus stop during a snowstorm, when the bus driver (Robert Bray) beats some sense into him, does Bo recognize that his behavior has been offensive and selfish. Once he apologizes to Cherie, she willingly boards the bus to Montana to start a life with him while Virgil stays behind.

Monroe's influence on this film, and on the portrayal of Cherie, is unmistakable. Monroe personally selected Cherie's costumes, and director Logan and screenwriter Axelrod insisted that Monroe shaped her role as Cherie. Rollyson argues that *Bus Stop* represents an actor's rare "opportunity to influence a film [. . .] directly" (102). She shaped the film through characteristic gestures, such as scratching her head, burying her face in her hands, or leaning her face against her palms or forearms, "defining," as Rollyson writes, "Cherie's fatiguing searching for an identity" (108).

At the same time, however, Cherie's search for identity directly challenges much of what was expected from Monroe's persona. Cherie is, in many respects, the opposite of *The Seven Year Itch*'s fantasy "Girl." We first see Cherie from Virgil's perspective as he watches her from his hotel window. Tired and harangued, Cherie fans herself as she sits in the saloon window. Because we first glimpse Cherie in this private moment, this sequence "is self-consciously cinematic and virtually voyeuristic in revealing the interior of her life" (Rollyson 107). Her life, as viewers soon learn, consists of a series of assaults on her privacy. A group of saloon patrons barge into the room where she is resting,

pawing at her until her boss ushers them back into the main saloon. She returns to the window and hangs her head, but her boss pushes her around and insists she return to the saloon. Although she is a showgirl, Cherie is neither as glamorous nor as sexy as the fantasy women Monroe had previously played. When her boss tells her to get into her showgirl costume, what might have been titillating is instead quite awkward. Rather than seductively sliding pantyhose up her outstretched legs or shimmying into a tight-fitting garment, Cherie leaves her robe on, gracelessly stumbles as she shoves her legs into the costume, and reveals the inner foundation of the garment rather than her breasts. Her striptease in reverse establishes the discord between the way she is expected to behave and how she actually feels.

Bus Stop's early episodes establish the pattern governing Cherie's life: while men have never treated her well, she maintains her self-respect by clinging to her dreams of completing her journey from, as she tells her coworker, "River Gulch [to] Hollywood and Vine," where, she claims, "You get discovered, you get tested with options and everything. And you get treated with a little respect, too!" These lines, delivered early in the film, unmistakably allude to Monroe's own battles with Hollywood. Everyone watching the film, knowing that Monroe had walked out on Hollywood because she was only given dumb blonde roles, and now seeing her in another at least superficially dumb blonde role, would certainly know that Cherie was more likely to get "treated with a little respect" by a rodeo cowboy than by Hollywood.

As Monroe's first film after she studied at the Actors Studio, *Bus Stop* earned her praise, but not respect. According to *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Bus Stop* reveals that, contrary to the "knowing laughter about Miss Monroe's attempts to broaden her native

talents by working at her acting[, . . .] she now has the last and very triumphant laugh. [. . .] The celebrated attractions are still happily there but they have been augmented by a sensitivity, a poignancy and an apparent understanding that Miss Monroe did not display before" ("Bus" 3).[43] Cherie's Ozark accent and stylized performance of "Old Black Magic," which is sung rather unpleasantly, as a "hillbilly" "chanteuse" would sing it, demonstrate vividly Monroe's acting ability, of which even the *New York Times* critic Bosley Crowther, who had lambasted Monroe in her previous roles, approved. However, while recognizing that she could act, critics also praised her body or attributed her performance to the work of Logan. Thus, Monroe's own career demonstrates how difficult it was to gain respect from Hollywood, a fact that makes Cherie's dream all the more naïve.

Cherie is not naïve, however, in matters of sex; this character trait derives from Monroe's status as a sexually active but unmarried woman whose sexual liaisons didn't detract from fans' admiration. *Bus Stop* participates in a role reversal in that Cherie is sexually experienced, but Bo is virginal. As the film's trailer explains: "He didn't want her to know that when it came to women, he knew nothing, but nothing. She didn't want him to know that when it came to men, she knew plenty, but plenty." The film was marketed as "the coming of age of Bo Decker . . . and the Woman who Made Him a Man!" The trailer's joke only works if it proclaims the opposite of the conventional scenario.

Initially, it seems that *Bus Stop* has set Cherie up as a woman for an inexperienced man to "practice on," thereby chastising her for her experience. Virgil encourages Bo to

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[43] For reviews praising Monroe's acting in this film, see Crowther, "The Screen" and Crowther, "The Proof of Marilyn."

explore his sexuality, telling him, "You're 21 years old, and we're on our way to a big city, Phoenix, Arizona. It's time you met up with a gal." He warns him, however, not to set his sights on an "angel," as Bo intends, but on "some plain looking little old gal with a cooperative nature and a good personality."[44] Virge's advice suggests that "gal[s] with a cooperative nature," that is, sexually experienced women, aren't worthy of marriage. He even ribs Bo, telling him he knows he is attracted to the women in cheesecake magazines. (Here, the film alludes to Monroe's nude photos, which, as noted in chapter two, were the first nude photos of a celebrity that most Americans saw, and thus she likely played a role in many teenage boys' fantasies of "the woman who made him a man.") Bo seems to corroborate Virge's opinion regarding "cooperative" women when he insists, "If I do find me a gal, it ain't gonna be a gal from all those magazines. I already decided. I'm gonna get me a angel." Although Bo insists that a pin-up model could not be his angel, upon seeing Cherie on stage in a burlesque costume, Bo decides she is his angel, and later insists, "I don't want no school marm! I want Cherry!" Bo's repeated mispronouncing of Cherie as Cherry hints at his desire for sex. Bo's angel is not a complacent "good" girl, but a woman uniquely equipped to provoke desire.

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[44] That *Bus Stop* received the PCA seal of approval reveals both the waning influence of the PCA and that the film's producers thought the audience would accept the sexually charged material. *Bus Stop* was one of the first films Shurlock censored, and many of his suggestions were ignored. While Shurlock argued that "Bo's line '. . . I wanta be in bed by ten o'clock' together with Cherie's reaction to it is unacceptably sex-suggestive," both remained in the film. The filmmakers also ignored the suggestion to "substitute some expression other than '. . . to practice on . . .' in Virge's dialogue with Bo," and, while Shurlock insisted that "the line 'Ya tryin' a tell me he never—' appears to have an unacceptable suggestive flavor," this line also remains in the film. Thus, it is evident that Virge intends for Bo to have just a sexual interlude, and that Cherie expects him to treat her as just a sexual interlude.

Because Cherie desires respect, she was initially attracted to Bo when he quieted the crowd during her performance: "It was real nice the way you made everybody shut up in there. Like you had respect for me. You made them have respect too. I liked that." But Bo quickly contradicts her first impression by insisting that they are getting married when he hasn't properly asked her, and by repeatedly embarrassing Cherie at the rodeo, where he treats her as though she is already his possession. Bo wants to bend Cherie to his will: "I'm just gonna pretend that little old calf is Cherry. I'm going after her, and I'm gonna get her, and when I get her, I'm gonna rope her." Cherie admits that she's attracted to Bo, but she isn't convinced to marry him because her understanding of love involves more than physical attraction. In one of the film's most melancholy moments, she admits she's not sure if she will ever find a suitable man: "Maybe I don't know what love is. I want a guy I can look up to and admire, but I don't want him to browbeat me. I want a guy who'll be sweet with me, but I don't want him to baby me either. I just gotta feel that whoever I marry has some real regard for me, aside from all that lovin' stuff, you know what I mean?"

While Cherie insists on respect despite her sexual experience, Bo's inexperience is the film's central joke, a joke that calls attention to the absurdity of the double standard. Virge encourages Bo to gain experience, but he belittles Cherie for having it. Explaining that sexually experienced women aren't acceptable brides, Virge says, "I ain't sayin' this particular gal you picked out ain't a good one to practice on. But a fella can't go around marryin' the first gal he meets." When Virge explains to Cherie that he doesn't want Bo to marry her, she indignantly responds, "It's cause I ain't good enough for him, is that it? I suppose he's as pure as a bunch of driven snow." Confirming Bo's "purity" at

the same time as he censures Cherie's impurity, Virge explains that Bo "spent his whole life pretty far out in the country." When Cherie questions Virge's logic, explaining, "I know what happens in the country, I'm from the country myself. I've been kissin' boys since I was knee high to a . . . ," Virge keeps her from detailing her experience, saying, "You're kind of sophisticated for Bo." "First time, huh?," Cherie asks. "Sure ain't never had that honor before." The scenario this exchange alludes to unmistakably reverses 1950s gender roles. In 1957, M.D. Lena Levine wrote that it was the husband's job to teach the inexperienced wife, who is "dismayed at feeling little or no sexual desires, which she had been sure would automatically come to her with marriage" (34).

While Levine argued that wives had no sexual desires, *Bus Stop* suggests that men must learn to satisfy women's sexual desires. Cherie is uniquely equipped to teach Bo what he needs to know about satisfying women, and as he learns, the film reflects the period's post-Kinsey emphasis on the need for men to engage in the proper techniques, both of seduction and sex. Bo's approach is wrong from the start: "Now, I come down for the rodeo tomorrow with the idea in mind of findin' me an angel, and you're it. Now I don't have a lot of time for sweet talkin' around the bush, so I'd be much obliged to you if you'd just step outside with me into the fresh air." Bo's lack of "time for," as he confuses the metaphor, "sweet talkin' around the bush" can easily be interpreted as code for his reluctance to engage in foreplay, either conversational foreplay or the physical foreplay associated with the "bush."[45] As he claims that he has no time for foreplay, Bo

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[45] Kinsey explains, "The slower responses of the female in coitus appear to depend in part upon the fact that she frequently does not begin to respond as promptly as the male, because psychologic stimuli usually play a more important role in the arousal of the average male, and a less important role in the sexual arousal of the average female"

represents the public resistance to Kinsey's unconventional finding that frigidity was not a psychological disorder but rather the result of improper sex techniques. According to Kinsey, "The average female [. . .] does not begin to respond until there has been a considerable amount of physical stimulation" (626-7). In 1954, gynecologist and psychiatrist Arthur Mandy insisted that, if men read the report, they would understand "the importance of the male's stimulating the female, up to and *including* orgasm, by labial and clitoral manipulation, rather than by sole concentration on *coital* positions and techniques" (101-2). However, this advice rarely made it into the popular press; even when it did, authors themselves "beat around the bush" by only hinting that husbands should read the book to find out how "correct physical stimulation" could lead wives to "enjoy these relations" (Davidson and Mudd 115).

As a Code approved film, *Bus Stop* could not go into detail regarding Bo's sexual technique, but his inadequacy at seducing women is reiterated throughout the film, unmistakably alluding to the prominent context of Kinsey's findings on female pleasure. Virge suggests that women sometimes like men for their minds, so Bo barges in on Cherie when she's asleep and encourages her to "get attracted to [his] mind" by listening to him recite the Gettysburg Address. The way the scene is shot, however, suggests that Virge is also out of touch with how best to seduce a woman. As Cherie insists that she has "no intention in the world of marryin'" Bo because she "know[s] all about your mind I ever want to know," the camera is behind the headboard, so that the bedrails resemble the bars of a cell across the characters' faces. This shot indicates that Bo's inept approach

(Chapter 16). She is also "more easily distracted" and then has to start over (Kinsey et al 627). See also Kelly and Butterfield.

is barring Cherie from becoming further involved with him. When Bo begins caressing

her naked arm and hip, the camera moves to the side, so that it is clear when Cherie,

aroused by his physical stimulation, acquiesces and turns toward Bo (Figure 4.3).
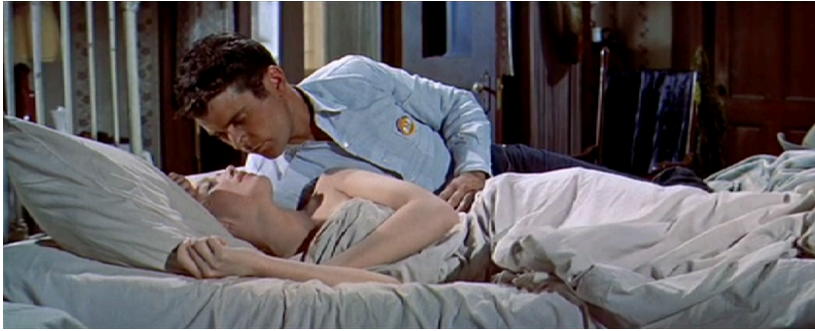
Figure 4.3. Bo's effective caresses. From *Bus Stop*.

To seduce Cherie, Bo must learn to humble himself. The bus driver, acting as a

surrogate for Virge, beats some sense into him, making a condition of Bo's loss that he

must apologize to everyone he has annoyed on the bus ride, including Cherie. He finally

admits, "Cherry, it wasn't right of me to do what I did to you. Treatin' you that way,

dragging you on the bus, tryin' to make you marry me whether you wanted to or not. Do

you think you could ever forgive me?" She replies, "I guess I been treated worse in my

life." Although Cherie looks defeated throughout this scene, she also approaches Bo with

the same kind of respect she seeks for herself. "Bo, I just wanted to tell you something.

It's kinda personal and embarrassing, too. But, I ain't the kind of girl you thought I was.

. . . I guess a lot of people'd say I led a real wicked life, and I guess I have, too." When

Cherie says she's had "quite a few" previous boyfriends, Bo admits, "I guess I just didn't

know anything about women, cause they're different from men." Cherie's response,

"Well, naturally," echoes Kinsey's findings, which encouraged men to approach women

as aroused and satisfied in a manner different from that of men.

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Through Cherie, and by extension, Monroe's sexual but not wanton persona, *Bus Stop* bespeaks a cultural shift in which unmarried sexually active women deserved as much respect as virgins. "Seeing as how you had all them other boyfriends before me," Bo states, "and seeing as how I never had one single gal friend before you, well, Virge figures that between the two of us, it kinda averages out to things being proper, and right." Bo's stubborn desire to marry Cherie, despite her past, leads Virge to finally accept her, but Bo still relies on Virge's authority. Cherie avoids making eye contact with Bo as she waits for him to explain if he feels the same as Virge, but an extended close-up two-shot illustrates, through the shot composition and editing, how they come to a mutual understanding. "I've been thinking about them other fellas, Cherry," Bo says, his face dominating the frame such that only one of Cherie's eyes is visible as she glances hopefully up at him. "I like you the way you are, so what do I care how you got that way?" he continues, as the camera gradually pans down to show her full face only when Bo has accepted her for her sexual experience. In this shared shot, "with Cherie's upper body lying along the bottom of the frame and [Bo] leaning above her," as Ana Salzberg points out, "the two merge in a body-landscape, a panorama of passionate recognition" (142) (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4. As Bo acknowledges Cherie's past, the camera pans down to show her full face. From *Bus Stop*.

After this, a series of shot/reverse-shot close-ups alternately isolates each of their faces as they realize their affection for each other, and signals how Bo's acceptance of Cherie's past enables her to "go anywhere in the world" with him. Bo's acceptance of Cherie's past is out of keeping with the conventional attitude toward experienced women. Levine advised women to keep their sexual experience a secret, because, according to a marriage counselor, "It's a rare man [. . .] who can hear about his wife's pre-marital sex and completely condone and accept it" (60). The series of close-ups in this sequence, rather than two-shots, indicates that Bo and Cherie are individuals before they are a couple, and, contrary to the advice of postwar marriage counselors, that their past experiences must be accepted before they can begin a successful relationship.

But what does Cherie gain when she agrees to marry Bo? Most obviously, she gains a way out of the saloon circuit and a spouse, despite conventional warnings that men didn't marry women who weren't virgins. As the couple stands outside the bus,

saying goodbye to Virge, who refuses to accompany them, Bo recognizes that Cherie must be "freezing" in the thin coat she has been wearing since he forced her onto the bus to Montana, and offers his heavy coat. The shot lingers on her as she wraps herself in its luxury. While Rollyson reads Cherie's enjoyment at this moment as "recognition of what she has won," he doesn't say what that is, but implies it is the security of marriage (111).

However, the film's final moments make clear that Cherie can expect more than the security of marriage in the form of the "deep freeze" Bo had promised, "or an electric washer, or any other major appliance you want." As Cherie wraps herself in the coat, she turns her head from left to right, lingering in the sensation of the coat's fur trim against her skin, displaying the closed eyes and open mouth associated with Monroe's signature expression of sexual pleasure (Figure 4.5). Cherie's visible pleasure indicates that Bo will work to satisfy her sexual needs, as he does her more immediate physical needs. After this exchange, moreover, Cherie gives Bo her scarf, hinting at a reciprocal relationship, a gesture that makes him whoop as he considers her needs again and helps her board the bus ahead of him. In short, Bo finally makes Cherie "hot" for him by thinking of her needs, demonstrating that he has learned the lessons indicated by Kinsey's unconventional findings regarding female sexual pleasure.

Figure 4.5. Cherie's pleasure. From *Bus Stop*.

Some Like It Hot

Drawing on her sexually charged roles in *The Seven Year Itch* and *Bus Stop*, *Some Like It Hot* more openly asserts Monroe's sexuality. In *Some Like It Hot*, Joe (Tony Curtis) and Jerry (Jack Lemmon), two hard-up musicians who inadvertently witness the St. Valentine's massacre in Prohibition-era Chicago, escape the mobsters pursuing them by disguising themselves as women. Joe becomes Josephine and Jerry becomes Daphne in order to join an all-girl jazz band bound for Florida. After he spends some time with Sugar Kane Kowalczyk (Monroe), who tells him she hopes to meet a millionaire in glasses, Joe concocts a second disguise, as the bespectacled Shell Oil, Jr. In a significant plot twist, Joe, as Shell Oil, Jr., feigns impotence to allow Sugar to prove her aptitude for love making. Meanwhile, Jerry as Daphne meets a real millionaire, Osgood Fielding (Joe E. Brown), whom, despite her initial impression that he is a "dirty old man," she agrees to marry. When the Chicago mobsters show up at the Florida hotel, the disguises unravel, but not before Josephine kisses Sugar goodbye. Despite learning that he is both Josephine and Shell Oil, Jr., Sugar insists on beginning a relationship with Joe. Jerry, even after he confesses he is a man, remains unable to shake Osgood, who maintains they are getting married. In several ways, *Some Like It Hot* presents a fluid view of gender roles and a less moralistic attitude toward sexual behavior than that which typified the 1950s.

Some Like It Hot, moreso than Monroe's other roles, illustrates her unique ability to defy conventional moral codes without appearing defiant. Although Billy Wilder, who co-wrote and directed *The Seven Year Itch*, also co-wrote and directed this film, Sugar differs greatly from the fantasy figure of The Girl, who represents allure without consummation, and so avoids transgressing the conventions governing sexual behavior.

Sugar is sexy and admits to being "not very bright," but she is much more assertive than The Girl; she seduces Shell Oil, Jr. to get what she wants. In so doing, Sugar contradicts two pieces of conventional wisdom regarding sex that had proven restrictive to postwar relations: first, that the sex act for women should entail passivity, and, second, that satisfying women sexually interfered with men's pleasure. Sugar's sexuality is aggressive, but also aggressively focused on the man's pleasure, and as such it alleviates any anxiety about satisfying her.

The film's Prohibition-era setting is adapted to the 1950s by virtue of Monroe and the meanings she brings to the film. Kinsey pointed out that the greatest changes in female sexual behavior occurred in the generation that was in their teens and twenties in the 1920s (244).[46] "Dressing up the 1950s as the 1920s," as Gerd Gemünden sees it, "allows Wilder to contrast the stifling and confining Eisenhower years with an era that was known for its audaciousness and unlawfulness, its sexual liberties and progressive ideas, and its economic and political volatility" (102). During the 1920s, sex was separated from procreation, and the period's "sexual liberalism," as John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman write, "affirmed heterosexual pleasure as a value in itself, defined sexual satisfaction as a critical component of personal happiness and successful marriage, and weakened the connections between sexual expression and marriage by providing youth with room for some experimentation as preparation for adult status" (241). Setting the film in the 1920s therefore draws on the seemingly more liberated values of the earlier period in order to reconsider the professed mores of the 1950s.

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[46] For other analyses of Kinsey's reports that allude to the 1920s, see Ditzion, Havemann, and Hurst. See also Reumann.

Alluding to the more blatantly sexual 1920s allows Wilder to highlight how Monroe combines the sexual assertiveness of the 1920s with the compliant attitudes characteristic of women during the postwar readjustment period. While Monroe's apparent sexuality calls to mind Jean Harlow and Mae West, whereas her predecessors were tough and full of bravado, Monroe has an uncanny ability to combine sexual assertiveness with a seeming naïveté and submissiveness. [47] Although Monroe doesn't have the flapper figure, her nearly transparent dresses signal her freedom from the "buttoned-up" mores of the postwar period's cultural conservatives; her sheer dresses are as transgressive for the 1950s as the flapper look was for the 1920s.[48] Sugar and the film's other women are not stereotypically conservative 1950s women; Kinsey's findings regarding female sexual behavior evidently apply to them.

The threat of homosexuality in the film may have helped make Sugar's behavior acceptable. In *Some Like It Hot*'s famous final sequence, Daphne, in order to convince Osgood that they can't get married, cycles through typical excuses—"I'm not a natural blonde," "I smoke," "I've been living with a saxophone player," "I can't have children"—but finally, because Osgood doesn't care about any of these things, Jerry exclaims, "I'm a man" and removes his wig, to which Osgood replies, "Nobody's perfect." The film ends with a two-shot of them looking straight ahead, Osgood grinning, Jerry baffled, as they speed into the future. Writers Billy Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond recognized that they could only push the boundaries so far. The final lines of the script read: "Jerry looks at Osgood, who is grinning from ear to ear, claps his hand to his

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[47] See Chapter 2 for details on Monroe's transgressive persona.
[48] More than the flapper style, Sugar's costumes call to mind pre-Code costuming (or lack thereof). In *King Kong* (1933), for example, Fay Wray wore a sheer blouse, and *Tarzan and His Mate* (1934) featured an extended nude-swimming scene.

forehead. How is he going to get himself out of this? But that's another story – and we're not quite sure the public is ready for it" (156). While Wilder and Diamond suspected that the public was not ready for a fully realized homosexual relationship onscreen, the end of Sugar's story—she speeds off to live outside of wedlock with another saxophone player—demonstrates that the public was ready for the sexually liberated woman onscreen.

The ease with which Sugar accepts Daphne and Josephine as women suggests that she's more comfortable with their new identities than they are, making her a model for accepting gender fluidity. Sugar befriends them as women; as they chat in the ladies' room, she confides in them about her past and her drinking. When Sugar climbs into Daphne's berth to avoid being caught by Sue, it is clear that the two of them have sexual chemistry despite the fact that Sugar thinks she's in bed with a woman. Sugar snuggles up to Daphne, but Jerry is uncomfortably titillated because he's supposed to be a woman. And the more Daphne trembles, the more physical Sugar gets: when she rubs Daphne's legs between her feet, Daphne has to remind herself, "I'm a girl." Later, Sugar receives a tender kiss from Josephine, a kiss from which she does not pull away. Neil Sinyard and Adrian Turner note the "audacity" of this kiss: "Hollywood's supreme sex-symbol [sic] is given her most passionate screen kiss by another woman" (222). Sugar accepts that these men are women, and that women are sometimes attracted to other women, subversively hinting at a new era of sexual mores.[49]

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[49] Several biographers have speculated that Monroe might have been homosexual. Her first dramatic coach, Natasha Lytess, claims to have had a relationship with Monroe, and Monroe supposedly admitted to liaisons with Marlene Dietrich and Joan Crawford. See Banner's biography and Tony Jerris's less reputable *Marilyn Monroe: My Little Secret*.

A few details from public responses to *Some Like It Hot* will highlight just how remarkably Monroe disarmed the most subversive aspects of her role in the film. Crowther hinted at the possible homosexuality in the film, but did not recognize it as such, instead using the film to prove that film censorship was changing:

> There's a scene in this Hollywood picture in which a lightly clad Marilyn Monroe does some rather voluptuous snuggling up with Jack Lemmon in the upper berth of a Pullman car. Even though it's true that Mr. Lemmon is impersonating a girl and Miss Monroe is taken in by the deception, it's a scene that would curl the hair of Will H. Hays, who used to have some rigid notions about scenes of gentlemen and ladies in bed. [. . .] Only it's done much more boldly and frankly than it could have been a few years ago. ("To Be" X1)

Not only does this review call attention to the fact that Monroe is "rather voluptuous[ly] snuggling" someone she thinks is a woman, but it praises the film for it (Figure 4.6). Furthermore, clergymen complained to the censor, Shurlock, regarding the film's "clear inferences of homosexuality and lesbianism" (Little). Shurlock, however, responded that the film had received "nothing but praise" in reviews, and concluded his response with a parting shot: "We are of course not defending the two exaggerated costumes worn by the leading lady; but we gathered these were not your major concern" (Shurlock to Little). Although two of Sugar's scenes could signal homosexual desire, and although she admits to living with men outside of marriage, her costumes constitute the biggest threat to public morals associated with her character. This is a new era indeed.

Figure 4.6. Two women in bed. From *Some Like It Hot*.

Despite her defiance of conventional mores, critics have alternately argued that

Sugar is a victim of patriarchy or a sign of the film's unmet transgressive potential.

Kathleen Rowe argues that Sugar becomes the object of the pursuit, underscoring her

status as a "victim" and "her submissive femininity" (189-90).[50] Rowe's interpretation,

however, ignores Sugar's assertive plan to snag a millionaire and her role in the

seduction. Ed Sikov specifically associates Sugar with the film's transgressive potential,

noting that the film recognizes as valid "emotional androgyny" while illustrating how it is

punished by society: "Sugar is a nearly suicidal drunk because she is abused by a society

that makes her powerless; Joe finds himself increasingly frustrated with the masculine

role he must play; Jerry discovers that Osgood is a fine catch only to be told that he is

sick to think so, and he consequently ends up longing for death" (147). What these critics

miss is that the historical context of the shifting attitudes of the late 1950s reveals how

transgressive and hopeful *Some Like It Hot* is regarding sexuality and gender roles.

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[50] For other significant critical interpretations of the film, see Cohan, Bell-Metereau, Garber, and Lieberfeld. Sikov points out that the film ends with "two hidden penises" in the same relationship, but also laments that "theirs is a love that dare not speak its name" (146).

Some Like It Hot is clearly infused with a 1950s context of anxiety about gender

roles, which stemmed not only from shifting understandings of marriage (see Chapter 3),

but also from the sex reassignment surgery of Christine Jorgensen in 1952. [51]

Summarizing the anxieties surrounding gender fluidity raised by Jorgensen, Gobind

Behari Lal writes for *American Mercury*: "How secure is anybody's sex? What is it to be

a man or to be a woman? How much sex change is possible in a human being? Can a man

and a wife walk into a hospital and come out roles reversed, Joe turned into Jane, Jane

into Joe?" (39). Note that Lal is not only worried about biology—he's worried about

gender *roles*. Drawing on the opinions of scientists, Lal reports that "to be human means

to be Man-with-a-touch-of-Woman, to be Woman-with-a-touch-of-Man" (42).

    Some Like It Hot dramatizes what it means "to be Man-with-a-touch-of-Woman,"

or the concept of gender performativity now foundational to feminist theory. According

to poststructuralist feminist philosopher Judith Butler, gender is not essential, but rather

"a performance that is *repeated*" (191).[52] Joe and Jerry do more than dress as women—

they perform the identities of women. When Joe calls the agent Poliakoff (Billy Gray) to

accept the gig in the all-girl band, he purses his lips and rolls his eyes up in an

exaggerated performance of femininity. Wilder cuts from the scene of this phone call,

when the two are still dressed as men, to two pairs of stocky legs stumbling in high heels

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[51] Jorgensen's story was more popular than that of the Rosenbergs, according to the *New York Daily News* (Meyerowitz 66). In addition to several *New York Daily News* stories, Jorgensen's story formed the basis of a five-part *American Weekly* series in February and March 1953, and appeared in at least twenty other magazines during the 1950s. See www.christenejorgensen.org to access many of these articles. See also Meyerowitz.
[52] Butler draws on the 1929 work of psychoanalyst Joan Riviere in "Womanliness as Masquerade." Film theorist Mary Ann Doane uses Rivere's theory of the "masquerade" to theorize female spectatorship as structured, like a masquerade, by distance from the female body on screen in "Film and the Masquerade" and "Masquerade Reconsidered."

across a train platform. But Jerry's high heel bends under him, and the look on his face indicates that he is not so sure his performance is accurate. Just as Jerry worries, "We're never going to get away with it," Sugar appears on the platform to serve as a model for the men-performing-women.

We first see Sugar from the shoulders up as she sashays down the platform. As Jerry comments that she "must have some sort of built in motor or something," he convincingly copies her shimmying shoulders (and viewers are spared any attempts on his part to copy her "Jello on springs" behind). "It is almost as if," argues Rebecca Bell-Metereau, "they admire femaleness to such an extent that they are eager to do as good a job as they can at actually becoming female" (57). Jerry reacts to Sugar's performance of femininity by declaring, "It's a whole different sex," a response Daniel Lieberfeld interprets as "gender essentialism." However, Wilder's focusing first on the men-as-women's legs and then showing Sugar from the shoulders up subverts the essentialism of the conventions associated with filming men and women.[53] Moreover, this joke's transgressive potential stems from the fact that, by adopting a few mannerisms, these men can successfully perform femininity, thereby rendering *inessential* many of the limiting characteristics associated with femininity, such as passivity, helplessness, and stupidity.[54]

Joe and Jerry, however, do not initially demonstrate that they accept women as their equals. Jerry refers to the women as "goodies" and wants "to borrow a cup of that Sugar." It takes the course of the film for their performances as women to transform both

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[53] Of course, Wilder also includes shots of Sugar's behind that follow the conventions of what Mulvey has termed "the male gaze," but he underscores how conventional these shots are when he uses them for Jerry and Daphne or delays using them for Monroe.
[54] For a year, Wilder wrote about fashion and beauty tips as a woman named Billie for the Berlin newspaper *Tempo*. He brought Billie's drag confidante Barbette in from Germany to train Curtis and Lemmon (Gemünden 116).

Jerry and Joe into something more than stereotypical men. Their arrival in Florida

removes them from the safer all-female (excepting Beinstock [Dave Barry], who is nearly

blind) world on the train and places them in the direct path of lecherous men. The elderly

Osgood Fielding immediately sets his sights on Daphne, pinching her in the elevator, and

a diminutive bellboy hits on Josephine. While Daphne is surprised, because, as she says,

she's "not even pretty," Josephine explains, "They don't care, just so long as you're

wearing a skirt. It's like waving a red flag in front of a bull." These statements underscore

the problems with how Joe and Jerry had treated women, including their bandmates, and

indicate that they are learning, through their successful performances of femininity, how

it feels to be a woman.[55]

    Much has been written about the "drag" performances of Tony Curtis as

Joe/Josephine/Shell Oil, Jr. and Jack Lemmon as Jerry/Daphne, but fewer authors have

attended to Monroe, who also, as *Newsweek* noted at the time, "is, as usual, an extremely

effective female impersonator, herself" ("Wonderfully" 113). Referring to a biological

female as a female impersonator underscores how much Monroe treated gender as a

performance, a performance she excelled at by exaggerating the culture's conventional

expressions of femininity, most notably through her prominent breasts (accentuated by

her costuming), her childlike naïveté, and her seeming helplessness. As Susan Griffin

insists, "Monroe must learn to impersonate not only a 'woman,' but she must

impersonate culture's *ideal* of a 'sexual' woman. And if she is numb to her own feeling,

she must imitate culture's dream of female sexuality" (212). However, Monroe's

performance of femininity in this film is not as submissive as it initially seems. Whereas

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[55] For other commentary on how cross-dressing transforms the characters' identities, see
also Armstrong, Bell-Metereau, Dick, Cardullo, French, Gemünden, Grindon, and Sikov.

Sugar had once accepted that men would seduce her, then leave her, when she tells Junior she is a "society girl" who attended the Sheboygan Conservatory of Music, she adopts the gold-digging persona associated with Monroe's earlier roles.

Sugar also informs Joe's understanding of how to perform masculinity. Bemoaning her past affairs with saxophone players who left her with nothing but "a pair of old socks and a tube of toothpaste, all squeezed out," Sugar tells Josephine that she intends to meet a millionaire in glasses while they're in Florida, because "men who wear glasses are so much more gentle and sweet and helpless." Monroe's film canon had built up to this moment, when audiences would criticize not Sugar for having sex with all these saxophone players, but the saxophone players for subjecting her to such a ruthless double standard. Acting as a "typical" saxophone player, Joe nuzzles up to Nellie (Barbara Drew) just to borrow her car. Therefore, to attract Sugar, he has to act out of character, as a helpless bespectacled millionaire reading the stock columns, to the point of feigning impotence.

Through Junior's impotence and Sugar's assertiveness, *Some Like It Hot* reflects a widely noted, and debated, shift in late 1950s sex roles. Throughout the 1950s, conservative writers countered Kinsey's findings by insisting that truly "feminine" women approached "the sexual act itself" with "receptiveness and a certain passivity" (Coughlan 109). Concerned about how few women seemed to understand the passivity he considered to be a biological fact, Robert Coughlan wrote (in a 1956 issue of *Life* magazine dedicated to the American woman) of a disturbing trend in American culture: "The emerging American woman tends to be assertive and exploitive. The emerging American man tends to be passive and irresponsible. As a result neither sex can give to

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nor derive from marriage the satisfactions peculiarly necessary to each. They are

suffering from what the psychiatrists call sexual ambiguity" (109).[56] "Today's American

male, if the experts are right," J. Robert Moskin wrote in the year of the film's release,

"has even lost much of his sexual initiative and control; some authorities believe that his

capacity is being lowered. More women are taking charge of sex relations, and they now

have three new weapons [brinkmanship, birth control, and female pleasure] to make their

control effective" (78). In a particularly scathing indictment, Moskin wrote that a man

> is no longer to concentrate on his own pleasure; he must concern himself
> primarily with satisfying his wife. To the point is Miss Davis's edict to
> wives in *The Sexual Responsibility of Woman*: 'The wife must make her
> husband realize, as he gladly will, how important it is that she be satisfied.
> She must be wholly satisfied; she cannot accept compromises.' Even
> though it is understood that male and female responses are not at all
> identical, many specialists insist that it is the male's responsibility to bring
> about mutual and simultaneous satisfaction every time. (78)[57]

Moskin hinted at the male passivity he struggled to resist. Male passivity

presumably stemmed from anxiety about defining masculinity. As Lawrence Frank

explained, "Boys and men growing up today are much more confused about what they

should and should not do to fulfill their masculine roles. Being uncertain, men face many

conflicts, trying to be both tough and tender, successful but not ruthless, strong but not

dominating, virile but not 'wolves'" (57). The difficulties faced by these confused men

were exacerbated, according to Frank, by the differences between male and female

understandings of the masculine role: "many men think of a 'real man' as a strong,

dominating, authoritarian figure. But many women, secretly or openly, rebel against such

masculine domination and are resisting the traditional masculine rights" (58, 60). It is

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[56] See also Lundberg and Farnham; Robinson; Kroger and Freed (cited in C Lewis);
Bergler and Kroger.
[57] See also Meyer, Frank, Robinson, Cohan, and Reumann.

little wonder, then, that as these conversations dominated the postwar atmosphere, many films—*The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), *The Marrying Kind* (1952), *Shane* (1953), *The Country Girl* (1954), *All that Heaven Allows* (1955), *Picnic* (1955)—dramatized how males might use a certain passivity to their advantage, allowing women to fawn over and chase after them.

Sugar is clearly an aggressive woman seducing a passive man. Her subtle means of sexual persuasion first becomes apparent when Sugar and Junior boat to Osgood's yacht. Sugar leans back against the boat's seat, and the high angle shot combined with her sheer dress with strategically placed rhinestones presents her nearly naked bosom to Joe, figuratively suggesting that she is offering herself to him "on a platter" (Figure 4.7).[58] When Junior tells Sugar that they're alone on the yacht, she confesses, "You know I've never been completely alone with a man before . . . in the middle of the night . . . in the middle of the ocean." Her strategic pauses indicate that she's not a virgin. She practically offers to make love to him. She assures him that she knows he is a gentleman, but Junior confesses that he's "harmless" because girls no longer do anything for him. He says, "If I ever found the girl that could, I'd marry her just like that" and snaps his fingers. After Junior tells her about his impotence, she pulls out all the stops—hands Junior a second glass of champagne after he drains the first one, dims the lights, turns on soft music, climbs on top of him, and kisses him, repeatedly, until his glasses begin to steam.

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[58] A similar dress design, using what designer Orry-Kelly called "nude soufflé," was featured in both the seduction scene and the film's final scene. "Moviegoers, mesmerized by the sensuous swaying of her close-to-nude breasts during the song, had a surprise coming. When she finished the number and turned her back to the camera, the dress turned out to be backless—down to M.M.'s tailbone. The effect elicited gasps from audiences" (Nickens and Zeno 113).

Figure 4.7. Sugar's nurturing bosom. From *Some Like It Hot*.

Yet *Some Like It Hot* does not portray the shift in sex roles as a threat. In fact, Wilder intended Joe's passivity as a joke: summarizing an interview with Wilder, Gene Phillips writes: "Wilder points out that, if Joe were the aggressor in this scene and overpowered Sugar, it would be dirty. But if she is the aggressor and seduces him because she thinks he is impotent, it is funny." As Wilder puts it, "'And so *she* suggests the sex, and she fucks *him*!'" (227). While the postwar commentators Moskin and Frank both argued that female sexual aggression was often the root cause of impotence, the scene in which Sugar "cures" Junior on the yacht makes female sexual aggression an enjoyable cure, thereby valorizing female assertiveness. In so doing, the film echoes controversial advice popularized in *Readers' Digest*. In an excerpt from her book *Help Your Husband Stay Alive* reprinted as "What Every Husband Needs," Hannah Lees explained, "It is essential to a man's well-being that he feel virile and physically attractive" (137). "The whole question is whether her want warms her husband or scares him," Lees elaborated. "It will scare him if she expects him to make love to her. Yet it can be the nourishment he has always needed if she is willing to make love to him" (Lees 139-40).

Sugar makes no demands on Junior, despite her sexual assertiveness. In so doing, she serves as a sexual fantasy at the same time as she advances the shifting sexual mores that made it acceptable for women to be assertive partners. Jerry had been the more passive, more feminized of the two men throughout the film—he let Joe gamble away their salaries and their overcoats, and he helped Joe maintain his disguise as Junior, going so far as to go out dancing with Osgood—but when Sugar kisses Junior on the yacht, it becomes clear that male passivity is sometimes a good thing. This message is reinforced in the crosscut scenes of Daphne leading Osgood on the dance floor, which suggest that Junior isn't the only man who likes his woman to take charge—Daphne secures a proposal from a millionaire by taking charge, just as Sugar hopes to do.[59]

This "reversed" sex scene transforms Joe. Although Joe tells Jerry, "It's going to break Sugar's heart when she finds out I'm not a millionaire. That's life. You can't make an omelet without breaking an egg," he isn't as callous as he seems, for he insists on saying goodbye to Sugar even though the Chicago mobsters have discovered them. When Jerry points out, "You usually walk out and leave 'em with nothing but a kick in the teeth," Joe replies, "That was when I was a saxophone player. Now I'm a millionaire." Although Joe is referring to his false role, he's also pointing out that Sugar's expectations for him have taught him how to *perform* masculinity. He even proves his worth when he gives Sugar the diamond bracelet Osgood had given Daphne. Sugar confirms that, although he has left her to marry another woman, Junior is "the first nice guy I ever met in my life. The only one who ever gave me anything." Because of Joe's habit of taking from Nellie and the girls in the band, we can assume that she's the first girl he's ever

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[59] Sinyard and Turner and Brandon French also comment on the male passivity in this scene.

given anything to, and thus that his time living as a woman has transformed him into a more generous, considerate mate. When he hears Sugar singing, "I'm through with love, I'll never fall again," he can't resist the urge to console her. As she sits on the piano, dejected, eyes closed, he walks up to her, still in full Josephine costume, lifts her chin, kisses her sweetly, wipes away her tears, and says, "None of that Sugar, no guy is worth it."

Recognizing that Josephine is Junior (she has never met Joe), Sugar chases after him. Although Joe insists, "You don't want me Sugar. I'm a liar and a phony, a saxophone player. One of those no-goodniks you keep running away from," Sugar can't deny her attraction to him. Sugar accepts Joe's past as a saxophone player, as Josephine, and as Shell Oil, Jr., perhaps because Joe knows about her past but nevertheless has treated her with some respect by admitting that "no guy is worth it." As she chases Josephine, Sugar reveals that she is not "through with love" entirely, but rather through with love based on deceptive behaviors and double standards. She and Joe ride off into the sunset, unmarried and never having discussed marriage, beginning a relationship built upon honesty about their pasts.

Monroe's films participated in a broader cultural project of advancing a single sexual standard. The 1958 article "Ten Indiscreet Proposals" warned "Don't be a sexual fascist!" by "believ[ing] the double standard of morality is legitimate" (Ellis 10). The series of transgressions associated with Monroe's career ushered in a new era of sexual mores beyond sexual fascism. Those of Monroe's films that most blatantly capitalize on her sex appeal draw on the transgressive elements of her off-screen life. As The Girl, Monroe most clearly plays a version of herself—she has posed nude, she is single but not

virginal, she is an actress. The Girl demonstrates how Monroe's off-screen transgressions embodied the kinds of female sexual behavior that Kinsey reported, the validity of which many Americans were debating at the time. Monroe's off-screen life also informs the role of Cherie, who is eager to find "respect" on Hollywood and Vine, but who is instead a showgirl. Finally, as Sugar, Monroe plays a woman who has been "used" like a tube of toothpaste, much like Monroe herself, whose series of affairs was gossip fodder, but she aggressively pursues a man and maintains her sex appeal. This series of films from Monroe's canon demonstrates her unique contribution to the postwar moment. Although Monroe was a "blonde bombshell" and a sex symbol, she credibly combined compliance and independence, seeming submissive while making her right to self-satisfaction axiomatic.

Chapter 5.
"I Could Swear You Were M. Monroe": The Symbol in *The Misfits*

Montgomery Clift wrote the following exchange between his character, Perce, and Marilyn Monroe's character, Roslyn, in his script notes for *The Misfits* (1961): "You know what—what—I could swear you were M. Monroe" (qtd. in Girelli 194). Underscoring the similarities between Roslyn, a character created for Monroe by her husband Arthur Miller, and Monroe herself, Clift's imagined conversation also underscores how easily Monroe could be made into a recognizable character through just a few key characteristics. As I discussed in chapter two, Monroe became an icon through a series of repeated images and abbreviated narratives of her life. These images and narratives had become incredibly meaningful through the force of generally agreed-upon interpretations of what "Monroe" meant, making her also a symbol. Symbols become symbols through convention, through the habit of thinking of a particular sign in a particular way. By the time *The Misfits* was made, in 1960, audiences had developed a habit of reading Monroe in a number of symbolic ways: as a girl simultaneously happy and sad, as a sex symbol, and as one of the last remaining stars of classical Hollywood. *The Misfits* subverts these symbolic readings of Monroe by also presenting her as in control of her performances of happiness and melancholy, as not available to all men, and as speaking her mind. In so doing, it serves as an allegory for Monroe's life, exploring the effects of being the good-natured sex symbol she had seemed to be in the early 1950s.

The Misfits has become notorious for the number of drafts it went through as it became a chronicle of the hurts leading up to Monroe's divorce from Miller, for the delays and costs associated with the production (the most expensive black-and-white film made at the time), and for being the final completed film of both Monroe (who died in

August of 1962 without having finished *Something's Got to Give*) and Clark Gable (who

died in November of 1960, just two weeks after shooting was finished). The script,

written by Miller, despite its often overdramatic rhetoric, is tempered by director John

Huston's realistic approach to filming, through which he often dwarfs the actors within,

alternately, a hypermodern Reno, a sparse unfinished house, and a harsh desert landscape.

 The Misfits tells the story of Roslyn (Monroe), a woman who, after securing her

Reno divorce, finds herself unable to shake off the advances of a number of men,

including Guido (Eli Wallach), a mechanic and pilot, and his friend Gay (Gable), an

aging cowboy. Guido invites Gay, Roslyn, and Roslyn's friend and landlady, Isabelle

(Thelma Ritter), to his unfinished house in the desert, where, after a night of drinking,

Roslyn decides to stay and experiment with "just living" with Gay as her guide. Guido

later tells Gay about some mustangs he has seen in the mountains, and Gay agrees to

round them up and sell them to be turned into dog food. At the rodeo, they find a third

man, Perce (Clift), who has chosen to become a rodeo cowboy rather than submit to wage

labor. After Perce is injured in the rodeo, the three men and Roslyn drink heavily, then

drive back to the house in the desert. The next day, they all go up to the mountains to

catch the mustangs. Roslyn is opposed to the killing of defenseless animals; Gay is

opposed to what he considers to be demeaning work for "wages"—but in the end Roslyn

convinces Gay to free the few mustangs they have captured. Roslyn and Gay agree, in the

film's final moments, to establish a more permanent life together, perhaps even to have a

child.

 "This film is really about the choice between illusion and reality," Miller told a

writer for *Esquire*, insisting that "the only real territory left is relationship to other people.

There really never was any other territory, but we are just finding it out" (McIntyre 78).

In addition to exposing the mythology associated with the West and the concept of

rugged American masculinity, Miller underscores how the film makes American

audiences choose between Monroe the illusion and Monroe the reality. Miller admitted

that he drew the character Roslyn from his life with Monroe. The characters in *The

Misfits* also must choose between illusion and reality regarding Roslyn. If the

expectations the men have for Roslyn mirror the audience's expectations for Monroe,

Roslyn's behavior consistently subverts those expectations, as she expresses her own

complaints, conflicts, and ambivalence. Thus almost everything in the film reflects the

conflict between the symbol Marilyn Monroe and some impenetrable reality.

The critical response to the film, perhaps because viewers expected it to follow

the tenets of a traditional Western, was generally negative. Although critics praised

Huston's direction, Miller came under fire for creating a "rambling, banal [film], loaded

with logy profundities" ("New" 68). *Time* noted that the film "is a dozen pictures rolled

into one. Most of them, unfortunately, are terrible" ("New" 68), and *The New Yorker*

called the film "a dramatic failure" (Angell 87). Reviewers called the psychological

narrative Miller created "a complex maze of introspective conflicts, symbolic parallels

and motivational contradictions, the nuances of which may seriously confound general

audiences" ("Film Review" 3).[1] Critics seemed most frustrated by the film's self-

indulgence: *Time* emphasized that it was "above all, a long [. . .] , fatuously

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[1] Others also criticized the film's psychoanalytic undertones. Arlene Croce wrote in the
British journal *Sight and Sound* that the film was for "a graying mass of nailbiters to
whom words like 'personal adjustment,' 'conformism,' and 'communication' sum up the
entire burden the human conscience has to bear in mid-century America" (142), and Saul
Bellow used the film to illustrate the overly psychological tone of the period's movies.

embarrassing psychoanalysis of Marilyn Monroe, Arthur Miller, and what went wrong with their famous marriage" ("New" 68). Now Monroe's personal life was directly exposed not only in publicity, but also in her film roles. *The Misfits* forced viewers to consider all the things Monroe symbolized, a task that they wouldn't expect from a Clark Gable Western.

A Star Vehicle

As a star vehicle, *The Misfits* capitalized upon the personae of three of the period's biggest stars: Gable, Clift, and Monroe. Star vehicles "exploit the popularity of a particular performer by accommodating their established 'type' and both reworking and advancing aspects of their previous work" (Shingler 111). Star vehicles draw on the star's established persona for consistency and a guarantee of quality, which makes them particularly apt for considering how audiences understood stars as symbols. Meant to showcase each star's particular talents, star vehicles point to what makes a star a star. As Henry Popkin wrote about Gable and Monroe in *The Misfits*: "We *know* they are present, and so, in the two main roles, we do not miss characters. Gable and Miss Monroe communicate themselves, and that is plenty" (433).

Of course, Gable did not communicate *himself*, but rather the version of himself viewers knew from his star persona. During his thirty-year career, from 1931 to 1961, Gable had roles in 67 films. His most famous roles were as the tough lover of a tough woman in such films as *Possessed* (1931) with Joan Crawford, *Red Dust* (1932) with Jean Harlow, *It Happened One Night* (1934) with Claudette Colbert, and, of course, as Rhett Butler in *Gone with the Wind* (1939) with Vivien Leigh. Through these roles, and his many off-screen liaisons with a number of women, Gable created a persona as "the

rough, tough, dirty-faced bad-guy-with-a-heart-of-gold who can slap a woman and still earn her love by the end of the movie through some heroic self-sacrifice" (Spicer 250). Women responded both onscreen and off. Jimmy Quirk wrote in *Photoplay* that Gable had "that uncertainty about him, that self-assuredness, that indifference that interests women. He is like a magnet that both attracts and repels. That complex mystery, woman, is baffled by a greater mystery than her own – a man she cannot understand" (63).

Gay Langland, the quiet cowboy with a string of brief affairs, echoes Gable's persona. Gable exudes charisma in the film, despite his hardheadedness and resistance to change. As producer Frank Taylor put it, "there was only one actor in the world who expressed the essence of complete masculinity and virility that we needed for the leading role—and that was Gable. At fifty-nine, he was still a contemporary image of virility. [. . .] Gable was virile to both women and men. [. . .] His essential maleness is right on the surface" (Spicer 286). And like Gable, who was tamed into a fairly typical domestic life by first Carole Lombard, and, at the end of his life, Kay Williams, Gay would also become quietly domestic for the right woman. However, his version of domesticity didn't necessarily involve marriage. Gable's title as "the King," the result of a 1937 publicity contest in the *Chicago Tribune-New York Daily News* syndicate, meant that he could get by with testing the limits of moral standards. A 1939 *Photoplay* article on "Hollywood's Unmarried Husbands and Wives" pointed out that Gable was living with Carole Lombard despite still being married to another woman, and yet Gable's reputation didn't suffer for it (Baskette).[2] *The Misfits* echoes this scenario, this time on the screen, when Gay and

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[2] Gable lived with Lombard outside of marriage because his wife, Ria Langford, refused to grant him a divorce. The *Photoplay* article pushed the studio to aid Gable in producing a suitable divorce settlement, and he and Lombard wed in March 1939.

Roslyn unapologetically live together outside of marriage. As he confronts a changing world, Gay, like Gable, also insists on living in that world on his terms, even when forced to compromise. Director Huston, author Miller, and Gable agreed on "the major statement of the screenplay and the common denominator of Clark Gable and Gay Langland: the necessity of personal dignity in a society bent on destroying individuality" (Goode 293).

The film is also a star vehicle for Montgomery Clift. Clift appeared at the top of *Life*'s "list of new male movie discoveries" with his first appearances in films in 1948 ("Life's" 6), perhaps because of his remarkable facial beauty. His Method acting was also critically acclaimed, and he earned Oscar nominations for *The Search* (1948), *A Place in the Sun* (1951), *From Here to Eternity* (1953), and *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961). Reviews of *The Misfits* noted how the film was simultaneously a star vehicle for Gable and for Clift: "Gable's last appearance is a reminder [. . .] that the films once had actors whose faces could fill the screen with character and interest. Now we don't get faces but psyches" ("The Misfits Provocative" 3). Highlighting the kind of acting that made him a star, Clift skillfully portrayed a damaged psyche in *The Misfits*.

Clift's inscrutable personal life shaped his persona—fan magazines had circulated rumors of his homosexuality as early as 1954—and he was known for his emotional intensity and sensitivity (Lawrence 168).[3] Clift's inscrutability and emotional intensity—often read as psychological disturbances—were exacerbated by his 1956 car accident. Sources disagree on the cause of the accident, some citing dark roads, others citing Clift's self-destructive impulses. Regardless of the cause of the accident, the way it marred

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[3] On rumors regarding Clift's sexuality, see Girelli and Lawrence, pages 143 and following.

Clift's face led viewers "to read [his performances] for signs of physical and mental suffering" (Lawrence 180).

In *The Misfits*, Clift plays a cowboy, as he had in the first film he ever made, *Red River* (1948; opposite John Wayne as his overbearing elder), but in *The Misfits*, the cowboy's work of purposeful cattle driving now is entertainment and spectacle. His role, moreover, alludes directly to his off-screen life: in his first scene in the film, he says, in a phone conversation with his Ma, "My face is fine, it's all healed up." This line practically prompts viewers to read the rest of his performance—as a self-destructive, withdrawn, drunken cowboy—as a representation of Clift himself. As such, Clift's persona inflects his role to the extent that he seems to be playing himself.

Monroe, too, played a version of herself in *The Misfits*. Monroe's career was built upon but rebelled against what the public knew of her personal life. If that personal life increasingly overlapped with her film roles as the years wore on, it did so most extensively in *The Misfits*, which her husband wrote for her by compiling anecdotes from her off-screen life. But the off-screen Monroe did not typify a "sex goddess." She was outspoken and not always happy, had trouble keeping a man, and was plagued with both mental and physical illnesses. *The Misfits*, therefore, perhaps inevitably if not intentionally, most vividly exposes the contradictions in the symbol "Marilyn Monroe."

Monroe the Symbol

Evidence of Monroe's symbolic status is apparent in the dramatic representations that seemed to make her into a fictional character even while she was still living. An episode of *I Love Lucy*, which aired on November 8, 1954, alluded to the actress when Lucy performed "a Marilyn Monroe type" by wearing a tight, strapless dress, mincing her

steps, sashaying, blinking frequently, tossing her hair, and opening and closing her

mouth, saying about Monroe, "she has a way of carrying herself, and smiling just so."

(See Figure 5.1.) George Axelrod's 1955 play, *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?*, and the

subsequent filmic adaptation starring Jayne Mansfield as Rita Marlowe, the vapid, sexy,

blonde actress resembling Monroe (1957, Tashlin), demonstrate how pervasively Monroe

had become a symbol to the wider culture.[4] In addition to her allusions to Monroe's

appearance, Rita Marlowe utters lines that resemble Monroeisms, for example, "I have no

romance. All my lovers and I are just friends." In 1958, a film loosely based on Monroe's

life, called *The Goddess*, drew on Monroe's biography, emphasizing how the actress

Emily Ann's (Kim Stanley) loveless childhood, mental instability, and promiscuity

shaped her path to becoming adored by millions.

Figure 5.1. Lucy as a "Marilyn Monroe type." From *I Love Lucy*.

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[4]Axelrod's 1950 theatrical version of *The Seven Year Itch* was not based on Monroe's persona, but critics have frequently remarked that the character of The Girl in Wilder's 1955 film adaptation of the play is clearly based on Monroe—The Girl has modeled nude, and very obviously fulfills the role of sexual fantasy in the film. In contrast, the character of Rita Marlowe is clearly based on Monroe, and is the only consistent feature between the stage and screen versions of *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?*

Symbols represent something other than themselves, and as both the preceding chapters and the previous examples demonstrate, "Monroe" certainly represented something other than the person formerly known as Norma Jeane to postwar audiences. In this chapter, by looking at her final completed film, I want to emphasize how Monroe's symbolic force was so strong that the character she played seemed to embody all the things Monroe had come to stand for other than herself, while at the same time underscoring how distinct the symbol was from reality. Although audiences were interested in Monroe's personal life, she represented a series of extremes that reflected both the status of the actress in Hollywood and the status of women in American society.

Like Monroe herself, Roslyn was chased by men, had a mother who "disappear[ed] all the time," and divorced a man who "wasn't there" (certainly Joe DiMaggio, whom she accused of watching TV rather than communicating with her, but also, perhaps, Miller, whom she would divorce shortly after the film finished production). Miller admitted, "Roslyn's dilemma was [Monroe's], but in the story it was resolved. I hoped that by living through this role she too might arrive at some threshold of faith and confidence, even as I had to wonder if I could hold on to it myself after we had both been let down from expectations such as few people allow themselves in a marriage" (*Timebends* 466).[5] However, even Miller's attempts to create a story to, as he said, "reassure her that a woman like herself could find a home in the world," failed because he, too, could not separate his wife from the symbol she had become. He writes that his attempts to help her break away from the symbol "had apparently proved the opposite"—

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[5] Miller says he wrote himself into Clark Gable's character (*Timebends* 473).

that she had no home in the world as anyone other than "Marilyn Monroe" (*Timebends* 474).

The overlap between Monroe and Roslyn shaped the entire production, such that all involved thought of Monroe as playing herself. Paula Strasberg, Monroe's dramatic coach, remarked to James Goode, who was writing *The Making of the Misfits* and was therefore present throughout the production, "'It's much more difficult to play yourself than someone you've never met. This is the most difficult part she has played, with the exception of one scene in *The Prince and the Showgirl* and *Some Like It Hot*. I do believe it was essential for me to be with her on this picture. It was essential because so much of it was close to her" (qtd. in Goode 259). Monroe complained, "When I married [Miller], one of the fantasies I had in my mind was that I could get away from Marilyn Monroe through him, and here I find myself back doing the same thing [in *The Misfits*], and I just couldn't take it" (Meyers 105, 223). But she could joke about how her film roles built upon each other to produce the symbol Marilyn Monroe. For example, when they were shooting a scene around the campfire day-for-night, Monroe "thought it ironic that she was so situated that she had to look straight into the sun and pretend to see the star that [Wallach] was talking about in the scene," and remarked, quoting herself as Sugar in *Some Like It Hot*, "'That's the story of my life. Always on the wrong end of the lollipop'" (Goode 194-5).

The pre-release press underscored the similarities between Roslyn and Monroe. *Time* explicitly enumerated them:

> Like Marilyn, Roslyn is a fractured, manhandled woman always 'searching for relationships,' full of hurtful memories about parents who 'disappeared all the time.' Helpless, yet flush with appetite, she is a compulsive time killer, shows a disturbing skill at batting a paddle ball on

a string—which Marilyn does constantly. On the set last week, Marilyn was obviously afraid to act and troubled by her responsibility to her husband's script. Drinking coffee by the urn, she trembled, tried to control her shaking hands, broke out in a blotchy rash, spoke in a voice so constricted that it was barely audible. ("Marilyn" 57)

According to Sidney Skolsky, a Hollywood columnist and close friend of Monroe's, "Marilyn, I believe, turns in her best dramatic performance. She is more of a large part of the genuine Marilyn than she has been in any movie. I can understand her being nervous and uncomfortable during the filming; she revealed plenty of herself, and I don't mean flesh and the wiggle" (14).

Today's critics also seem uncertain about how to handle Monroe's role. While the film is most often discussed in terms of Miller's art, Monroe's feminist biographers provide two interesting but different takes on the film. Barbara Leaming argues that Monroe played Roslyn with "the terror of a woman hunted by various men," emphasizing Monroe the victim (366). Lois Banner, on the other hand, refers to Roslyn as "a pantheistic force of nature, never more radiant, never more wise," emphasizing Monroe the goddess (355).[6] These conflicting interpretations neither overlook nor overemphasize aspects of Roslyn's character. Rather, Roslyn is divided, conflicted, and ambivalent. The contradictions Roslyn evokes thus highlight the film as a portrait of Monroe as a conflicted symbol.

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[6] In addition, one of the critics responding to Miller's art recognizes in Roslyn a staunch anti-war figure predating the Vietnam era and a critic of genocide, and notes, "that Roslyn can embody such a range of moral imperatives—not, admittedly, without straining dramatic credibility—speaks well for the relevance of *The Misfits* in a feminist era" (Goldstein 118). Laurence Goldstein overstates Roslyn's response to Vietnam, which is loosely metaphorical, but is interesting for claiming Roslyn as a feminist heroine within this context.

The Misfits is, nevertheless, fundamentally, a movie about men. Gay, Guido, and Perce are trying to figure out what being a man means in an era in which men make their living from white-collar work and must succumb to the conformity of the workplace. *The Misfits'* characters all choose itinerant work because it's "better than wages." As the film's title makes evident, this lifestyle is out of step with postwar American society, and yet, in the context of sociological treatises such as David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), William Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1955), Erich Fromm's *The Sane Society* (1955), and Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd* (1960), resistance to "wages" is also idealistic, and thus somewhat admirable.[7] Thus, Isabelle can valorize the cowboys as "the last real men on earth" while Roslyn demonstrates that the men no longer accurately understand their world. When she calls the men "murderers" for rounding up five horses, she forces them to confront the reality of the labor they have chosen. In response to being called a murderer, Guido frantically repeats three times "she's crazy," but his protests reveal how "crazy" this itinerant cowboy way of life looks from the outside. Roslyn shows them that killing the horses for a few dollars is in effect working for wages, and in a dishonorable manner. Thus, when Gay resolves to "find another way to be alive, that's all. If there is one, anymore," he wins Roslyn's commitment.[8]

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[7] See also Goldstein, "*The Misfits* and American Culture," and Christopher Bigsby's chapter on *The Misfits*.

[8] Guido also makes *The Misfits* an anti-war film; he declares: "We're all blind bombardiers. We kill people we never even saw. [. . .] Dropping a bomb is like telling a lie. It makes everything all quiet. Pretty soon you don't hear anything, you don't see anything, not even your wife. [. . .] I can't make a landing and I can't get up to God, either." In general, the film criticizes the hypermasculine environment that makes killing seem like an acceptable profession. See producer Frank Taylor's script notes for evidence that the anti-war message was deliberate.

In its focus upon the men and their needs, the film reveals the role of a woman like Monroe within the context of the shifting gender roles of the early 1960s. Roslyn is also a "misfit" who "[doesn't] know where [she] belong[s]." If Miller did in fact write Roslyn's perspective as a version of Monroe's story, it reveals how he understood Monroe. The song over the credits resembles horror music: squealing violins, staccato piano, and sudden drum pauses warn viewers that this story will not be a lighthearted romance like Monroe's other films. Instead, this film colors the disappointment of Sugar Kowalczyk in *Some Like it Hot* with hopelessness and lack of humor. Roslyn's story, juxtaposed with the men's stories, is one of never being able to escape the men who try to make her understand their perspectives without listening to hers.

In this context, the multiple drafts (rewritten on the set during filming, but also rewritten several times from 1957 to 1960) attempt to differentiate Monroe as symbol from some other gestured toward reality that is never fully captured. For example, Roslyn's first appearance in the first draft of the script, from October 1957, reads thus: "She is dressed in jeans and a blouse, with a beige bandana holding her hair. The reins of the horse are draped over its neck; she is holding open a homemaking magazine like House and Garden, and is absorbed in it as the horse takes her faithfully up the steep trail" (Miller, *The Misfits* 1957, 1). The article she is reading is "Tips for the Woman who Lives Alone," and, a fairy tale princess, she says good morning to a grasshopper that lands on the page, whistles to a bird, says hello to nature, and praises the horse (Miller, *The Misfits* 1957, 1).

By the time *The Misfits* began production, in July 1960, Miller introduced Roslyn very differently. First, Isabelle tells Guido that Roslyn's car is dented because "the darn

men in this town [. . .] keep running into her just to start a conversation." We first see this irresistible beauty from a distance, through a sheer curtain, and then through the reflected image as Roslyn sits in front of a mirror putting on her makeup—a hint at the effort it takes to be the kind of woman men crash into to begin conversations. As Ana Salzberg notes, "Captured in the luminosity of the looking glass, her visage appears in all its famous beauty: simply, she wears the mask of Marilyn Monroe, movie star" (144). We are only given the image of the movie star for a few moments, however, before Roslyn turns toward the camera, which captures her face in medium close-up, revealing the wrinkles around her eyes, the unnatural angle of her eyeliner, and the texture of her skin (see Figure 5.2). These juxtapositions underscore the difference between the fantasy figure of the movie star and the actress in close-up, a theme that will resonate throughout the film, including, for example, when Monroe stands, wearing jeans with her hair in braids, next to a closet door on which several pin-up images of her have been taped.

Figure 5.2. The fantasy in the mirror; reality in medium close-up. From *The Misfits*.

The distinction between fantasy and reality established in Roslyn's first scene

underscores the other ways she tries to disguise who she is in order to please others, in

particular, by pretending to be lighthearted despite her melancholia. Roslyn receives

positive reinforcement from the other characters when she performs in ways that meet

their expectations for a "happy girl." When she provides a paddleball show at the local

bar, winning money and entertaining the crowd, it prompts Gay to whisper in her ear,

"I'd marry you," and Isabelle to declare, "That girl can do anything." Roslyn brushes off

Gay's offer, presumably because it comes only when she is pretending to be cheerful. In

fact, earlier in the film Gay had told her, "I think you're the saddest girl I ever met."

(Questions regarding whether Monroe was the happy person she appeared to be on screen

or infinitely sad made their way into most press on Monroe, and became central to her

persona. In his autobiography, Miller writes about this period, "I knew by this time that I

had initially expected what she satirized as 'the happy girl that all men loved' and had

discovered someone diametrically opposite, a troubled woman whose desperation was

deepening no matter where she turned for a way out" [*Timebends* 466].) Roslyn calls

attention to the disparity between Gay's assessment of her and that of others, remarking,

"I'm usually told how happy I am." Gay replies, "That's because you make a man feel

happy."

Roslyn recognizes what people want from her and tries to turn in good

performances despite the melancholy that colors most of her interactions. For example,

when Isabelle is discussing a cowboy she once knew, Roslyn hopefully suggests that Gay

and Guido might know him and could help her find him again. Although Isabelle tells

her, "You've got to stop thinkin' you can change things," Roslyn insists, "But if there's

something you can do. I don't, I don't know what to do, but if I knew, I'd do it." In this

scene, Roslyn's face tells the story, as her expression morphs from anger to helpless

despair, but finally, she resigns herself to cheerfulness and stands up and asks for music.

The low angle shot when Roslyn returns to her performance of cheerfulness makes her

loom large over the other characters, visually signaling that her power is in her

cheerfulness. A similar sequence is repeated a few minutes later. Gay encourages Roslyn

and Guido to "put on a show" because they are both good dancers, and, while Roslyn

cheerfully complies for one song, when the music changes, she asks Guido why he never

taught his now dead wife to dance. Guido doesn't want to discuss it, but Roslyn continues to express her feeling that husbands and wives don't "[teach] each other what we really know." Sensing the shift in the mood, however, she begins snapping her fingers and returns to cheerfulness, saying, "Guido, you're a nice man, smile!" While Roslyn is often the voice of reason in the film, when it is clear that she has dampened the mood or disappointed the men in any way, she strives to rekindle the cheerful mood. In this way, she challenges the role that is expected of her while also demonstrating that it is inescapable.

Drawing upon Monroe's off-screen identity, in particular the way she had been represented as susceptible to mental illness, *The Misfits* engages the debate surrounding the difference between "the gift for life" and nervousness.[9] According to Guido, Roslyn has transformed his unfinished house into a home "because you have the gift for life, Roslyn. The rest of us, we're just lookin' for a place to hide and watch it all go by." Guido's comment, however, disregards that Roslyn has, in fact, been hiding out in this isolated desert home, distancing herself from, as she remarks to Gay at one point, the hustle and bustle of life in Chicago. Roslyn can only tolerate the misunderstanding of her character (perhaps a projection of what the men want to see from someone so beautiful and sensual) for so long. As she laments not having a broader education, Guido tells her, "You got something a lot more important. [. . .] You care. Whatever happens to anybody, it happens to you. You're really hooked into the whole thing, Roslyn. It's a blessing."

Roslyn counters, however, with, "People say I'm just nervous," asserting that her experience of the world isn't "a blessing" to her, no matter how rose-colored Guido

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[9] See, for example, the 1956 *Time* article "To Aristophanes and Back."

intends to make it. What Guido understands as a blessing is the very thing from which

Roslyn needs release. Caring for everyone, her degree of empathy, only results in her

own heartbreak, because no one ever recognizes her pain or her needs. The churchladies'

auxiliary representative who has hounded the cowboys for donations seems to hit a

deeper nerve with Roslyn: "sinner, I can tell you one piece of information, you've got it

in the middle of your pretty eyes, you are looking for the light. I know you and I love you

for your life of pain and sin. Give it to the one who understands. The only one who loves

you in your lonely desert." This woman may be trying to manipulate a donation out of

Roslyn, but she is the only one willing to recognize her loneliness and pain.

Roslyn's melancholy may in fact stem from the mistrust she has for others. She

expects to be lied to, used, and left behind, aspects of her character that draw on

Monroe's identity. Some of her more melancholy lines echo these themes: "Maybe all

there really is is just the next thing. The next thing that happens. Maybe you're not

supposed to remember anybody's promises," and, "Maybe you're not supposed to believe

what people say. Maybe it's not even fair to them." Viewers know, however, that

Roslyn's expectations aren't out of line with the behaviors the men have already

demonstrated. In fact, when we first see Guido, he asks Roslyn to go out with him after

her divorce hearing, and when we first meet Gay, he is explaining to a divorcee why he

can't go back to St. Louis with her. Guido makes clear that this divorcee is one of Gay's

many affairs when he asks, "Which one was that?" Thus, Roslyn is being a realist when

Guido offers to let her use his house and she asks, "Last woman's gone?" or when Gay

cooks her breakfast after they have spent the night together, and she asks, "You do this

often?" Although both men say they have never done these things before, as Elisabetta

Girelli points out, Guido's and Gay's behavior, and Roslyn's response to it, establish a pattern for "'normal' masculinity," which is shown to "define the sexual conquest of women as men's prize activity, achieved through the mastery of laborious, preestablished behavior" (188-9).

The men in *The Misfits* seem convinced that Roslyn is interested in each of them, and that if they offer, she will gladly accept a relationship. Such a scenario recognizes that Monroe symbolized a woman who often tried to use her sexuality to her advantage. Because of the image created by *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *How to Marry a Millionaire*, Monroe had become a symbol of the woman who was desperate for a man and would do anything to acquire one. However, Roslyn isn't the available sexual partner the star Monroe seemed to be. She says to Gay, "I don't feel that way about you, Gay" (a statement that seems a bit unreliable since they end up in bed together shortly thereafter). When Perce tells her, "I trust you, Roslyn. I think I love you," she says, "No, you don't know me." When Guido tries to kiss her, she pushes him away; later, he offers to stop the mustang hunt if she's "through with Gay now" and if she "give[s] [him] a reason." Instead of jumping into his arms, Roslyn tells him off, a culmination of the efforts she makes throughout the film to gain her voice: "A reason? You, a sensitive fellow. So sad for his wife. Crying to me about the bombs you've dropped and the people you killed. You have to get something to be human? You never felt sad for anybody in your life. All you know is the sad words. You could blow up the world and all you would feel is sorry for yourself."

Still, the film does not (perhaps cannot) wholly abandon the sex symbol. Gay and Guido frequently watch Roslyn—as she dances, as she hits a paddleball, as she rides a

horse—and their point of view shots highlight that they serve as surrogates for the audience members who have come to ogle the star. After a night of lovemaking with Gay, she tells him, "Listen, if you want to go somewhere, I don't mind being alone," elaborating, when he insists he doesn't want to leave, "I just mean, I want you to do what you feel like." Gay compares Roslyn's behavior to that of other women he's known, who assume cowboys are "dumb, so they tell 'em everything" and "do [. . .] everything they couldn't do back home," and he finds that she doesn't treat him like someone she can use. Therefore, she's the only one who "has respect for a man." Gay interprets Roslyn's understanding that men will leave, that they aren't bound to her, as her "respect" for them and their independence.

Roslyn lives with Gay outside of marriage, but the film does not take this as evidence of her sexual availability to all men. In fact, because Gay "condone[s] her sexuality," according to Miller, the film succeeds in making her *less* of a sex symbol and more of a modern woman who is comfortable having a sexual relationship without marriage but unwilling to have sex with anyone who comes along (McIntyre 78). Thus, the film accepts the revolution Monroe's films had been working toward since the beginning of her career, especially, as chapter four of this volume discusses, in relation to her nude photo and her performances in *The Seven Year Itch*, *Bus Stop*, and *Some Like It Hot*.

As a modern woman, and not a sex symbol, Roslyn asks Gay to respect her. He discovers that a rabbit has been eating the lettuce he has planted in their garden, but when he gets his rifle to shoot the animal, Roslyn begs him to give the rabbit another chance, because "it's alive and it doesn't know any better." Rather than consider her perspective,

Gay tells her to "go on inside and stop being silly." She insists on her position: "I'm not being silly, you don't respect what I feel," but Gay only demands she respect *him.* This conflict is ended by the surprise arrival of Guido and Isabelle, who perhaps overzealously comment on the difference they see in the pair since they have been living together. Guido remarks, "You must be a magician. The only thing this boy ever did for a woman was get out the ice-cubes," and Isabelle points out that it looks like Roslyn has "really found" herself. However, because these lines appear just after Gay and Roslyn's fight, they indicate that Guido's and Isabelle's responses are colored by understandings of respect that differ from Roslyn's. From all outward appearances, Gay respects her because he is doing things for her, and because he is doing things for her, she should be contented.

But Roslyn isn't contented, perhaps because of the demands being placed on her by not only Gay, but also Guido and Perce. Roslyn is a mercurial force—although she causes the men's unraveling, they also look to her for healing—an aspect of Roslyn's character that resonates with Monroe's.[10] As Graham McCann remarks about both Monroe and Roslyn, "She is at one and the same time an attraction and a distraction, a disturbing, disruptive force as well as a soothing, regenerative one" (157).[11] The hypermasculine rodeo sequence, and its aftermath, make this clear, as man after man makes demands on her because of his attraction to her, but in so doing, threatens to destroy himself. Perce is injured in the rodeo, and spends the night drinking with a

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[10] See, in particular, Graham McCann, Carl Rollyson, and Christopher Bigsby.
[11] See also McIntyre's story on the production, in which she notes that Monroe "becomes at once the symbol of impartial and eternal availability, who yet remains simultaneously forever pure—and a potentially terrible goddess whose instincts could also deal death and whose smile, when she directs it clearly at you, is exquisitely, heart-breakingly sweet" (74).

bandage around his head. Perce shares his emotional injuries in a conversation with her behind the bar. When he lays his head in Roslyn's lap, her body, "part sex object, part soft pillow," as Girelli explains, "cradles the wounded Perce/Clift in perfect stillness, as a protective harbor for his restless movements" (193).[12] Gay wants Roslyn to meet his children, but when he can't find them in the crowd, he climbs onto a car and falls off in a drunken stupor, resulting in Roslyn cradling him in a similar manner.[13] Because Perce and Gay are both too drunk to drive home, Guido drives, but nearly kills them in the process, as he speeds recklessly just to get Roslyn (who has Perce's head in her lap and her hand on Gay's shoulder as he lies passed out in the back) to pay attention to him, or, as he puts it, to "say hello, Guido." Roslyn has to clean up these messes—she apologizes to Guido to stop him from hammering at the house in the dark, she keeps Perce from unraveling the bandage around his head, and she comforts Gay as he complains about her helping the other men. She's supposed to fix everyone, to heal everyone, and they'll endanger themselves and her until she does so.

Finally achieving a moment of peace after putting all three men to bed, Roslyn leans against the house and quietly says, "Help." Her plea for "Help" seems to build on the most enduring of the symbolic legacies of Monroe—the need for aid. However, Roslyn makes this call so quietly that no one comes. I have found no critics who account

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[12] Girelli argues that Perce and Roslyn are psychic intimates rather than physical intimates in the film, partly because they share a similar emotional vulnerability (which would have been evident to the film's contemporaries because of Clift's biography, drawing on the accident that marred his face and his heavy drinking as well as his alleged relationship with Monroe).

[13] One could make a case that Gay's children were never there—that he came up with the story to get Roslyn's attention and to distract her from spending time with Perce. There is evidence for this interpretation in Guido's surprised reaction when Gay asks him where his children went ("where are who?," he asks), and in the desperate way he shouts in the street for them.

for the context of Roslyn's plea for help. Because the men expect her to heal them, to make them whole, she herself is in danger. Guido has nearly killed them all, just to get Roslyn's attention. Only Alex North, who composed the music for the film, has remarked on what Roslyn's plea for help adds to the development of her character: "I felt there a need to write a piece—the only piece in the whole score that uses a jazz idiom. There I found the use of jazz most expressive in conveying her feeling of being the mother of three children, singing the blues. It was the height of her despondency and frustration" (qtd. in Goode 320). Because the men are three overgrown children (Perce, when half-asleep, even calls her "ma"), they do not consider how they might help her, or that she is an independent person, not someone defined by or bound to a man.

The film suggests, however, that a woman not defined by the needs of men is formless, impenetrable, and incomprehensible. Indeed, the backlighting and soft focus make Roslyn appear slightly hazy (see Figure 5.2), underscoring how Guido and Gay perceive her. According to Guido, "She's kinda hard to figure out, you know. One minute she looks kinda dumb, brand new like a kid, and the next minute she . . . she sure moves, though, doesn't she?" When Roslyn comments that Gay looks at her like she's "crazy," he reassures her, "I just look that way cause I can't make you out." What these men can't "make out," it seems, is how she can appear so "prime," as Gay puts it, and yet not demonstrate a sexuality that exists primarily for male pleasure.

Figure 5.3. Soft focus Roslyn. From *The Misfits*.

The scene in which Roslyn dances aimlessly across the yard, self-absorbed, spinning and hugging herself demonstrates her unavailability. With her back to the camera, her straps fall from her shoulders, and she finally embraces a tree. Roslyn's self-motivated dance recognizes what Monroe the star is supposed to symbolize—sensuality, seductiveness, a sexual object *for* men—and subverts it by making it possible that the star's body exists *for* herself: she controls her sexuality. As Richard Dyer notes, *The Misfits* breaks with the rest of Monroe's oeuvre in that it "begins to hint at a for-itself female sexuality as formlessness. The men in the film look on, unable to comprehend her sensuality; grasping a tree she looks out at them/us with a hollow expression of beatitude, straining to express what is already defined as inexpressible" (*Heavenly* 61). Thus, Roslyn's dance, as J.M. Coetzee explains, allegorizes Monroe's "resistance to the highly focused and even regimented models of sexuality purveyed not only by Hollywood and the media but by academic sexology. Roslyn is dancing out a diffuse and—in the light of the rest of the film—forlorn sensuality to which neither Guido's sexual predatoriness nor [Gay's] old-fashioned suave courtliness is an adequate response" (65). This dance makes

Roslyn "less of a sex symbol than a nature symbol," as Alexander Walker notes, "a species that offers few handholds for a determined man of action. She exists in the moonlight she dances in, in the leaves of grass Gable walks on, in the suffering wild life that he, in his Hemingway outlook, has thought to be only good for pot shots. When brute force meets the life force, it is the former that has to yield" (311).[14] In other words, in *The Misfits* the sex symbol, unattainable and self-driven, rather than male driven, is thus not really a sex symbol.

Roslyn challenges the idea of the sex symbol as compliant and uncomplaining. When Guido praises his deceased wife for being as "uncomplaining as a tree," Roslyn responds, "Maybe that's what killed her. I mean, a little complaining helps sometimes, maybe." Roslyn's face tells this story—she feels his pain, but she feels more for his wife. In the 1957 draft, Roslyn more eloquently explained her perspective:

> A person should never get mad, or even say something they really mean. People laugh at you if you do that. Especially a woman. And I never did, I never got mad. Not 'til the last year or so. Soon as I started to say what I thought I lost my husband. That's the truth. You know why girls lie to you? Because that's what you want. You can't stand the other thing. Nobody can. And it's alright, unless you want to be a freak. Whereas nobody wants to be that. (Miller, *The Misfits* 1957, 100)

Roslyn consistently stands up for herself, even if it might make her a "freak." She insists on driving her own car out to the desert house in order to be in control of her movement, argues with Gay about killing the rabbit, and struggles to convince the men not to capture and sell the horses. Roslyn's self-respect is also evident in her description

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[14] Sarah Churchwell traces how the press represented Monroe and her brand of sex appeal as "natural," beginning with the earliest fan magazine stories and the *Playboy* centerfold story. Thus, *The Misfits*, by aligning Roslyn with nature, subverts this convention of describing her as a sex symbol, making her alignment with nature threatening to the extent that it makes her unavailable to the men; see also Goldstein 116-17.

of her nightclub dancing: while the other girls faked it, and people thought she "was

crazy," "I really tried, you know? Whereas people don't know the difference." Because

of this, James Harvey refers to Roslyn as "an *anti*-phony" in the spirit of Holden

Caulfield (67). When Gay refuses her offer to buy the horses, Roslyn runs off, screaming,

"Killers! Killers! Murderers! You liars! All of you, liars! You're only happy when you

can see something die! Why don't you kill yourselves and be happy? You and your god's

country, freedom. I pity you! You're three dear, sweet, dead men!"[15] Roslyn's screaming

is filmed in a long shot, rather than in a series of close-ups, an effect which allows "the

environment," George Kouvaros explains, to make "a mockery of Roslyn's objections to

the hunt, just as it painfully expose[s] Gay's age and physical decline. [. . .] Her enraged

expression [is] swallowed by the vast expanse of empty space" (180).[16] (See Figure 5.3.)

  But perhaps her rage becomes all the more palpable because it is seen from a

distance. "Her bent-over posture suggests a being who is divided in two by male and

female contentiousness, by love and hate of society, and by life and death themselves,"

according to Carl Rollyson, but "in projecting her profound sense of alienation to Gay, to

his male companions, to men in general, and to the whole of existence, Roslyn is both

triumphant and defeated. She is the ultimate cinematic embodiment of Monroe's double

bind" (*Marilyn* 181). In the end, Roslyn's voice is heard, suggesting that this distance and

this scene were necessary to make the men see Roslyn as a thoughtful person with a valid

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[15] In the 1957 draft, when Roslyn offers Guido money for the horses, and he tells her, "Everything has to die," she says, "That's not the same as being destroyed, is it? Is it the same?" (144). She aligns herself with "the thing that get's [sic] eaten?" and insists, "It can't be that way. We're human, we're supposed to understand . . ." (Miller, *The Misfits* 1957, 145). Roslyn's eloquent pleas for sympathy are absent in the final version, making her calling the men "murderers" near the film's climax seem less rational.
[16] See also Coetzee 66.

perspective, not as an incoherent mystery. Her complaining saves the horses' lives and

puts her on an equal footing with Gay, allowing them to form what might be a stable

relationship. The men are not tough cowboys but "primitive boys awed by a sex

goddess," as Catherine Texier notes. "At the end of the film, although [Gay] proves his

manhood by catching the wild mustang, he has to release it in order to have her, and it's

clear she is the one who's tamed him, not the other way around" (Texier 174).

Figure 5.4. Rage at a distance. From *The Misfits*.

At the same time, Roslyn is not uncompromising. In fact, each time she asserts

her perspective, a small gesture of recognition makes her concede. For example, when

Roslyn argues that Gay knows capturing the wild horses "isn't right," and that "a kind

man" can't, in fact, also be a killer, Gay counters that Roslyn might not be entirely

different from him:

> Sure. Maybe we're all alike. Including you. We start out doing something,
> meaning no harm, something's that naturally in us to do, but somewhere
> along the line it gets changed around into something bad. Like you
> dancing in a nightclub. You started out just wantin' to dance, didn't you,
> but little by little it turns out that people ain't interested in how good you
> danced it, they're gawking at you with something entirely different in their
> minds, and they turn it sour, don't they? I could've looked down my nose
> at you, too, just a kid showing yourself off in a nightclub for so much a
> night. But I took my hat off to you 'cause I know the difference. This, this

is how I dance, Roslyn. And if they make something else out of it, well, I can't run the world anymore than you could.

Roslyn, who had been avoiding Gay's gaze, looks Gay in the eye, and says, "You took your hat off to me. . . . You mean that, don't you, Gay?" While Gay has made a somewhat condescending speech, she clings to his expression of respect, although it also scolds her.[17] The give and take between Roslyn and Gay complexifies their relationship.

The Misfits of Late Hollywood

Gay's speech to Roslyn could also be Gable's speech to Monroe, a speech on how stardom has changed in the late studio era. On a large scale, *The Misfits* serves as an allegory for Monroe's stardom. By this point in her career, Monroe symbolized sexuality and failed marriages. In addition, she represented the female star in that she was consistently assumed to be playing herself, had left and returned to Hollywood after attempting to be a "serious" actress and to form meaningful off-screen relationships, and had no privacy. *The Misfits* integrates these aspects of Monroe's persona into Roslyn's character, making the film a commentary on what it means to be the star who becomes a symbol.

The film metaphorically addresses Monroe's acting career. We first see Roslyn practicing (and forgetting) her lines: "He persistently [sigh] how does that go again? [. . .] Well, do I have to say that? Why can't I just say that he wasn't there? I mean, you could touch him, but he wasn't there." This scene represents Monroe's Method approach to

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[17] In the short story, Roslyn is a schoolteacher, but "in the long version, Roslyn becomes an 'interpretive dancer' who has dwindled to performing in strip joints. By making her less intellectual and more of a class match for Gay, Miller guarantees that their relationship will not be an uneven struggle in which each partner exerts an exploitive power over the other (her snob condescension, his sexual allure, the obverse of what the union of Miller and Monroe represented to the general public)" (Goldstein 115).

acting, as well as pervasive criticisms of her abilities. The problem of remembering lines

plagued Monroe on the set of *The Misfits* (as it had on her other films); Goode quotes her

commenting on Miller's disdain for her mistakes: "If you happen to invert a phrase—

YOW! I've told Arthur it doesn't make any difference as long as the meaning is there.

[. . .] I can't memorize the words by themselves. I have to memorize the feeling" (qtd. in

Goode 200). Roslyn practically echoes Monroe's explanation when she tells Isabelle why

she can't remember what she's supposed to say at her divorce hearing: "I can't memorize

this. It's not the way it was."[18]

Monroe, by the time of *The Misfits*, also symbolized the seeming impossibility of

a Hollywood star having a successful marriage. Although Monroe's 1953 film roles

explored problems associated with marriage, after 1953, she rarely played women

seeking husbands, perhaps because of her very public and very brief (nine-month)

marriage to Joe DiMaggio in 1954. By the time *The Misfits* entered production, rumors

had been swirling that she was about to divorce Arthur Miller, to whom she had been

married for five years.[19] At the same time, Monroe reflects the changing mores of the

period to the extent that, by the early 1960s, divorce no longer demonstrated lack of

dedication to marriage but rather a lamentably forgivable experience. After all, as

Christensen admitted in his 1958 reprint of his 1950 marriage manual, "Divorce has been

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[18] Although her acting was criticized throughout her career, Monroe's face tells the story
in so many scenes in *The Misfits* that her acting skill is evident. However, when critics
complimented her acting, they undermined her appearance: "Miss Monroe has seldom
looked worse; the camera is unfailingly unflattering. But there is a delicacy about her
playing, and a tenderness that is affecting" ("The Misfits Provocative" 3). The title of
Dick Williams's review sums up what he noticed about Monroe's performance: "Marilyn
Still Needs a Good Girdle."
[19] Goode reports that the *Los Angeles Mirror* and Sheilah Graham for the *New York
Mirror* hinted at a possible divorce in September of 1960 (128-9).

increasing more rapidly than has marriage. Something like 2 per cent of the total population aged fourteen and over are now divorced, and something like 13 per cent of all persons now married have been previously divorced and remarried" (438).

That Roslyn criticizes marriage shows how Monroe's persona continued to develop from the passive bride she became in her 1953 films. Roslyn suggests to Guido that perhaps he and his wife, like so many husbands and wives, "were strangers:" "I only meant that, if you loved her, you coulda taught her anything. Because, [sigh] we're all dying aren't we? All the husbands and all the wives. Every minute. We're not teaching each other what we really know, are we?" Roslyn characterizes marriage as a slow death, perhaps because of what she has known of married life. She tells Gay the story of a man who, when his wife was delivering a baby, called her for a liaison, "I mean, he was calling ME. They're still 'sposed to be happily married." In Roslyn's experience, happy marriages are built on lies and deceit, and she refuses to be a part of that. In response to her husband's pleas for her to reconsider divorce, she says, "I just don't believe in the whole thing any more."

The pin-up photos of Monroe taped to Roslyn's closet door allude directly to Monroe's inability to escape her past. The July 1960 version of the script refers to these as "photos for the doorway of a second-class nightclub" (Miller, *The Misfits* 1960, 49). Monroe as Roslyn is forced to speak the somewhat cruel lines, "Oh, don't look at those, they're nothing. Gay just hung 'em up for a joke." When Guido insists on opening the closet door again, she pushes it closed and pushes him out of the room, with a look of both annoyance and aggravation (Figure 5.5). Roslyn thus represents Monroe's own experience—eight years after her nude photos were made public, her past still haunted

her. *The Misfits* suggests that Monroe isn't the glamorous sexy woman of the past, but no one can forget that woman and see her for how she is now. The experience of shooting the film demonstrated that Monroe could not escape this past—one extra "told Marilyn she recognized her from the famous calendar picture" (Goode 103). As Salzberg writes about the shots of the taped pin-ups, "Featured in her most clichéd poses of female stardom, the pinned-up Monroe recalls the Mulveyan object 'cut to the measure' of the male gaze [. . .]—a one-dimensional figure existing on screen to satisfy a desirous perspective." However, in this scene, "with her hair in braids and dressed in jeans with little make-up," Monroe is, as Salzberg notes, "nearly unrecognizable as the woman in the pin-ups" (145). Thus, Roslyn challenges the understanding of Monroe as nothing more than a pin-up; when Roslyn closes the door on Marilyn Monroe, she prompts viewers to interrogate the relationship between the actress and the sex symbol.

Figure 5.5. Roslyn closes the door on Marilyn Monroe. From *The Misfits*.

By this point in her career, Monroe also symbolized, through her sexually charged roles, challenges to Hollywood's censorship system. Although Roslyn's and Gay's sex outside of marriage caused trouble with the Production Code Administration, the producers successfully manipulated the system. The scene in which Gay awakens Roslyn

after they have slept together was problematic, particularly because Monroe wanted to

challenge the censors. In the seventh take of nine, Monroe exposed her right breast

(Goode 179). Although printed, the scene occasioned debate:

> Taylor thought that the take which momentarily showed Marilyn's breast
> was by far the best, and wanted to keep it. Miller was undecided. They
> asked Marilyn, who said that it was natural. She said that the picture had
> no seal from the Motion Picture Association anyway, and added: 'Let's
> get the people away from the television sets. I love to do things the
> censors wouldn't pass. After all, what are we all her for, just to stand
> around and let it pass us by? Gradually they'll let down the censorship—
> sadly probably not in my lifetime.' Max Youngstein had called from
> United Artists in New York, 'just out of academic curiosity,' and was told
> about the shot, which Taylor described to him as 'a beautiful natural
> accident.' (Goode 182)

While the group decided to use this shot, they hadn't yet cleared it with the PCA, which

had refused the picture a seal of approval simply based on the script, because it "lack[s]

effective compensating moral values" (Shurlock, qtd. in Goode 183).

Hesitations remained about using the breast shot. Miller agreed that "in general

it's a better take, but I don't want the goddamn picture to be known as 'the picture with

the exposed breast'" (qtd. in Goode 297). Moreover, the film's producers had to consult

with United Artists, who, fearing condemnation from the Catholic Legion of Decency,

refused to use the print (Goode 304). Nevertheless, the PCA wouldn't give in on the issue

of compensating moral values. In December 1960, *Cosmopolitan* reported that, "As a

story of adult relationships aimed at grownups, *The Misfits* will be released without a

Production Code seal. Marilyn's explanation: 'When the story opens, the girl isn't

married to Clark Gable, and she doesn't get punished for that. The Code, you know,

doesn't permit people to show navels. I don't think oranges are even allowed to have

them'" (Whitcomb 54). On January 7, however, PCA head Geoffrey Shurlock gave the

film a Code seal even though the script was unchanged. By advertising the film as "adult" and barring children under 16 without an adult, they avoided the C rating from the Legion of Decency. While Monroe didn't succeed in getting nudity on screen, she participated in a story which would have been deemed unacceptable under a strict interpretation of the Code, and thereby undermined the power of the PCA in her lifetime.

Although *The Misfits* interrogates the power of stars to influence audiences and shape their own lives, it is ambivalent about what stardom means for the stars themselves. The film's closing lines underscore this ambivalence. When Roslyn asks, "How do you find your way back in the dark?", Gay replies, "Just head for that big star, straight on. The highway's under it. It'll take us right home." The final shot is of the celestial star. But, in this allegory for film stardom, what does it mean to follow the big star? While Monroe and Gable are big stars, the film has expressed the instability of the star's persona by subverting audience expectations for a "Monroe type." Nevertheless, this final call to follow the big star suggests that the star persona is inescapable, and the final lingering shot on the star suggests the impossibility of looking away from the star—or understanding her as anything else. Miller stated that the end of the film is "the end of flight [for Roslyn], when she comes to see that the violence in man, which is the violence in all of us, can exist side by side with love" (qtd. in Goode 75). Her oscillating between being a symbol and resisting being a symbol implies that the end of flight seems dictated by the conditions of the stardom that she has been fleeing.

But the film also expresses sympathy for stars who feel they have to flee from stardom. In *Timebends*, Miller remarks that *The Misfits* reflects his feeling that "we [the "indifferent" world] were being stunned by our powerlessness to control our lives, and

Nevada was simply the perfection of our common loss" (439). While his statement

certainly could refer to the pervasiveness of divorce in Reno and the powerlessness of the

individual with the prospect of nuclear war, Miller could also be referring more to

himself. Since the beginning of his relationship with Monroe, he had been shaped by the

conflict between his desire for privacy and the public's unwillingness to grant it. "There

was some madness to the desperation of their need for her," he wrote about a publicity

event in New York. "What frightening power she had! The event seemed like the

intrusion of a gross iron hand into the vulnerable flesh of our existence and yet at the

same time signified her triumph, a proof of the immense public importance she had won"

(*Timebends* 459). Moreover, as Miller had learned, even a star as big as Monroe had little

power over her own life. When she fought the studio and "won" her new contract terms,

she still ended up unable to choose the kinds of roles she desired.

This desire for privacy and power over one's own life is dramatized in *The

Misfits*. Four times Roslyn obsessively chants, "I can go in, and I can come out" as she

jumps up and down the house's makeshift concrete block step, indicating how much

Roslyn wants control over the direction of her life. Kouvaros reads this scene as

affirming Roslyn's "confiden[ce]" in her "ability to negotiate the threshold between

home and world" (187). The threshold between home and world in the film allegorizes a

similar threshold between the star's private life and public persona. When Roslyn finds

the concrete block and proudly places it beneath the doorway, she demonstrates her

mastery of the threshold, and implicitly indicates the possibility that a star might control

her privacy. Roslyn's final line, "How do you find your way back in the dark," however,

expresses doubts about that control, that is, about the possibility of a star's existing

outside of stardom. "One had to face the inbuilt paranoid opening in the ups and downs of her standing with her public," Miller said of Monroe's state when he was writing *The Misfits*. "She, the woman, could not send herself out to perform and make appearances while remaining at home to create a life. Having to look at herself with two pairs of eyes, her own and a hypothetical public's, was as inescapable as it was enervating in the end" (*Timebends* 459).

In addition to capturing the essence of Monroe the symbol, *The Misfits* remains poignant because it was the last film completed by Gable and Monroe, two of classical Hollywood's biggest stars. Because the film was released just months after Gable's death, contemporary audiences would have looked for signs of that imminent death in the film, just as today's audiences look for signs of Monroe's imminent death in it. Perhaps somewhat melodramatically, Magnum photographer Ernst Haas remarked that the atmosphere on the set of *The Misfits* "showed how some stars are like stars in heaven that are burned out. The light is still traveling, but the star is gone. They were actors playing out the allegory, then seeing it in life. It was like being at your own funeral" (qtd. in Arnold 83).

Like the classical star system, these stars were aging to an extent that it seemed they might become irrelevant. Even without these deaths, the film captures the aging of Gable and Monroe. "The film wants us to read into the actor's gestures and actions other roles and performances, but it also wants us to attach these roles and performances to a body that is brought down to earth, a body measured in the same scale of years, months, and days as that governing any mortal body. Subject to such physical wear and tear," writes Kouvaros, "the bodies in *The Misfits* do not just have a past, they also have an age.

This ensures that the question at the heart of the film's story—how to act, *now*?—applies as much to the actors as it does to the characters" (199).

The film also serves as an allegory for the changing conditions of stardom, which were moving toward the package-unit and free agent system. The package-unit system of production following the late 1940s and 1950s divesture of vertically integrated theater chains (the result of the 1948 Paramount decree) meant that many stars had greater power over their own careers. They were no longer bound by contracts with the studios, and as free agents, a record of box-office success could rapidly escalate their wages. In turn, producers were willing to pay the higher wages for the insurance of a film's success a star provided.[20] Such a system also paved the way for more star-led independent production companies. The shift to the package-unit system had taken place by 1955 (Mann 7). Barry Langford reports that "the decade 1945-55 accordingly saw the total number of contract players at the major studios (apart from MGM) decrease from 804 to 209: in early 1953 *Newsweek* reported that Paramount had just twenty-six contract players, mostly low-salaried youngsters, and only three bona fide stars (Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, and William Holden)" (23-4).

The Misfits was a package-unit production backed by Seven Arts Productions. While Monroe was still under contract to Twentieth Century-Fox, the conditions of her contract freed her to make films outside the studio, and she and Miller had invested their own money in the film. Gable had refused to renew his contract with MGM in 1953, meaning he, too, was operating as a free agent, and chose *The Misfits* as a role he thought could be profitable. Gable earned $750,000 for the film, plus overtime at $48,000 a week

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[20] For more on the shift from the studio system to the package-unit system impacted stars, see McDonald, *The Star System*, chapter 4.

for the nearly six weeks that the film went over schedule, and Monroe earned $300,000; both also earned a percentage of the profits from the film (Goode 213).

The shifting star system had impacted Monroe and Gable very differently. Gable consistently found new projects and formed an independent production company with Jane Russell and her husband, making ten films from the end of his contract obligations in 1954 and his death in 1960. Monroe had helmed her own production company in 1956, but the company disintegrated due to disputes with her business partner. (Marilyn Monroe Productions, Inc. demonstrates one of the problems with this new system—stars rarely had the business acumen to successfully manage their passion projects. Therefore, as Langford notes, those who most benefitted from the new system were talent agencies [26]). Reading *The Misfits* as an allegory for the changing star system, Gay's reluctance to commit to contractual wages could be read as an attempt to valorize the free agent system, but the fact that Gay is clearly out of step with postwar labor conditions suggests the inability of the older generation to recognize that even the free agent stars were often at the mercy of the studios for distribution. At the same time, the way the film insists on the inescapability of stardom, combined with Roslyn's adaptability, allegorize how Monroe's success may have grown had she no longer been obligated to make films assigned to her by Fox.

History, however, proved that Monroe's star persona was inescapable. Roslyn *is* in many ways a representation of Monroe that capitalizes on and subverts the symbolic aspects of Monroe's star persona. According to Sarah Churchwell, "Roslyn is just an older, sadder and wiser version of The Girl" from *The Seven Year Itch* (66). But she is not *just* The Girl—what would The Girl be as older, sadder, wiser? Monroe, playing

Roslyn, suggests that an older and wiser version of The Girl would at least be aware of the effect of her persona on others. What producer Frank Taylor wrote on his script notes applies with striking aptness to Monroe as much as to the character she played:

> Roslyn: She's the hero, she alone has enough courage to venture in a land that will always be foreign and hostile to her: the world of those who need her. That includes the men, all the men, of course. [. . .] They may forget her, but what she brought them will stay with them. That's her victory, a victory she never will be able to enjoy, and that's the price she has to pay for being what she is. She's every thing that's right and good, she's life as it should be, she's what stays with us when the clamor and the noise and the lies and the dust have settled. But she always will be recognized too late. (Taylor Script notes 1-2)

We may forget (or never know), anything but the symbol of Marilyn Monroe, but what wonder that she created such a symbol, one that she could act out, resist, and subvert, one that made her a star.

Conclusion.
"Every Now and Again the Blonde Woman Screams and Shouts"

Perhaps nothing makes clearer the important meanings Monroe brought to a film than considering how we would have understood *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1962) had Monroe—who was under serious consideration for the part—been chosen over Audrey Hepburn for the lead. Truman Capote, author of the novel, said, "Marilyn was my first choice to play the girl, Holly Golightly. [. . .] Holly had to have something touching about her [. . .] unfinished. Marilyn had that. [. . .] Audrey was not what I had in mind when I wrote that part" (Inge 317).

Capote's Holly had much in common with Monroe. Like Monroe, she had "a face beyond childhood, yet this side of belonging to a woman" (Capote 12). Capote's Holly is blatant about sex. When she finds out the narrator is a writer, she says, "I've never been to bed with a writer. No, wait [. . .]," and mentions a writer she has been to bed with (Capote 19). Holly asks Mag Wildwood if her lover bites in bed; Mag says she doesn't remember: "I don't d-d-dwell on these things. The way you seem to. They go out of my head like a dream. I'm sure that's the n-n-normal attitude." "It may be normal, darling; but I'd rather be natural," Holly replies, echoing Monroe's own statements about sex.[1] "Listen. If you can't remember, try leaving the lights on," Holly advises (Capote 50). Finally, the Holly of the novel, echoing sentiments Monroe made famous at the end of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, insists that sleeping with men for money has its own moral code: "I haven't anything *against* whores. Except this: some of them may have an honest

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[1] *Time* quoted Monroe as saying "sex is a part of nature, and I'll go along with nature" ("To Aristophanes" 80).

tongue but they all have dishonest hearts. I mean, you can't bang the guy and cash his

checks and at least not *try* to believe you love him" (Capote 82).

Even the screen version of Holly—heavily modified to accommodate the

censors—would have been an apt vehicle for Monroe. Holly stuffs the telephone in the

suitcase, she says, "'cause it muffles the sound"; this silly gesture seems typical of

Monroe's characters, who read books upside down (*Millionaire*) or keep their "undies in

the icebox" (*Seven*). Holly describes what she calls the "mean reds:" "suddenly you're

afraid and you don't know what you're afraid of." Had Monroe played the part, this

statement would allude to her well-known mental disturbances; her suicide attempts

became public knowledge thanks to a *Time* profile in 1956.[2] Holly comments that "it's

useful being top banana in the shock department," and Monroe was certainly known for

being daring; that she admitted to posing nude because she needed money made her

shocking behavior endearing, or, as Holly puts it, "useful." When in Tiffany's jewelry

store, Holly comments, "It isn't that I give a hoot about jewelry, except diamonds of

course," but she also doesn't plan to wear diamonds until she's over 40—these lines seem

like they could have been spoken by Monroe's Lorelei Lee (*Gentlemen*). Finally, when

Paul calls Holly "a girl who can't help anyone—not even herself," he echoes a number of

writers who thought of Monroe as helpless and in need of male protection.[3]

And Monroe longed to play the part of Holly Golightly, the hillbilly turned New

York play-girl. Her suitability for the role, moreover, is particularly clear when we

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[2] See "To Aristophanes and Back." That these suicide attempts were common knowledge
becomes clear upon reading the 1962 profiles of Levy, written before Monroe's death,
and Meltsir, written after her death.

[3] This perception of Monroe becomes clearest in fan letters, including those by Darone,
Tompkins, and Adler. (These letters are discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, this
volume.)

consider these lines from the film: "I don't even want to own anything until I can find a place where me and things go together. I'm not even sure where that is, but I know what it's like. It's like Tiffany's." Removed from their context, these lines seem just as likely to have appeared in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953). Diamonds are a girl's best friend, as Lorelei Lee advised.

Although Monroe and Hepburn became big stars in the same period, their personae were on opposing ends of the spectrum of female sexuality. At the same time that Hepburn was a Cinderella whose transformation unleashes her sophisticated and loveable self, Monroe evoked associations with women so sexual that they had to resist the advances of men. Hepburn's films were coming-of-age romances; Monroe's were sex comedies in which she was often the butt of the joke.

Holly's forthright attitude about sex prevented the film from being faithful to Capote's novel. That Holly was a call girl made Paramount executives worry about getting the film past the censors. Screenwriter George Axelrod (who had written the play of *The Seven Year Itch* and adapted *Bus Stop* for the Monroe film) solved the problem by displacing Holly's over-the-top sexuality onto Paul: "If she slept with everyone, why wouldn't she sleep with him? [. . . Because] He's a gigolo, too. [. . .] So their conflict? Leaving a steady life of fiscal security for one of love. Going from being 'owned' to being free. Making the late fifties into the early sixties" (Wasson 84-5). Even after this change, production documents indicate that the filmmakers needed to eliminate the overt sex. In his summary of the screenplay, Geoffrey Shurlock, head of the Production Code Administration, crossed out sex between Holly and Paul, leaving a document that looked like this: "Paul's novel, which has Holly for its heroine, is accepted and he and Holly

celebrate. ~~They end up spending the night together.~~ Paul realizes he has fallen in love with Holly and breaks with 2E" (qtd in Wasson 95).

Casting Hepburn against type as Holly was the final step in asserting the film's "decency." Hepburn had become a star in the 1950s playing innocents who underwent dramatic transformations and gained the love of older men—Hepburn as Holly was, as Wasson puts it, a "cockeyed dreamer á la Princess Ann in *Roman Holiday* and Sabrina in *Sabrina*" (89). Hepburn shaped Holly in a way that made Capote's story acceptable in early 1960s Hollywood: Hepburn's Holly is sophisticated and independent. Holly constantly runs out on men before any sex occurs, something audiences would have been unlikely to believe of Monroe. When Hepburn as Holly watches a stripper perform, her sophisticated elegance distances her from the scene, so that her questions to Paul about whether the performer is "talented" or "handsomely paid" seem wholesome. "Do you think you own me?" Holly says. "That's what everybody always thinks, but everybody happens to be wrong." Although many Monroe characters might have uttered those lines, none would have convincingly conveyed Hepburn's sense of independent, sophisticated innocence.

In short, Hepburn made the film an escape from reality, another Cinderella story, while a Monroe version would have made it an engagement with the sexual realities of postwar America. Considering how Monroe would have shaped *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, had she been given the role, illustrates what I have been arguing throughout this project: Monroe's star canon doesn't only affect how the public perceives her as a personality but also the meanings of each of her films.

The final line of *Some Like It Hot* summarizes the basis of Monroe's appeal: "Nobody's perfect." From her earliest work as a model, when she created the images that would undergird her status as an icon, Monroe worked with her imperfections. Her first modeling agent and coach, Emmeline Snively, told her to smile differently because her gumline was too high, and critics commented on her fluctuating weight. Nevertheless, postwar Americans seemed unable to get enough images of Monroe. Her pin-up poses became so iconic that they inflected her film roles, such that she was a former pin-up model in *The Seven Year Itch* and *The Misfits*. The publicity image of her white dress for *The Seven Year Itch* appeared on the front pages of many major American newspapers. Monroe became a star in an era when a movie star's picture was front-page news.

But Monroe's photographs alone don't account for her iconic status. Many fans, both men and women, formed intimate attachments to Marilyn Monroe, created by fan magazines, newspapers, weekly magazines, and public appearances. The details of Monroe's personal life—she was a motherless child; she was a loveless woman—made her a Cinderella figure. Thus, her mistakes, such as posing nude and having extramarital affairs with costars and public figures, were interpreted as the effects of a lifetime of heartache, and made fans love her more.

Monroe's off-screen life inflected the meanings of her films. Monroe certainly was an imperfect wife. Off screen, she divorced three men—James Dougherty, Joe DiMaggio (after nine months), and Arthur Miller (after five years). Her imperfections, however, endeared her to postwar men and women, who were also struggling with the radically reconfigured social landscape of the postwar period. Monroe's films engaged with the period's proliferating marital advice. On screen, she played a working pageant

queen wife in *We're Not Married!*, a murderess in *Niagara*, and gold-diggers in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *How to Marry a Millionaire*. Her personal life colored these roles, such that they seemed to reflect her own struggles to choose between marriage and her career. Monroe's films reflected the unacknowledged pitfalls of marriage and the problems with a cultural discourse that encouraged women to be housewives.

Monroe communicated sex appeal through her body and a lack of salaciousness through her wide-eyed, smiling face, thereby serving as a perfectly imperfect sex symbol. She was not an over-the-top insinuator in the style of Mae West—rather, her double entendres were always delivered as though she didn't know what she was saying. Monroe's delivery mode made it seem unlikely that she was consciously using her sex appeal to manipulate others. Monroe made frank discussion of sex acceptable, and thereby ushered in the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Her roles in *The Seven Year Itch*, *Bus Stop*, and *Some Like It Hot* attest to the changing understanding of female sexuality in the postwar period. By playing women not interested in marriage, but interested in pleasure, Monroe reflected Kinsey's findings that about half of women engaged in sex outside of marriage. What's more, while in these roles her desire for pleasure is apparent, the films received PCA approval. Monroe thereby contributed to the weakening of the PCA's power.

By "playing herself" in *The Misfits*, she demonstrated the tension between the icon of Marilyn Monroe and the index of the conditions of stardom at the end of the studio era. Roslyn is a barely veiled version of Marilyn Monroe—as is evident when she closes the closet door on Monroe's pin-up images. *The Misfits* attests to the impossibility

of a star ever escaping her persona through a role that allows Monroe to both acknowledge and resist her status as a symbol. This film unites Monroe's screen persona and off-screen life in resistance to conventional values: her character embraces divorce, lives with a man who is not her husband, and openly criticizes men who betray trust. *The Misfits* most extensively interweaves Monroe as an icon, an index, and a symbol. How Monroe embodied the contradictions inherent in both postwar culture and Hollywood stardom, fittingly, becomes most apparent in her final film.

Reflecting on the climactic horse-roping scene in *The Misfits*, J. M. Coetzee writes, "The horses are real, the stuntmen are real, the actors are real; they are all, at this moment, involved in a terrible fight in which the men want to subjugate the horses to their purpose and the horses want to get away; *every now and again the blonde woman screams and shouts*; it all really happened; and here it is, to be relived for the ten-thousandth time before our eyes. *Who would dare to say it is just a story*?" (67, emphasis mine). Although Coetzee's point is to disparage "all the cleverness that has been exercised in film theory since the 1950s to bring film into line as just another system of signs" in favor of underscoring that "there remains something irreducibly different about the photographic image, namely that it bears in or with itself an element of the real," his doing so illustrates, although he does not intend it to, the extent to which film is a system of signs. For what he calls "an element of the real" is only partly real; the rest is mediated fiction. The photographic index bears traces of the real, but even it is constructed, even it is a sign, as Peirce so usefully reminds us.

The photographic index is just one index to which films refer—they also bear traces of the culture which created them, of the industrial conditions of filmmaking, of

technological developments, of exhibition and distribution practices, and of the people who participated in them, stars and extras alike. (In fact, one of my favorite movie scenes is a sequence from *Falling from Grace* [1992] that features my grandpa as an extra—I like this scene because it is a photographic index of him.) Much of what I have had to say about Monroe has been about various indexes of her, both in her publicity and in her films. Perhaps I have privileged Monroe as an index for just the reason Coetzee underscores—the index's traces of the real make Monroe's films more than "just stories." Understanding how Monroe indexed her culture and the process of filmmaking in the 1950s provides some insight into why she was so interesting to her contemporaries. It also provides some insight into why she is still so fascinating to audiences today: when we watch Monroe in a film, we glimpse not only her radiant beauty and her mesmerizing charisma, but also the concerns of ordinary postwar Americans, and of what acting and filmmaking meant in the late studio era.

Much more can be said about Monroe's films, including about those that I have analyzed in some detail. For example, *The Seven Year Itch* very obviously indexes postwar popular Freudianism, as does the earlier *Don't Bother To Knock*. Similarly, several of Monroe's early films, including *Hometown Story* and *Let's Make It Legal*, deal with corporate politics. Three of Monroe's films, *River of No Return* (1954), *The Prince and the Showgirl* (1957), and *Some Like It Hot* (1958), in the way that they engage anxieties about secret identities and the way that past actions haunt the present, can be read as indexing the ominous shadow that McCarthyism cast over the country, and especially over Hollywood in the 1950s.

But if Monroe's films and the sensibility her persona brought to them virtually embodied 1950s realities, she was also important for the ways she served as a sign of anything but "reality." Even prior to her stardom, Monroe was given the star buildup, which consisted of turning her into an icon by attaching her visual image to a small body of oft-repeated stories. The details of these stories, however, were contradicted by other details in gossip columns and were inflected by Monroe's off-screen life. Monroe therefore accrued additional meaning because of the way her personal life contradicted her studio publicity. That is, the public agreed that there was more to her than her official publicity revealed, and, as they debated what she was "really like," she came to symbolize a number of concepts: marriage, sexuality, censorship, even Hollywood itself.

The last line of Monroe's final interview is "please don't make me a joke" (Levy 77). While I can think of a number of works that seem to make her a joke, many writers have exercised caution and restraint in telling Monroe's story. This project, I hope, satisfies her wish by demonstrating that, far from being a joke, she was central to postwar American culture. I have deliberately avoided speculating about Monroe's personal life. Much of the evidence I use is the evidence the average fan of the 1950s would have had—what was printed in fan magazines and gossip columns. Although her persona certainly contained elements that were already working to make Monroe into a joke in the 1950s, it also contained much that demonstrates that she wasn't a joke. Many people felt, and still feel, as though Monroe speaks to their concerns—as women negotiating between homemaking and careers, as lonely individuals who long to feel attractive and witty, as victims of exploitive labor conditions, as inwardly fragile beings with tough exteriors. Monroe attested to the power of her films to reveal her significance as a public figure.

She told James Goode, on the set of her final completed film, "Goethe says a career is developed in public but talent is developed in private, or silence. It's true for the actor. To really say what's in my heart, I'd rather show than to say. Even though I want people to understand, I'd much rather they understand on the screen. If I don't do that, I'm on the wrong track or in the wrong profession" (qtd in Goode 199).

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HONORS AND AWARDS
University of Kentucky Woman's Club Fellowship, University of Kentucky, 2016.

Dissertation Year Fellowship, University of Kentucky, 2014–2015.

William Sowder Award for Best Graduate Student Article, Department of English, University of Kentucky, 2014.

Presidential Fellowship, University of Kentucky, 2012–2013.

Dissertation Enhancement Award, University of Kentucky, 2012.

Bonnie Cox Graduate Research Award, University of Kentucky, 2012.

Ben Wathen Black Memorial Graduate Scholarship, University of Kentucky English Department, 2012.

Selected Participant: Futures of American Studies Institute, University of Kentucky College of Arts and Sciences, 2012.

Reedy Quality Achievement Fellowship, University of Kentucky, 2008, 2009, 2010.